

**Voices from the Grassroots Oral History Project**

Detroit Equity Action Lab

Damon J. Keith Center for Civil Rights

Wayne State University Law School

Detroit, MI

**Linda Campbell**

Interviewed by

PETER BLACKMER AND ORIANA YILMA

April 5, 2019

Detroit, MI

## Narrator

Linda Campbell is a grassroots activist who lives in Detroit, Michigan. She is a co-founder of Detroit People's Platform which advocates for a Community Benefit Agreement for the city of Detroit, affordable housing, and usable public transport for Detroiters. She is also a member of the Economic Justice Alliance which fights for quality jobs and fair wages for low-wage, low-income citizens. She came to Detroit in 1972 for a job opportunity. She left for a decade and came back to the once thriving city and found it filled with blight. This inspired her in her activist activities.

## Interviewer

Peter Blackmer is a Research Fellow at the Detroit Equity Action Lab, an initiative of the Damon J. Keith Center for Civil Rights at Wayne State University Law School.

Oriana Yilma is an undergraduate student at Wayne State University majoring in Psychology and minoring in African American Studies.

## Abstract

Linda Campbell speaks about how she came to Detroit and what inspired her to create the Detroit People's Platform. She talks about her organization's structure and how they work to organize communities and activist leaders across Detroit. In particular, she speaks to coalition building and policy making. She also mentions the Detroit People's Platform's 2013 Convention and what went on during the meeting. Proposal A and a Community Benefit Agreement Ordinance for Detroit, which were both advocated and campaigned for by the Detroit People's Platform, are discussed at length. Linda Campbell talks briefly about and pays tribute to Mama Lila Cabbil.

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Black student movement; Community Benefit Agreement; Detroit People's Platform; Detroit, Michigan; Emergency management; Emmett Till; Foreclosure crisis; Great Recession; Lila Cabbil; Segregation

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Transcript of interview conducted April 5, 2019 with:

Linda Campbell [LC]

Detroit, MI

By: Peter Blackmer [PB] and Oriana Yilma [OY]

**LC:** My name is Linda Campbell. I live in the city of Detroit [Michigan], and my primary organizational affiliation is the Building Movement Project, Detroit People's Platform. I allied my coalition with a number of organizations including DEAL [Detroit Equity Action Lab]. I also am a member of the Economic Justice Alliance of Michigan which fights for quality jobs and fair wages for low-wage and low-income folks. I am the--a member--or at least Detroit People's Platform is a member of the Housing Trust Fund, and we are the institutional anchor for Equitable Detroit, the citywide community benefit agreement ordinance coalition.

[0:00:58]

**OY:** So, could you describe your neighborhood in the city when you first came to Detroit?

**LC:** The neighborhood I lived in when I first came to Detroit--I came to Detroit in 1972 right out of undergrad, and I lived with my cousin as is sort of like traditional for young Black people when you come to a new place. My generation was still doin' that. I had never been in Detroit before, have a cousin and his wife who lived here, and so somebody got on the phone and called and said I had gotten a job in Detroit and could I live with them. So, I moved into an upstairs flat on Ilene right off Fenkell, which is in District Two now, and it was a...was a good neighborhood. I mean, there were lots of working-class people who lived in the neighborhood.

Small, two-story flats. Some were living downstairs. Typically, the landlady, the landlord lived downstairs, and they rented the upstairs. Pretty vibrant. On the corner of Fenkell and Griggs, the next street over, was a big grocery store, Whitney's Grocery Store. It was a walkable community. There were all kind of little shops along Fenkell. There was--Livernois and Fenkell was pretty active. There was a busy and thriving fully occupied community. There was a mix of African Americans and whites because the lady who owned the house, the older lady, was a white. So, the landlord was living right there down the stairs from us, so.

[0:02:41]

**OY:** So, how has the city changed since then?

**LC:** Well, sometimes I drive down that block and, you know, I reflect on what the block was like in 1972 and the way it appears now, and of course there's the blight, and we all know that the blight occurred for a variety of systemic reasons: subprime lending problems, lack of investment in the city, collapse of a strong, high wage paying job economy. So, the community reflects that kind of system. It's disinvestment. That's that part of the city.

