

**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

**Jerry Goldberg**

Interviewed by

PETER BLACKMER AND ORIANA YILMA

May 3, 2019

Detroit, MI

## Narrator

Jerry Goldberg has been an activist for over fifty years. His struggle has largely been focused against big banks which he believes are the underlying cause of austerity and Detroit's financial crisis. He began law school at age fifty and has defended Detroiters in property and tax foreclosures. He is a leader with the organization Moratorium NOW! which was formed in 2008 to fight against the banks, stop evictions and foreclosures, and educate the community of their rights to their homes.

## 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

In this interview, Goldberg gives a comprehensive background on the origins of the financial crisis locally and nationally. He describes his work as a lawyer in the fight against foreclosures. He explains that the root of the problem are the banks and that activists must recognize that austerity is a result of a corrupt capitalist system. He describes the Depression-era tactics, such as move-ins, employed by Moratorium NOW! during the foreclosure crisis and discusses the role of law within movement activism.

## Keywords

Antiwar movement; Black Panther party; Detroit bankruptcy; Detroit Eviction Defense; Detroit, Michigan; Detroiters Resisting Emergency Management; Education; Emergency management; Foreclosure crisis; Gentrification; Labor unions; Law; Marxism; Moratorium NOW!; Privatization; Tax foreclosures; Urban renewal; Water shutoffs

## Restrictions

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Transcript of interview conducted May 3, 2019 with:

Jerry Goldberg [JG]

Detroit, MI

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

[Pre-interview discussion]

**JG:** ...not enough of a movement to really address and the same in the housing issue. We were really early on and really analysing the role of the banks and the subprime lending, and it's the same thing, It wasn't a big enough movement to really address it, and there are reasons for that too, I mean, partly because they did a pretty decent job of co-opting it. That was the role of the [Barack] Obama administration, from my point of view, was he was put in to basically put a lid on the financial crisis, which mostly affected Black people, and to make sure there wouldn't be the kind of uproar there should have been. Detroit should have been the center of the country for what they did to us, and that's kind of--so, you know, we got a lot of traction, but not enough. It happened. You look around Detroit. I cry every day. And, we feel the weight of it. We really fought it hard. I mean, I intervened in the bankruptcy for no money. I ended up going bankrupt. And, I knew nothing about bankruptcy. [laughs]

**PB:** So, it was like a crash course in real time.

**JG:** Uh-huh, same on the foreclosure work. I'd never...I'm not a real estate or a consumer attorney, but my colleague and I, we approached it politically, and then we got so many calls that--I don't know if you heard of Vanessa Fluker. She and I

took a flight out to Boston [Massachusetts], took a course overnight in predatory lending, and started representing people.

**PB:** So, what kind of law were you studying when you were at Wayne State [University]?

**JG:** Well, you know, you just study law. [laughs] There's no such thing as studying what kind. But, my emphasis--when I went to Wayne I was 50 already. So, I've done plaintiff civil my whole--civil rights, employment discrimination, and then I did a ton of anti-foreclosure work for years, a little personal injury. So, who are you doing this for?

**PB:** So, we work with the Detroit Equity Action Lab in the Damon J. Keith Center. So, what we're doing is, on one hand, making sure that movement history is being documented in this era but also trying to think more broadly about how we can be using this kind of video media to be working on narrative change in the city used as proactively and policy advocacy and educational and trying to figure out how we can make history more present and be in service...

[Conversation about technology equipment, getting interview set up]

[Pre-interview discussion ends]

**OY:** Could you give us your name, where you live, and your organizations and affiliations?

[0:00:00]

**JG:** Sure. My name is Jerry Goldberg, and I live in the city of Detroit [Michigan], and I work with the Moratorium NOW! Coalition.

**OY:** Could you describe your neighborhood and the city when you got here?

**JG:** Where I'm living right now? Well, I live in East English Village. So, our neighborhood is one of the few that hasn't been completely destroyed by the foreclosure epidemic, in terms of the houses are still standing pretty much in our neighborhood. But when I bought into that neighborhood--I rented for a long time and then bought a home when property values were kind of at their peak in that area and still relatively low. It's a nice area. It's an integrated area with mostly bungalows. But, my house is still way under water on my mortgage. I couldn't sell my house for what my mortgage is right now, and that's in a relatively stable neighborhood of Detroit. Eight blocks away from me, a friend of mine bought a home on Haverhill where there's only five blocks--five homes standing on his block, and that's just eight blocks to the east of where I live. To the west, I'm sorry.

