

[0:00:00]

Harold Lee: I think a public official ought to be honest. And I think that if you catch him stealing, he should be punished.

Moderator: What about Nixon?

Harold Lee: I don't think anybody understands what the whole Watergate business was about. Nixon was not nearly a thief.

[0:00:30]

No, sir. He was a thief, too, merely, but what he was trying - it's exactly what Mrs. - who was it? The vice president's wife, candidate. What's his name? Mrs. Mondale said the congressmen are doing it to their secretaries...

[0:01:02]

...and the Nixon people are trying to do it to the country. Nixon was trying to steal the country. I don't mean steal the country in terms of owning it, I mean stealing the country so far as our liberties and democratic privileges are concerned. I don't understand, of course most people don't understand that. But when you read and listen to those tapes and read those tapes and see what that man had in mind about how he was coming down on everybody who was opposed to him...

[0:01:34]

...these blacklists that he put out to try to crush and discredit and bankrupt everybody who was opposed to him, the whole thing was to create a monolithic society, a situation where he himself would run this country forever.

Moderator: You think he was [unintelligible]?

Harold Lee: Nixon intended, if he had served his four years, we would not be having an election in 1976. That's my conviction. That's the difference between Nixon and everybody else.

[0:02:02]

Nobody else ever had that ambition.

Moderator: You actually think...

Harold Lee: [Schlesinger] said he had alerted the department of defense in the last days of the Nixon administration to be prepared to stop any coup that Nixon may try.

[0:02:34]

Schlesinger said that, his appointee. The hell he knows. You all don't read.

Moderator: We read.

Harold Lee: God damn, it's amazing how much - my source doesn't come from the inside: it's all public. It's right there. It's in the papers. It's in the newspapers. It's in the magazines. It comes out on the television, and it's on the radio. If you listen, you'll understand something.

[0:03:02]

No. Schlesinger said he was fearful and had the Department of Defense.

Moderator: As an attorney, should that man be in jail now?

Harold Lee: Oh, God damn right he ought to be in jail. If anybody's going to be in jail for anything that happened. If you go pardon Nixon, pardon them all. Shit, he's the whole damn culprit. There's no damn sense in putting poor old what's his name in jail and Nixon's out there living where he is.

[0:03:35]

That doesn't making any damn sense at all.

Moderator: Is Nixon dead as a politician now in this country?

Harold Lee: Oh, yeah.

Moderator: Nothing happened?

Harold Lee: Oh, no. He's scared of everybody. All the thinking people. Whatever you say, most people in this country still believe that this is the best way to run the government...

[0:04:02]

...where somebody's got something to say. But everybody knows that once you set up - because Hitler proved that, so did Mussolini. And once you put all the power and abrogate all the constitutional guarantees that everybody had, [unintelligible], shit, that ain't true. Rockefeller and I don't give a damn who it is. When the man says cut his fucking head off, off his head goes. And his money ain't going to save him when he gets back.

[0:04:33]

Nixon was a vindictive person. Took offense at trifles. Shit, as a dictator, he would've been worse than Stalin, because he's so vindictive and so easily offended about trifles such as...

Moderator: What is Gerald Hoover then?

[0:05:00]

Do you feel that he's an extension of Nixon? Or he's his own man at this particular point in the game?

Harold Lee: No. I'm going to tell you, it takes a man of unusual intelligence to dream of being a Hitler. Hitler always said he was a genius. And he was.

[0:05:33]

He was just a demonic one. But a man has to be able to see over a period of time that he's ahead of other people in his thinking, his planning, his foresight. And therefore, he says to himself...

[0:06:00]

...“Why let these other son of a bitches think? They don't ever think right. I ought to do it for them, because I'm always right.” Of course, he isn't always right, but that's what he thinks. “Therefore, they're going to be better off if I decide what they should do, where they should go, what they should say, what they should read.” And then he makes a lunch for us.

[0:06:31]

But didn't think that America could never succumb to a dictatorship. It sure can.

Moderator: She's 200 years old. What's preventing there from being a dictatorship, really? Nixon came that close. What's preventing it?