When I think about other parts of Detroit, some of them are doing quite well. I remember one neighborhood--my daughter attended the Detroit Community Music School which was located where now the Center for Creative Studies. That was a Black neighborhood over there. It was, you know, like folks who had lived in Black Bottom. It sort of got migrated up John R., Brush, heading towards the North End. I remember the North End...the North End being a very, very vibrant neighborhood. In fact, I married someone from the North End, and it was a kind of community where people didn't lock their doors 'til the last person came in at night, you know? Close-knit community. People knew each other. People had been there for, you know, for decades, where it's in your families.

I left the city. I was gone for about a decade. I left in the late [19]80s and came back in the [19]90s. And in the late [19]90s--and I drove through that neighborhood, and it was heartbreaking. I cried when I saw what had happened

to that neighborhood. Parts of the North and in other parts of the city, it had been such a beautiful city for everyday working-class folks and particularly Black people. When I came here, I had never seen Black people living so well and living in these beautiful homes and vibrant neighborhoods, and the ravage of disinvestment that I saw when I came back, I just...I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe that I was coming back to the same city. That was in the late [19]90s.

And so, fast forward now. There's still some of that. You know, I drive around the city 'cause a lot of my work is in the community, right, and I can go from one neighborhood in Detroit to the next neighborhood and see where the intentional investment is happening. People in neighborhoods outside of Midtown, Downtown in the selected neighborhoods that would be developed are doing the best they can to try and hold on and create something, come together and create vibrancy, but we're not getting the investments. So, you're gonna see, in reality, these two cities, which is something that in our organization we started noting about 2013, 2014. We're seeing two cities here in Detroit. You know, what's happening in Downtown, Midtown and what's happening in the rest of the communities, rest of the neighborhoods, so.

[0:06:06]

**OY:** So, how did you first become active in struggles for racial equity and social change?

**LC:** Well, as I mentioned earlier--do you really want me to go back that far? I mean, my first demonstration around equity, although we didn't call it that then, was in 1964. I think I was 14 years old. I grew up in St. Louis [Missouri], which was pretty segregated. I went to segregated schools, and there was a millage about to be put on the ballot to--for the public schools, and I remember the disparity. You would hear the teachers talking about it, the way our science labs looked at the all-Black high school compared to the science lab at the all-white high schools and how we desperately needed this millage to pass in order to upgrade our facilities, you know, renovations to our buildings, what have you. And so, me and my girlfriends made a huge sign and went and stood out on the street and held up the sign asking people to vote for the millage. That was around a racial equity issue as

it relates to education, but that's not what we named it back then. We just thought, well, you know, we wanna make sure we get resources for our schools.

And, I lived in a Black student movement while I--in the [19]60s, I wasn't quite old enough to be a part of the southern Civil Rights movement, but I went to college in the late [19]60s, in 1968, and there was a really emerging strong Black student movement which was kind of like the carryover from the Civil Rights movement 'cause you had a lot of Black kids going to white universities and sort of beginning to build and agitate around Black identity change inside these institutions to more reflect the broader community of African Americans. So, yeah, I have been at this a long time, so.

[0:08:04]

**OY:** So, who have been some of your greatest influences in your activism organizing work?

**LC:** Greatest influences. So, then like what is that vision in my mind that I hold when I'm doing this work?

**OY:** Mhm.

**LC:** I would say...I would say Emmett Till. I was six years old when Emmett Till was murdered, and I remember the shock that sent through the community. I was in St. Louis. Emmett Till was murdered in Mississippi. It was one of the few times I saw my mother break down and cry, you know, and it just... He was 14 years old. Like, did we forget how young he was? And, I kind of held that in my mind. Not all the time, 'cause I couldn't hold that kind of grief all the time, but I've held that image in my mind. He was a 14-year-old kid, you know, who was unjustly murdered, and he never really got a chance to live into who he could be. And so, my...my commitment has always been to honor and live into the hopes and aspirations of my ancestors, and I consider him to be one of the ancestors, right?

So, there's a whole host of folks, you know, the nameless folks who I stood and watched in my living room back in the early [19]60s who were being hosed by the sheriffs in the South. You know, the dogs were being turned out on them. I did know their names, but these were young people, these were Black people who were unafraid, who were standing up to power, and really, really putting their lives on the line, and I wanted to be part of that legacy as I matured and grew.

[0:10:15]

**PB:** This is going to be quite a jump. But, just in the interest of time--'cause I would love to ask so many more questions about that period as well. But to bring us closer to the present and the work that you're doing now in Detroit, could you talk a little bit about how the Great Recession and the subprime mortgage crisis impacted the city?