[0:01:10]

**OY:** How has the city changed since you first got here?

**JG:** Well, the city has changed dramatically. When I first moved here was in 1970. I moved here as a young student activist from Ann Arbor [Michigan]. I was with Ann Arbor SDS [Students for a Democratic Society]. We had a big group, and we all thought that we were all revolutionaries and that we had to go and organize among the workers. And, Detroit was a tremendous city when we moved here in 1970. It was the center of the Black liberation movement. The [Black] Panthers were very active. The League of Revolutionary Black Workers, Republic of New Africa came out of Detroit. So, it was a dynamic movement, and I went into the factories. And, the Black movement was impacting white workers too. I worked in a factory out in Wayne that was about 80, 90 percent white, the most racist place I'd ever seen. Within two years, we elected a committee that was--a union committee--there was five Black committee men out of seven because the white workers were seeing how the Black workers were so militant in the city, and they said, "Hey, we need some of that here, too," and that was how strong the movement was in Detroit. Detroit was...it was a great city to be an activist. It was dynamic. I mean, I moved here post-rebellion, so there had already been a lot of

white flight, but for young Black workers you could get a job in a factory. You made a decent living. It wasn't down-and-out like it is now.

And then, the big changes occurred. The first big change was with the auto restructuring beginning in [19]79 when Chrysler went into bankruptcy, and they shut eight of nine factories in the city of Detroit. And in my mind, it was really a deliberate attempt to use the restructuring of auto, which was going to happen, in a racist fashion to destroy the power of the Black working class in Detroit, and it had that effect. So first, Chrysler did it. And from [19]79 to [19]82, literally they eliminated 35,000 union jobs in the city, auto worker jobs, almost all Black workers. Chrysler, I believe, hourly force went from 70 percent African American to 30 percent in three years time off the backs of Detroit. And then, GM [General Motors] did the same thing in the late [19]80s when they shut off Fleetwood and the Cadillac plant and destroyed a neighborhood to build a new plant with half--a quarter of the workers.

But, all of that was an attempt to destroy the base, the power base, of the Black working class in Detroit which was unique in Detroit because Detroit was a city where the Black liberation movement really merged with the working class movement which made it have tremendous power. So, I always believe that that was a very conscious destruction of Detroit. It was the first wave of what I believe was corporate destruction of Detroit. We lost 600,000 people from 1970 to 1990. I believe property values declined from something like 30 billion to 10 billion in the city, and it was a very conscious effort to destroy the base of the working class, Black working class.

[0:04:02]

**OY:** How did you first become active in movement work?

**JG:** Well, I was a product of the [19]60s. So, you know, the anti-war movement and the youth movement of that time is what attracted me. And as I got active, back then, on an international scale, almost all the liberation movements were led by Marxists. So, you had in Africa the groups in Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique,

Angola were all led by Marxists. Cuba was at its heyday. China was at its heyday in its revolutionary zenith. So if you were serious about being against the war, you tended to move towards Marxism much more easily than today. Even though there's a lot of interest in socialism, the world movement was much more revolutionary. And, I was serious. So, I became a serious revolutionary, Marxist, Leninist and have been ever since.

[0:04:51]

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

**JG:** Well, there have been many. I mean, I've known people for many years so it's hard to pick one or two. But, you know, I've worked with many great revolutionaries. I saw Fred Hampton when he was a young person. We had very good relations with the Panthers here. And, you know, just in Detroit, there are many wonderful revolutionaries that we all work very closely together, whether they're from Welfare Rights or a whole spectrum. I've had the privilege of working with many, many terrific organizers over the years. I've been active 50 years now.

[0:05:26]

**OY:** What lessons should current and future thinkers, activists, and organizers draw from the histories of SDS?

**JG:** Well, SDS there's a little less so, but I think the real lesson that I still believe is the most important lesson is that as people move into the struggle, the art of revolution is bringing revolutionary politics to challenge the capitalist system in a practical way to the working class, and that's, to me, the lesson we've learned in Detroit because we've been engaged. Living in a city like Detroit, you couldn't just do anti-imperialist and anti-war work. The conditions always mandated that you get involved in the community, and the technique we've always used is called



transitional demands. We would find demands that kind of voice immediate concerns of the people but in a revolutionary manner.