Harold Lee: Tradition, I suppose, and the fact that there is an overwhelming majority of the people, I think, who are dedicated to its continuance.

[0:07:02]

Moderator: Isn't it possible that it could've been a coup and the masses not known about it?

Harold Lee: I would hope that at some point some of the actual people who hold the power, such as the generals in the army and in the air force and navy, would conclude that this is not a legal action...

[0:07:34]

...and that we would just carry it out.

Moderator: There's no legality in a coup.

Harold Lee: Listen, that's right. The Watergate conspirators and the related crimes, the break-ins and so forth that were carried out, the illegal snooping and so forth that was carried out...

[0:08:04]

...was carried out on the order of the president. And none of those people had nerve enough to say that you do not have the authority to give this kind of order, therefore, I will disobey it. The president is the commander in chief, therefore, any order he gives is supposed to be obeyed.

[0:08:35]

But the order has to first of all be a legal order. Once you resist an order, the burden is on you to prove its illegality. I had this question when I was in service, when the officer told me to do something that I thought was wrong and I knew was wrong, I would just do it. I'm not going to do that.

[0:09:00]

Moderator: But you had to have it together.

Harold Lee: We have a confrontation then, [unintelligible]. [Unintelligible], your liberty is to bring your charges. But you're wrong. The articles don't say so. I got off of it each time. I was right, I guess. [Unintelligible] testing. But you have to know.

[0:09:30]

And this requires hitting your books. My good Black friends are always talking about what's illegal and then going off for self-help. And nine times out of ten, they're wrong. They don't have any right to resort to self-help under the circumstances that they think they have. And of course, then they get it. they catch it in the neck. And of course, the way they see it, they were only trying to do what they thought was right.

[0:10:02]

That's not the way our society works. You've got to be right, not think you're right. Because you're rightly motivated doesn't excuse you for doing wrong. You've got to be right. And if you don't know what the difference between what your rights are and what your rights are not - like this damn cop that was on TV the other night and told these photographers they couldn't take his picture without his consent, he's a damn liar.

[0:10:34]

Told the television people they couldn't take his picture without his consent. He's assuming he's got a right he doesn't have.

Moderator: Who was the greatest man you've ever met? I'm talking about next to your economics teacher, let's say, that you have ever met and known.

[0:11:05]

Harold Lee: I didn't have an opportunity to know the man intimately, but I did meet the man on several occasions, and that would be Dr. Martin Luther King. If you talk about Black people, in my book...

[0:11:32]

...I list Frederick Douglass as the number one Black man in this country, I've deduced. And next to Frederick Douglass, I list W.E.B. Du Bois. Next to Du Bois, I would call it Martin Luther King.

[0:12:03]

And next to Martin Luther King would be A. Philip Randolph. These are giants on the American scene, if you ask me, in my opinion. And of course, I love Paul Robeson. And I don't know whether Paul was such a great man or not, but he made me feel so good.

[0:12:30]

I just love him, I love him. He came here in 1946 to do a concert at the Municipal Auditorium. I don't know if you know Paul Robeson or not. He would be [unintelligible].

[0:13:00]

Moderator: Right. Yale man.

Harold Lee: Baritone singer. Rutgers man. All American.

Moderator: Actor.

Harold Lee: He's big, Black, beautiful. Beautiful Black son of a bitch, man. I loved him for that too. Liked him for his color, his features. Big mouth, big lips, deep voice.

[0:13:31]

Drove the white people crazy. You couldn't keep your hands off of him. But that's all right. Paul came here and sang at the Municipal Auditorium. At that time, Blacks were admitted to the Municipal Auditorium and were permitted to buy seats in all price ranges.

[0:14:04]

But they were all together in all price ranges. Orchestra that's the main floor. All the Blacks sat together. Box seats. All the Blacks sit together. Loges, all the Black - when they sold out of the seats they had reserved for the Blacks and the loges, there weren't any more loges they told you.