**LC:** Well, it was devastating in the city. I mean, I experienced it. I'm a homeowner. I was one of the folks who saw my property values collapse. I saw how it changed those neighborhoods like the neighborhood I lived in when I first came here, just kind of wiped out those neighborhoods because of the burden of the subprime lending regulations. People were faced with these huge balloon payments, these exorbitant rates that--monthly rates--that they would have to make. It just...it destroyed the wealth in the city. Detroit had been a very wealthy city with a lot of that Black wealth invested in homeownership. And so, I witnessed the subprime crisis just wipe that out. And as a result, people lost land, lost ownership, lost sense of cohesion in communities. And yeah, they were struggling to recover some of that now. So, we're still living with that legacy. It's been, what? Almost ten years? We're still living with that legacy.

[0:11:52]

**PB:** And, could you talk about what it looked like to...how were people responding to that? How were... What kind of organizing work can you do against, like, the massive financial institutions?



**LC:** Yeah, that's a good question, but one of the things I'll say about Detroit is that it's sort of in the DNA of Detroiters to fight back, to organize, whether it's in the block club level, whether it's a bigger neighborhood association, or rather through the more formalized organizations, social justice organizations. Detroiters started organizing and fighting back, you know. I can remember taking part in many demonstrations against the banks because people at least in those circles understood who to target. The target wasn't your neighbor who had just lost their home. The targets were the institutional investors and financial overlords on Wall Street. That's who the targets were. And so, there were many demonstrations around Detroit about trying to hold the banks accountable for what they had done to the community through the subprime lending scam, yeah.

[0:13:15]

**PB:** So, that--I mean, this happened a few years before the city was placed under emergency management. So, what is--as word is circulating that emergency management is a potential, is a possibility, can you describe what the conversations were like in the city or what, like, the... What was the collective mood in the city as word is kind of coming down that this is gonna happen?

**LC:** In the places where I was sitting with other activists across the...across Detroit, there was this sense of impending doom, you're right. And, we had gone through the consent decree, and I think once the consent decree happened, people realized that we were probably on the path to emergency management. Although many of us did organize and work with groups like the Sugar Law Center to get passage of the repeal of the emergency management law. So, yes, there was active engagement around trying to fight this very law, but they also started thinking about what kind of movement infrastructure did we need to put in place to really sort of enhance and strengthen the on-the-ground democracy that we were determined to hold onto, you know, in the city of Detroit, and out of that grew many movements. As I said, that movement making is in the DNA of Detroit.

So, you had folks who were organizing around issues of transit. You had folks organizing around the environmental issues in their neighborhood and community. We were starting to look at development and the transfer of public investments like our tax dollars into private wealth. So--and then, really consciously talking about land and land use to sort of rebut the narrative about how valueless Detroit had become. We were sitting on 139 square miles, and many people were trying to convince us that, ah, that's too much land, you know, and that was the narrative to really sort of justify the concentration of wealth in 7.2 miles of the city versus the main part of the city. So, many strategies really pushing back against the new narratives and strategies that were being imposed on the city. About--at that time, they were talking about downsizing the city, so people started organizing. Out of that organizing came the Detroit People's Platform, so.

[0:16:06]

**PB:** Could you talk...could you kind of give us a little bit about that back story about the genesis of the Detroit People's Platform? Like, the first convention. Like, what would that...what the work was that you all put in?

**LC:** Well, the--as I said, we had already started that work across the city just kind of trying to build cohesion across these various neighborhood and various movements that were happening with the notion that we had to move into protect mode, that we wanted to define a quality of life platform that Detroiters could rally around and fight to protect through public policy and advocacy and organizing. So in June of 2013, we held this convention at Marygrove College, and we had activists and resident leaders and organizations from around the city come and attend, and we identified a five point platform of issues that we would organize and fight for in terms of holding onto our own grassroots community-based democracy and fighting for equality alike for Detroiters.

[0:17:21]

**PB:** Could you bring us into that convention, kind of describe the mood, the atmosphere? Like, what kind of conversations were taking place? Were there any debates that might have been going on in that space?