And, what I mean--so, one of the examples--and we'll talk about that more--is during the housing crisis, we always developed the idea of a moratorium on foreclosures. Well, what does a moratorium mean? It means that your property right to your home supersedes the property rights of the banks to take your home, and you have the right to do whatever you need to defend that, and that's the conception that we've always raised. Raise demands in a simple, basic way, but they go to the root of the crisis, which is always capitalism and usually, in this period, finance capital.

And, that's the lesson I think that we've gained over the years in how to carry that out in living struggles, and I think it's a lesson that needs to be conveyed to young people now. There's a tendency that once people become active to view, we've got to peel the threads, get behind what's going on if you're really going to fight it. You can't fight water shutoffs without fighting the cause of the water shutoffs. The cause is that the water department took out 1.1 billion dollars in bonds to repair infrastructure and paid 537 million as termination fees on corrupt swaps to the banks. But how do you fight a shut off? Where's the funds? That's what mandates it. They go after the poor. That's when they started going after the poor. Well, how do you fight those shutoffs unless you fight the banks that are at the root of those shutoffs? And, that's kind of the lesson that we try to bring into the movement. It's somewhat lacking. It's not--it has to be broad. It has to be learned, in a way. It's not something you just get. Many people have the right instinct to fight shutoffs, fight evictions, but to really fight them we believe you have to get to the root of what's causing them.

[0:07:59]

**PB:** I want to bring us back a little bit in recognition that this current wave of privatization isn't new. So, I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about some of your earlier struggles against the privatization during the latter years of the [Coleman] Young administration?

**JG:** Sure. Well, as I said, we always...we took on--actually, the plant closing struggle back in the [19]80s with a campaign for a job is a right, a moratorium on plant closings. We actually built a pretty large campaign nationally to say a job is a property right of the workers. The same idea--it was an idea that was actually espoused by the Secretary of Treasury [William Woodin? Henry Morgenthau, Jr.?] under [Franklin D.] Roosevelt, and it was actually the idea that the UAW [United Auto Workers] espoused before the Flint [Michigan] sitdown strike to say that ideologically to prepare the workers, you have a right to take care of these plants 'cause they're your property. Your sweat equity has more than paid for your jobs, and we popularized that idea, and they had a pretty big struggle in the...

But then during the Young years--the Young administration came in. It was an unusual administration because he was one of the Black administrations in a Black city on a major scale. And when Young first came in--and he rode the anti-police brutality wave into office. I mean, he came in on a promise to abolish STRESS [Stop the Robberies, Enjoy Safe Streets] when there was a big social--and he actually did abolish STRESS and did do some fairly serious changes in the police force in terms of affirmative action. And, the other thing is when Young first came in, Mayor Young, he wasn't supported by any of the ruling class. So, his administration was what we would call a more classical social democratic administration. They brought union officials because those were the people who had the skills in the Black community to run things.

But over the years--but, he accommodated a lot to the corporations, and there was actually a lot in his last years, we kind of feel, when he wasn't that much in power. He did try to initiate privatization of--they privatized Detroit General Hospital, which was a big step and a big struggle, and I've worked with people involved with Diane Bukowski. I think you've interviewed her. We were very active in that struggle. We tied it into the plant closings by Chrysler at the time too. And then, we had a big coalition to stop privatization. There was a really interesting coalition in the early [19]90s, but we were always cautious. We never made Young the main focus of it because you had to become cautious of that because, you know, Young was very popular as the first Black mayor. But, we stopped the first wave of privatization. We actually got some pretty good language introduced into the city charter. It was an interesting campaign because it was when the socialist

countries were collapsing and they were introducing privatization then. So, we were kind of tied in. So, that was our early struggle against Coleman.

And then, the other struggle we did during the Young--the big struggle. From [19]79 to [19]82, there was a huge recession in Detroit. There was an auto restructuring then and virtually all the funds got cut off to the city by the [Ronald] Reagan administration. So, the city took a double whammy. So, we did a big campaign around hunger then too, and we actually used the federal government for the release of surplus food, and Young actually embraced it, and we actually won the release of commodity food distributions that lasted for 17 years. So, that's--we went to court and then we mobilized around...that's sort of the strategy we used a lot.

