



DR. WARREN H. STEWART, SR.
1951 -

Honored as Historymaker 2017
Senior Pastor First Institutional Baptist Church,
Community Activist



The following is an oral history interview with Dr. Warren H. Stewart, Sr. (**WS**) conducted by Patricia Faur (**PF**) for Historical League, and video-graphed on August 16, 2016, at the Arizona Heritage Center in Tempe, Arizona.

Original tapes are in the collection of the Arizona Historical Society Museum Library at Papago Park, Tempe, Arizona.

PF It is Tuesday, August 16th and this Historical League oral history interview is with Dr. Warren H. Stewart, Sr. who is senior pastor of First Institutional Baptist Church in Phoenix and a 2017 Arizona Historymaker. Good morning, Dr. Stewart. The first question is what does the H stand for?

WS The H stands for Hampton. It is my maternal grandmother's middle name, but it's interesting how I got that. I did not have a middle name when I was born and the tradition of black Baptist preachers when I was called to preach in Kansas, it used to be like W.H. Stewart or C.H. Littlejohn, and I said I can't be a preacher without a middle initial. So, my nickname was Hochi, H-O-C-H-I, and so that's when I started adding the H and as I got more sophisticated, I took my grandmother's maiden name Hampton, so Warren Hampton Stewart, Sr.

PF: Okay. All right, where were you born and when?

WS I was born in Independence, Kansas, December 11, 1951.

PF Okay, then when did your family come to Coffeyville, Kansas, or were your grandparents already there?

WS Yeah, uh, my grandparents had been there for years. I would hear my grandparents talk about their parents when they moved there and I would say since all of their children were born there

and my oldest aunt is 92, they've been there probably before the turn of the century - of the - of the 20th Century.

PF Do you know why they came to Coffeyville in the first place?

WS Well, they migrated from the south, I believe. My maternal grandfather was part Cherokee and many of his relatives lived in Oklahoma where there was a Cherokee reservation. And so, they moved across the border because Coffeyville is right on the border of Kansas and Oklahoma.

PF Okay. Talk about your early childhood and family.

WS Well, um, I was born to a single mother, Jessie Elizabeth Washington, and, um, I was reared in the home of my maternal grandparents, her mother and father, at 511 West 12th Street in Coffeyville, Kansas, right next door to the 12th Street Baptist Church where I was Baptist born, Baptist bred and Baptist fed. So, I lived in Coffeyville until I was 19. Even though I was born in Independence, uh, I had an aunt and uncle - a great aunt and uncle there, so I lived with them and - and my mother, I understand, when I was first born, but then we moved back to Coffeyville.

PF Okay. What can you tell me about your family structure? How many siblings did you have and what - what's the birth order?

WS Well, um, that - that's - that's a good question, uh, I'm virtually, essentially a single - an - an only child. However, on my father's side, I had a sister who was much older than me. I met her and was in her company two or three times in their home in Chicago. Then I had a younger sister born in 1960 and she was the joy of our lives, but she died at age 13 months from double pneumonia. And that was a - that was probably my first traumatic experience with the death of a loved one. So virtually I - I was raised as an only child, even though I had an older sister, and I had a younger sister for 13 months until she died.

PF Okay, and you were about 9 years old then?

WS Yes, I was about 9 years old when she died. It was - it was very difficult for my mother.

PF What role did your grandparents Clarence and Ruby Washington play in your life?

WS Well, it's interesting because in my formative years from infancy probably through early elementary school, we stayed in - in the home. My mother stayed in the home with - with my grandparents and I called them mama and daddy. And my mother didn't like that because, uh, I

didn't call her by her first name, but I called my grandmother mama and my grandfather daddy, um, and so they were the parental figures.

PF Okay. Well tell us about your parents and grandparents' work.

WS Well my mother, uh, as I said, she was a single parent. I think she was around 23 when I was born, but my mother had health challenges most of her life, even before I was born, and she had some mental challenges also. And so, I was reared with a mother, I mean, with a mother, grandparents, and had to deal at a young age with her mental illness and her being physically sick also a lot. I remember one time she was very sick, almost unto death and I had to help put her in the car to take her to emergency. I remember that, you know, and she - it - it was just a very traumatic experience. Um, one - once or twice she had to go to a mental institution, so I grew up with that, you know, kinda, and at that time to be mentally ill was shameful. So I - I - I dealt with that as a child, but I always had my maternal grandparents there to be there, a solid foundation for me. Yes. And they had 11 children altogether, so actually my aunts and uncles who were still at the house, who had grown up, they were more like my brothers and sisters.

PF Oh, interesting.

WS Yes.

PF So they were close in age?

WS Yes, yes. And they were close in age, uh, I have an aunt who is ten months younger than me. Yeah, yeah.

PF Well what did your Grandfather Clarence, do?

WS Oh, my grandfather was the chief cook or chef at the leading restaurant in Coffeyville, Kansas, um, I think it was - I can't remember the name of it now, but it was downtown, and it was known for its reputation and - and he would be the chef there, the main cook, and interesting, it was during, uh, the Jim Crow days. Even though my grandfather was the cook and it - and - and all the leaders from Coffeyville, the mayor, city council people, uh, the rich people would eat there, we could not eat there because of our color. The only time we were able to eat at - oh, it was George's Cafeteria - the only time we were able to eat there was for the staff Christmas dinner, uh, during Christmastime, and the restaurant was closed, and they allowed us to come in the front and eat, but the - but the restaurant was closed. So that was my, uh, a very, very significant introduction to discrimination.

PF Okay. Well, you talked a little bit about your family lived next to the church...

WS Yes.

PF And any other description of your neighborhood you lived in?

WS Well, it was, yeah, it was, we lived on the west side not far from downtown Coffeyville, um, the community college was almost a block away. It was just a block away. So, there were houses, uh, it was probably for that day, a middle-class income. Everybody who lived on our block, they worked. The person right across the street, he was a police officer. He was he - he was one of the few black police officers in Coffeyville. Um, the people of the church were factory workers. There was a smelter there. Some of the women were teachers. Others worked at the hospital, like that, so it was a place where virtually everybody worked in the neighborhood and - and we all knew everybody on our block and all the blocks down. It was a very - it was a very close community.

PF Okay. And your grandparents were very involved in the church?

WS Oh yes, yes.

PF And how did they participate there?

WS My grandfather was a deacon there, a long-time deacon. My grandmother was what they called a deaconess and my mother was a musician. She played for the church. She - she would tell me that when I was a little boy, she would set me on the bench beside her as she played for the choir at the church. She played by ear. Very gifted at that. So, uh, I was brought up in that church and I have great memories of being there.

PF Okay. Well what difficulties or hard times did your family experience?

WS Well, well, um, my grandfather was - was the bread winner. My grandmother was a stay in mother, so she never worked outside the home except during election times, she was a poll worker. But, um, she was there all the time for all her 11 children plus me and the challenge I had was my mother's health challenges because she was never able to work, sustain a job. And we were on welfare until I was 19 years of age. And so, I came up very poor even though I - and - and, as I got older, my mother and I lived in rental houses that - that my grandfather owned, so - but they were never more than three blocks away so I could go from the house back home. But the challenge of being the son of a single parent, I knew my father. He lived in Kansas City. I would see him every now and then. He would come in and so we developed a relationship, but with her health challenges, with my father, biological father not being there, um, it - it caused challenges for me.

PF In your book *Victory Together for Martin Luther King, Jr., The story of Dr. Warren H. Stewart, Sr., Governor Evan Mecham and the Historic Battle for a Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday in Arizona*, you talk about hearing Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech on television. How old were you and is that the first time you became aware of him and the Civil Rights Movement? And what do you remember about that speech and did it change your life at all?

WS Well, I was 11, I was 11 years of age. I had heard of Dr. King and I - and I think our whole family probably watched that - that presentation from Washington, D.C. in August of 1963. But it was then as, you know, having been reared in a community which was - I went to integrated schools all of my life, they could stand on the west side of Coffeyville, but I'd experienced racism as I mentioned before, and I mentioned in the book. I experienced racism. So, to see him as a - as an 11-year-old child talking about his dream for America and America to live out what's in the Constitution and the Preamble, and to talk about his four little children and - and the dream about, um, sons of former slaves and former slave owners - owners to sit together and black and white children playing together. That gave me a hope, um, that I probably had not had and had not been articulated by anyone until that march on Washington. And so, I believe that's where the seeds in the me were planted to fight for justice and to - to dream for America to practice what it preached - preaches when it relates to the Constitution and the Pledge of Allegiance, etc.

PF Okay. In grade school, what teacher or event made a lasting impression on you? And what was it?

WS Well, there were - there were two teachers, of course, my kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Kurtz, uh, I had a crush on her. I mean, she was the first woman outside of my mother and grandmother that I was in the room daily. I remember her. But then I also remember - I don't remember the name of this person, but she was my Spanish teacher in the - in junior high. And I took Spanish and I never forget, I cheated on a test and she saw me. And she caught me and, um, she said, "Warren, I'm not gonna flunk you, but I'm gonna give you a D minus." She said, "You are very intelligent. But I saw you cheating on the test. You asked another person the answers." And I remember that and - and I guess it jolted me into reality that cheating is not the way to go. But I don't remember her name, but I remember her tellin' me that, "I'm not gonna flunk you, but I'm gonna give you the lowest grade I can to teach you a lesson."

PF In grade school, what teacher or event made a lasting impression on you? And what - and in what way? In your book you mention that you were shot while burglarizing a house at the age of 14.

WS Yes.

PF What can you tell us about that event and what happened after you were shot? And in what way did this event change you and your outlook on life?