**LC:** Well, yeah, it was interesting because we were gathering as a whole, but we were also gathering within our city council districts. I think it was--we had just voted in city council districts. So, we were limited to that new structure, that new government structure. So, we organized ourselves in our districts as part of the whole though, you know, there was...there was these internal discussions within each of the districts about what the priority issues were, which was lively. We had representation from some organizations, some districts more than others. This was without the typical political folks. These were all just everyday Detroiters in these spaces.

We had a host of workshops to kind of like get people caught up on what their issues were, whether it was around urban ag[riculture], land use, Detroit Works. The emergency management lobbyists had about 25 workshops going on sponsored by other activists. There was lots of learning, lots of energy. And then, the groups went back into their caucuses at the end of the learning to sort of prioritize what they thought the agenda should be moving forward. So, very, very interactive, very democratic process, and I think it's important so that undergirded with all these--the learnings about the different issues that were happening in the city at that time and an intentionality about creating a structure that we would live into in the future.

**PB:** When I hear you talking about this convention...

**LC:** And we had t-shirts!

**PB:** What did the t-shirts look like?

**LC:** Well, the t-shirts said, "Detroit People's Platform Convention 2013." [laughs]

[0:19:33]

**PB:** I'm thinking through a historian's lenses, and I'm seeing so many parallels between, like, the Black Convention movements of like the late [19]60s, early [19]70s, like the Black Power movements, like the Gary Convention [The National Black Political Convention held in Gary, Indiana], and all these kind of like parallel political tracks. Was that kind of history influencing this, the emergence of the convention?

**LC:** Well, I would say so because we had cross-generational representation. So, you had people like me who had been really active in the Black student movement. You had some of my elders who had come up through the Civil Rights movement who had been participants in SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee]. We had some of the folks who had been really active in some of the newer Black movements, political movements that were happening in the [19]70s. So, yeah, it was a real diverse mix of folks who brought different perspectives on political organizing, but it was through the lens of Black identity politics, I would say, mostly, but recognizing the need given that we were confronting here in the city to sort of have a wider tent with agreement around our principles, community for the platform, so.

[0:20:51]

**PB:** So, what came next moving forward out of the convention space? Was there a process by which the platform was ratified, or how was this brought into communities outside of just a convention space?

**LC:** Yeah, the platform was ratified that day at the convention, and because of the way it was structured, there was leadership representation from each of the districts, and the charge was that they would form the leadership core but they would relate to their...in their districts with their setup of organizations. And so, we didn't...we didn't do direct organizing in the districts. We organized through a leadership structure because there was leadership already in those

neighborhoods, folks who had been in organizations and relationships for decades. We didn't feel the need to disrupt that with the new organizing strategy but just to harness the intellect and the wisdom and the commitment and the relationships that existed among the leadership and bring to them to the table and sort of support that.

[0:22:00]

**PB:** So in the years since the convention, could talk a little bit about, like, the organizational structure of the Detroit People's Platform? How many folks you have on staff, what roles are, and maybe like any--if you're looking back, like--any reflections that you might have upon some of the things that have really worked or some of the great accomplishments and then maybe some other things that you think can continue to be improved upon?

**LC:** Well, we still have essentially the core group of founders, and I wanna take a moment to lift up Mama Lila Cabbil, formerly with DEAL, who has recently made her transition. She was one of the founders of Detroit People's Platform, and we really will miss her wisdom and her guidance, but she is in my ear, you know, giving me a million tasks to do, [laughs] as we all know and love her to be, and I try and live up to as many of those as I can.

So, we still maintain our core group of leaders, and those leaders represent the interests of their neighborhoods, and we organize around--we're initially five core platforms, but now it's more land justice, which includes affordable housing and land use and more recently the Community Benefit Agreement Ordinance. We organize around quality jobs, transit justice, and good governance. Those are the issues that we have organized around. We did a lot of work around food justice, but so much of that is already being done in the city by folks who allied with us that we sort of stepped back from that work specifically. We have five staff at Detroit People's Platform, and our leaders, the people's--the leadership structure is representative across a number of coalitions that we're a part of. We have the CBA [Community Benefits Agreement] city-wide coalition. We have the Housing Trust Fund Coalition. I mentioned the Economic Justice Alliance Coalition and a recent coalition that consists of organizations in Detroit that are looking at these

broad issues of democracy and ways to build power with other people-of-color-led organizations statewide, so.

[0:24:34]

**PB:** So, I'm--from talking to so many of the folks who have been a part of coalition building, I have heard a lot about the difficulties and the challenges of coalition building. Could you speak to what your experience has been and some of the challenges in coalition building?

