Introduction to the interview, by Becky Nicolaides:

This is an interview with Louis Chase, one of the early Black residents of the suburb of Lakewood, in Los Angeles, California. Lakewood was a mass-produced suburb built up in the late 1940s and early 1950s. While Lakewood began as racially segregated, by the 1970s people of color were gradually moving into the community, and Lakewood now represents one of L.A.'s most racially balanced towns. Louis Chase was born and raised in Barbados, then moved to London as a teen where he became very involved in social justice activism. He moved to Lakewood with his wife in 1980, one of the few Black American families living in the suburb at that time. His daughters Cassandra and Shaundra were born and raised in Lakewood, making them "original kids" of Lakewood's second generation of residents. In 2022, Cassandra Chase became the first Black American elected to the Lakewood city council.

The interview was conducted over two days, via zoom in 2022. This is an abridged version of the interview.

Louis Chase, Oral History Interview with Becky Nicolaides - Abridged
Session 1 of 2
April 29, 2022, via zoom (in Los Angeles, California)

BN: I'm going to just start out by saying this is an oral history interview with Louis Chase conducted by Becky Nicolaides on April 29th, 2022. So the question I always start with is just to ask when and where you were born?

LC: I was born in Barbados on April 25th, 1943.

BN: Maybe we can start off, can you tell me a little about your family's background, your parents?

LC: Okay. I grew up in a household in Pilgrim Road, and that was the home of my paternal grandparents. I was at that home and not at the maternal parents because my grandfather was of the view that my mother was too young to take care of me, and also that they did not have enough resources that would enable me to actually have a good life. So at three months of age, my grandfather went to the maternal home and literally took me away just about three miles away. And of course, this was at a time when there was no transport, so he just had – he walked on dirt paths to the home. In Pilgrim Road, my grandfather had two cows and sheep and some pigs. And of course, given the fact that cows gave milk, I was able to have milk from a very early age. So I really grew up in that household rather than in the household of my maternal grandparents.

BN: I'm sure you have a lot of memories of your childhood, but can you just tell me a little about your childhood, growing up there with your grandparents? What was that like?

LC: It was a good experience. Well, the house was on the main road, which is Highway Number 7, which stretches basically from Bridgetown to the Sam Lord's Castle... Growing up in that household was just fun. I sort of engaged in activity with my peers, and I went to school when I was five years of age, and again, back in those days, I had no shoes....

We had no kitchen, so we had to fetch water from a nearby public -- we call it the standpipe, and that was because of the shape of it. It was like straight, and then of course with the pipe attached. And we would get water there in buckets. And my grandmother, in fact, she used to wake up about three o'clock in the morning, fetch the water and put it in a large barrel. ... Breakfast would consist of – we call them biscuits, and you call them crackers. One would have two crackers and a cup of tea. Now tea meant

English tea, and we would talk about cocoa tea and we would talk about coffee tea. Or we would also have in the morning porridge, which was basically cornmeal porridge, or we could have tapioca or it's called I think sago, and that would be the meal to go to school on....

The school was an elementary school and also was a Methodist school, but it was called Providence Boys School. The principal of the school or the headmaster was always a Methodist lay preacher.... And so our early, that's called literary exercises, were done on slate. So we wrote on slate, and of course we rubbed off everything. In terms of counting, it was also those colored marbles with a hole in the middle where you go from one to three. That's how we learned how to count. Then we somehow graduated from slate to the books, which had the area where using cursive, you had to get the letters into that particular line in an orderly fashion. And then of course, after mastering that a few years later, myself and my friends, we wrote in cursive. And oh, the other thing too, also part of the graduation from those early classes was to use ink. Because we had these desks with ink wells, and of course the task was to make sure that you did not have any ink on your fingers, and neither did you make sort of smudges on the paper. And because if you got ink on your hands, then at one o'clock for the second session of school, you had to get all the ink off your fingers.

Every morning we had to line up for an inspection, and the inspection meant that your hair had to be combed. There could be no evidence of let's say dried – I think they call it aqueous humor – that is tears in your eyes or any substance in any part of the eye. Your hands also had to be clean, and your feet also had to be washed. And of course, one way of making sure that that happened, we would use coconut oil on our feet because as black persons, the tendency for the feet to look rather ashy.

BN: What would happen if you weren't clean and were not up to their standards?

LC: Well, you would be sent to the headmaster, to the headmaster's desk, and he would discipline you with a leather strap. In fact, I was one of those good students, and after I became the head prefect of the school, and so what would happen, you would be sent to the head prefect first for an inspection if any of the other prefects felt that you hadn't paid attention to your personal hygiene. And I would make the determination as to whether you went to the headmaster who would then discipline one with the strap....

BN: What was your feeling about school?

LC: I think, what was it was – one, you had no option, and so you just had to like school. And I guess at that time too, you had to like your teachers, no matter what you thought about them, you learned to have some affection for them. And if there wasn't affection, at least some sense of respect for them and the exercise of being polite to one's teachers, I can recall an incident where one student had been disciplined by the headmaster, and so he brought his mother to the school to tell the headmaster off. So she was at the school door, and she broke off in a volley obscenities, and the headmaster grabbed her by the hand, and with his strap, he began to beat her too.

BN: Oh my gosh. Okay, that does give an idea of the picture there.

LC: Yes, yes.

BN: So, it sounds like it was pretty – they had high expectations of the children there, but it sounds like you were definitely meeting those expectations if you were given those responsibilities.

LC: Yes, and – I went to Sunday school too, that which was part of, I would say, part of the education. And I think that in terms of reading – of course, we had to read the Bible. And there was a book called Royal Reader Book One, which was a very elementary book, but there was only one copy in the school, we were so poor.... For geography, well, there was a large map of the British Empire because we were colonial kids. There was a large map of the Empire. And on that map, all the countries that had been colonized by the British were in a kind of a pinkish color, and we were all proud to be members of the British Empire.

BN: I'm assuming that was taught -- that pride was part of what they were teaching?

LC: Oh, yes. And of course, and every morning at school, the headmaster would read the headlines from the newspaper, which was all in 99% of the cases, something that was taking place in England. So we knew the names of all the prime ministers of England. We also knew the name of all the leaders in Africa, presidents of those countries, or the head of those countries. In terms of the Caribbean, we also got to know who all the prime ministers were of the various islands. There were sometimes premiers and not prime ministers. If the country was not an independent country, it had a premier. If it was independent, you then had a prime minister, and we had to know all their names. This was part of our education. Now in terms of learning how to do things like spelling – we had our take-home work most days when we had our [note]books, which were basically still something like this, and we would have to take down dictation. The words were written on the board. We had to take the words home, and the following morning, we had to know the meaning of the words, and we also had to be able to spell the words. And so we were taken out into a kind of veranda that was located at the school, and the teacher would simply go from student to student.

If we didn't know, we had to suffer the consequences of a leather strap or a tamarind rod, because we had a large tamarind tree not far within the school grounds. And so, not that we all wanted to be good students, but we just wanted to avoid being abused by the teachers. We called it abuse. And I remember when I was an adult, and I went home and I met one of the headmasters, and I said to him, something like, you all were abusive when we were kids. And he said, “Well, Chase, I take it that you've just learned another word, but it was good for you.” [laughs]

BN: At that point, were you seeing your mother, or was she living near your grandparents?

LC: No. Well, I grew up with my aunt, in my grandparents' house. ... The important piece here too is also about my aunt. My aunt, she was like my mother. She was basically my mother. My actual mother, I used to see her occasionally. She worked as a – they used to call it a servant. The term servant was used rather frequently, and this is part of that colonial tradition, of course.... And what that meant that she worked at the home of a rather wealthy person, a white person. And that was at least 10 miles away from where we lived in. I would have to get on a bus to go there. I didn't go there very frequently to her workplace.

BN: So she lived in that house?

LC: No, she lived with her parents. At a place called Easy Hill. Easy Hill was – to give you some idea – it was near Wilcox Plantation and a place called Tyne Bottom. And our family was the only family that lived on Easy Hill, and this was the Chase family. It was a wooden house, and there was just a lot of shrubbery around the house. ...