WS Well, we - yes. And - and, it did happen. It's not as bad (*laughs*) it's not as bad as it seems. I was 14. The guy who was with me was 18. He was a neighbor. A lady lived across from where my mother and I were living at the time. She was sick and went back to Arkansas to live with her relatives. We figured because she was a old lady, she had some hidden treasures somewhere in her house. You know, so one night, we were gonna go in to see if we could find some hidden treasure under the bed or something. And so, we broke into the house and it was very cold. I had on two coats, a jacket and an overcoat, and my accomplice was too big to get in the window. He was gonna go in the window. So we got the window up on a certain height. And so, I went in and all we found was an old iron. That's all we found. So, we're getting out. I climbed out of the window. And we made a noise trying to close the window. We did not know she had left her next-door neighbor, whose name was Bud, a gentleman, as the watchkeeper, you know, to watch over her house. And we heard him moving in his house 'cause the houses were close together and I ran around - I went around the house to see where he was and my friend was in front of me, the accomplice. He took off and we heard Bud say, "Halt." And when he said, halt, we heard a shot. And then I took off and I ran for about a block to my friend's house, which was the next block over. But before I got there, I felt warm, and I got underneath the streetlight and - and I saw where blood was coming out of my chest and my arm. And I realized I had been shot. And so, I went to his house. I made it to the house. We made it to the house, his house, at the same time. He came in the back way. I came in the front. And he said, "Don't go in the house." I said, "Joe, I'm shot." He says, "Don't go in the house, don't go in the house." (*Laughs*) But I - we were in the house and I passed out and I was taken to the hospital. I spent a week in the hospital.

PF Did it change you in any way?

WS Well- well I didn't break into any more houses. Um, yeah, and I - and a lot of people think that's when I really "got religion" and changed. No, I - it slowed me down, but again, it was a very significant experience because I never - when I was in the emergency, my grandfather came to emergency room, and I was layin' there. He just looked at me and the look he had on his face was of great disappointment. He didn't say much. But I knew I had disappointed him by doin' that because he was well respected in the town. He was a town leader and I - he didn't say much. He just looked at me and I knew I'd really disappointed him.

PF All right. Tell us about your high school years. Uh, what kind of student were you and what were your best subjects? Which subjects in school did you like the best?

WS Well, in high school, um, I took the basic subjects. I went to Vo-tech, vocational school, which was - which was associated with the school to study drafting because I wanted to be an engineer.

See, due to the challenges I - I had as a child, being born out of wedlock and my mother's challenges, I stuttered. And - and I - I was terrible at speaking before people. And so, I figured being an engineer, a draftsman, I didn't have to talk a lot. And so, I took that, and I aced those courses. I learned how to type in high school. Um, we started - in the late 60s, we started, I think, a - a black heritage club or something like that. At that time, black - African Americans were being more vocal about our heritage rather than being ashamed of it. And so, I remember I was the head of the black heritage club at the high school. And, uh, we had a situation where it was customary for the football captain to escort, uh, the queen for the football. And that year, an African American woman, I believe, became the queen. And so, there was a controversy, and they wouldn't let her be the escort of the white quarterback. So, I led a movement in high school. Went to the principal, I said, "This is unfair. And - and how can you change the rules because the queen happens to be black, and the football quarterback is white?" And - and so the compromise was we started a black heritage queen contest celebration in February. So, we had a black heritage queen and then the leading football player was her - who was African American - was her escort. So that was the compromise. So that was my first - really getting involved in fighting against racism - and trying to work out a compromise.

PF Did you belong to any other organizations or play any sports?

WS I - I played football. I was a guard in my senior year. Uh, we had a community choir that was made up of - of black - black students from all over the town and from different churches. And I was the president of that choir. I was not the director, but I led that choir and we would sing all over the - the city as well as that part of Kansas and some of Oklahoma.

PF Okay. Okay, you would've been 16 when Dr. King was assassinated, right?

WS Yeah.

PF Um, tell about where you were and how you felt when you heard that news?

WS I'll never forget that. I was driving down one of the main streets in our little downtown listening to the news. I was in my grandfather's 1964 Studebaker Lark. He won it in a toothpaste contest. But I was driving it and the news came on, uh, the bulletin that Dr. King had been shot and killed. And I balled up my fist and I hit the dashboard. I split my grandfather's dashboard because when they said he had been killed, I just hit it. And then I rolled down the window to find the first African American I could see walking on the sidewalk. And I shouted out, "They killed Dr. King." So, it was in the evening. I remember that very vividly. Yeah.

PF Okay, your biography says that you accepted Jesus as your personal savior at the age of 16.

WS Mm-hm.

PF And that was in 1968.

WS Yes.

PF And preached your trail sermon in...

WS Trial - trial.

PF: Okay, the...

WS Trial.

PF ...that's what I was going to ask.

WS: Yeah, trial sermon.

PF Was that a misprint?

WS Not - not trail. Yes.

PF Okay. I saw that several places. Uh, you attended Coffeyville Community College and received your associate of arts degree. Tell us about that experience. Uh, and did you have a job while you were at community college?

WS Yes.

PF Okay, you attended Coffeyville Community College and received your associate of arts degree. Tell us about that experience. And did you have a job while you were attending community college?

WS Yes. Coffeyville Community College was right around the corner from where my grandparents lived, so I walked a block to - to college. Um, in college is where I really excelled academically. Uh, I did okay in high school, but I really excelled, um, going to the different classes at community college, uh, I was part of the Phi Theta Sigma, which is the, uh, which is the junior college level of Phi Beta Kappa. It was Phi Theta Kappa which was the junior college equivalent. So, I graduated top 5% of the class. I worked - again, I told you my mother and I were on the welfare so there was something called the WIN Program, the work incentive

program. So, they paid my tuition, paid my books, plus gave me \$15 a week, no \$15 every other week to work part-time. And so that's how I made it through college. I was also a - I ran to be the college president, the vice president, with a white friend of mine. We lost, but we gave a good fight. I was known as the best dresser on the college campus. I was a young preacher, so I was trying to - I would wear suits and ties and sports coats every day. So, stuff like that. It was a great experience.

PF Okay and when did you decide you wanted to become a minister and what motivated you?

WS Well, at age 16, I was - I accepted the Lord as my personal lord and savior. I had been in church all my life, but I really found out at age 16 that I needed a personal relationship with Jesus Christ to really be a Christian. So, I did that. Um, and - and at 16, but there was something in me that kept saying there's something else you need to do. There's something else you need to do, and I couldn't put my hands on it. And so, I went to my pastor of 12th Street Baptist Church at that time, and I asked him, I said, "Can we have a youth Sunday, every fourth Sunday," whatever it was, "and can I give a 5-minute talk every youth Sunday?" You know, every fourth Sunday. He said yeah. So, I did that for three months. The third month, as I was getting ready to give my talk, I said, "I got - I gotta - I gotta say this. I've been called to preach." And my grandmother was sitting on the second row where the deaconess would sit, and a tear ran down her face and the pastor looked at me and smiled. He said, "Oh, I've been knowing that. I just knew it would soon come out." And so, then a year later, I preached what is called a trial sermon. That was my first message.

PF Okay. Um, why did you decide to go to school in Dallas after your community college experience? Was it your purpose to become a minister? Which I think you already said, um, and what steps did you take to do that.

WS Yes. Well, um, in my hometown, none of the African American pastors that I knew of were full time. They all had - they were bi-vocational. They had another job or either they lived in Kansas City or Tulsa and they would drive in for the weekend. So, I had never seen a full-time pastor. And so, once I accepted my call to preach, um, I said I wanted to be a fully trained, full time pastor 'cause I didn't want to have to do another job during the week. And so, uh, during community college, I was going to, uh, I was going to be bi-vocational. I was gonna be an engineer on, you know, full time and preach on the side. But then there were some preachers who would come into our cities and do what we called a citywide revival. And three of them in the consecutive years they would come, were from - from Texas and - and they were graduates of Bishop College in Dallas, Texas. And one of the local pastors took me to meet one of them, uh, after one of the revivals and he said, "Young man, if you're serious about preaching, go to Bishop College." Bishop College was known at the time as one of the leading black bap-predominantly black Baptist colleges that produced great preachers and pastors. And so, after finishing two years of community college, uh, I left Coffeyville and, uh, for the first time in my

life, to live somewhere else. And I drove down to Dallas, Texas and I attended Bishop College and, uh, would never be the same because it was a great experience there.

PF The decision to attend Union Theological Seminary in New York in 1973 had to be a huge decision. What events led up to that decision?

WS Well, well, one, Bishop College was in the Bible Belt. So, it was very conservative. Union Theological Seminary was one of the leading seminaries at the time and very liberal. So I had been in the Bible Belt and I wanted balance, so I want, uh, I wanted to go to a seminary back east, but also I met my pastor - the person who would be my pastor in New York City when I was in seminary, Dr. Sandy F. Ray, preaching at Bishop for our minister's institute and I was so impressed with his preaching, I went to meet him and talk to him and he invited me. Said, "If you decide to go to Union, I haven't had a young man to work with me at Cornerstone Baptist Church in Brooklyn for 20 years. And if you decide to go to Union, call me up and you can be my student minister." And so that motivated me to apply for Union Seminary and I was accepted, and I went there, and I served for four years under Dr. Sandy F. Ray at Cornerstone Baptist Church. He was Martin Luther King Jr.'s father's best friend and classmate at Morehouse. And so, I met all of the King family there except Dr. King 'cause he had died, but - but, I was able to be mentored by a pastor who Martin Luther King Jr. called Uncle Sandy.