[0:14:30]

First balcony, all the Blacks sat together. And the upper balcony, all the Blacks sat together. They did not see them in the same section of the hall, that is if the orchestra would be here, the boxes would be there, the loges would be there, first balcony would be there, third balcony would be there. And when you looked out, if you looked out at it without paying any attention, you'd see Blacks all over the house.

[0:15:05]

You'd just have to sit there and study it a little bit before you could see what's going on. But when you looked out, you'd see Blacks here, you'd see Blacks there, you'd see Blacks over here, you'd see Blacks here. You'd just see Blacks everywhere. And of course, when Paul came here, the place was just filled with Blacks. Just a whole lot of Blacks. But there were far more whites than Blacks. The first time he'd given a concert in Kansas City, in my memory, the only time he ever gave a concert here...

[0:15:33]

...was that. And Lucille Bluford, bless her little sweet soul - Paul was - Dr. L.W. Turner, he'd called in a shrink. I don't know if you know what [unintelligible] he's no doctor around here now. You may not have heard of him, but he still lives and he still practices medicine.

[0:16:00]

But he used to be considered our best surgeon before Carl and [Unintelligible] came overseas. L.W. Turner went to Rutgers with Paul and knew him personally. And when Paul came to Kansas City, he always stayed [unintelligible]. Always stayed with Dr. Turner. And Dr. Turner always had a little something for him.

[0:16:32]

A number of people were well acquainted with Paul. So Lucille knew him well. And at intermission, Lucille went back to see him. And she said, "Paul, I thought you told me you didn't sing before segregated audiences." And Paul said, "I don't." She said, "You're singing before one now."

[0:17:00]

He said, "No, I'm not. Blacks are all over that place. I looked at it. There are Blacks all over that place." And she said, "Yeah, but you didn't notice what they'd done. They're all seated together in various price ranges. And he said, "Is that true?" She said, "Yes." He said, "Let me go see." And he came out and looked and he saw it. You can't see it unless you look, because you probably would be very impressed to look up and see Blacks all over this place.

[0:17:32]

And he said, "You're right." And then Paul came out and told the audience what had happened. And he didn't sing before segregated audiences, and that is in his contract, and that he is singing before one now and he has never done it before. "And my first inclination was to discontinue the concert immediately..."

[0:18:03]

...but at the behest of my Black friend, I've decided to continue. But the program is going to be entirely changed." And he started off with Jim Crow. And the whites started leaving. God damn, he was [unintelligible].

[0:18:28]

Moderator: Paul. That's the kind of fellow he was.

Harold Lee: And then he sang all of the Black fighting songs. The rest of the program. And by the time he finished, half of the white folks had gone. But we were screaming.

Moderator: But you knew him though.

Harold Lee: We niggers, oh, yeah.

Moderator: He was running with some pretty heavy fellows back in that particular period. Who else did you know like that? Did you know Martin Luther?

[0:19:00]

Harold Lee: Yeah. I knew Martin. Martin was here at least two occasions. I met him and talked with him rather extensively. He was in Milwaukee and I was in Milwaukee and I met him and talked to him rather extensively.

[0:19:30]

I doubt if before he died if he - I was walking down 12th Street and he was too. And he would say, "Hey, Holliday." [Unintelligible] like that. But I would

guess that if he were going to a place where he thought I might be, he'd probably know who I was. In other words, if I said, "Martin, come to Kansas City and I'll meet you at the airport..."

[0:20:04]

...when he got off the plane, he could pick me out of - he'd have ten times to figure out who I was and who it was he picked me out of the rest of the people. [Unintelligible], I guess. I knew Thurgood Marshall very well, of course. He used to come here all the time. After I began practicing law, I used to collaborate on some things with the [unintelligible].

[0:20:33]

Moderator: Jumping forward a little...

Harold Lee: Because Roy Wilkins is very well known here, right around here, I guess.

Moderator: Roy Wilkins?

Harold Lee: Yeah. He used to leave here. And he comes here all the time.

Moderator: Know what his address was when he was here?

Harold Lee: No. I don't know. Lucille would probably know. His brother Earl lived in the house where C.W. Robinson lives now, right on Mersington there.

[0:21:03]

Right behind me.

Moderator: Did you ever meet D.A. Holmes?