BN: And then you said you were seeing your mom, but not that frequently, but there was still that connection there with your mother, it sounds like.

LC: Yes. She dropped by occasionally, and it was like to say “hello,” because my welfare was in the hands of my aunt. And also, because of that too, I went to church because my grandmother was a member of – the whole Chase family were members of the Providence Church. And in fact, tomorrow the church will be celebrating its 190th anniversary.

BN: What kind of church was this?

LC: This was a Methodist church, a very large Methodist church. It was built by slaves from several plantations... a very large church that could accommodate almost a thousand people.

BN: Let me ask you, just following up on that, did you learn about slavery at your school?

LC: We didn't learn very much about slavery, but we actually knew that – we knew who we were because of the presence of the plantations. And because I would say our history in terms of what we got to know, perhaps some of us after we had finished school, was that, I think it was around in the 1930s, there was something called the Moyne Commission that was sent out to the islands because of the poverty that existed on the island. And this commission, I think it made a number of recommendations because, one, there was no Black person who was serving in the Parliament. Two, there were no trade union movements on the island.... So the Moyne Commission actually recommended that there should be resources available whereby there could be some kind of governance by the people. ...

BN: I do want to ask you a couple more questions about your childhood there. One is, what was the role of church for you as a child – in your everyday life?

LC: It was basically community -- church equaled community. That's where you met your friends, that's where you made friends. That's where you got some idea as to any sense of discipline and what is the right thing to do or what one, to put it in sort of ethical terms, what one ought to do, your role. You are a child, you're not an adult. And, for example, walking to church or walking to school every morning, there would be other parents in the verandas of their homes or standing outside their homes. And the one thing you had to do, whether they were on the right hand or the left hand, you had to say “Good morning. Good morning,” to almost everyone. If you missed anyone, by the time you got home, there would probably be a thrashing, because you have disrespected a person in the community. So we grew up, I would say, in a rather loving community where each person took care of you, in terms of your welfare. And school was just another place where – and in fact, they used to use a Latin term *in loco parentis* – teachers are in place of a parent. And so, there was this a kind of regimented learning and understanding about your role as a student. And then of course, later in years, you would come of age. ...

BN: I'm going to kind of move us forward a little bit. I know [your daughter] Cassandra had shared with me that you moved to London as a teenager when your mother had moved there, I believe, and then had sent for you to come live with her in London. What year was that?

LC: Now, to give the context. In 1955, there was a hurricane by the name of Janet, and if you Google that, you'll see the damage that it created to the island. As the Empire, England was in the process of rebuilding itself after the war. So, people in the colonies were asked to come and help build the Empire.

So people went to work in London Transport, and that is the subway also as bus drivers. People also went to build houses. So all those appropriate skills were used. People also went to work in food stores. For example, there was a company called Lions, and they used to sell, it was like a superb donut store, donut place, and coffee, et cetera. People went to work in those fields. So my mother went to work at a hospital as a maid, and she went to work in the laundry room of a hospital, and she did that. So, in 1960 – well, of course, I was in touch with my mother because these were, again, some of the big events – as one growing up, you had to learn how to write a letter. And I had to use a pen, an ink pen, because we didn't have ball pens in those days. And so I had to write letters. One would get a letter maybe every month or two, and you responded to the questions. The letter always began, something like, "I hope you're doing well, blah, blah, blah, and that you're not ill, blah, blah, blah. Finds you as it finds me," something like that. And on one occasion, I wrote and I said to my mother – I was then 17 – and I said, "I would like to come to England." And it was basically said in jest, I wasn't that serious about it, but my mother was living in London, and the reports we were all receiving as kids was something like, the mythology was that the streets were paved with gold. And of course, the currency, the Barbados currency, when the British currency was calculated against it, it was like four times greater. The British pound was $4.80 cents -- you had to have $4.80 Barbados dollars for one English pound.

So the pound had that high currency. And again, when one gets there, there's always that calculation in the mind that I can actually buy A, B, and C in Barbados, at home. So you're earning a lot of money, or it's perceived to be earning lots of money. So, as I said, in 1960, my mother simply responded to my letter. She sent back a money order, which was the equivalent to the fare to fly me from Barbados to London. That was August 13, 1960. [age 17] It was my first plane ride, I had never flown anywhere before.

BN: Had you graduated from school at that point?

LC: Well, at the age of 14, I left school when I was 14. And because of poverty, I couldn't get into secondary schools, but I was considered by many to be a bright kid. And in fact, during that, let's call it between [age] 14 and 17, there was a house being built next door to where I lived, and I learned how to be a stone mason and plasterer. And also how to be a plumber all on this one house.

BN: So you were developing trade skills. Did you feel, did you want to go back to school?

LC: There was a sense of satisfaction going into the trades field.

BN: And you were getting paid, I'm assuming?

LC: Oh, yes. And so the earnings -- it was kind of a misery, really, the kind of work that one was doing, because one was using – I'm trying to remember the name. It's a substance that's mixed in cement, and it tends to make your hand blister.... And I did a good job because I was being paid the equivalent to what persons who were twice my age or more was earning. And I was a tile layer, I was a plasterer, and I did something called terraza, which is, it creates a kind of a glass-like surface. And I also used to work on ceilings, plaster ceilings and that kind of stuff. So the money was good, but the work was laborious.

BN: So when you moved to London, Cassandra had shared with me that you ended up going to Oxford. When did you start at Oxford?

LC: Well, there were some things that preceded that. What preceded that was I worked in textiles. I began as a swatch-maker in a textile firm, and then I graduated to being a stock-taker. And then I moved from one, and I was dealing with linens, polyesters, et cetera, almost anything that women wear, that was light – I was in that firm. Then I moved over to another firm where I dealt with much heavier textiles, and that is for coats. ... And what was so important about both of these places was that the people who owned those firms were all Jewish. And so they were the foremost, they were in the frontline of providing work for the immigrants.

And then what also accompanied that was the stories. And I never knew anything about what had taken place in Germany. So, as we engaged in conversation, like Kurt Marcus, who was the owner of the company, he had lost his parents in the concentration camps. So all that was, let's call it, it was raw, in terms of learning about it. And in a sense, all my sensitivities about race almost like began then. And also, asking some rather important questions about, "why does the Bible talk about the Jews in this fashion, that the Jews did this, and the Jews did that?" And so I had a kind of critical inquiring mind about the tension between Christianity and Judaism, and of course, and all the raw politics within the Empire.

And also during that period too, I grew up with -- I don't know if you know of the Menuhins, Hephzibah Menuhin and Yahudi Menuhin, and Yahudi was one of the world's leading violinists, and Hephzibah was also one of the world's leading pianists, that's brother and sister. And I had started a youth club too, in London, and I worked with a man called Richard Hauser. Richard was Hephzibah's husband. And he wrote ... two books. One was called *The Fraternal Society*, and the other book was called *The Homosexual Society*. So I began to learn a lot from Richard. And Richard worked at a prison called The Wadsworth Prison. And in those days, there were lots of conversations about criminality and the relations between homosexuals and prostitutes. And Richard was a sociologist. And I can remember one afternoon, there were two people in his home, and I joined in a conversation, and then he said to me, do you know who those two people were? And I said, no. He said, one was a homosexual and the other was a prostitute. And they were living together. And in fact, they got married so as to avoid being persecuted by the general public. And so again, in terms of morality and ethics, the line in Christianity is that she's a whore, he is et cetera. So again, the fashioning of my mind was, but they're normal human beings.

BN: So, was Richard's book taking that perspective?

LC: Oh, yes. And as I said, he worked in the prison, and among people, of course, who were gay and who were not... And tremendous insights into, what shall we call it, behaviors which I see as just normal behavior.

BN: So, it sounds like you were learning about certain progressive perspectives on society and people.

LC: Yes.

BN: So this would've been in the '60s, right?