PF Tell us about your experiences living in New York. What part of the city did you live in?

WS Well, I lived in Manhattan, but again, New York City was like a second home because four of my aunts and uncles had migrated from Kansas to New York City. So, I would - I would spend summers in New York City as a child. So, I knew New York City. And so, when I went there, even though I stayed on campus in Manhattan every weekend, I would go to Queens and I would have dinner with one of my aunts and uncles and so, uh, it - it became like my second home because I had been there so much.

PF Okay. You stayed at Union Theological Seminary, received your Master of Divinity degree and your Master of Sacred Theology degree. Did you plan to stay there and do your doctor's degree?

WS Yes. Yes, I, uh, again, at that time I did not necessarily know if I wanted to be a pastor. And because I was exposed to Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic, and I did well in languages, my emphasis was on the Old Testament. I had some Old Testament professors I liked, I thought perhaps I wanted to get a Ph.D. in the Old Testament. And so, I - I applied for it. And at the time, there were several churches that I tried to - well - well, that I was a candidate for it, to become a pastor and it didn't work out in New York City. Even my pastor, Dr. Ray, tried to refer me to a couple or three churches there, but I was unmarried at the time. I was young and never pastored before. So, they kept looking over me. So, then I said, well let me get a Ph.D. But I'll never forget, I

applied for the Ph.D. program there and was rejected. I was rejected and I couldn't understand that because I had done my second masters. I - I had done well. My Old Testament professor supported it, but Dr. James Cohn who was still at Union was known - he's a theologian known for - for, um, writing about black theology and black power. He voted against me getting the Ph.D. But here's the reason, I was very angry at the time. But he told the committee that Warren Stewart is destined to be a leader in the church, and we don't want him up in some ivory tower teaching Old Testament because he is destined to be a leader in the church in the community. So, uh, I was mad at the time...

PF Yeah.

WS ...but later on, now I see his - his wisdom and insight.

PF Well, you have a wonderful ability to express yourself in speaking and writing, often it's even poetic. How'd you gain these skills?

WS Well, God first. God gifted me to - to be his spokesperson, be one of his spokespersons. My grandfather was active I said, as a deacon in the church, but he was also a lodge brother. He was like the head of the - the - all of the lodges in Kansas at one time. So, I would hear him speak. He was a great orator. So, I - I heard - so, so I heard it as a child. And then with the gifts God has given me. And then again, it's amazing, as I said, 'cause I stuttered terribly. So, I never - again, when I - when I announced my call to preach, another deacon, Deacon Robert LeGron, Sr., who was the superintendant of the Sunday school at my church, he came up to me after I preached my trial sermon, May 18, 1969, he said, "Boy, I didn't know how in the world you were gonna be able to preach 'cause you stutter so badly. But the Lord certainly has His hand on - hand on you." So, he was amazed that I was able to speak eloquently because I stuttered so badly.

PF But you didn't stutter when you preached?

WS Not, when I preached. No, no. No.

PF Okay. Okay, and you certainly met and were mentored by several great Baptist preachers. Your book, *Interpreting God's Word in Black Preaching*, mentions Henry Mitchell, James Sanders, and of course, you just mentioned Sandy F. Ray. Could you talk about each of them and their influence on you?

WS Who was the third I heard you said?

PF Sandy Ray.

WS But you said Henry Mitchell...

PF Uh, James Sanders?

WS Oh yes, okay. Yes. All right.

PF Okay. Yeah, and you might have some others, too.

WS Well - well, yeah, I had - certainly I have one other for sure. Uh, Henry Mitchell, ironically, I just spoke with him recently. He is 97. He is the last of my mentors who is living. Dr. Sandy Ray died in 1979 at age 81 and of course, just to watch him and - and he was considered one of the greatest African American preachers of his time, and so to sit under him for four years was just - that was a seminary in itself. And just to watch how he dealt with scriptures and dealt with people. So, uh, and he was a very humble person. He was the vice president of the National Baptist Convention USA, Inc. But yet, he was very humble. Henry Mitchell again was a scholar. He was my doctoral supervisor and he encouraged me to write about hermeneutics in black preaching in 1982 when I got my doctorate. And - and, because he said no one had ever written about the - the hermeneutics, which is the science of interpretation of black preaching. And so, what I did for my dissertation, I studied the preaching of Dr. Sandy Ray, Dr. Bill Jones, Dr. Manuel Scott, the- they all are deceased now. And I studied their preaching and developed five hermeneutical principles on what is found in the - in the best of black preaching. James Sanders was a white professor. He was my white professor in seminary. He was a Methodist, but he was known for being a - a preaching white man. I mean, he - he could - he was a storyteller and so he really took me under his wings when it came to the Old Testament and the writing of the prophets. The other one is Dr. Gardner C. Taylor, who just died last year at age 97. He was - was cited by *Time* magazine years ago as probably one of the - the five best preachers in America. And he was a great orator. He and Dr. Sandy Ray were best friends and his church, Concord - Concord Baptist Church of Christ - was down the street from Cornerstone, so I took preaching from him at Union - Union Theological Seminary. And so that was very impactful for me and we, we maintained a relationship until he died at the age of 97.

PF All right, Dr. Stewart, tell us the story of how you came from New York and ended up in Phoenix Arizona at First Institutional Baptist Church.

WS Well that's an interesting story because, um, when I first got - when I first received an application from the church, a friend of mine, Dr. Bobby Jo Sauser, has friends in the church. So, he knew the church was looking for a pastor. And he sent my name, so they sent me an application. And I - when I got it, I said, First Institutional Baptist Church Phoenix? I said, there are no black people in Phoenix. And I threw it in the trash. And, and because at that

time, the black Baptist religion world revolved around New York City, so I wanted to stay in New York City and pastor. Even if it was a storefront, just to be in New York City. So, um, I threw it in the trash.

Then, I preached in Newark, New Jersey about that same time. I was working on my second masters for a guy named Granville Seward over at, uh, over at a church in Newark, Zion Baptist Church, I believe, Mount Zion in Newark, I preached for their youth day. And I preached. He said, "You know what? There's a church trying to call me to be the pastor in Phoenix and I don't wanna go to Phoenix. I'm gonna send them your name." I said, "Is it First Institutional?" He says, "Yeah." He said - he said, "Yeah." So, he sent them my name also.

Then, I had a seminary classmate whose father was coming in town to New York City and at that time, any preacher who was anybody in the black Baptist Church to preach at Cornerstone where Dr. Ray was the pastor, would be - a notch on, you know, I mean, put that on your resume. So, my friend begged me to get Dr. Ray to let his father preach at a Sunday night service. So, Dr. Ray said yes, so that night came for the service. My friend's father didn't show up. So, Dr. Ray looked at me, he said, "Well, you're gonna have to preach." And I had an unfinished message in my briefcase. So, I preached that unfinished message. Lo and behold, a lady from First Institutional Baptist Church was in the audience that night to hear me preach an unfinished message. She came up to me after the service. She said, "You're what we need in Phoenix. I belong to First Institutional Baptist Church."

So, my name came from three independent sources to First Institutional. Also, after my friend who recommended me at first said, "Warren, they said they haven't received your application." I lied and told him I lost it. So, they sent me another one. So, I sent it because of my friend, Dr. Sauser; but they got it and when the pulpit committee got it, they said, "Well, he's - he's nice recommendation, but he's unmarried. He's 25 and never pastored." So, they kind of put it in file 13. But after my name came from these two other independent sources, Dr. Seward, who they wanted and this lady, her name is, uh, Sister Evelyn Jenkins, she's dead now.

So, they called me and said, "We want you to come." I came in March of 1977. I preached. They had the meeting, the - the call meeting the next day. I - I got all but one vote and I became their pastor. So, I - I came to Phoenix. And that friend whose father didn't show up to preach, that friend when I was called there, he said - he laughed and he said, "Dr. Ray is banishing you to the desert and nobody will ever hear from you anymore." He's still pastoring a little small church in New York. I've been all over the world. *(Laughs)*

PF *(Laughs)*

PF Okay. You came as senior pastor to First Institutional Baptist Church and you're still the senior pastor. How has your position changed over the 39 years you've been there?

WS Well, of course, coming as a young pastor, uh, people are checkin' you out. They're trying to mentor you. They're trying to mold you into being the pastor they want you to be. Uh, but - but the other piece when I came here - because First Institutional was such a historic church and like a leader for the black Civil Rights Movement in Arizona. I mean they would have major meetings. I was told when Dr. King was assassinated, that the community gathered at First Institutional to have a, you know, an impromptu memorial, etc., for him. So, it's been known as being a leading church for many, many years. And so, it kind of propelled me out there in the community. And so, I was invited to, uh, give the prayer at the city council, on different commissions, etc., in the black Baptist denomination, the state convention, the - the associational meetings.

I was - I was put forth as a leader because I was the pastor of First Institutional Baptist Church. So, the church has grown so. I mean, we have, we have a - what do we call a - a holistic Christian ministry. We - we meet peoples' needs during the week. We have work in Africa, in India. We are recognized nationally as one of the leading mission churches. So, um, it - it has really become a role model church. People - when I preach around the country, they - they refer to First Institutional as a role model church under my leadership.

PF Okay. All right and, you - you already touched on it a little bit, but what is the history of First Institutional Baptist Church? How long has it been in...?