**LC:** Mhm. Mhm, yeah. I mean, coalition building is challenging, but in this environment, it's hard to have major wins as a single organization. That's just the truth. It's hard to build enough power to achieve that kind of wins that are meaningful. And so, because we represent a diverse group of leaders from across the city, the coalition structure works best for us. We're really sort of basic about our coalition work. We're singularly focused in our coalition. So, for example, the CBA coalition, in order to be a member, to have been invited into that coalition, you had to want to fight for ordinance. You couldn't just say, "Well, yeah. Sure, I believe in community benefit agreement." No. You had to say you believed Detroiters deserved an ordinance that codifies that we get a seat at the table when they're using our public money. There were a lot of groups who were on board for the CBA. They couldn't take the step to call for an ordinance because it was extremely political at that time. It's a holding on to the issue and the vision that unifies the coalition that is extremely important and has worked for us over time.

[0:26:18]

**PB:** So, since you brought up the CBO [Community Benefits Ordinance], could you kind of walk us through how Detroit People's Platform first got involved in that? Was it the 2016 campaign around the Community Benefits Ordinance?

**LC:** Well, we actually got involved in the Community Benefit Agreement work in actually 2010. That's how far back this fight goes. When we started reading, the folks at Sugar Law [Center] got smarter about community benefit agreements because there was talk of building a light rail from downtown up Woodward to 8 Mile, and it was going to go through the North End, which was one of the neighborhoods where we had been organizing with some of our social service partners and the emergency food pantry around transit issues, and we thought, "Oh, okay. We're getting ready to have a light rail. That means development. That means we should be organizing the community." At that time, we were just thinking a Community Benefit Agreement Ordinance. That project ended up morphing into the M-1 Rail, but we had done all of the leg work to get folks ready for this development project.

We thought, "Alright, we're not gonna have the development happen in the North End. It's all gonna be concentrated Downtown, in Midtown using our tax dollars?" And so, many of the folks who were counting on being a part of that development project either through jobs or improvement in their neighborhood, you know, became concerned that tax dollars were being concentrated in Midtown, Downtown for this...in this streetcar, and it was actually the folks in the emergency food pantry who said, "Ah, ah. No. We're gonna be cut out unless we do something. We'll have to go to city council and demand an ordinance." And since we had been organizing with them, we thought, "Well, okay." So, we organized. We went to city council. They made the demand. They wanted an ordinance. They didn't feel like just an agreement or a handshake was good enough because they didn't trust that that would happen with the developers. And so, we got behind them and started supporting the organizing work on the ground. The community went through the legislative process because they truly felt they could get a legislative agreement to enact the ordinance. That didn't happen after about two-and-a-half years. And then in 2016, they decided, "We're gonna put this on the ballot, put it before the Detroit voters."

[0:28:55]

**PB:** So, could you talk about that, like, the actual legwork of that campaign, what that looked like?

**LC:** It was brutal. [laughs] Yeah, because it was an all-volunteer campaign. We raised, I think, 11,000 dollars, and the way the ballot campaign works, you have to qualify by getting enough signatures from Detroit voters. It was only Detroit. Then, it has to be vetted and be certified. And then, you can go on the ballot. So, volunteers got the signatures. We were on our way to certification. We got wind that there was mounting opposition to throw out our signatures. But when they did the validity check, about 80 percent of our signatures were valid. So, we passed that test. And then, we learned that city council, some of the--not all--some of the city council members were going to put a competing ordinance. So, our Proposal A, which we like to call the people's proposal, and Proposal B, which was put together by opposition on city council with...with a lot of support from corporations and special interest mounted a campaign as well.

So, it was a hard-fought campaign. Ours was basic grassroots organizing, out there knocking on doors, making phone calls in church basements and barber shops and the fish restaurants at night, organizing and talking to Detroiters about why this was so important that Detroiters have a say if our...if our public tax monies are being invested in these large scale developments, and we heard that our opposition, they spent about, I think, over--it may be close to 1.25 million dollars. So, we had huge opposition. And as you might expect with that kind of opposition, we lost, but we managed to get almost a hundred thousand votes. They beat us by 15,000 votes. So, it was--even though we lost, technically we had forced the city to move and put something on the books about a Community Benefit Agreement Ordinance.