LC: This is in '60s towards the '70s. And also, the other thing was also ecology, because that's when I met Yahudi, he was the first English person to have an electric car. So, conversations about ecology had begun. And of course, the context for the conversations on ecology had also to do with my involvement in – I was part of this CND movement, called CND, Campaign For Nuclear Disarmament. And I'm trying to remember the name of the luminaries. One was a philosopher, Bertrand Russell. I met him, I was a

teenager when I first met him, because there were these marches from Aldermaston to Hyde Park Corner. ...

Because what happened is that subsequently, I became something called a Community Relations Officer and an Associate Community Relations Officer in the London Borough of Camden. And that's important for a number of reasons. I'll get back to that. I was the first black Associate Community Relations Officer in England, and that arose out of a bill by the British government in, I think it was 1965, that had to do with a variety of restrictions on people coming from the Commonwealth.

BN: So what exactly was a Community Relations Officer?

LC: Our task was to promote good and harmonious relationships in communities throughout the Borough of Camden. And the major communities were Jewish, Cypriot, Africans, and Anglo folks.

BN: So it sounds like a human relations type of person.

LC: Yes.

BN: And was this a governmental position?

LC: A local government, it was a local government position.

BN: And they were implementing, kind of proactively placing these folks into these positions?

LC: Yes. And the question is, how do you go about this? And our particular committee had, we ran a preschool playgroup. And then the other thing we did, we started one of the early housing associations in England and in London.

BN: So, it sounds like you were definitely gravitating into this sort of social justice work. Do you remember around what year you started doing that?

LC: That was around 1967, 68. ... [Also] I was the chairman of the Notting Hill Carnival, that would give you some idea as to my other involvements.[1]

BN: What kind of group was that?

LC: The Notting Hill Carnival is the largest street festival in Europe. And I became chair of that because of some discontent in the community about the organizational, about strategies for organizing it. And also – I had to forge relationships with the local police and also with the local city council, and basically folks who didn't want the carnival to take place on the streets of Notting Hill. ... Over a million people attended that event. I was in charge of the event. And in fact, during those years, some of those years, there was a tension between the police and young Black people. And the event became the stage where these young people acted out the drama of their lives, that they had been arrested by the police. They had been abused in some fashion. They had bad relationships with their parents. And I was at the center of some of that because I too was arrested by the police back in 1968.

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[1] See Abner Cohen, *Masquerade Politics: Explorations in the Structure of Urban Cultural Movements* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), for mentions of Chase.

BN: Would you say this was part of the social justice movements around this time around the country?

LC: The social justice movement, I would say – the birth was in two, we could look at two sectors. One was this initiative by the government to have these paid employees. But then of course, there were – being as a commonwealth people, we began to, because if you are a citizen of Barbados, you're a Barbadian. If you're a citizen of Trinidad, you are a Trinidadian. If you're from Jamaica, you're a Jamaican. But when you land in England, you are seen as a Black person. You are also seen as a West Indian. So it's like people whom you never had affiliation with before, people from the islands – I'd never traveled to another island – all of a sudden, because of this, what should we call it -- this impoverishment, a kind of ghettoization that you had to gravitate towards your own for security and for entertainment .... We became West Indians. So then of course, there were all kinds of abuses that were reported.

BN: Is this where the friction between the police and the community, this was all coming up?

LC: Yes.

BN: And the Notting Hill Carnival, this is where it was all really playing out?

LC: The Notting Hill Carnival became, it was basically a street festival and music, food – but again, this is where young people came. And you had this idea of the young people who were born in England, of Barbadian, of Jamaican parents of -- and of course, they too were raising questions about the police and job opportunities. And in fact, soon after that, after the ’68 experience, I had been arrested by the police – I was the vice chairman of a group called Full Employee Trust. And this was a second-chance training opportunity for young people in England. And this initiative was started by a number of businesses in the city of London, and Barclays Bank International was at the frontline of providing a place where young people could be trained and also providing a number of people who could actually train young people in office work. And my task was to teach young people life and social skills.

BN: What an interesting trajectory. I really appreciate how you've told me this story from your time working in the textiles and you're raising your consciousness about the Holocaust, and then as you were moving into these different areas. Now I'm getting a clearer picture of your pathway toward Oxford as you were getting involved.

LC: That is interesting, because I was the Associate Community Relations Officer. And the then Community Relations Officer, he decided to retire.... And the assumption among many was that I would therefore almost graduate to becoming the Community Relations Officer. And that did not happen.

Well, but what happened was that – I use these words loosely because I don't like the use of the words – a white man was given the position as Community Relations Officer. And there was a tremendous tension between he and I because the person who trained me, he went to the same college in Oxford that I will be talking about later. So things like English grammar was important. A style of writing was important. There was almost like a whole craft to the work of being a Community Relations Officer. And this person who came in, his writing was poor. And remember, again, in those days, we weren't using computers. We were using typewriters and white-out. And if the person who trained me, if there were more than three errors in a letter, the letter had to be retyped. Now with this person, four or five, and it was like an eyesore. ... And so the tension between he and I became so ferocious that he said to me, if I don't stop questioning his authority, he was going to punch me in the face and he would report. Right. And I said, and I would report it to the chairman of the committee.

Now, the chairman of the committee was a very interesting man.... His name was Peter Brooke. His father was Lord Brooke. And Lord Brooke was the person who got the British government to get rid of capital punishment. And Peter was a businessman, great skill in the craft of writing and let's call it the management of institutions. So the issue was, my circumstance was reported to the committee, and they said I should investigate the possibility of going into college. And that I did. And there were two possibilities. One was going to a college in Birmingham for one year, and the other was the possibility of going to Ruskin College, Oxford, for two years. And I took the opportunity to go to Ruskin College, and for two reasons: one, it was prestigious, and I knew my boss was a student there, and some other persons whom I got to know later. And also, it was a school about some of the interests I had. One was in trade unions, and the other was also in the politics and administration of African countries.

Because I had wanted – one of my interests in this broad range of human rights, I had wanted to work for Oxfam or another agency. And so I studied African history by two of the leading – at that time – historians in the world. They were worldwide scholars. All their books were used as source material by people all over the world. And then of course I wrote a dissertation, which was called "From Marcus Garvey to Eldridge Cleaver" or something like that. Because I was really involved in some activities that were taking place in the United States.

BN: What was your field of study?

LC: My field of study was the politics and administration of developing countries. And education. And that encompassed, let's call it a history of race relations in England and, of course, all those tenets of relationships between England and the Pan-Africanist movement and what else? And radical movements in the United States.

BN: When did you decide to pursue the ministry, or to move in that direction?

LC: All that I was doing there, most of that activity was in England. In 1978. I was engaged to Marion. ... And in fact, between '78 and '80 was a very stressful period. And when I graduated from Ruskin College, I was employed. I was employed by a group called the Notting Hill Social Council that was run by a man by the name of Donald Chesworth. And he's worth Googling. And my task was to carry out an investigation into relations between West Indians and the police in Notting Hill, because that was also the place where some people say the first race riot in England took place, but that is not true. The first, let's call it resistance, took place in Liverpool. ... It's early '70s, very early '70s, was when I was at Ruskin [Oxford].

BN: And then after you graduated, then you went into this position, the Nottingham Social Council?

LC: Yes. Yes. Right, after that, I went into Nottingham Social Council. ... And then in fact, I was funded by the Roundtree Trust, and I was called -- I was a fellow of the Roundtree Trust. And then there was some work, which I also did back to Richard Hauser and Hephzibah. And I became a fellow of the Center for Group Studies, which was run by Richard Hauser....

BN: And then when did you meet Marion?

LC: Well, I met Marion back in the 1970s, 1976, I think.

BN: How did you meet?

LC: I'm almost like forgetting my life. I went to the University of Warwick, Coventry, and Marion was a student nurse in Coventry. And there were a few Black students at the University of Warwick. And for our entertainment, we would go into Coventry because there was a community there, a Caribbean community. And so Saturday night was always the big night. There would be an event in – there's a hall somewhere, and we would meet persons, and I can't remember the dates now, but I met Marion and we got to know each other. And after that, she decided to travel to America to work as a nurse. She worked as a nurse in London, and then she worked as a nurse in – she decided to come to the United States because the offerings were better and financially. ... And then on one of her return visits, we met and we talked, and it made a lot of sense to me in my life that Marion should be my wife. And then she said yes....