WS Well it - it was started in 1905 and it was then the Second Baptist Church of Phoenix. It started after First Baptist Church. Um, so it was like the leading black Baptist church. It has given birth to other black Baptist churches in the city. Um, it changed its name under one of the pastors in the first half to First Colored Baptist Church because there was an unwritten rule that no black Baptist church in a town could be First Baptist. They'd either have to be Second Baptist or whatever. So, they changed it at some point to First Colored Baptist Church. Then a pastor came along during the late 1940s and 50s and he felt that being called First Colored Baptist Church was too restrictive. So, he is the one that introduced Institutional Baptist Church because he said even though we're a predominantly African American church, we are a church that reaches out to anyone. So, under his leadership in the late 40s, they named it to the First Institutional Baptist Church, and it's been that name since the 40s, late 40s or 50s. And so, that's - but it's still a leading church, uh, here in the State of Arizona. Not just of black churches, but of all churches. We are recognized for our involvement in - in Christianity as well as justice issues around the State and the nation.

PF Okay, you received your Doctor of Ministry degree five years after coming to First Institutional Baptist Church from the American Baptist Seminary of the West in Berkeley, California. And that was 1982?

WS Yes.

PF And how are you able to be a full-time minister and also attend seminary?

WS Well, the Doctor of Ministry program is a professional doctorate degree for clergy. Um, so they want you to be involved in the local church while you are studying for the doctorate. And so, what they would have was summer intensive. I went up to - up to Berkeley three summers in a row, would stay two weeks at a time. We would take classes all that morning, then have assignments that evening and then after say, six weeks after the sessions, we would send our completed projects back to them. I also - because my concentration was in hermeneutics in black preaching, which deals in interpretation, I was able to take some classes at ASU that deal with oral interpretation and speaking and the study of the science of speaking. So, I was able to take classes here during a couple of semesters and transfer them toward my doctorate. And then the last six months, uh, the last semester was given to writing the dissertation. And so, I would commute in the summers.

PF Okay. All right. We want to start talking about Dr. Martin Luther King and, uh, the first question is how did your knowledge and appreciation of Dr. King change as you became an adult?

WS Well, as I became an adult, I - I consider him as one of my mentors, even though I never met him. He, you know, he was assassinated before I was able to meet him. But I - I watched - not only the "I Have A Dream" speech, but I studied him. I read his books. I saw clips of him, uh, videos, I heard his messages, um, knew people who knew him. So, I saw him as a role model for me and, uh, and so - and then when I met Dr. Ray and - and Dr. Ray could tell me about him as a young boy, about him as a student. By the way, when Dr. King was stabbed in New York City by a deranged black woman when he was speaking one time, or after he was speaking, uh, he - he recovered in Dr. Ray's house. So, he - before he could fly back to Atlanta, he recovered for weeks in Dr. Ray's home. So, Dr. Ray could tell me stories about him. For example, Dr. Ray said when - when Dr. King was working on his doctorate at Boston University, he would come down and preach for him. He said Dr. King was not a great preacher. He was okay as a - as a student. He was very intellectual. And he said he was not a great pulpiteer. But he said, he became that after he received his doctorate, went to pastor the little church down in, Montgomery, Alabama, Dexter Avenue. And was - was called to be the leader when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on the bus. And because he was a young seminary trained black pastor who had a doctorate, he was thrust into leadership. And then under the pressure of racism and divided leadership, his preaching gifts improved. So, yeah.

PF Is there any particular book or writing of his that is one of your favorites?

WS Not really. I've read all of his books, *Strive Toward Freedom*, uh, *Where Do We Go From*

Here, Chaos or Community, um, Strength to Love, they all - they all are impactful on my life and have been guiding forces for my prophetic pastoral ministry.

PF Okay. And for your Master of Divinity thesis, you chose the subject “Do Prophets Exist in Our Contemporary Culture?” As part of that research, you examined the life and writings of Dr. King. Did you choose this topic because you wanted to write about him or was it that where the topic led you?

WS Well, um, I had to write a thesis for my first master’s degree. And, uh, because I was intrigued by him and a white pastor by the name of Walter Rauschenbusch, who pastored in New York City, uh, during the turn of the 20th Century, and he was known for - for implementing the social gospel. He - he said, “The gospel is far more than just making people get to heaven. We have to help people live down here.” And he was intriguing that he started the social gospel in the poor, white neighborhoods in New York City around the turn of the 20th Century. So, I did a comparative analysis between his preaching and Martin Luther King’s preaching and to answer the question, do prophets exist in our contemporary culture.

PF Okay. I think you’ve alluded to his, but I’ll ask it anyway. In what way has Dr. King influenced your personal life and ministry?

WS Well, he was a young pastor who had gone to seminary, who was not satisfied in just preaching to the people on Sundays, but saw a connection with what I call Jesus and justice. And he saw that what you preach about and learn about Jesus Christ, has to be applicable and transferable to one’s everyday life and to the life of the society. And justice was a very key component. And so that’s - that’s what made Dr. King one of my most significant mentors; because he connected between the theological and the practical, the everyday lives of people.

PF Okay. Before we talk about your role in making the Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday happen in Arizona, let’s talk about the book, *Victory Together for Martin Luther King, Jr.*, which talks about the six-year struggle to make the third Monday in January the official state holiday. The book was published in 2015. When did you start writing it and when did you finish and what inspired you to write the book?

WS Well one, I’m a meticulous note writer. And when I was thrust into leadership, the fight for the paid state holiday honoring Dr. Martin Luther King here in Arizona, I would always, at the end of the day, would look at the notes I took in meetings and would kind of write down what transpired that day. I guess I learned that discipline from - from earning two masters and a doctorate. I mean, you, you write. You - you have to prove everything. You have to have your evidence. So, I used that and one day I wanted to tell the story. Because so often, the history of African Americans has been - has been told by someone else. And so, I knew we wanted - I wanted the history of winning the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday in Arizona - I

wanted it told from our perspective, my perspective, from an African American, not from somebody else who - who saw the videos, who heard from others, but somebody who was there at the inside. So, that's how, that's why I began to write the book. And the church, First Institutional, gave me sabbatical in 1994 and so one of the assignments was to write the history of the King holiday. And I was able to almost complete it during that time. I rented an apartment where I would go in the day and lay out all my papers. At that time, there were no computers and - and I could type, but I - I wrote out the 700 and some odd typewritten, manuscript, I wrote it out in - in hand on - on legal size yellow paper. But it took me about six months, and I finished it, but I let it just stay be- because I tried to get it published by my publisher who published my first book, *Interpreting God's Word in Black Preaching*, but they didn't feel it was of - of any national interest. And so, I just let it set there and finally, um, a couple of years ago, I found somebody who would help me to publish books and I re-edited it, and got it published in 2015.

PF You - and you sort of answered this one about how you - how well you keep records. And that was one of my questions. It seems like you kept all your documents, notes, sermons, speeches, letters, pictures...

WS Yes.

PF You must be a - a meticulous...

WS Yes, uh, some people call me perfectionist - I don't consider myself a perfectionist. But meticulous, um, I just - I take notes. I take notes. You know, because again, I guess I learned that from working on my doctorate.

PF Okay. What kind of feedback have you gotten on the book?

WS Oh I've gotten very positive feedback, those who have read it, uh, that is significant. Uh, one of the first comments was, um, from the editor, the publisher of the *Arizona Informant*, the, uh, the local African American newspaper. And he said, "Well now, by writing your book, you've secured your place in history." And I mean, that was not my reason for writing the book. But it's interesting, uh, that was his comment. That - that you've secured your place in history to tell your version of the story. But, um, I just wanted, I wanted people to know the inside story. All of the different - the maze of tryin' to get this State just to honor Dr. King as the nation was already doing, signing the law, by the great Republican President, Ronald Reagan.

PF Okay, so let's talk about that - that struggle here.

WS Okay.

- PF** You know, the federal Martin Luther King holiday went into effect in 1986. The Arizona State Senate voted down the Martin Luther King holiday in May of 1986 and was that the first time they voted it down?
- WS** No, no they had voted it - well, the late Cloves Campbell who was an Arizona State Senator, had - I think he introduced it. He had introduced it every year shortly after this, uh, the assassination of Dr. King. But it was always voted down. Then Representative Art Hamilton, who was the minority speaker, was a great leader in the Arizona State Legislature and he got them almost to the place where - where it would be pass- I think it was passed in the Senate that year, but it was defeated by a couple of votes in the House of Representatives. And, then after it was defeated. Governor Babbitt, then Governor Babbitt, called me up on a Friday afternoon at my home and said, "Reverend, I think I have precedence to - to declare a Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday by executive order. Can I do it in your church?" And May 18, 19, uh, 19...
- PF** '86.
- WS** ...86, he declared the King holiday and signed the executive order in the pulpit of First Institutional at our eight o'clock a.m. service.
- PF** Okay, had there been any meetings with him to do that beforehand?
- WS** No, no, no. He said he had talked with Representative Art Hamilton and he had talked with, um, his attorney general, I can't remember his name at the time, but - but he said, Governor Fannin, I believe, had set a precedent because after John Kennedy was assassinated in - in November of 1963, the Governor shut down the state employees, gave them a day off in honor or in memory of President John F. Kennedy. So, he said that was his precedence to do it by executive order, even though the legislature had defeated it.
- PF** Had you met Governor Babbitt before?
- WS** Oh, Lord yes. Yes. Again, by being pastor of First Institutional, you get invited to all the key meetings, that relate to justice issues, African American issues, and I had - oh, I had been in meetings with him and - and he and I had crossed paths often on - on the opposite sides of the street. Um, so I knew Governor Babbitt and he knew me. And it was a - it was a very amenable relationship, even though we disagreed on some issues. Um, he was. he was considered by the African American community to be a friend in the State House.
- PF** Okay, and why did he choose First Institutional Baptist Church to make the announcement?