[0:11:21]

**PB:** So, let's bump up just a little bit--and this has deep roots too. But, can you kind of give us a crash course on the history of the causes of the foreclosure crisis?

**JG:** Sure. Well, you know, Detroit--with all that had happened, Detroit had kind of stabilized by the year 2000 or so. As I said, when I bought my home, prices had gone up a little bit. The neighborhoods had pretty much stabilized. They didn't look nothing like they look today. The property values had stabilized. So, it's not like the city was back to where it was in the early [19]70s, but the city at least stabilized, and its neighborhoods by and large remained intact up through about 2000.

Then in the early 2000s, early to mid 2000s, that's when the banks launched what's been known as the subprime mortgage crisis, and really what it was was a deliberate plan by the banks, every major bank. Some ask, "Who were the good banks?" There were none, and it was a plan that they wanted to generate quick profit. And so, what they did is they would send--and this is documented in the Senate Select Committee report on the Wall Street and financial crisis, which is a great thing. It reads like *The Godfather*. So, what they did was they would send brokers into neighborhoods, and they would go up to someone, "Hey, you need a

new roof. No problem, we'll give you the money for it. Just sign your home to us, sign a mortgage on it." And literally, that's what they did. They trained people, and they rewarded people for going into mostly poor neighborhoods, mostly neighborhoods concentrated with people of color, and would sign people up with these mortgages.

And, many of them in Detroit, what we saw most typically, were adjustable-rate mortgages where the first year, it would be like 500 dollars a month. But by the third year, your mortgage tripled. It would go up each year, and they were selling them to people on fixed income, and this was a very--just to be clear, this was deliberate, and the reason they did it is then the banks would package these subprime mortgages into investment security instruments that they sold on Wall Street. So, they might package a thousand subprime mortgages in a bond, sell it on Wall Street, and the rate of profit on those bonds was eight times greater than it was on the bonds that were the fixed-rate bonds. So, it was irresistible to them. It was irresistible. They were making huge profit. The rating agencies, Standard [and] Poor's and Moody's, the agencies that put Detroit into bankruptcy, would okay, would rate these bonds as AAA bonds knowing they were fraudulent because they were paid by the banks to do it. They were paid by the number of bonds they rated. So, it was a completely fraudulent operation, criminal fraud operation, and in Detroit where we had the highest rate of Black home ownership of any city in the country, we were the most devastated. So from 2005 to 2010, we had 65,000 mortgage foreclosures, bank foreclosures in the city of Detroit. I believe 78 percent of them were on subprime mortgages, and it was just devastating, and literally a quarter of the population was driven out of the city during those five years.

And when we heard about it, we saw it coming, we right away started researching it, and the research we did showed that in the 1930s when there was huge foreclosures, 25 states passed moratoriums on foreclosures. A moratorium meant that the bank--if you were facing foreclosure, you could go to court, you got an automatic stop on the foreclosure, and the judge had to set your payment based on an affordable payment. And, 25 states won those. They were won because there was a big movement in the [19]30s led by communists and socialists where there were unemployed councils literally block-by-block. And so, when someone was facing a foreclosure, the bailiffs would come move their stuff out, and they would just move it back in, or they would stop the auctions themselves, and the

power of that movement--there were 25 states that wanted that, and the moratoriums were legalized by the U.S. Supreme Court, and it was a famous decision, Home Building and Loan Association versus Blaisdell, that said in a period of crisis, the people's right to survive supersedes the contract clause of the U.S. Constitution.

So, we did the research. So, we had the goods on it, and we also found that in Michigan, the governor had the power to declare a state of emergency. A state of emergency can be--usually when there's a flood or something like that, but it also can be a man-made or corporate-made emergency. So in 2007 when Governor [Jennifer] Granholm, the great liberal Democrat, was going around the state having town hall meetings about the economic problems in Michigan, I snuck into one of them, wrote my question in legalese. And so, she asked, "What would you do if you were governor?" and I raised my hand, and I said, "What I would do is put the people before the profits, use your executive powers to put a moratorium on foreclosures, evictions, and utility shutoffs." And, I don't know if you've seen Governor Granholm. She's very white, but she really turned white then, and we pursued it.