BN: ... Did the decision to get married to Marion and enter the ministry, was that kind of happening together?

LC: Well, it happened after I got here after, after we got married. Because I flew into America on the 20 something of November, and we were married either on the 3rd or 4th of December. We both used to get it wrong. I would say it's the 3rd, and she would say the 4th. ...

BN: And what year?

LC: I think it must have been 1980. I arrived in November and got married in December.

BN: And you got married in the United States?

LC: Yes, we went to Las Vegas, and we got married. In fact, what is interesting about that marriage is that we decided, because I wasn't getting married in a church – although I was strongly affiliated to the Methodist Church in England, and in fact, I also... was chairman, [of] one of several committees in the Methodist Church dealing with issues of race relations. And some of that too is related to my relationship with people who knew Martin Luther King and the nonviolent movement in England. That's another story. But yes, I tried to get a job in human relations because the extension of my work in Full Employee Trust in working with young people and also in finding them jobs, I thought it was a grand segue into my life in the United States. I wrote over 250 letters. And I had probably about four interviews with directors of corporations here in Los Angeles, including Barclays Bank. And I had also been in touch with Mayor [Tom] Bradley because one of my close friends in England was the Lord Mayor of London, and that's Dr. David Pitt. And he knew Bradley because it was like the two most exciting places in the world have Black mayors, and that was London and Los Angeles. And of course, I had spoken to Bradley about the possibility of a job, but again, there were no jobs.

BN: So this would've been around 1980 or so?

LC: ‘81. And thereafter.

BN: It seems like it was a pretty different climate in terms of human relations work here in Los Angeles versus in London.

LC: And this was basically a new space, and again, race relations in a different fashion....

BN: One of the things I found in my research on LA – so when you moved here, that was right after Proposition 13 was passed, which was in 1978.... I had dug up a few articles talking about how because of Prop. 13 cuts, there were a lot of social services slashed throughout California, and one of the areas that was really hit was human relations work in LA County. So the whole LA county apparatus for human relations took a big financial hit in the wake of Prop 13. And this was happening right at the time when a lot of communities like Lakewood were starting to integrate and turning from all-white to much more diverse. I see this as part of the problem of how some of these communities were not handling human relations very well, because some of the resources were just not there. It sounds like you were experiencing that firsthand when you were trying to go out and get a job in that area, right around that same time.

LC: And there are two things about that. One is that I discovered that it wasn't that easy to get a job. And in fact, I went into, I did a training on simply how to get a job. In fact, I went to a headhunter, a sort of headhunter school. They trained me in interview techniques and how to write letters and all of that kind of stuff. And that's why I wrote so many letters. But of course, no avail. The second thing was, I was totally unaware of the geography. One of the things about living in England is that you believe everything is like being in England. I was – because I started traveling to the United States prior to 1980, in '78 to see Marion – and I can remember I was in Washington, DC, and I went to the train station, and I said, I would like the train to get to California. And I said, well, will it take six hours? And he said to me, no, it's probably cheaper for you to get a plane and fly. Because again, in England, I can go from London to Glasgow in three hours. And so my mind was compressed. And I said that to say when I was here, I didn't know how to drive. I never drove a car in England. I traveled by the subway. I got to work from Notting Hill where I lived to the city of London in 30 minutes. That was it.

BN: So did you learn how to drive?

LC: I learned how to drive. ... I recall when I failed the first test, and the person at the DMV, he said to me, would you please take me back to the DMV? You are driving on the wrong side of the road.

BN: Oh, no. [laughs]

LC: [laughs] So I think that was on the Tuesday, and I went back on the Thursday and passed the test....

BN: When did you and Marion move to Lakewood?

LC: 1980. Well, because Marion lived in Long Beach at first. She had an apartment in Long Beach. And during 1980, when I had expressed my intention to come to the United States, she said, well, the one thing we are going to need is a home. The short version is, we've never been renters. So we bought a home. Marion, she handled the finances. I said, how much money do you need? And she said, X amount. I sent it to her. And we got the home.

BN: Did she pick the home and decide that you were going to live in Lakewood? She made that decision?

LC: Yes.

BN: Do you know why she chose Lakewood?

LC: I presume that it – one, it was a good price, and also she liked the neighborhood.

BN: And then that was in 1980. So did she buy the house while you were still in London?

LC: Yes. And on one of my trips to Washington or New York, I would fly from there to Lakewood and I would do some painting. Then I would go back to London and do my work.

BN: Can tell me about your decision to go to Claremont Graduate School, and then we'll come back to Lakewood.

LC: Well soon after – what happened is that attending the Methodist church there [in Lakewood], I got involved and they asked me to teach Sunday school. And then I met a man, one of my friends is Derek Humphrey. Derek Humphrey funded the Hemlock Society. He wrote a book in England called *Police Power and Black People*. And then he came to the United States because his wife had cancer, and this was before there was any law about voluntary euthanasia for the terminally ill. And he wrote a book about this called *Jean's Way*, which meant getting a doctor, finding a doctor who on a particular day would give her the hemlock. And that happened in England. And as a consequence, the Director of Public Prosecutions, the equivalent to the Attorney General, had to consider whether he should be prosecuted or not. He was not prosecuted. And he came to the United States and he was living in Washington State. And he and I met again, and I was involved with the conversation on voluntary euthanasia for the terminally ill, which was like a new thing emerging in America. And then of course race relations was taking a different turn in California. And I was also in the front line of that. I became a member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

BN: When you say that, in what way did you see it taking a different turn – race relations?

LC: Well, the term "different" means something different from what was going on in England. And here there is this tradition that one can look back on in terms of Martin Luther King Jr., and my involvement with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. And at the same time, people in the church in Lakewood were having conversations with me about race. And one of the retired ministers said to me one day, he said, Louie, I think the Lord is calling you to be in the ministry of the Methodist Church here. United Methodist Church.

BN: In Lakewood?

LC: Yeah.

BN: So this was the minister at Lakewood Methodist?

LC: No, the actual minister was Japanese, and he was the first Japanese superintendent in the United Methodist Church in California [George Nishikawa]. And probably if I pushed it, it could be in the United States. And of course that is juxtaposed against Japan, the war and Japanese persons living here in the United States.

BN: I'm really intrigued by this, because Lakewood at that time was, it was still predominantly white, right?

LC: Yes.

BN: So what was the worldview in that church? Was it a progressive church, would you say?

LC: I wouldn't call it a progressive church, but the leadership of the church, let's call it, would appear to be progressive. [Nishikawa] was – to be a district superintendent in the Methodist church is a very high office, which means that he has responsibility for a number of – he had the responsibility for all the United Methodist churches in Los Angeles. [He was] Japanese, so that was new. He was responsible for the African-American churches, the Filipino churches, the Armenian church, I think there was an Armenian church.

BN: This is the Lakewood minister and this is the Japanese American minister?

LC: Yes. So very often what happens is when a superintendent leaves the superintendency, he is appointed into let's call it, a plum position in the church. And he was sent to Lakewood.

BN: Oh, so that was considered a good position?

LC: Yes. And also stability. *Why*? Well, one, remember, most of the workers of that church were in the aircraft industry. So, the church was solidly able to pay its apportionments because these professional people were able to tithe. There were a few members of the congregation who own – is it Winchell's or something like that. They used to sell, what was it called -- donuts and coffee or something like that. One of the members, he owned a number of those companies in Lakewood. ... So, it was a solid, conservative, paying church. And I think, I can't remember the state, but most of the members of that church came from a particular state, came out here and they all worked in the aircraft industry.

BN: Was the congregation predominantly white?

LC: Predominantly white. I was perhaps the first Black person to become a member of that church.

BN: So, I'm just really intrigued by the progressive ideas that you had and bringing them into this whole milieu in this very white conservative congregation, solid middle class. What was that like? Was there friction?