- WS** Well, because it - it was the oldest black Baptist church, not the oldest black church because Tanner Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church down the street is the oldest African American church, but it was the largest African American church at the time and so I guess he chose to come there. Yes.
- PF** Okay. All right. That holiday was short lived because Evan Mecham ran for governor saying he would repeal the holiday. He was an unlikely candidate that won in a three-way race with only 40% of the vote.
- WS** Yeah.
- PF** What was your reaction to the outcome?
- WS** Of the race? We couldn't believe it. I mean, uh, we could not believe Evan Mecham finally won and he had run for governor, I think at least four times before that and lost, but because it was a three way - three-way race, with actually two Democrats running against each other, um, then superintendant, oh God, I can't remember her name. Carol somebody. Anyway, there was a female who was the Superintendant of Education, oh, Carolyn Warner. She was the Democratic, uh, primary winner, but there was a large group of - of Democrats who didn't want her, and they were able to talk this rich gentleman, uh, to run as an independent candidate - candidate, so Carolyn Warner and this - this independent candidate who was actually Democrat, split the democratic vote and that's how Evan Mecham won with less than a majority.
- PF** Okay.
- WS** We were all in shock.
- PF** Yes. Well, Governor Mecham will be, of course, be notoriously remembered for rescinding the Martin Luther King holiday shortly after he took the oath of office. Um, what are your impressions of him?
- WS** Well, uh, we tried to get him - the African American leaders tried to get him not to rescind the King holiday. We had a meeting with him shortly after he was - was elected to be the governor. He was then the Governor-Elect. I'll never forget. There was a black Republican, uh, who was a psychologist, he worked with him, and he arranged a meeting with then Governor-Elect Mecham and his, uh, spokesperson to come and meet with about 18 leaders, mostly African American, one Jewish guy from Tucson, the three or four African American legislators we had, to meet with him. And it was a rainy day. I'll never forget that. And, uh, they asked me to moderate the meeting. So he came into our meeting. It was a table of about 18 people around the table. He came and sat next to me. And my opening words were, "Governor Mecham,

thank you for - or Governor-Elect Mecham, thank you for coming. We would like to talk to you about your decision, your campaign promise to rescind the Martin Luther King holiday when you become the governor in January.” And his remarks to all of us in that room, never forget it, he said, “I didn’t come here to debate or discuss the Martin Luther King holiday with you people. Black people don’t need a holiday. You need jobs.” And we were all stunned that a white man came to our meeting and spoke to recognized African American leaders around the State like we were children. The meeting was short. There was not much to say after that. Um, and I had to hold his hand and give the closing prayer. And that was one of the most difficult things I’ve ever done in my life. *(Laughing)*

PF I can see that.

WS And - and that black psychologist who was at the other end of the table, after Governor Mecham elect had - had left, Dr. Joe Parham said to me, “Reverend, I’m not a prayin’ man, but I was watching your body language and I was prayin’ that you wouldn’t hit the Governor.” Yeah, it was - it was - it was bad. I - I used to hear my grandfather talk about white men talkin’ to black men like they were boys, and I’d never had it happen to me. I was - I was furious. I was so furious there was a - there was a interview of me after that and I - I don’t know what I said, but one of my senior members who is now deceased saw it on TV. She called my house. She said, “Reverend, come to me - come to my house. I want to talk to you.” I went to Mrs. Reese’s house. She said, “Now Pastor, don’t let anybody get you that angry ever again.” She said, “I - I saw you on television. I heard you were so angry.” She said, “Pastor, don’t let anybody get you that angry ever again.” Yeah, it - it was unbelievable.

PF Did you agree with her that you shouldn’t get that angry again?

WS Yes, because I had a pastoral friend of mine - I said some words to him I couldn’t say on - on television about our meeting. Yeah. Yeah, I- if - if 10 was the top of bein’ angry, I was 15. And I - I was, yeah, it was terrible. Yeah.

PF All right. Well then, uh, let’s talk about the Arizona For a Martin Luther King holiday grassroots coalition.

WS Yes.

PF Um, was that formed before or after Governor Mecham met with you?

WS That was formed after he was elected because we knew he had made a campaign promise. So, we came to - some - some leaders came together, and our goal was to get to him to try to convince him since President Reagan had signed it into law, Republican like him, our goal was

to convince him that it's not such a bad thing. And he ought to change his mind. So, that's how Arizonans for a Martin Luther King, Jr. State Holiday was formed, and we also knew that there was a possibility that the state legislature could - could look at it again and perhaps pass it so it wouldn't be an executive order and the Governor could not overturn it. But that did not happen and so, um, as - as history will prove, uh, one of the first things the Governor did when he became governor in January of 1987, was to rescind the King holiday.

PF Okay. Who was on the executive committee?

WS Dr. Paul Eppinger who was then pastor of the First Baptist Church of Phoenix - the - the oldest Baptist Church, uh, in the State of Arizona, predominantly white Baptist Church, uh, Representative Art Hamilton, um, Representative Sandra Kennedy, Senator Carolyn Walker, leading pastors from around the Valley and the State, um, there were - Rabbi Plotkin, who was a leading Jewish rabbi. So, it was diverse. Tommy Espinoza who was a rising Latino leader. It was a very diverse group. We met together virtually every week to - and the goal - once the Governor rescinded it, was to get the legislature to now go ahead and pass it. Yeah. So, it was a very diverse group.

PF Okay.

WS Men and women, too. Some of faith, some not of faith. Very diverse, yes.

PF Okay. Well, let's go - we want to talk about the boycott that Arizonans for a Martin Luther King Holiday called on March 26, 1987.

WS Yes.

PF You, and I would guess the entire executive committee, uh, didn't take that lightly. You wrote, "When you are in a battle to win, there are times you must take risks to reach your ultimate goal." You said that you were shaking when you gave the press conference announcing the boycott. Uh, why did you consider that - that decision so risky?

WS Well, because it - it dealt with businesses losing money and the travel business, the hotel business, many of those, uh, those hotels and the - and the travel industry employed people of color, so it would affect them. But actually, you see, we didn't start the boycott. Stevie Wonder started the boycott. Stevie Wonder was scheduled to do a concert in Tucson shortly after the Governor rescinded the holiday and Stevie Wonder made a statement, a public statement, and he called on people - even though he was already here - when he found out that he rescinded it, because he had worked with Mrs. King and President Reagan to get President Reagan to sign the holiday into - as a federal law. So, um, he had a press conference and called

people not to come. So, it took us two months going back and forth as a coalition to decide if we wanted to support the boycott called by Stevie Wonder. After the legislature just kept saying no and the legislative leaders in the Arizona House and Senate just would not come to any compromise, then we actually joined the boycott that was already in progress called by Stevie Wonder. But also, following Dr. King's method that he used in the Civil Rights Movement, the boycott was probably the last strategy - first was dialogue with the powers that be, get support from the people, have peaceful protests, etc. Then if that didn't work, then you move to the boycott. So, we followed his strategy to the tee. And the only strategy we never got to was civil disobedience if they had not passed the holiday, as they did in 1992. But, we were nervous - I was nervous because I knew it would - it would cause people to - to negatively look at what we're doing. Terry Goddard at the time was an honorary chairperson. He was the Mayor of Phoenix. He left - he sent me a letter, uh, and resigned from the committee because we boycotted Arizona, which included Phoenix and Phoenix already had a paid state holiday. So, I - I had to go against the mayor of the largest city in the State of Arizona who had worked with us for the holiday.

PF You mentioned that civil disobedience would have been the next step.

WS Yes.

PF What would that have looked like?

WS We would've, uh, we would've probably gone to the state legislature and sat in until the police came and - and drug us off. Yeah.

PF Okay. All right. Were - were you surprised at how effective the boycott was?

WS Yes. Yes, yes, uh, conventions began to cancel. And they were primarily conventions of people of color or deal with social justice or labor. All the natural alliances of the Civil Rights Movement, and - and we got support from denominations who were gonna have regional meetings here, national meetings here, entertainers began to cancel their concerts. Um, it was - it was amazing, yeah.

PF Okay. What was your reaction to the NFL announcement they would cancel the 1993 Super Bowl in Phoenix if the King holiday didn't get passed?

WS Well it was mixed. One, we appreciated the support, um, but we knew that that would anger the anti-King holiday people and that would anger the voters who might change their minds, which we found in 1990 that they did. The announcement came, I think, the day before the - the general election in 1990, that if Arizona doesn't pass the King holiday by vote of the people, um,

the Super Bowl would never come to Arizona and that angered a lot of people. So, I had mixed - I was - I was glad they took a stand, but I knew that it might affect the outcome of that 1990 vote, and it did. There were two different versions of a proposition up for the King holiday, on the ballot, and both were defeated.

PF Okay. We'll talk about that a little later.

WS Oh sure, sure.

PF Yeah. Tell us what you thought when the business community was so quick to get on board with the King holiday once they realized the Super Bowl would not be held in Phoenix and the financial hit that the businesses would take?

WS Well, I felt they were being hypocritical. Uh, you know, I mean, we wrote to what was then called the Phoenix 40. They were the group of businesspeople that ran Phoenix and Arizona. One or two of them responded to my letters on behalf of the coalition. Eddie Basha, the late Eddie Basha, who said, "You know, I support you guys." Tommy Espinoza, who was the only Latino on the Phoenix 40. But none of the others, the - the bankers and the heads of corporation, the newspaper people, they did not respond initially, but when the NFL said that the 1993 Super Bowl that they wanted - when they said it would not come in '93 if they didn't - if Arizona didn't have the King holiday, uh, after Governor Mecham rescinded it, I got a call from Bill Shover who was the director of communications or community work from *The Arizona Republic* which - which was a strong newspaper at that time and he said, "Reverend can we talk about the King holiday?"