Harold Lee: Yeah.

Moderator: There's a big age difference between you. What kind of person was he?

Harold Lee: My evaluation of D.A. Holmes is that, without question, D.A. Holmes was a man of very strong and overwhelming personality.

[0:21:35]

I never felt that D.A. Holmes, in our college, utilized their talents to the extent I thought was possible for the advancement of Black people in this town.

[0:22:03]

Although Holmes and Carl, and Carl more than Holmes, did do considerable things. So far as Holmes is concerned, it may be that I have a personal prejudice, because I decided...

[0:22:35]

...in consultation with some white friends of mine to enter the University of Kansas City. And at that time, this was opposed to their policy. And I undertook to try to break that policy in 1946.

[0:23:04]

Took two years for us to do this. Dick Bowling was among the group of people who helped. I was introduced by the then owner of what was the Davidson Furniture Company.

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Used to be Don here on Warner. Used to be Don here at [unintelligible]. Davidson was his old man, or Warner. It was the biggest downtown furniture store in town at the time. And I was introduced to Arthur Mag by him. His name was [Stark]. Ray Stark.

[0:24:02]

Although he was Jewish. And I met Arthur at Menorah Hospital. [Unintelligible] hospital you'd see a picture all over the damn place. Didn't want him to [unintelligible].

[0:24:26]

Moderator: What's his last name?

Harold Lee: Mag.

Moderator: Mag. Arthur Mag.

Harold Lee: And Mag was on the board of trustees at the university at the time. And shortly after I met Mag, I was admitted. And I think Mag was very influential in bringing that about. Mag is very influential man in his time. You don't know that?

Moderator: Uh-uh.

[0:25:00]

Harold Lee: Number one lawyer here at the time. Stinson, Mag, McEvers, and Fizzell. They know Stinson. And Mag is still practicing. I guess Mag must be 85 years old. [Unintelligible].

Moderator: You being a defense attorney, who's been the baddest prosecuting attorney you've ever known?

[0:25:35]

Harold Lee: I've never run across a prosecuting attorney. I thought it was worth a damn.

Moderator: Was [Teasdale]?

Harold Lee: No. Teasdale was on the traffic case.

Moderator: Why haven't you ever sought that position?

Harold Lee: Oh, prosecute. Of course, we're only entering the period of time where it may be possible to win.

[0:26:04]

I doubt if it's possible to win now. But there's never been any possibility. I remember a Star reporter approached me once some years ago and said he heard I was going to run, and he was thrilled to death.

Moderator: You could win. Let me go on.

[0:26:30]

The law. Is the law partial? Is the law blind? Is the law fair?

Harold Lee: Let me tell you this. This is my opinion. When my son was in law school, he was having some trouble with taking his test.

[0:27:03]

I told him that the problem was that he was attempting to find some technicality in the law, some obscure thing that didn't make any sense.

[0:27:27]

I say, "You can answer any question if you just keep this one thing in mind: the law is fair." That's what the effort is, to make the law fair, according to our standards of fairness. And those standards change from time to time. And he said he thereafter, before he took a test, he wrote at the head of his page, the law is fair.

[0:28:02]

And his grades thereafter improved tremendously, because he did not look for a gimmick, but he looked to see - I said, "All you have to do is to examine the question, and you decide, even if you don't know the principle or law. You decide what would be a fair solution. What would be a fair solution to this probably, fair to all the parties involved."

[0:28:27]

Now, the problem in the law is, and when it is not fair, is the interpretation of the facts. The little girl in North Carolina, whatever it was...

Moderator: Joanne Little?

Harold Lee: Yeah. Would've been convicted had not all of this great effort been made to save her. The law is the same...

[0:29:01]

...but she would've been convicted because, without the great effort they put into it, and particularly the great amount of money they spent selecting the jury, probably the greatest, more money was spent selecting that jury than in any trial in the history of this country, [unintelligible]. They spent something like \$50,000 to select a jury, with experts and psychologists and psychiatrists and all that kind of crap they went through...