LC: No. There were a very – I'll tell you why.... They asked me to speak to the men's group about what was taking place in England. And also, the minister, when he was going on vacation, he asked me to preach at the church. And I never realized that there were a number of people who had children who were seriously ill, not only children, but also adults who were seriously ill. And they had wanted to have conversations on the issue of voluntary euthanasia for the terminally ill. So, I invited my friend from Washington State, Derek Humphrey, to come to the congregation. And so we had these two areas, one, this issue of race where I knew a fair amount, and Humphrey also knew a fair amount about. And so it was like – they had a need. And dealing with voluntary euthanasia for the terminally ill was part of my acceptance into – credentials. We need you. Right now.

BN: Right. So that seems like that was opening the way for you on some level to gain acceptance. But did you address the race relations issue as well?

LC: No, I didn't have to. I think my early time there was more a question of – he is acculturated. I was a member of the United Methodist Men [group], so I was another United Methodist man in the church. We just worked together. I would attend their meetings. And in fact, at that time too, I didn't have a vehicle. And I remember the first day that I went to the church, after the service – the service was from, I think 11 till 12. At 12:30 someone actually showed up on my doorstep and said, we are the members of the Lakewood United Methodist Church, and we would like you to join us. And so I said to the person, my problem is I don't have a vehicle. I can't get there. And he said... I will pick you up for the meeting of the United Methodist Men and I'll also pick you up on Sunday morning to take you to church.

BN: Was the United Methodist Men's Group within that Lakewood congregation?

LC: Yes, yes. Almost every United Methodist Church at that time had a thriving group – we had United Methodist Men, United Methodist Women.

BN: And was that group predominantly white?

LC: All white.

BN: So earlier when I asked about the race relations issue, you said, it wasn't an issue. Was that because the church was still all white? Or why was that not an issue, would you say?

LC: Well, because I became aware of the fact that there was – and it's different in England – that you had what they call white United Methodist churches and Black United Methodist churches and Korean United Methodist churches and Japanese United Methodist churches, Armenian United Methodist churches.

BN: So how did you feel about that?

LC: Given where I lived, I felt secure.

BN: Just because given what you had come from in London and all of your work there, it was more raw like you had said, the issues were more intense and friction. So in this environment then, it just was very different, it sounds like?

LC: It was different. And obviously with the leadership of the church, this Japanese person who obviously had relationships with a whole bunch of other people, we didn't have any conversations about the whole issue of race.

BN: Let me ask, you did have in your mind at all a kind of awareness of – I mean I'm not sure how familiar you would've been – that these had been pretty segregated communities, a place like Lakewood. Was that in your awareness at all? I'm just curious as to whether that was in your consciousness at all or if you were thinking about that at all.

LC: It was a totally new environment. But again, even in England, we had our white congregations and we had our transitional congregations and also in England – and this was my mother's experience, and I think they now call this particular early period, they call it the Windrush Generation [postcolonial immigration from the Caribbean to UK]. And in those days, back in the 1950s when many of the West

Indians went to at least – there's a church in Notting Hill and they wanted to become members and they said, "We're so glad to see you today. We will possibly not see you anymore at our church." It was something like that. No welcome for people [of color] into churches in England.

BN: Were those integrating areas, or racially integrating areas?

LC: In many places they just wanted to keep people out. Keep Black folks out.

BN: Were you aware of Lakewood's history of segregation?

LC: No, no. None at all. I got to learn a lot more about that after. And also issues of redlining. I was a stranger to much of that. But it was interesting that during that period there was still redlining taking place in parts of Los Angeles. Yeah, that's true. Because when I became a member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, it took everything to a different level. Both in terms of understanding what is taking place in Long Beach, and because I was also active in Long Beach with a number of rabbis, and this was before, and this is when I was in training as a United Methodist minister. And in fact in Long Beach too, at that time there wasn't even a Black council person on the city council

BN: This is in the '80s?

LC: Yes. And I was one of the people who helped facilitate the first Black person on the city council in Long Beach.

END SESSION 1

Louis Chase, Oral History Interview with Becky Nicolaides
Session 2 of 2
May 2, 2022, via zoom (in Los Angeles, California)

BN: This is an oral history interview with Louis Chase conducted by Becky Nicolaides on May 2, 2022.

We left off last time talking about your involvement with the Lakewood United Methodist Church, and then I think you were moving toward the story of how you ended up going to study theology at Claremont. So, I was going to ask you how you came to study for your Masters of Theology at Claremont University.

LC: Whenever the pastor was away – and this is George Nishikawa, the Japanese superintendent, who was the minister at the church there – whenever he went away on vacation, or missed a Sunday, he would ask me to preach, and I did it. And so, there were two ministers in the congregation. One was a retired EUB [Evangelical Brethren Church] minister, and the other was a retired United Methodist minister. I say that because in 1968, there was a merger of The United Methodist Church and the EUB church also to form The United Methodist Church. And the issue that pulled these groups together was, it was on the racial issue. The United Methodist Church South and the United Methodist Church North merged and formed the new United Methodist Church. So the issue of race was to some degree something so very sensitive in the ear of Methodism, and also of the EUB church. So the United Methodist minister, he said that he felt that God was calling me to the ministry and that I should possibly explore what all that was about. So he spoke to the president of the [Claremont] School of Theology about it. And I had an interview with the President – his name escapes me again – but after that

interview, I was put in touch with a Black United Methodist minister, who was the professor of ethics there by the name of Cornish Rogers. And within a matter of – because I think that conversation went on during the summer. And I began studies in September at the School of Theology. And also I began to explore what they call "the call" in the Methodist Church, which means I was assigned to a Methodist minister for supervision. And I did that and then the rest is history. But I was also a commuter student from Lakewood to Claremont. I went there almost – like my assignments were, some days I will spend one complete day at Claremont, on other days I would simply go there and return home....

BN: So during your time at Claremont – you had also worked with James Lawson there. And John Cobb, I think?

LC: Yes. Correct.

BN: I know something about James Lawson. But can you just talk to me a about how that experience shaped you? I'm sure that's a huge question.

LC: Okay, every student at Claremont had a sort of internship with a minister of the church. And my internship was with the Holman United Methodist Church, and James Lawson was a Pastor. Lawson was described by King as the leading nonviolent strategist in the United States of America. And so, the import of all that Lawson represented attracted me also because of the emphasis on non-violence.

And I grew up in London, in part with two towering figures in the field, more than two in the field of non-violence. One was his name was Canon [John] Collins of St. Paul's Cathedral, very important place and also very important person. In fact, he was the one who invited King back in 1967 or so to London. And the other person was – he's now a Sir -- Sir Wilfred Wood. He was the first Black bishop in England, he's of Barbadian origin. And I worked closely with him when I was the Public Relations Officer of the West Indian Standing Conference, that's this WISC. And that was the group that was consisted of a number of groups that were self-help groups that were resisting against racism in England, and also trying to help West Indian persons from well, people of West Indian origin from the islands. So, we had like the Grenada Association, the Jamaica Association, the Vincentian Association, and a number of others. And we met once a month at the West Indian Student Center in Earls Court [London].

Okay, Lawson was very much involved in dealing – the big issue of that day was apartheid. So part of my assignment was to work around the issue and to mobilize the church. So we organized something called Red Ribbon Sunday, where all the members of the church were given copies of the passbook that every Black person in South Africa had to carry. And, and we invited Dennis Brutus – I first met Dennis Brutus in England, when I was a Community Relations Officer in Camden, and he taught at Kentish Town School. But then he immigrated to the United States and was a professor somewhere in New York. And he wrote a number of books, the most famous I think, was called *Letters to Martha*. And that was about his – he was on Robben Island, too, with other luminaries, [Nelson] Mandela. And so he was invited to Holman to speak. And of course, he spoke on the issue of apartheid.