So, we do have an ordinance on the books now. It's not as strong as what we wanted on Proposal A for the people, but when you think about what we were up against the fact that we went from being dismissed by the powers that be and said that will never happen here to forcing them to respond and make--have an alternative ordinance that actually is here now, and we're continuing to organize and fight for amendments. It's quite a feat for the volunteers who worked on the ground to get this happen, to make this happen. We're the first city in the nation to have a CBA ordinance, and there are other cities and groups that have organized and to pattern themselves after our work.



So, here and again, post-emergency manager and bankruptcy when our democracy had been pretty much stripped from Detroiters, Detroiters organize and fight back with a lot of hard--with a progressive lens about the future, with a sense of self-determination that we can make this city work for us. It was just... It was just extraordinary. It was. And so, in that way, it was a win because it sort of sent the signal that Detroiters are back, Detroiters are taking hold of and reinvesting in their democracy and their self-determination.

[0:32:49]

**PB:** So, I do wanna ask some more questions about that campaign, but one of the things that your last point made me think about was how you bridge the gap, or how it--like, in your conversations in that community, in your organizing work, how do you move as an individual or organization from responding to crises--like with foreclosure crises when you're in survival mode, how in your conversations do you move from there to a more progressive vision?

**LC:** Well, having come to Detroit when I was a young girl--I was 22 years old when I came to Detroit, and I always say it's in...it is in the DNA of the city to be progressive. There are so many progressive movements that have come out of Detroit. It was the home of the labor movement. Within the traditional labor movement, you had this really powerful Black revolutionary labor movement. I know a number of professional organizations nationally that were formed by Detroiters creating these alternative systems and organizations to really hone in on racial inequities that were happening in these professions like social work and education. And so, there's a thoughtfulness that's always existed at the grassroots level in Detroit. What we haven't always had are the resources to sort of implement our visions.

But in addition to moving beyond mobilization, there is ongoing organizing, the education work, the building of relationships, and allowing folks to sort of set their agenda and getting behind their agenda for a vision, and Detroiters do have a vision of how they want to see this city hold on to. Strategy is key. Folks, tactics are good, and we love tactics, but you have to have a long-term strategy about the outcome that you're working towards. And so, it's just reiterating, holding your

coalitions together, holding your memberships, reinvesting in the leadership development of your membership is a formula that we think works here in the city of Detroit. And, not being afraid to take on the tough issues. So, you have to reinvigorate the movement from time to time. Yeah.

[0:35:22]

**PB:** Could you talk a little bit about that political education work? Because this is so--like, when you get into like the policy weeds, this stuff gets so dense. Like, how do you break that down and make it plain to then organize around, like, these tough issues?

**LC:** Well, I mean, you use a variety of methods you know of. I think, you know, the one-on-ones were always good. It's just basic, you know, just having one-on-one conversations with folks in the community. We organize in a variety of spaces. We organize in social service spots. We organize in emergency food pantries. We organize in pantry--mobile pantries.

And so, understanding narrative and understanding narrative through a historical lens because a lot of times Detroiters can connect what's happening right now to what's happened historically in the city and in their...in their familial history which may go to some of the southern movements and movements in other parts, other movements that have happened. And so, making those historical connections. Being sensitive around language, using film, using art and culture as a way to draw people in and sort of break down a lot of those dense policy terms. And then, allowing people to have some leadership in how you frame the issue and the solution. If you go back to the basics, which is those who are most impacted are the ones who are best able to define the solution, you do sort of unpack a lot of that dense policy work that, you know, some of us have to deal with anyway.

[0:37:08]

**PB:** Could you talk also a little bit about--and I know you did this really well in that report that came out through Equitable Detroit--could you kind of point toward

some of the big lessons that you learned through that campaign about--whether that's like working with a political structure or organizing, wherever you wanna take it--but what are some of the major takeaways that you've...that you draw from that campaign?

**LC:** Ah, the major takeaways from the CBA campaign. You have to do the basics, and the basics are getting out, knocking on doors, talking to people, having a strong message, one-on-one organizing. That's basic to a campaign. The coalition has to be singularly focused and unified around the vision. You cannot have multiple agendas inside the coalition and have it succeed. I would say consistent leadership. We had been together for a while. The coalition just wasn't formed around the CBA. We had been working together since 2010. So, we had built a lot of trust relationships to move to the next level.