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...trying to select a jury. And the reason why she would've been convicted? Because the jury she would have gotten would have never listened to her statement or the facts. They would have operated on the assumption, which is the normal assumption in the south...

[0:30:01]

...and the reason why you have a harder time getting justice in the south is that the white man is telling the truth and the nigger's telling a lie. So once you get up there, where it's a white man's word against a Black man's word, a Black man - I criticize the expressions of opposition to the system that is in the mouths of so many Black youth today...

[0:30:33]

...because listen, they do not have an alternative that appears would operate more justly and more fairly. The approach of the youth is [unintelligible], which has never been successful in any effort.

[0:31:04]

And the most glaring example of it is the first revolution of 1789, where there was nothing to replace Louis the 16th after they cut his head off. Nobody had in mind a form of government which would operate successfully.

[0:31:34]

The communists have maintained rule in Russia since 1921 because, when they got rid of the czar, they had an idea in mind as to what they wanted to

replace it with. And they began to try to put that into effect. But to merely destroy without being able to replace with something better...

[0:32:04]

...leads to anarchy. And of course, you know what - I suppose you know what happened to the French Revolution. They ended up killing each other. They had nothing. And they ended up doing nothing but killing people, including themselves. Of course, it was very easy for Napoleon to walk in.

[0:32:30]

Moderator: Two questions: where are we today as [unintelligible] people?

Harold Lee: In my opinion, Horace, we stand at the crossroads of history, where we have an opportunity to make great strides forward or to go back to days that perhaps haven't been experienced by Black people...

[0:33:04]

...since the end of the reconstruction era. And which way we go, in my opinion, is mainly - is not entirely the responsibility of Black people. Not white, but Blacks.

[0:33:35]

We have in my opinion embarked upon a rather dangerous course. And that is that we are becoming a nation of beggars and not doers.

[0:34:02]

A nation of rip-off people. Achievement is no longer our goal. It would've been an insult to my generation if you had told us that we couldn't make it to the University of Michigan, unless you gave us some special tutors to help us to get through. It would've been an insult to my generation...

[0:34:31]

...if I had been told when I went to the University of Michigan that the only way I could get through there was to be tutored by some white son of a bitch, I'd tell them to kiss my ass. I'm as good as he is. How many students you got up here? At that time, they had about 25,000. They got about 40 now. How many of them are going to make it through?

Moderator: You made a very clear statement in the very beginning of this tape about enlightenment. You have been enlightened.

[0:35:01]

You are an extremely intelligent man. You've been educated to a T. You've been through economics. You've been through that system. You've always had the ability - a lot of people don't have that natural ability, that natural thing, that magnetism for information and such.

Harold Lee: My thinking about that is this, Horace.

[0:35:29]

Bertha Holliday, [unintelligible] the records to my family, but I know them more intimately than anybody else. Bertha. She's not by herself. I'm not saying that she's - we're any exceptional family or anything like that. There are many other people who've done the same thing. Matter of fact, my generation is all the same. [Unintelligible]. Thurman, Dr. Thurman.

[0:36:02]

[Lee Bellfield]. Name them. Anybody. [Swinton]. Anybody in my generation, we all went through the same thing, just as poor as the next. None of us had a dam of water.

Moderator: But look at the caliber of people that you just named out. Everybody you named in high position within this entire community, you know what I mean?

Harold Lee: My point is, what I'm trying to tell you Horace is that they started from the same level you did, maybe lower.

[0:36:31]

Probably lower, because poor people aren't poor anymore. What poor was in my day is not poor anymore. When my mother divorced my daddy in 1922, the court gave an order for child support...

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...which he did about just as they do now. The court gave the order and that was it. There wasn't a damn quarter he gave. And my mother knew that that was going to be the result in all probability. She's got two children. What is she going to do? She knew she had to support them and she did. Today, we go down and get on the welfare road, which is all right.

[0:37:33]

Moderator: That's money, that's free money.

Harold Lee: Yeah. I think you should. If you're eligible, you should. I had a secretary here who's gone now, and they're still eligible and won't go to apply. I criticize her every time I see her. She works all the time, but with four children, she would

still be eligible for some assistance. She wouldn't get a whole grand or anything like that, but she would...