And then, we popularized the idea of a moratorium, and we actually met with State Senator Hansen Clarke who had--it took him a lot to do it because when I first met him, "Everyone will be for this," but we laughed. But finally, he put in a bill that we helped draft. And then, we went out in the street, and we went to popularize the idea, and we started getting calls from tons of people who were losing their homes. And so, myself and Vanessa Fluker, who I work with--an amazing people's attorney, still represents a million people today who are losing their homes--we took a crash course in predatory lending, and we would go into the banks. And for a while, we did great. We would go into 36th District Court, we were civil lawyers with 30 page briefs that they've never seen before. So, we were getting people their homes for a buck for a while, but that didn't last.

And then when we would lose in court, we would picket the homes, or we would picket the banks, and we had even move-ins, and we won a lot of homes back, and Detroit Eviction Defense is kind of an outgrowth of this. We brought this into Occupy, said, "Why don't you have a march on the banks against foreclosures during Occupy?" And they said, "Oh, great idea!" So, they had a great march, and

they actually called my colleague after the march assuming it was one of the homes she was representing and gave the guy his home back, and we went back to Occupy saying, “You won!,” and they were so excited they formed an eviction committee. But, that was kind of the foreclosure crisis, and we fought it very hard, and there were other groups too. Like, the Detroit Eviction Defense did a lot of it, and it had obviously a devastating effect. You can’t lose a quarter of your population without it having an effect on the city finances, and that’s kind of what led them to the city’s financial crisis, which I can go into if you’d like.

[0:18:28]

**PB:** Let’s put a pin in that. I want to come back to that. I’m curious--so, your background’s in labor organizing, anti-war organizing. What was it about the foreclosure crisis that this is what you threw your hat into the ring for?

**JG:** Well, we knew that this was kind of the center of the attack of capitalism on the working class during that time. It was really through the housing crisis that they launched an attack, and we saw it. We saw the impact it would have. And so, it was a natural. We never--my work has never been union organizing is here, this organizing--it’s all connected. It’s all part of the overall struggle to fight for the people’s rights against the capitalist system. So whatever the aspect of that struggle, to me it’s always the same because you’re fighting the same enemy. And basically, the tactics change, but the approach didn’t change.

And, again, the moratorium is an example of again what we call transitional demand, trying to--see, back then, a lot of groups, there was ACORN [Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now]. They would fight more for modifications of loans, we have to do things to reform the banks and all. But, our view was that kind of is fighting within the confines of capitalism. We took a very simple demand to say, “You have a right. Your right to your home supersedes that bank’s fraudulent mortgage.” Well, that goes to the core of capitalist property relations that says people’s rights come before the rights of the banks, and that’s why we like the moratorium demand. Even though it’s a very simple demand, it was very appealing to people in its essence. It was anti-capitalist. It challenged

property relations, and that's kind of the approach we have taken in all the struggles we've been involved in.

And, it took hold. I mean, it was quite a dynamic campaign. The idea was very popular. We just couldn't get it. Granholm eventually--there were a couple reporters came in from Telesur, and they did a whole documentary on it, and they finally quit. They would dog Granholm because none of the reporters would ever ask her a meaningful question, and they said, "Why don't you put a moratorium on?" And, we have her on tape saying, "Well the banks wouldn't approve of it," and that was our great liberal Democrat Jennifer Granholm, [laughs] who I blame four-square for the destruction of the city of Detroit because that was before...that was before it happened. See, the neighborhoods were still intact when we raised that demand. It could have stopped it. It could have been stopped.

[0:20:55]

**PB:** So, who--was that your research into the Depression era?

**JG:** Yeah, we did the research ourselves.

**PB:** How did you stumble across that particular Supreme Court ruling? Did you already know about it, or was it something you found?

**JG:** No, I read--I mean, even before I was a lawyer, I would go to a lot of--we always liked to do that. We would kind of find--we believe in this country there's a lot of respect for law, much more than it deserves. And, I'm a lawyer, and I believe there's absolutely no justice in the law, and the first thing that I tell any client that I represent, if you're looking for justice for a civil case, your justice comes from yourself and knowing you're right, and all civil cases are about getting a little bit of compensation for how you were wronged. So, I don't believe in the system one iota. But still, we believe the people do believe in law. So, we believe that.