The other issue had to do with the question of unions. And there was not very much representation in Los Angeles for many persons in the immigrant community. And so Lawson basically organized people, or others organized, and Lawson trained union members in non-violence. And he and I would argue that the largest, the strongest movement in the United States for the change of the conditions of life of immigrant people has been the trade union movement, and that all that has been accomplished non-violently. And that this is what the authorities should be focusing on, rather than focusing on the issues of what they call violence that erupts within the African American community from time to time. So that's one of my great learnings from Lawson. And as a consequence, it was

Lawson who took me to my first protest meeting where we engaged in civil disobedience. And where I was arrested, Lawson was arrested.

BN: What was that? Do you remember what it was?

LC: Yes, it was the workers at USC [University of Southern California] were seeking unionization, there was resistance by the authorities. And so we had a sit-in outside, blocking the entrance to USC.

BN: Do you remember what year that was? ...

LC: ... Sometime in '80s, because that's when I was working with Lawson.

BN: So you were working on the degree, you were in working with Reverend Lawson, and then were you still connected with Lakewood United Methodist?

LC: Only in terms of – my connection, it was more in terms of some people... In the Methodist church, we talk about "the connection." We are connectional church. So from time to time, all Methodist churches get together. We have an annual conference, all the people get together, all the key people from these churches for the annual conference. So there was a sense in which I had a relationship with the Lakewood Church.

BN: You said you were interning with Reverend Lawson. *Yes*. And, so you were kind of working at Holman at that point, in an intern capacity?

LC: Yes, sort of, a part-time position.

BN: At the same time, you were still working on your studies?

LC: Yes.

BN: And then when did you get your degree, at Claremont? Do you remember?

LC: It was in the 1980s...

BN: And then let me ask you, did you become a US citizen?

LC: No. I've never been. And one of the reasons for this is – it sounds rather silly and may be rather silly – my feeling was that the narrative of an immigrant was not necessarily right, by the United States government. All immigrants did not work in the garment industry. Immigrants – I had friends who were university professors, friends who were in the field of engineering and lots of other skill sets, that were not the stereotype. And my view is to say, I am not a stereotype either. Even though many people thought that I was – saw me as an African American – that's probably because of, of course, the obvious. ...

BN: And then, throughout this, you're living in Lakewood with Marion, Cassandra. I know you had another child, which I'm forgetting when she was born.

LC: 1968.

BN: You had another daughter with Marion.

LC: Shaundra.

BN: And when was Shaundra born again?

LC: '84. Always remember that -- that was the year of the Olympics. And it was also the year an American artist sang this – Lionel Richie, sang that song "All Night Long."...

BN: I wanted to ask you some questions about Lakewood. And I know it sounds like you were very busy and going to Claremont and going to these various churches that you were working in. Just thinking about Lakewood – you had described last time about how Marion had bought the house. And she took care of a lot of that whole process. Is that correct?

LC: Yeah.

BN: Do you recall – was there any friction with buying that house at all?

LC: No, there were no problems with that at all. ... The house was purchased before I got here [to the U.S.].

BN: And so escrow closed and all that and then – had Marion already moved into the house?

LC: Yes. Yeah.

BN: Did either you or Marion ever experience any kind of negative discrimination or weird energy from neighbors or anything like that, near the time when you settled in Lakewood, when you moved in?

LC: I would say not. I would say not. And I guess part of the reason could be that the northern District 5 where we're located was a relatively poor neighborhood....

BN: What street was it again?

LC: Elaine Avenue.

BN: So that was a relatively poorer area of Lakewood?

LC: Yeah. Even though the accommodations were fine. ... Well, some things are coming back now. I guess, I became aware of... I use the word prejudice – and I use the word prejudice rather than discrimination because it has to do more with like, I wasn't denied any service.... Cassandra went to school, both Cassandra and Shaundra went to the same preschool group. And because one day, if I remember, Shaundra came home and the question was, "Am I a monkey?" I said, "Why do you ask?" And it was that one – she was called a monkey by one of the kids at school. And so that sort of racial sensitivity emerged because she was the – both Shaundra and Cassandra were the only Black kids in that playgroup. There were other children who were Hispanic. Also, there were some who were Japanese

that were there. And, obviously, the skin color was obvious, was dark. But we didn't have to discuss these issues with the teachers. What we decided to do, of course, was affirm our children. Tell them who they are. And so that was the kind of environment in which they lived, they grew up in. The same thing happened when they went to dance because they were in the – there was a ballet group within the neighborhood and they became part of that. And they never complained to me about any forms of, of being felt "less than" in those groups, in the ballet group.

But what I did notice, what was rather stark was, from time to time when we went shopping in the Lakewood Mall, it was rather clear that in some stores, we know that we were being followed by security. But of course, nobody says, the reason why we're doing this is because you're Black. But we, of course, being in the company of other so-called [inaudible], they talked too about having that experience. The other thing that became – where I know I was discriminated against. As I told you, I bought my car. I bought a car when I came here, I had to learn how to drive, etc. I think I got at least four tickets by the Lakewood Sheriff's Department on – I'm trying to remember, they claimed I was driving exceeding the speed limit on Carson Boulevard, which is a rather long boulevard. And, I know I hadn't been exceeding the speed limit. I remember, well, in the general sense, one Saturday morning, I was on the 605 Freeway, and the CHP [California Highway Patrol]– I was driving the same speed as other people – and the CHP, they pulled me over to the side and of course told me that I was breaking the speed limit, etc. I know I didn't, and I was given a ticket. So, my encounters with the police, I think was clear evidence of discrimination....

BN: Were these the Lakewood Sheriffs?

LC: Yes.

BN: Did that keep going or did it stop at a certain point? Or what was your memory of that?

LC: My memory of it was, I think that I was probably stopped at least – I had about four tickets based on that....

BN: Can you recall any other things, memories of prejudice or any negative interactions within Lakewood?

LC: There was nothing that I can recall that really stood out because I think there are all kinds of other little things that happen. You know, avoidance. You are in a setting and you know that the reason why people are acting strangely is because it's you.

BN: Yeah. Can you tell me about your immediate neighborhood? Did you get to know any of the neighbors or what was that neighborhood like?

LC: The truth is we only got to know the neighbor to the right of us. That would be towards the west of us. And all this is so interesting because we have, let's call them, patterns of neighborly behavior. When I was in Barbados, I knew everybody on the street. Then I went to England, you knew everybody in the apartment. Those were your neighbors. So from apartment living then to living in Lakewood, the pattern of behavior is totally different. You get to know your neighbor either on the right or on the left. And both my neighbors were Hispanic. We had no problems. But then on the other side of the road, there were a number of apartments, and nobody really bothered us from the apartments. We were on one side of the road, and they were on the other side of the road....

We also had children. Our children were about the same age, so that was another point of contact.

BN: Did you let the kids play outside, or what was your feeling about that?

LC: There wasn't really that much space to play outside. Because outside was basically would be considered dangerous because Elaine Avenue, even though not as busy as some thoroughfares, was busy enough to present a risk if we allowed our children to play outside. The playing outside was supervised. But what we did do is, we went to the parks with the kids. That was a better play space and safer play space than doing activity around our immediate neighborhood.

BN: So was traffic the major concern in terms of letting the girls be outside?

LC: Oh yes...

BN: And over the years, did you get to know any more neighbors or were those immediate next-door neighbors your main connections on the block?

LC: They were the main connection. They were the main connection on the block.

BN: Were you close to those neighbors, or how would you describe that?

LC: It was, we were good friends. For example, we weren't reluctant to share produce. I think I planted an orange tree, so whenever there were oranges, we shared that with the neighbors....

BN: Last time we spoke and I asked you about your awareness level of the history of segregation in a place like Lakewood, if you'd been aware of that heritage in these communities, which was very common across Los Angeles. So many of the suburban areas of Los Angeles were really segregated in the ‘50s and ‘60s. But I think you had shared with me that that just didn't really seem to be on your radar at the time.