[0:38:02]

I told her, you'd get Medicaid. And of course, her medical's out of sight. You'd get Medicaid, because everybody in the family's sick, including her. You'd get Medicaid. You would probably get food stamps. You'd get something. You're working every day. You're going to still do that. But if you've got some extra support, I think everybody should get any benefit that's available to them, I think they should take advantage of it.

[0:38:33]

Although my sister and I supported my mother in a nursing home for 11 months before we finally asked for some help on it. But I was in politics. I guess maybe I thought somebody might criticize a politician for something. But it didn't make no damn sense, now that I think about it. Cost \$600 and some a month.

[0:39:01]

That's almost \$7,000 of [unintelligible] for no damn reason at all. And 99% of that money was mine. My sister gave me - she [unintelligible], but I told her, whatever. We're going to see to it that the bill is paid every month. And we did. As it may, point is, as I was saying...

[0:39:33]

...if your ability isn't the same as everybody else's, which it may not be, just work harder. That's all. I was about to say, when my daughter went to the University of Chicago after having finished Central High School, the University of Chicago admits the top 1%.

[0:40:05]

They put Blacks on a little different scale. And they put them in a category by themselves. So you get in if you're in the top 1% of the bracket of people. That's how she made it. In her merit exam, the national merit exam...

[0:40:31]

...she was in about the 85th percentile, I think. But in the Black national merit exam, she was 99th percentile. My point is that Bertha was not prepared...

[0:41:00]

...to do the work required at the University of Chicago.

Moderator: Does she admit that?

Harold Lee: Oh, yeah. But she says no way in hell are they going to flunk me out. And it doesn't take but a little while to catch up. Those Jewish kids, and that's what most of them are at the University of Chicago, they are heavy.

[0:41:31]

Moderator: I can dig it.

Harold Lee: And she just worked day and night. And it doesn't take long. After the first year, you're up. You work like it, I did the same thing at Lincoln University when I went down there. They didn't teach us a damn thing here at Lincoln High School. Dumb as hell. My entrance examinations at Lincoln University were zip, zip, zip. I had to take remedial math at Lincoln University.

[0:42:04]

Remedial math was really so damn simple until I got out of it right away. But I had started there because of where I was here. Damn near had to take remedial English. And I thought I had a hell of an English background, because I went to [GT Brown] for three years, and he was a damn good English teacher.

[0:42:27]

But I made it in English and got in a Standard English course, but I had to take a remedial math. But after my first year, I put the rest of them - the kids who came out of Sumner High School in St. Louis and the Jefferson City High School, the Laboratory High School in Jefferson City, they were much better trained than we were, from Kansas City. And we didn't do well. Kansas Citians didn't do well at Lincoln University. Didn't do well anywhere else.

[0:43:01]

Top person in my class flunked out.

Moderator: You don't think that the reason why Bertha made it through the University of Chicago, and Harold through Howard Law School, was because of was he absorbed through...

Harold Lee: No. Yeah. No question about it.

[0:43:28]

Moderator: A mother with her masters and a father with everything equivalent to a PhD in law.

Harold Lee: No question about it. They benefitted from being my children. I would not say that anybody, no way in the world, as a matter of fact, for anybody to go to the University of Chicago and make it. Of course, they're not going to get in in the first place, so that's no problem about it. If you don't show some indication that you can make it through there, they don't let you in.

[0:44:01]

They don't like to flunk.

Moderator: Do they have the same policy as the Ivy League school, that if a person flunks it's not the individual but the institution that has failed? That type of a thing? Once you're in?

Harold Lee: Once you're in. Yeah. I don't know why they'd take that attitude. They take the attitude that if we let somebody in here, they're supposed to have the ability to come out.

[0:44:28]

They lowered their policy somewhere at Bertha's instance, in order to it; get more Blacks in there. It didn't work out, so they went back to the other policy. They had to flunk out about half of them. And then they stopped. They said, "We're not going to do that anymore." That's wasting time and money. Wasting their time, their money. It takes \$6,000 to educate a kid up there. And they spend \$6,000 on a kid and he's still dumb and they just sold \$6,000 down the hole.