PF Okay.

WS And so we - we became friends. Even though we probably were both suspect of each other. We became friends and are friends to this day.

PF All right, you wrote your book and said the fact that the King holiday became an economic issue in Arizona will tell historians much more about Arizona's conservative politicians than about the legislative records. Describe your feelings when the noble motives for instituting the King holiday changed into an economic motive.

WS Well, again, um, money talks and - and I estimate, if you take the 1993 Super Bowl that did not happen, which would have brought in 250 to 300 million dollars, plus all the conventions and concerts that canceled, I believe that Arizona lost a half a billion dollars ... And money talks. And, uh, again that - that's why the Civil Rights Movement used the sit ins and the boycotts because when the opponents of justice for all refuse to budge, the only thing that would get them

to budge was hit their pocketbooks. And that proved to be the case with the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday.

PF Okay. On September 21, 1989, the Arizona Senate finally passed the bill making the third Monday in January the Martin Luther King, Jr. state holiday in place of Columbus Day. And Rose Mofford signed it into law the next day. However, it was just the beginning. How did you feel when a petition drive arose to repeal the law and force a referendum vote?

WS Very disappointed. Uh, we - and even though at that time I believe Governor Mecham had already been - yes, he had been impeached because Rose Mofford was the Governor. We knew his signature was all over it. Even though he had been impeached and was no longer the Governor, we knew that the people who launched the referendum immediately after it was signed, were his disciples, so to speak. And so, yeah.

PF Okay. Why did you decide to resign and allow the Anglo community, or the business community take charge of getting the King holiday passed?

WS Well, that was in - in the 1990 after we had - see, there were actually two King holidays passed by the legislature, one in '89, one, I believe, in the first part of '90, but the business community kinda took over and started their own - it was MLK for a Better America, something like that. They didn't wanna work with us. Really. And so, they took it upon themselves to fund their own campaign to - and they came up with the two different version of - one was to - to change King holiday for Columbus Day, which I'm no fan of Columbus Day but I - I knew that would infuriate a large segment of the population. Uh, and the other one was an economic issue. I can't remember that, but I knew that their primary purpose for wanting the King holiday was not for what it meant, it was to get the Super Bowl here. And so, I had a challenge from an integrity perspective to join their forces because I did not think they really wanted it for the right reasons.

PF Okay. How difficult was it for you to watch from the sidelines? Or was it a much-needed break?

WS Well, it was - it was difficult. I mean, yes, it was difficult. And to be very honest, I didn't support either one of the versions that they had. Uh, and I almost predicted that they were not gonna win.

PF Okay. Okay, yeah, and you mentioned this, that there were two referendums on the ballot...

WS Right.

PF ...on November 6, 1990, 301 that replaced Columbus Day with the King holiday and 302 adding

the King holiday to the list of state paid holidays. As we know, neither passed. Was it because there were two propositions on the ballot, or do you think there were other reasons?

WS Well, some people say that they were confused because there were two different versions of the King holiday, but I believe the reason there was a shift - because all the polls said that the one adding the King holiday was gonna win, but remember the night before, the day before, was when the sportscaster said that the NFL said if - if Arizona doesn't pass either one of these, the Super Bowl will not come. And so, I think that angered enough voters that they voted against both of them.

PF And I believe that was Bryant Gumbel?

WS Yes. Yes, it was, Bryant Gumbel, yes.

PF Okay. How did you feel at that point having the King holiday rescinded four times?

WS Well, yeah. I felt it was time to move on. I began getting calls and I got a call from an Arizona, uh, news anchor off the record. He said, "Pastor Stewart," he said, "we need to hear from you." I said, "No, no." I said, "Arizona has res- has rescinded the holiday, defeated the two propositions - have overturned the two propositions that came through the legislature, now they defeated two ballot propositions." I said, "Let's just move on. Let's move on." And he said, "No Pastor Stewart," he said - he said, "we need - people know that you want it for the right reasons." And I told him, I said, "Look, give me the weekend to pray about it and I need to talk with a couple of people." And I called Art Hamilton to seek his advice. I called a seminary classmate, Dr. Calvin Butts, III who pastored the Abyssinian Baptist Church, New York City, which was pastored by Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. and Sr., great leaders in the black community. And I sought their advice. And after speaking with them and praying about it, talking over with my family, uh, I - I said, "Okay. Let's try one more time." And so, we started what became known as Victory Together, to try to get it passed in the 1992 election, in the general election.

PF Okay. Uh, the person that called you was Frank Camacho?

WS Camacho, Frank Camacho.

PF Okay.

WS Yes.

PF From Channel 3?

WS Yes.

PF And I have the quote here, “Pastor Stewart, our State is being torn apart by this King holiday defeat. And I believe if you call some people together, they would come and we could win this thing.”

WS Yes.

PF And that’s what sparked your interest in...

WS Yep, that’s what...

PF ...to do it again.

WS ...you know, and like I said, but - but again, I - I resisted it and said, “No, it’s - look, they - this - obviously this State doesn’t want the holiday. Let’s just move on.”

PF Okay. Okay, the new campaign, Victory Together, One Clear Choice, how would you say this is different from the other...

WS Well, it was different because this time, the Phoenix 40 crowd, after being embarrassed, that their one-million-dollar campaign didn’t win the King holiday, they kinda were out there and, uh, they sent overtures to me that they would work with - with the coalition I’d launched this time, instead of bein’ outside, they said we will come and work at the table with you. And Jack, the late Jack Pfister, who was for a long time- was the general manager at SRP, was the person who worked with us. He would not hold an office, but he said, “I’ll be your - I’ll be by your side.” And Mr. Jack Pfister did that and he brought the Phoenix 40 crowd in as much as he could, as much as he could.

PF Okay. Okay, this time it was a low key, broad based, grassroots organization...

WS Yes.

PF ...with the support - of the Phoenix 40?

WS Yes.

PF Uh, in November, November 3, 1992, was the election day and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

became a reality in Arizona. How did you feel when you heard the election results? Were you surprised that it would make national news given the low-key campaign?

WS No, uh, well, it might have been a low-key campaign, but it was international news. I - people would come on vacation from Europe - would come to visit First Institutional because they saw me on television. I mean, it was - it was international issue, and so, um, give me that question again, I'm sorry. Can you ask me that question again?

PF Yeah, were you surprised that it made national news given that the campaign was low key?

WS No, no. The campaign was low key in the sense that there was less protesting. There certainly was not a boycott. But it was working behind the scenes with businesses - businesses and just with the people of Arizona to get them to see this is an American holiday, not a black holiday. But, but it was international news. Um, we had articles in the *New York Times*; I appeared on television with former Governor Mechem, with, in a talk show...

PF Phil?

WS Uh, I can't remember the name of...

PF Phil Donahue.

WS Phil Donahue and Nightline we were on - I mean, so it was - it made - it made international news, but the approach was different on the ground level, yes.

PF And that's what made the difference?

WS Yes, because the task was to - to convince Arizona voters that this is not a black holiday. See, that was the issue. Remember, Arizona at that time had only about three and a half percent black people. So, to have a holiday honoring a black man, many of the Arizona voters said why - why do we need to honor a black man or have a black holiday when there are only 3% black people here? I mean, that - I mean, they did not see Martin Luther King, Jr. as a national leader, as a - as a revolutionary in the 20th Century, as George Washington was in the 18th Century, as Abraham Lincoln was in the 19th Century. Well, that's what Martin Luther - Martin Luther King, Jr., in essence, finished the job of liberty and justice for all in the 20th Century. But they saw it as a black holiday. So, we had to convince the voters knowing that it would have to go before the people, the only way we could get it. That this is an American holiday.

PF How did you celebrate the King holiday in 1993?

WS Oh, it was a - well, at that time, the then America West Arena, which is now another name, but it was brand new where the Phoenix Suns played. We filled that auditorium - that seats over 19,000 people - to capacity to celebrate Arizona's first paid state holiday honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on the third Monday in January. Stevie Wonder came back, um, to give a speech. Rosa Parks came back. It was - it was one of the greatest experiences. It was the crowning celebration event of six and a half years of working day in and day out to get the state of Arizona to honor Martin Luther King, Jr. with a paid state holiday as the federal government had been doing since 1986.

PF How do you celebrate the King holiday today?

WS I usually go get my grandchildren and we march in the celebratory march and go down to the festival, uh, where you just see people of all colors that come there to celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. But more than that, I teach them of the importance, my grandchildren, of standing up for justice and for what is right and against racism on an everyday basis.

PF During the years when you worked to get the Arizona to declare the third Monday in January as a paid state King holiday, you received a lot of hate mail, which you seemed to take in stride. Was your family ever on the receiving end of verbal abuse because of your stance?

WS Not - not the family personally, but they would, um, people would send me hate mail, one - one morning they set fire to my newspaper and threw it in the driveway. Um, they would call me and hang up. Tell me to go back to Africa. But my children and my wife, they weren't - they weren't affected. It was mostly targeted at me, yes.

PF Okay. And you also received high praise. There was a letter that Bill Shover and Bill's one our Historymakers...

WS Yes.

PF ...wrote to your children that had high praise and really kind of touched me quite a bit. In his last paragraph, he wrote, "You are fortunate to have a father who so loved his community that he was willing to sacrifice his time and reputation." How did that letter make you feel? And how did your children react to it?

WS Well, at the time, my children were young, so they didn't - they didn't - that didn't mean - but just recently, I - I put together a folder for each of my children and in that - with - with different pictures and - and some family biographical information, but also I put the letter in there, so that now as adults, they can have it to read and they can share it with their children that their - that their children's grandfather, uh, made a difference in the state.