A tactic that we've used is to raise these demands that confront capital but to give them kind of a legal handle--and not to say that the way to win it is to go to court, but say you have a legal right to a moratorium. You have a legal right to stay in your home. Let's make it happen. Let's use that. So, we did the food campaign. We went to court, but our rallies never said, "Support the lawsuit." They said, "Fight for food. Build an army of the poor," and that's the approach. So, it's kind of using the legal framework to raise revolutionary demands, and I would always do a lot of research on that. That was kind of my role a little bit. And, we came out of--one of the leaders of Workers World, Sam Marcy, was really good at it. So, he helped us develop that technique.

[0:22:36]

**PB:** So, in this--in a capitalist society where capitalism is so deeply ingrained in all our culture, can you tell me about how you have those conversations with folks when you're organizing, talking about capitalism?

**JG:** Sure. Well, that's--you hit it. That's a contradiction that we have. Even now where there's a lot more interest in socialism--which really is tremendous. I mean, I've been in organizing for years, and it's really only the last five years. I do a table now, the first thing I ask them is, "Are you interested in socialist ideas?" and 80 percent of people say, "Yes!" That's like, wow, great! That makes things a little easier for us, but still that's not the case among the masses of people, and that's the question. But, it's not like they love the system. They're getting screwed by the system. So, the question is: how do you articulate what's happening to them in a way that seems real, isn't just rhetorical, isn't just going on and on about some abstraction but is going on and on about confronting their daily life? It puts them in a fight against the system, and that's really what I call the art of revolution is how to do that, and that's what determines whether or not you're going to sustain over the years because you're not going to do it just by raising a red flag, and I'm all for--I'm a revolutionary. I'm not for hiding what I'm about, but you have to bring people in on a level where they see it.



And, the one thing that we've learned is when you do that, it's not like people don't understand it. If you're losing your home, every person who lost their home, you can be sure, would call the banks a hundred times to save it. So, they would have a visceral hatred for the banks. And so, what you'd do is give me an outlet for it. You never have to convince people how rotten the banks were. In fact, even in my movement work, it's harder to convince the activists to take on the banks than the average person because the average person hates the bank. The problem is, first of all, they're blaming themselves, which is what the society does, they atomize people. So, they blame themselves for losing their home, and the first thing you have to do is cut through it. There was a group we worked with in Portland. They treated anti-foreclosure work as grief counseling and actually said you had to take people through that.

And literally--and I've spoken to rallies. I spoke one time at California where people were really hard hit, and I looked over the crowd, and it was so depressing, and I just got up and attacked the banks with every bit of vigor that I can have--and I can be pretty vigorous--because I wanted to unleash that hatred and say, "Wait a second! Don't blame yourself. You're the victims of this!" And then, you also gotta give a handle on a fight that seems real and that is real, and that's what we try to do. And to me, that's kind of what--to be a good activist, that's...I believe very strongly in that approach, and I believe that's kind of, through my experience, that's what I think I can offer younger activists is how to develop that approach.

[0:25:33]

**PB:** Let's dig into that a little bit more since we're here. Can you talk about your approaches to having those conversations, like on a day-to-day basis, the day-in, day-out process of organizing a radical consciousness and a radical framework? Because when we look historically at some of the publications that Marxists had put out in the [19]70s, [19]80s, it's so damn text-heavy. It's impenetrable for a lot of people. So, can you talk about your process of the art of revolution?

**JG:** Sure. Well, as I say there, for a foreclosure campaign, we would--the first thing we did, we articulated the demand, and we gave it a little life, like confronting

Granholm with it. Then, we would go to all of it. Back then, the Attorney General [Mike Cox] would have these bogus foreclosure fairs and really they were where all the banks would be there to put people in loan mods and all that kind of crap, most of which would fail anyway. So, we fought our way into those, and we set up a table. They ran us out. I went to court, and we won the right to be at all of them to put our propaganda out. And, we would have a flier, you know, build a fight for a moratorium. We would explain what it was, that there was a historical basis for it, that a moratorium means that you have a right to stay in your home, and that the judges mandate it. We would use the law as a lever for propaganda, and when we would get calls for people, we would represent them. We would say, "Come on, let's take on your case," and we would go, and sometimes we would go into court with it.