LC: No, no, it wasn't. And I guess, and this is just a feeling that even though it was segregated, the people who were living in Lakewood – and I can't remember for the life of me which state they had come from – but it was like people from one particular neighborhood surrounding, was part of this Lakewood Methodist community. And I think there's something about migration, even though it was internally in the United States. Because you begin to hear stories about people saying, “and we put everything in our car and we headed towards Lakewood,” headed towards wherever the place may be that they understand. There's something internal about their understanding of what it means to be a neighbor or what it means to be new in a neighborhood. And so the issues of redlining, even though it wasn't apparent to me, I can understand people trying to hold onto their piece of territory because there's always that – and this happens among all communities – you try to keep people out or it goes both ways. You try to keep certain people out. You also try to bring certain people in. Sort of a push and shove kind of relationship in terms of, what do we want this community to look like? And I suspect that the kind of people who fared well – and I would be one who fared well in Lakewood – are people with some strong sense of independence and also people with a strong sense of family.

BN: Who fared well.

LC: Yes.

BN: Yeah, because at the time you moved in with Marion and then Cassandra and your growing family, I mean that was the beginning of change in the community. There had been some Latinos who'd moved in. I've looked at a lot of the census data on Lakewood, but there was a gradual change happening.... There's one demographer who's written a lot on LA and they sort of consider Lakewood to be a racially balanced city now where it's evolved to the point where there's enough diversity and it's sort of staying fairly stable demographically. So it's not like some communities where there's total white flight, where all the whites leave, and then it almost resegregates to be non-white. But it has reached a kind of stability in terms of demographics, which is kind of remarkable.... But at the time you moved in, that transition was just starting to happen. And so, I'm just curious – Were involved in any sort of groups or anything in Lakewood?

LC: The only thing I was involved in Lakewood was at the United Methodist Church. There were no other groups. I had no sort of political orientation. I didn't join the Democratic Party or the Republican Party. No, I wasn't with other groups.

BN: Did you ever go back to Lakewood United Methodist? Because I know you were working in other churches, but did you stay connected there over the years or maybe give a guest sermon over the years?

LC: Oh yes. I have stayed connected with that church over the years. And in fact, lots of my colleagues used to call me and say something like, we are going to Lakewood. Any tips for who do you know in the community? ... The last minister at the Lakewood Church, he's African, and he replaced a young man from – a Filipino young man, very well-read scholarly person, but he was also, he's gay. And I gathered from some, he didn't really make it there. And again, that church, how should we call it? The membership has changed a lot over the years. Some younger people have come in and many of the group that I knew then have died, or there was always a little memory when I would go back sometimes. And of course they ask, is there anyone who is here who hasn't been here for a long time? Somebody will come up to me and say, I remember you. I remember you. It also tells me I'm getting old [laughs].

BN: Would you say that Lakewood United Methodist was pretty progressive?

LC: I think as a church, yes, they were progressive because almost theologically, one was still fighting against the more evangelical people who were in Lakewood.... I think the Methodist Church normally is, it is more radical than the Evangelicals.

BN: if you think about Lakewood in general, would you say it's a fairly liberal or conservative community? Do you think it leans either way?

LC: I think it's probably more conservative than anything else.... Because I think perhaps many of the immigrants who are now in Lakewood, they may well be conservative themselves.

BN: Immigrants, from where are you thinking?

LC: ... I know there are a number of people from Latin America who are there, and very often people from Latin America are evangelical and very often rather conservative in their view of, I think both faith and action. And also there's something about migrant or immigrant communities who acquire their

piece of house. They want to make sure that they have it forever. And they're likely to be in the company of the majority group, the majority-minority group. And I don't like talking about the notion of majority and minority because I think there's a point at which it doesn't really make sense. You're not really a minority.

BN: You're the majority.

LC: So, I'm saying I think it's probably more conservative than liberal. I think every now and then there are these spurts of what they may perceive to be radical – is really persons of Cassandra's generation. I think that their outlook on life is so different. The culture is so different.

And, it's not like saying she's taken on their culture, but it's all part of the way people live. ... It becomes new. It becomes new, and these things appear to be almost generational, and then people simply drift apart. And even now in LA with persons who I have known since the 1980s, their children have grown and act differently, culturally different in terms of relations. My daughter, Shaundra, her best friend is Hispanic, and she doesn't apologize about it. She has another best friend. Her father died last year. He's from Jamaica. He was again my best friend. But they are like sisters – Shaundra with regard to this particular young woman, they are sisters. It's a new world. It's a new world....

And I think Shaundra and Cassandra, they were brought up in this environment where we jump on a plane and we go to Barbados and it's home. We again jump on a plane, go to London and it's home. We come back to California and it's home. There is a certain rootage or it could seen as rootlessness or it can be seen as rooted in.

BN: I mean, do you think you feel that yourself?

LC: Well, it's again, almost like linguistically. It's like code switching. When I leave California and go to London, I've got to be British. And people will say, you don't really sound like those Americans. When I go to Barbados, they say, Hey, you sound very British. And of course you soon acculturate yourself back to all those early childhood isms and language and the culture. So again, you code switch back into that. So you create these different worlds as you move from space to space. And I think there's something healthy about that. It's accepting something that sometimes we wish to rebel against. We are changing and change is all around. We are always changing, and we can't stop that process. There's nothing we can do to stop it.

BN: Do you feel also that sense of rootedness, would you say, and that where you said it's home and Barbados, it's home, and London. Do you also kind of feel like that for yourself?

LC: No. It goes in cycles. You say something, this is not home. This is not my home. So when I talk about home, I'm talking, I'm referring to Barbados. But then there's also that being in England, that was home. So it's like, I think Sam Cook wrote a song that says, wherever I lay my head, that's my home.

BN: How do you feel about Lakewood?

LC: That was home when I was there. When I'm there, Lakewood is home. And there's a sense in which, again, maybe this is where we all have to learn that wherever we move to, we have to create those conditions which provide for us a sense of security and also a sense of joyfulness and entertainment. And it can be anywhere. It can be anywhere.

BN: I know you were in your own churches over the years, but just from whatever connection that you maintained with Lakewood United Methodist, do you recall them dealing with race issues over the years?

LC: In the Methodist church, there are always conversations on these issues, on issues, race and society. And of course, back in the 1990s when there was that major uprising in Los Angeles, it impacted almost every city. And of course it impacted Lakewood and Long Beach and that had happened. And at the time of that uprising, I was at a church in Lynwood. That was my first appointment as a Methodist minister. So it was something that was in the conversation everywhere.

BN: What do you remember about how it was impacting Lakewood, the 1992 uprising and everything?

LC: Well, I think one of the concerns, of course, big concerns was the fact that the Sheriff's Department was in Lakewood. And there was that contract, I think, which has remained by the authorities to contract out the policing services to the ... Sheriff's Department. And I would say as a sort of observer, I wish it were not the case because I think some police are by far more friendly than sheriffs. There's a certain militarization and apartness by Sheriff's Departments. It's the vehicle they drive, which obviously is like, it's not a police car. It's not like someone who would stop the car to get out to have a conversation, to have a conversation with you. It is someone who, when you are stopped, it's like they're almost under arrest. Police officers by far – there's something attitudinally about police and the Sheriff's Departments and also I guess in relation to Black people.

BN: So you think the Sheriffs are not as good at that human connection?

LC: I don't think they are at all.

BN: Even in Lakewood? I've been curious about that. Because it's the Lakewood Sheriff's Department, so that station has jurisdiction over several communities beyond Lakewood. But I've heard some people tell me that they feel like those Sheriffs are very disconnected from the residents. They don't really try to get to know the residents or have an actual presence, a community presence in a sense. And maybe I'm hearing the same kind of thing from you.

LC: And I think that police normally have a different relationship with people than the Sheriff's Department....

BN: But are you thinking the LAPD or are you thinking maybe smaller communities with their own police forces?

LC: The one community I came across was, is it Glendora? It's out here at Glendora. And I can remember I lost – someone broke into my car on one occasion, and at Glendora is where the lost property is. And I remember walking into the station, and it was by far friendlier. And I have found in any community where I was interacting with the Sheriff's Department, in fact, in Diamond Bar, the Sheriff's Department is totally disconnected. I believe that to be the case....