PF It was a lovely letter.

WS Yeah, powerful. I have it on my wall, uh, in my study at home.

PF During your activities on behalf of the King holiday, I know your congregation took on several building programs. Can you tell us about that?

WS Yes, while all the fight for the King holiday was going on, we were doing some major expansion. When I came to the church, there was basically one building. In 1990 to '91, we built what we call the body building, which is our administrative and educational building. Then after that, we renovated the sanctuary, which is now called our worship center. And then finally in 2004, we built our family life center which is called the hope center. So, all total, about 9 million dollars of expansion within a 10-to-15-year period.

PF Okay, and 2004 was the last building program that you had?

WS Yes, yes, yes.

PF Okay. Uh, was - was it completely debt free?

WS We are completely debt free now. Most of the 9 million, I think 7 million was paid for in cash. We had to make a decision whether or not we wanted to save all the money to build the 5-million-dollar hope center or to put the cash we had down on it and pay it back. So, we decided to go ahead and put the cash we had down on it, and we burned the mortgage September of 2015.

PF Okay. Is - is the hope center the same as the family life center?

WS Yes, yes. It's called the hope center, but it is a family life center, yes.

PF Okay. Well, you wanna tell us about the people that are served by that center?

WS Yes. We chose to build a campus that is functional, rather than a huge sanctuary where it's used a few hours one day a week. So, uh, the hope center is where we do most of our holistic Christian ministry. We feed literally thousands of people, uh, every year. We - we provide lunches. We have a clothing distribution facility. We do job networking. We have a computer room where people can - we teach them how to do their resumes, how to - to try to find jobs. We oversee - it's under what is called Fibco Family Services, which is one of our

three non-profits, and we have that work on site. Then we have several homes for seriously mentally ill people around the Valley. We have a home called the Ejima House which is a home for unwed teenage mothers and their infants. We have the Samaritan House, which is emergency housing for those who need temporary housing. And then we have another corporation called the Broway House Corporation, which runs a Section 8 housing apartment with 80 units to provide housing for low-income people.

PF Okay in 2013, you ran for Phoenix City Council, District 8?

WS Yes.

PF Tell us about that.

WS Well I, I was drafted to run for the City Council. That City Council District had been occupied by an African American for nearly 50 years and then Michael Johnson, the Councilman, was termed out and we were trying to keep it, uh, represented by an African American, even though the demographics have - have changed. And so, there was difficulty in finding someone to succeed him. I was on the committee to try to find an African American to run. And there were non-African Americans who were running. And, um, I missed a meeting, and I was told after that meeting, I was the one that was - was nominated to best represent our chance to keep the seat. Uh, made it through the runoff, I mean through the, uh, primary, but didn't make it through the runoff, but it was a great experience. Running for office is very humbling. Having to knock on doors of total strangers, ask people for support money. It is one of the most humbling experiences I've ever had. Yeah.

PF Okay. You'd mentioned that the demographics of District 8 have changed.

WS Yes.

PF How have they changed?

WS Well, well when I came here, I mean, South Phoenix was populated by primarily African Americans. I mean, that's where the African Americans live, many of them, but as racism has decreased, legalized discrimination, you can live in the Valley wherever you can pay the rent, wherever you can pay the mortgage, and so, uh, African Americans have left District 8 and moved around the Valley so it reduced the percentage of African Americans and then due to gentrification and development, white residents have moved into South Phoenix. 'Cause South Phoenix used to be - when I came here, nobody wanted to live in Sou- it was the bad word, the two bad words, South Phoenix. Now it is one of the fastest growing areas in the City of Phoenix and is what? It is 15 minutes from downtown, if you work downtown, uh, now we

have freeways, so the majority of the people who live in South Phoenix are not people of color anymore. And so, whereas it was easy for an African American to be re-elected before, it was not easy, and it didn't happen in the 2013 race.

PF Okay. Do you think you'll ever do it again?

WS I would think so. I'm sure there are a crossover candidate of color, um, I guess I'm - I'm considered history. I mean, I'm old school so I did - a lot of the younger people and the new people moving to District 8, they didn't know about the - they don't know about the King holiday. They don't know about the things that we've done fighting for justice and so, my historical advantage did not work.

PF Okay. I got a quote here from Howard Norris, who wrote an article in the *Arizona Informant*, which is the African American newspaper endorsing you. And I'm gonna quote it. I'm gonna be quoting it because I wanna ask you about the issues he brings up.

WS Sure.

PF He says, "For more than 35 years, Warren H. Stewart has been committed to providing continuous community leadership on such issues as collaborative planning, care of the homeless and veterans, health care for the needy, neighborhood development for low-income housing, child advocacy, improved mental health delivery, services for unwed teenage mothers, immigration reform, and ending the use of overzealous police force." And that's quite an endorsement. And some of these issues you've already talked about.

WS Sure.

PF Are there any others here that you would like to talk about?

WS No, but - but over the years, the church and I have been involved in many justice issues. We fought against apartheid. We got the Arizona Retirement Fund to divest from companies doing business in South Africa during apartheid. I mean, we - we got bridges built across Salt River, uh, the Salt River that were not washed out in the 100-year floods like they used to be. So, we've been fighting for justice issues for a long time.

PF Okay. Dr. Stewart, you have traveled and preached extensively in 38 states and territories and 51 countries. Would you share a couple of interesting stories that stand out for you?

WS Oh my goodness. Interesting - yes, the first time I went to Israel, I was sent there along with Representative Art Hamilton and Tommy Espinoza and a diverse group of Arizonans to see what

the issues were in Israel. And I'll never forget, um, when we were touring Israel, our tour guide showed us Bedouin shepherds on the sides of the hills outside of Jerusalem who lived in tents, but they had TV antennas where they were able to watch TV. And he was bragging to us, he said, "You Americans talk about how bad we treat the Palestinians over here. But look, they have TVs in those tents." And we looked at him and said, "What has that got to do with - with discrimination and, you know, I mean, so you have a TV and you livin' in a tent." And, um, and - and I never forget, our guide, his name was Jacob Panini. I'm sure he's dead now. He was a former freedom fighter of Israel and we talked to him about Israelis making peace with the Palestinians. I'll never forget what he said. Jacob Panini said, "I will go to bed with the devil before I make peace with an Arab." I never will forget that. And he kept telling those of us who were people of color, who kept pointing out what we saw as discrimination, he said, "No, you Americans don't understand. This is not discrimination. This is the way we do things over in Israel." But so, that - that stands out for me...

PF That's an eye-opener.

WS That's an eye-opener. When he said, "I will go to bed with the devil before I'll make peace with an Arab." And that was in 1980. Another one, yeah, I've been to Africa several times and, um, I was there under apartheid and was very afraid. I was one of the few persons on a - on a clergy mission trip to choose not to stay in a hotel in Johannesburg, but to go in Soweto and stay in the homes under apartheid. And so, I was very afraid 'cause I had heard about, you know, how blacks are treated in South Africa and, um, I didn't know if I'd make it back to the hotel, etc. So that was quite an experience, but - but I learned some Zulu and Xhosa there and when Nelson Mandela was freed from imprisonment for 27 years, he took a tour to United States. And as a religious leader in our denomination, there was a small meeting in the chapel at the Riverside Church in New York City. I was invited to come, about a hundred people when he and his then wife, Winnie Mandela, were introduced to the religious leaders in America and, uh, so in a small chapel that sat about a hundred, he and Winnie Mandela come walking down the aisle. And when he gets to me, I said, "[speaking African language]." And he - it like startles him to hear somebody speaking in his language. And that simply means, "Praise the Lord, good to see you." But it startled him, and he looked at me when I spoke to him in his own language.

PF Okay. You have many achievements bestowed upon others given to you, um, I'm going to read some of them here. Award of Excellence in Black Church Studies 1982 by the Ecumenical Center for Black Church Studies from Los Angeles, California. Recognized as one of the 10 most influential religious leaders in the Valley in *The Arizona Republic* in 1985. Recognized as one of the 10 people whose achievements have most notably affected Arizona on Arizona Hall of Fame. That's from *Phoenix Gazette*. Named Living Legend in 2002 by the *Arizona Daily Star* in Tucson. You received the Calvin C. Goode Lifetime Achievement Award from the City of Phoenix MLK Jr. Celebration. Recognized as one of the 25 leaders and legends in the

From Dr. Warren H. Stewart, Sr. 2016 Video Interview

business community - 2005 *Phoenix Business Journal*. Recognized as Best Pro-Civil Rights Pastor 2011, *Phoenix New Times*. Faith Community Award 2011, *Arizona Informant*. Inducted into the 30th Anniversary of the Martin Luther King, Jr. College of Ministers and Laity Board of Preachers, April 9, 2015, Morehouse College, Martin Luther King, Jr. International Chapel, Atlanta, Georgia. In addition, you had your oil painting hung in the Morehouse College Martin Luther King, Jr. International Chapel in Atlanta, Georgia. And I'm sure there's many others that are not even listed here. Plus, you are now an Arizona Historymaker 2017. Um, are any of these awards more special to you than others? Do you have one that's particularly grateful for?

WS Well, the one in 2015, I never dreamed of being honored by the Morehouse College, Martin Luther King, Jr. National Chapel and to have my - my oil portrait hanging just a few feet from my late pastor, Dr. Sandy Ray, and one of my most significant mentors, Dr. Gardner Taylor, who are just a few feet from the portraits of Dr. Martin Luther King, Daddy King, his mother, his wife, just is amazing. I'm from Coffeyville, Kansas. That's - that's a long way from Coffeyville, Kansas. It's mind boggling.