I would say another major lesson for us...just believing in the cause. And, I mean, when we look at it now and we look at the opposition that we went up against, I mean, it was incredible that we were able to achieve what we were able to achieve, but we did that because we deeply believed in the fairness and that the fight for equity in this town the time had come. So, I would say principled commitment to your vision and to your strategy in the campaign.

[0:39:21]

**PB:** So, what's next? You know, in the months and the years since that campaign, what have been the next steps in continuing? I mean, is the goal still to have this ordinance revised and passed? What comes next?

**LC:** Well, we're pretty honest about the fact that what was passed, the ordinance that we're--that's in position now is not what we wanted. We wanted an ordinance that was much more people-centered, which gave community much more power, which lowered the threshold so that many more projects would be eligible for the CBA, and it would create legally binding contracts between community and the developer. We still hold on to that vision. And so, we have put forth a series of amendments because the way the city charter reads is after

voters vote on a ballot initiative, you have to wait a year, and then you can come back and organize and push for amendments at the city council level. So, we have people in our leadership, same group of folks as before who meet with city council regularly, have put forth a set of amendments based on the research that we've done about how this current ordinance is not working for the community.

So, we continue to organize and fight for amendments, and we'll, you know we'll see. We...we're not going anywhere. We have a long-term investment in making sure that Detroiters experience their inequitable development in the city. After all, we subsidized most of the development that's happening in this town. And so, we wanna see fairness in terms of minority-owned businesses. We wanna see more presence of development in our neighborhoods, and we want an explicit commitment to racial equity from the city in terms of what the development strategy overall looks like in this town. So, those are things we continue to fight for.

[0:41:29]

**PB:** Could you talk a little bit about some of the hot spots in the city right now in terms of struggles for CBAs?

**LC:** Well, you know, Midtown and Downtown, I mean, how much more can they build down there? It's just...it's incredible the overbuild that's happening. So, there...there's some major projects that are coming up. Residential housing projects, new hotels that are getting--that are meeting the threshold. And so, we'll be organizing in those communities. Right now, Fiat Chrysler over on the East Side, their Chrysler Corporation, they're doing a major expansion. That's going to be--we imagine it's going to be a pretty big public investment. There's already work going on, organizing in that community. The community has come together and come up with a list of benefits that they would like to see.

I would say, on a smaller scale, there's all the development that's happening in these selected quarters, like Jefferson Chalmers, which is a sort of a new hot neighborhood for people, for investors. And there, you know, the emphasis really

is on equitable development and not displacement because we believe that there is a threat to the existing residents that will be priced out of that neighborhood. So, we move from the large-scale projects--which, you know, we will be monitoring and organizing around those--to the work that we have to organize with our resident leaders, the immediate development threats to their communities where there's the actual threat of displacement to existing residents.

[0:43:18]

**PB:** So, just--so, I can get into the weeds with you here. What does that work look like? And the relationship between Detroit People's Platform citywide and the smaller-scale organizing, say, for instance, the organizing work around Fiat Chrysler... So, how...what's the relationship like between the local and the citywide?

**LC:** Well, one of our principles in terms of organizing as it relates to equitable development in the CBA is we only organize in communities where they voted 40 percent or more for the Proposal A. If you didn't vote for Proposal A in your community, we're not going to invest energy in trying to organize there. Where the Fiat Chrysler expansion is being planned, voters who turned out in that election, over 80 percent of them voted for Proposal A, so that's our constituency there. And so, we have members of the citywide CBA coalition who live in that community who represent those interests in our coalition meeting, and the resources that we have available, we make those resources available to them. So, you know, we contain--spend over short-term support around canvassing, organizing door knocking, pho--we made over 2[000] to 3,000 phone calls on behalf of folks in that neighborhood. So, whatever resources we have, we bring them to bear with the leadership as part of the CBA citywide coalition's commitment to that organizing effort.

[0:44:58]

**PB:** I apologize for the breakneck pace of these questions kinda coming at you. One of the things that I wanted to ask about is some of the narrative work that

DPP has to do. Particularly, I wanna talk about the big monied interests coming in and shaping narratives. Like, the usual dominant narratives about stadium development or bringing in a whole bunch of young white folks as like the keys to development and rebirth of the city.

**LC:** Keys to success to the city.

**PB:** Right. And then, you know, a tax on--against CBAs as like did they stifle job creation like with the economy. How does the Detroit People's Platform counter those kinds of narratives?