[0:45:00]

Moderator: They don't play that. Shooting back forward real quick. Angela Davis. Is there such thing as a political prisoner in this country, would you say?

Harold Lee: Depends upon how you find a political prisoner. I would say this: there is no person who - very few. And there may be some. I'll take that back. There may be some.

[0:45:31]

But there are very few persons who are in jail merely because of the ideas that they hold. There was one time, we had a law. Smith Act put you in jail for [unintelligible].

Moderator: [Unintelligible] freedom of speech of anything else?

Harold Lee: Yes. When the Supreme Court finally [unintelligible], so we don't have that no more.

[0:46:00]

But at one time we did. During the McCarthy era, we had the Smith Act. And they put communists in jail for being communists. And communist supervisors in jail for being communist. But that don't conform with our concept of freedom of speech or freedom of expression. And so the Supreme Court struck the law down, so we don't have that anymore.

[0:46:30]

Moderator: Why don't we have a...

Harold Lee: I don't think A

Moderator: Why don't we have a...

Harold Lee: I don't think Angela Davis - I don't give a damn what she had been called. What a philosophy had been, if you look at the fact of the situation, first of all, there had been the most horrendous crime committed, perhaps, that I know of. I don't know when anybody has taken a gun, put it to the head of a judge sitting on the bench.

[0:47:02]

Put him in a car, strapped a gun to their hand and eventually kill him. The reaction is so, that somebody is responsible. And no question, somebody got the gun to him. No question. You look around and you pick up the most likely suspect.

[0:47:29]

Your evidence is weak, but you got to have a suspect. Then something may happen later on to strip of your evidence.

Moderator: But you got to have somebody.

Harold Lee: Almost. They're going to arrest somebody. She happened to be the strongest suspect. And whether she did it or not, we still don't know. Of course, she figures she was justified. She thought the judge should've been killed.

[0:48:01]

So naturally, she figures that she was persecuted, because she didn't do nothing but kill a no good damn judge that should've been killed. But that isn't the way we look at it. You don't kill judges because you don't like them.

Moderator: You've been a lawyer now how long?

Harold Lee: Since '52, 24 years.

Moderator: Twenty-four years.

[0:48:30]

Can you tell me the most difficult case that you had and won?

Harold Lee: I can tell you a case that I enjoyed winning more than any others.

Moderator: What's that?

Harold Lee: My sustaining the civil rights ordinance, public accommodation audience.

Moderator: You worked on that here?

Harold Lee: Mm-hm. I did it.

Moderator: That was your baby.

Harold Lee: That's mine. I wrote it and took it to the Supreme Court. Sustained.

[0:49:03]

Then we had to refer it. And I led that. And we won that too.

Moderator: I like that. So that was your baby. All the way.

Harold Lee: There are two things I've done. And I say this. Two things I've done that I'm very proud of.

[0:49:35]

I think justified my having existing. I think a person ought to make some kind of contribution. Somebody other than just feeding yourself and the kids, in order to justify living. I think man's in this world for some purpose other than to be a burden.

Moderator: To do something.

Harold Lee: Right.

[0:50:01]

And first thing I did was [to go to] the University of Kansas City in 1948. Six years before Brown versus the Board. And Blacks in Kansas City were going to school getting degrees and getting jobs long time before Brown versus the Board.

[0:50:25]

And the other thing was my work and connection with the civil rights ordinance, including my work with the CCSA to open the downtown department stores. And then after that, the enactment of the public

accommodations ordinance, which was an act, which was introduced by Bruce Watkins.

[0:51:00]

And he was first a member of the city council. And the city council passed that ordinance, because they were assured by the legal staff of Kansas City that it was unconstitutional. It would not stand up.

Moderator: Public Accommodations Act?

Harold Lee: Yeah. There have been opinion after opinion...

[0:51:31]

...that it was unconstitutional for a city to pass a public accommodations ordinance if there were no state public accommodations statute. At the same time, Symington, Jim, was a member of the legal staff of St. Louis City.