PF Okay. You have served at First Institutional Baptist Church for 39 years. Many times, a pastor and the congregants get crosswise and there's a short tenure at any given church. Uh, the leadership skills you possess must be unique. How would you characterize your leadership style and where did you learn your leadership skills?

WS Well certainly I - I had to - I had to learn it on the run. Remember, I came to this church, First Institutional, at age 25. Never pastored before. I watched my pastor, Dr. Sandy Ray, I watched how he - he's a great man in stature; friends with the late Governor Nelson Rockefeller who was the Vice President and all that stuff, but he was a very humble man. He - he was very approachable. And he was a peoples' pastor. And so, I've learned from him, and Dr. Ray taught me that we are more given than giving. That - that people give us much more than we're able to give to them. So, I've never forgotten that. And then from my humble backgrounds, um, I'm just grateful to God for allowing me to do the things. And then I believe in collective decision making. Some of my peers criticize me because I'm not a dictator. So, so whereas I could appoint pastoral staff people when there's a vacancy, I will bring in a committee, a deacon, a trustee, a young person, a woman, etc. So, and so I will say, "Let us make the decision." So, I - I believe in collective decision making, even though as senior pastor, I certainly have a lot of influence.

PF Okay, so you must be comfortable delegating...

WS Oh very much so.

PF ...many positions and giving the responsibility to others.

WS Very much so.

PF Okay.

WS Very much so.

PF All right, you have a son, Warren Stewart, Jr., who's also a pastor and leads a different church. Uh, you must be very proud of him. Talk about his journey.

WS Well he's coming up. He - he is my namesake; he has been on my staff twice, but sometimes fathers and sons can't work together. But he started his own church, the Remnant Church, and, uh, and he's a graduate from ASU. Um, I wanted him to go to seminary and the last time he was on my staff, I think maybe ten years ago, I gave him a year. I said, "If you're not enrolled in seminary by the end of this year, you know, you've got to go." So, at 11 months, he - he resigned. Because he - he thought at the time that my wanting him to go to seminary was saying that he wasn't validated until he went. That's not the case. Seminary gives you tools to better understand the scriptures, to better be a church leader. And so even after he left me and started his own church, some of his new mentors got him to go to seminary and he just graduated in May of this year from Phoenix Seminary with his master's degree. And so, he and then with all of the - all of the recent challenges we've had in race relationships, police shootings, etc., the Black Lives Matter, he has become a leader and the news media, uh, go to him first and not to me like they used to. And that is - that is a delight to see him arise and become a young voice, a younger voice for justice issues as well as being a pastor, yes.

PF Okay. All right. Tell us about your wife and children and what they're doing?

WS Well my - my wife, Karen, she works with us on the staff. In introducing her to different functions, I often say, "She's my partner in marriage and ministry." Uh, she is a wonderfully gifted person. She's our director of evangelism and discipleship. And, um, she's been to seminary herself. Very gifted. And so, we are partners in marriage and ministry. We are a blended family. We have seven children, six from me, one from her. And so that - that has its challenges there, being a blended family. But they are all adults. We now have 12 grandchildren and they each have their own different personality and we hang out with the grands. We hang out with some of the - some of the children. It is - there's never a dull day with seven children and 12 grandchildren in a blended family.

PF Do any others have any thoughts of pursuing a ministry? Doing ministry?

WS Yes, yeah, yes. My third son, Jared has been an interim pastor at a Free Methodist Church here

in the Valley. Um, he and his wife have three children. I have my youngest son, Aaron, he's been called to preach. Um, but he's been going through some challenges. We all been going through some - some challenges. But each of them were brought up in the church. Um, and they all know that God has a purpose for each of their lives. And so, we've made it through the good times as well as the bad times.

PF Okay. Well let's just talk - or mention the others, too. Since we've mentioned two of them already. How about Matt? Matthew Stewart?

WS Matthew is a supervisor for the Department of Child Safety. He - he and his wife, uh, they have two children together. Um, he's the more quiet guy, the introspective one, so he's doing well. Matthew he is born in 1980, so he will be 36 this year. We talked about Jared. Justin is my artist. Graduated from ASU last year. Excellent artist. He works in group homes by helping young people who are having challenges in their own homes. He goes to these homes. Jamila, my youngest daughter is about to graduate from ASU. She is working full time also. Jessica, our second daughter, Karen's daughter, uh, has two children. She's a full-time worker. I think I've got everybody. Yes, Aaron, I think I mentioned, yes, we got 'em all now.

PF Okay. All right. Do you still drive the red Camaro?

WS Yes, I have a 1982 red Camaro sport coupe that I tried to give to my two oldest sons, Warren Jr. and - and Matthew when they were going to college. They wanted Hondas, foreign cars. So, I took it back. I've restored it. It looks like it's brand new. My wife complains because we have a two-car garage and her car sits - sits outside. And my - my '82 Camaro, and I have a 2010 Camaro, they sit in the garage.

PF Well, did you buy your Camaro in 1982?

WS I bought it brand new, and very interesting. I didn't intend - okay, Monday's my off day as a pastor. That's my sabbath day. So, I would take my children, I only had two sons, riding. So, we were riding one day. We were - we were out in Tempe. We passed by a Chevrolet dealer and saw two Camaros. And I had a Chevette at that time, which is a little tiny car. And they were outgrowing it, where they couldn't sit in the back seat. We were up - there was a sale. I bought it in three hours. So, I drove home that night in that hot red 4-speed Camaro, and I drove up in the - in the driveway and my wife said, "Whose car is that?" I said, "It's mine." She said, "That's not your car." I said, "Yes, it is." And so, I bought it in December of 1982, and I've had it ever since. One owner car. Yeah. Yeah.

PF Might be historic soon.

WS It is historic and - and it cost me a lot of money, yeah. I mean, to keep it up.

PF What do you do to relax? What hobbies or sports do you participate in?

WS Well, I do a lot of walking. I try to walk 10,000 steps a day. I work out. I have weights at home, exercise equipment, so I do that three times a day. I happen to be a vegetarian. So, I try to take care of my body. Um, my wife and I go to the movies almost every Monday to see - see what's on at the movies. So, that's what we do to relax.

PF Okay. Uh, what do you think you'll do about retirement?

WS Well I want to retire. I - I hope to have a successor at First Institutional, so there would not be a long-time break between me being the senior pastor and not having anyone and the next pastor. If that's God's will, it'll happen. Uh, I'm in my 40th year, uh, Moses did 40 years. Um, I hope to have a successor within five years for sure.

PF Okay. All right. Well, you've lived in Arizona for 39 years. What makes Arizona special for you?

WS Well, when I moved here - when - no - when I came to candidate for the church in March of 1977, after living in New York City for four years, what caught me was the cleanliness and the natural landscape, being surrounded by the mountains. I'm an outdoors kind of guy. And my wife and I now live right at the foot of South Mountain, so I can walk outside of my door and go into the wilderness, so to speak, and see coyotes, quail and just all types of natural animals. So, so it has been geographically the setting, the cleanliness, but also in the 39 years I've been here, Arizona has been in a growth posture. And I tell people all over the country, in spite of them hearing about our racist issues, whether it's with a former governor or with a sheriff, etc., I tell them that the Arizona leadership often doesn't represent the real Arizonans. I said, "You can live anywhere in Arizona that you can pay the rent or the mortgage. You can have a relationship with anybody you want, regardless of their color." It is one of the most wonderful places I've ever lived in my life.

PF Okay. What do you see for Arizona's future?

WS Well, I - well, if we can keep the conservative right from having a strangle hold on the state legislature, I see great things. Uh, but again, like I said, the districts are as such, people who do not represent the change in Arizona run the government. And so, if we can ever get representatives who are representatives of the majority of Arizonans, the future is - is up and up.

PF How would you like to be remembered?

WS A guy that loved the Lord, loved his family, and loved people.

PF There's a great deal of unrest in our country today, especially in the African American community due to the perception that there's a racial bias with young black men who are unfairly stopped, detained, and sometimes shot by law enforcement officials. Would you share your thoughts?

WS Well one, it's not a perception, it's reality. There is systemic racism. I say this consistently wherever I can. I said it to the Governor, the current governor, about a month ago. I said, "Governor," I said, "Yes, we get upset about the police shootings, about retaliation," I said, "but Governor, systemic racism injures and/or kills more people of color daily than all police brutality, black on black crime, brown on brown crime, HIV/AIDs, Ebola, Zika, combined." Systemic racism affects our public education. It affects economic development. It affects health issues. It affects the environment. It affects so much. And the system is corrupt. And we need to change the system. Uh, so yes, there - we, from the White House on down, we need - we've never really addressed America's cancer of racism. We - we've treated it, but we've never addressed it. And until we address it, we might be going back in reverse.

PF Phoenix had a recent demonstration, but to date serious violence has been avoided. Where do you think Phoenix is in regard to racial bias?

WS Well, again, overall Phoenix is a great place to live. But racial discrimination still exists. The fact that people of color are not the majority of population, but they are the majority of people in our jails and prisons. Listen, there was a study done on the cause of mortality in Maricopa County recently. And of the eight causes of mortality of people in Maricopa County, African Americans topped seven of them. The only cause of mortality that we didn't top was suicide. Cardiovascular disease, HIV/AIDs, violence, accidents, all those other reasons for people dying, we top. So, something is wrong with the system.

PF And that's been a part of your mission...

WS Yes.

PF ...also is to address these situations?

WS Yes, yes.

End of Interview

/gmc