**LC:** Well, we counter those narratives in a couple of ways. We publish a newspaper four times a year where we actually devote that space to telling our story and offering up narratives from community where these--where the organizing is happening. So, we illustrate what's going on on the ground for our newspaper series. We have a really robust social media presence.

Again, we continue to convene and work across our coalition partners. They are on the front lines in their communities, and they carry the message and the agreed-upon narrative back into their block club meetings and association meetings, and we address it head on. We produce what are called one sheets. So, we get informational facts out to community in easy-to-read ways. We distribute those at meetings across the city. We have our leadership folks come in and distribute in their community district. So, it's still back to that basic one-on-one organizing and public information and not being afraid to have a counter-narrative to what the...what's being put out by the majority folks, particularly the majority media. So, we have a fair amount of media presence. I know during the CBA campaign, we got about 60-some media hits, which is pretty good. So, people are responding to our counter and oppositional narrative as well, so.

[0:47:25]

**PB:** What--again, like, I'm coming at this from a historian...so when I think about CBO, I'm thinking this seems to me as a direct intervention into these historic processes and cycles of urban renewal, so-called Black removal, these constant cycles of displacement and colonization. Do you see the CBO as a...a way to address that, or does there need to be more beyond a CBO?

**LC:** Here's where we differ with some of the national--other national folks who work on CBAs 'cause there are lots of people who have been doing CBA, and they've been doing good work on CBA way before we started doing that work. They see and use the CBA as a tool...as a tool for land use and planning, and we're fine with that. We think that is what it is you should--zoning. You can have an impact on zoning. Housing, a variety of interventions that give folks some access to having influence in those areas.

For us, the CBA is a way to build power. It is--it was a way to disrupt, on a couple of levels, the narrative about development in the city of Detroit. That all narrative--that all development is good development. We wanted to disrupt that narrative. We wanted to re-emphasize that there is a lot of public wealth that's being invested in private economic development, and there's some accountability there, both on the part of the private developer and our city government. You don't get the incentives unless local government awards them. So, there's an accountability. So, again, sort of asserting some kinds of checks on the way the elected officials were doing their job. And, it's...it creates energy around moving an agenda, and it builds power and gives folks a place to come and exercise their thinking about land use and equitable development. So, for us, we see it much bigger--we see it as a much bigger movement than just an essential tool for urban planning, so.

[0:49:56]

**PB:** So, to kind of follow up on that bigger picture and the broader objectives, what can--and in your analysis, what can and should--sustainable equitable healthy development that takes into consideration racial equity, what can that all look like and what should that all look like in Detroit?

**LC:** How much time do we have? [both laugh] Two minutes? I can't say that in two minutes. I would say that organizing around the CBA is a good first step. I would say that there needs to be intentionality around making sure that local government is accountable for how our public resources are being invested. And therefore, there should be a call for a racial equity strategy from city government that is very intentional around racial inclusion. I think there is a need to be accountable for how these tax dollars have been invested, and therefore monitoring of development and penalizing those developers who don't deliver on our investment.

And, I think we need to think more broadly about the demands that we make on the developers. We need to be looking at issues of sustainability. We need to be looking at issues. Are they coming to the table, these developers, with an analysis around health impacts, you know, environmental impacts, you know, climate change, you know, the bill? They're...they're recreating our communities. They're redeveloping the built environment in the city at this time. That we're being made much more and more aware of the impact of climate. How are their development plans align with what's going to be good for this city environmentally 15, 20, 25 years down the road? We shouldn't allow them to come in as real estate developers and just simply avoid any accountability or ownership for that kind of thoughtful planning.

So, I'd like to see our planning department--again, I believe in a robust role of our government in these processes. I'd like to see our planning department be much more exacting with these developers in terms of issues of sustainability and, you know, more forward thinking about their impact on the built environment. That's just a start of how I think we should think about the bigger question of equitable development in the city.

[0:52:50]

**PB:** Ok, do you wanna offer any quick kind tribute or statement to Mama Lila's legacy before?



**LC:** Well, earlier I mentioned that she was one of the founders of the Detroit People's Platform. We miss her every day, and it's hard for me to believe that she won't come through that door late, as was [laughs] Mama Lila's case, and then, you know, have these brilliant ideas and a list of tasks for me and others around the table to perform. So, she made a real strong impression on us in the very beginning, and her legacy will continue to be reflected in our work, so.