BN: I wonder If there's something about the contract system, that very transactional relationship with these contract cities, which of course Lakewood started all of this. But I think when it comes to policing, it may not be an optimal kind of way to be doing policing. I don't know if you think that's true?

LC: Well, I think it's true. I don't think one could claim that there is community policing or community sheriff-ing in Lakewood.

BN: And would you say that's been true for all the years you've been living there?

LC: Yes. And I think the other aspect to that is that – crime, the whole issue of crime is almost like in the business. Everybody wants to see less crime, less crime. And the belief that the more sheriffs we have around, the less crime we will have. The more law enforcement there is around, the less crime you'll have. And I don't think people live that way. But the feeling for, or feeling some sense of security becomes important in the environment. So therefore, people will pander towards the Sheriff's Department and will support it financially. And I don't know what the budget is in Lakewood, what it is, but I'm sure high up in terms of the budget, there's probably more resources going towards the sheriffs than probably any other department.

BN: What is your sense, if it's not more police, what do you think creates safer communities?

LC: I think one is by building safer communities. I think the one area in which we are very laxed in the United States is the question of making neighborhoods neighborly in terms of interactions between people, mechanisms where local people can get together at probably, we call it, neighborhood centers, make them neighborly. I think there has to be some intentionality about community building. And I think that is lacking in most cities at the moment.

BN: Do you feel like it's lacking in Lakewood?

LC: Oh, yes. I don't think there's that intentionality to create a neighborhood. I think people want, let's call it governance, but not the intentionality of the creation of – what are the needs of this community? So it's not a question, do they want all these police, how can the resources, what can the budget reflect that indicates the building of intentional communities? ...

[Cassandra] still runs the Empowerment Congress and the model of the Empowerment Congress is to do with – how do you really create neighborhoods where you don't have – because most people who run for government are people who've got money. And to me, the best model is you don't have to have anything but you can run. You have a ticket on which to run, and to make it issue oriented. And it's not really about who I am as a person, even though I should have integrity. But it's a question of, how can the community speak through me in terms of acquiring the things that they need for the good life....

BN: Neighborhood Watch groups seemed to be very popular in Lakewood. Were you ever involved in anything like that?

LC: No, we were never involved in the Neighborhood Watch.

BN: Were you aware of those groups?

LC: I've heard about them. And again, not anything, not in depth. I heard about, and I would have all kinds of questions too about neighborhood groups. What do they really represent? And are people being as neighborly? ... okay, now in Lakewood, if your dogs bark at night, you can be reported to the city council. So are there really neighborhood groups, again, as I would talk about trying to build community? Or is it a kind of a watchdog? Although in some of my studies years ago and when I was in England, I was

talking about dealing with community policing. I think it's important because I personally believe that policing is not done by the police. Policing is done by the community. If I don't call you, you don't really know what's going on in my neighborhood. And I believe that in community building, the reliance has to be on the community. Communities do the policing, not police. Police very often make arrest, but they don't really do the policing.

BN: ... If you think back to all the time you've been in Lakewood, now 40 years or so, 42 years. Are there any salient issues or incidents over those years that stand out in your mind, of something that maybe happened in the community, good or bad, or whatever that just seemed to stand out to you?

LC: I think there are probably two things. One is the number of Hispanic businesses that have emerged in the neighborhood. And the second is, which concerns me even now, is the import of property developers and the building of apartments in District Five. That to me is a major concern because one is moving away. There's going to be a lot more traffic in the neighborhood, than its neighborliness because it's a matter of working and sleeping and attracting younger communities. Because I think with the cost of properties and also in terms of rentals, it's going to be new people who are coming in and who can afford it.

BN: So you're saying that the building of apartments – so is there a push to build more apartments then?

LC: Well, yes. In fact, on Elaine Avenue where we live, lots of apartments have gone up. How should I describe it? There are new properties. They have knocked down old houses. They've knocked down a number of old houses and thus built. It's like, how can we manage, how can we just have more people for and offer less in terms of accommodation? And of course these are new properties and they look attractive and will be attractive because I think many of the young people who are moving into apartments now, they do not need the same type of services that we wanted back in the 1970s, 1980s. Everything is automated. So there is – one is living with less space and paying a phenomenal rent for it. It's somewhat like, I think what has gone on downtown LA. ...

BN: So is your concern, because I mean, California is certainly having a housing affordability crisis. Some people think we have to build more housing and more units in general in order to have more places that people can live. But is your sense, so it sounds like your concerns, it's creating more traffic, and what else?

LC: And not more affordable housing. Because I think what is really needed is affordable housing. I say this is not a race thing. People just need to be able to afford to live.

BN: So the places that they're building, it sounds like they're higher end, fairly expensive rents?

LC: Property developers are not interested in poor people. I think property developers want to make profits, and it's not Section 8 housing. It’s, we just want to make the fastest buck.

BN: Would you support – is there any move to build affordable housing in Lakewood?

LC: Not that I'm aware of. Not that I'm aware of. But I would support affordable housing in Lakewood....

BN: And then you also, you'd mentioned the number, more Latino businesses. What kind of businesses are you thinking of?

LC: And there are a number of mom-and-pop stores, but I know there are still a number of stores. There's still a number of shops from when Lakewood was that farm community. There's still a few of those around, and I think that's good for the health of the community. I like the notion of space and I don't like congestion, and I would like to see more affordable housing even in the – District 5 where Cassandra is going to be running....

BN: But you're saying the Latino businesses and all that, are a positive change?

LC: I think it's healthy. I think it's healthy. Very healthy. Yeah. ...

BN: Okay. Then I'm going to just ask you my last question, which is, what has living in Lakewood meant to you?

LC: It is basically foundational. Being able to move into a community and to be able to purchase one's piece of house. I think my life would've been totally different if I simply was renting in Lakewood, because to me, simply to be renting isn't roots, putting down one's roots in a community. Because I think having a home is the foundation for family life and interaction with other families, no matter how sparse that interaction might be. Because as Cassandra and Shaundra, being the only two Black kids in school – and I think later there was another kid who came, dropped in – but that exposure was important for them and also for their maturity in terms of what is taking [place] socially within the community. I have learned that kids do not learn by what you tell them. They actually learn by the examples of what they have seen. All the stuff that they've seen around them is perhaps a more major influence on them than what, as a parent I can say, this is what you need to do or what you need to consider.

BN: Would you say Lakewood was a good place for your girls to grow up?

LC: A very good place.

BN: Could you just talk about that?

LC: I think it's, well, one was witnessing the whole development of a community. Even things like the shopping center, what it was then and the renovations that it's gone through and what it is now. That's important. Also, we have even, I think it's called the Long Beach Shopping Center, which is just next door to – there's a little enclave, a city -- near Lakewood here.... But for a while, lots of the gang members used to be there. So very strong little city, lots of Hispanic gang members. I've never felt that the African American community developed gangs in Lakewood. I may be wrong, but I never sensed that at all. And probably it's the numbers game.

BN: ... Anything else you want to add? I know I've asked you a lot of questions.

LC: Nothing I can think of at the moment.

BN: I so appreciate it. It's been really wonderful talking to you and just getting to know you through this interview. I really appreciate it. ... Great meeting you. I've really, really enjoyed this, so thank you.

LC: You're welcome.

BN: Take care of yourself and we will stay in touch.

LC: Peace.

END

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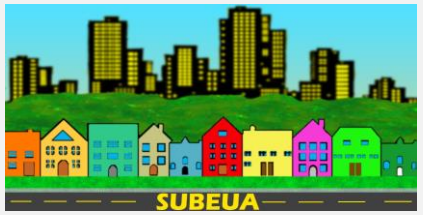

"THE CREATION OF THIS INTERLLECTUAL OUTPUT WAS FINANCIALLY SUPPORTED WITHIN ERASMUS+ PROJECT *URBANISM AND SUBURBANIZATION IN THE EU COUNTRIES AND ABROAD: REFLECTION IN THE HUMANITIES, SOCIAL SCIENCES, AND THE ARTS* (2021-1-CZ01-KA220-HED-000023281)."

SUBUEA 2021-1-CZ01-KA220-HED-000023281

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