[0:52:05]

And he had been called upon to write an opinion as to the constitutionality of an ordinance [unintelligible]. And his opinion was the same as mine, that it was constitutional. And St. Louis enacted an ordinance.

Moderator: Before Kansas City?

Harold Lee: Before Kansas City. And their ordinance was never challenged...

[0:52:30]

...which is why we had to sustain our ordinance. And I might say we won that in the Supreme Court by a four to three vote.

Moderator: Question. Why doesn't Kansas City, Missouri have a Black state representative? What's the politics?

Harold Lee: What do you mean state? We have a state representative?

Moderator: I'm talking about a state senator. Excuse me. What's the politics?

[0:53:02]

Harold Lee: Black people don't want one, I presume. They had the chance to do it. They threw away 1,900 votes on Henry Ross.

Moderator: That's be very kind to what you're saying, really.

Harold Lee: I don't think anybody had any notion that Ross could win. Do you?

Moderator: I didn't work for him.

Harold Lee: I know it. But did you think there was anybody in town who thought Henry Ross could win?

Moderator: Everybody knew Henry Ross wasn't going to win.

[0:53:30]

Harold Lee: Why did they stow away 1,900 votes for him?

Moderator: Why do we align ourselves politically that Henry Ross existed in the election in the first place?

Harold Lee: I don't know. But he does. He does exist. He does get votes.

Moderator: So now it's going to take 1980 or 1982 before we can get a Black senator.

Harold Lee: I think 1984 is the year.

Moderator: Before we can get any type of representation in the senate.

[0:54:02]

Harold Lee: And the next election will be 1980. And I don't know. We may try then. I won't try again. I'm through running for public office. We had an easy opportunity...

Moderator: You're still basically a very young man. Why would you consider being through with public office, when the majority of your impact on this city has been in the arena?

[0:54:35]

Harold Lee: You don't know. You take a lot of battering, a lot of criticism, a lot of misuse. Your family does. Accusations. All that sort of stuff that...

[0:55:02]

I've been active all my life. I started in 1939. And my senior year at Lincoln University, I led and organized the statewide movement to prevent the establishment of a Black law school in the state...

[0:55:33]

...in an effort to get Blacks admitted to the University of Missouri under the Gaines Decision. The Gaines Decision said that Blacks had to be educated. The State of Missouri had to provide the same education for Blacks in the State of Missouri...

Moderator: Separate but equal type of thing?

Harold Lee: No. It didn't say separate but equal. It said it had to provide the same education for Blacks.

[0:56:05]

Same quality and kind of education for Blacks in the state as is provided for whites. And the answer to that was to establish the Law School of St. Louis. And we tried to prevent that, to no avail, of course.

[0:56:35]

But what a tremendous movement. And we got a fair response, but it was a tremendous undertaking by students.

Moderator: In which direction are you going to go now?

[0:57:02]

Harold Lee: Oh, I'll still be active in the community and various community projects. And of course, I'll still be active politically in attempting to elect candidates to public office that I think will operate in the best interest of our community.

Moderator: What about city council folks or something like that?

Harold Lee: No, I'm not going to run for public office myself.

[0:57:34]

Moderator: How many qualified people do we have out here?

Harold Lee: I'm not going to subject myself to that sort of thing anymore, Horace. I've done nothing. I'm not going to do that.

Moderator: We don't have that many qualified people in the community that...

Harold Lee: Like I said, after damn near 40 years out here...

Moderator: You're just going to lie back and make money in your firm now.

[0:58:02]

Harold Lee: Isn't that long enough? I told my mother when I went to Lincoln University in 1935 that if I was lucky enough and fortunate enough to earn a college degree....

[0:58:31]

...that I would use my talents in an effort to lift and improve the condition of my people. I said that in 1935. And I think I've done it. I have lifted the law

profession of Black people to a state of respectability in this town. A lawyer was not considered worth a damn when I started practicing law.

[0:59:05]

And I said it won't be like that long. And in five years, I was saying everybody would know, I'm the number Black lawyer in this town. And in five years I was.