But a lot of times, we'd lose in court. We'd be out there in our picket line, and we won a lot of them that way, and we probably won more that way than we won in court over the years, and we'd set up a picket line at the banks or do a rally at their home. We did a move-in on Clairmount one year. Maryanne Godboldo, the woman who, you know, she's the woman who ended up--she just died. She defended her kid against them stealing her kid for not--for using natural medicines. She turned us on to people. I'll never forget it. And, all the groups came together. So, we did a lot. We would move dumpsters. You know, the dumpsters would show up in front of the homes. We would move them. We would blockade them. So, we did a lot of direct action, and--but we did it by first propagating, and we put very simple literature, "What is a moratorium? There's a legal basis for it. You have a right to stay in your home. Let's fight and make it happen," and that would kind of be what our flier would be, and we would put out tons of them all over the city.

[0:27:55]

**PB:** I want to come back to some of the direct actions. From an organizational perspective, since we're talking about coalitions, who is part of the coalition?

**JG:** Well, originally, the moratorium was founded for anti-war work, but then we directed it toward the housing crisis that took on the name of the crisis. I mean,

it's really more like a mass organization than a coalition, I would say. But we work, you know, because of the work, we had bankruptcies. There was a group of retirees that stayed active, they're part-- consider themselves part of it. So, we worked--it's a broader grouping. It's not all socialists. It's not all revolutionaries. So, it's a broader grouping. It's really a...really, better way to describe it would be a community organization, community-based organization, but we also open ourselves up. If someone's in a struggle, we invite them to come, and report to us, and we try to help out and take it on. We were just very involved with May Day. So, we do a lot of work like that. And, it also has an anti-imperialist component to it. So, we've done a lot of work in solidarity with Venezuela. We just--with Puerto Rico. One thing we've always tried to do in all our work is we tie in what we're doing domestically to the broader international struggle to break down those barriers that are so great in this country because they're all tied in together.

[0:29:17]

**PB:** Could you say more about that in terms of why is it important to locate these local struggles within that broader global context? We're talking about relationships between Detroit, New Orleans, Puerto Rico, Palestine, Iraq, the Southern Cone.

**JG:** Well, if you're going to have--the biggest barriers to what we call class consciousness is people operating in their own interests as working people and oppressed people is of course racism and national chauvinism. So if you're going to bring people, to move them into a consciousness where they see the system, the economic system, is the root of the crisis, it means breaking down that chauvinism, those barriers, and that's why we feel it's extremely important. And obviously, the biggest barrier in this country is racism, but internationally too that we believe that you want to draw the link because it also strengthens people.

We did the national conference on austerity about a year ago, and it was great for people in Detroit to see that it's not just Detroit, that what's happening in other cities is pretty similar to what's happening in Detroit. And, we brought in people from Puerto Rico in for that conference, and then they had us go to Puerto Rico to let the people of Puerto Rico know that what's going on with them isn't just

Puerto Rico. It happened in Detroit too. Because I think all workers are strengthened by a sense that they're not in it alone, that's what we gotta break down. It's individualism. Then, there's national chauvinism. There's so many ways they use to atomize the working class as a class, and we want to break those down because as you break them down, then people see they're fighting a system and they feel stronger.

[0:31:02]

**PB:** So, in terms of--well, I'll take that a step further. While we're thinking about what becomes of that consciousness, say a worker in Puerto Rico now feels this kinship with a worker in Detroit. What's the next step there?

**JG:** Well, I mean, if we were a stronger movement, we would do more [laughs] to solidarize it. But, you know, we'll call an action in solidarity with Puerto Rico in a minute. We'll do whatever we can to make sure people are aware because it's the same forces. Who's destroying Puerto Rico? It's not the hurricane. That was the lever to accelerate the destruction, but it's the same banks that destroy us. Wells Fargo has bonds in Puerto Rico. They sold one bond--it's called the COFINA [Puerto Rico Sales Tax Financing Corporation] bond--for two billion dollars. By the time they added 730 percent interest, they were paying 21 billion. So, it's the same banks that destroy us, destroy them. So, the same targets are there. When it comes to austerity and the attacks on the working class in this day and age, it's the banks, which we call finance capital, that are really the dominant fashion. So if you're going to fight them, let's fight them everywhere.

To me, Puerto Rico should be a world focus right now. What's happening in Venezuela, well, Venezuela is subject to sanctions. Well, on who...on whose behalf? On the banks and also on the oil companies. So, you draw that solidarity. I think it strengthens everybody in the struggle. And, I really believe Detroit, when we hit the bankruptcy, we should have been the focus nationally. There should have been a national march in Detroit because we were the center. I mean, the subprime mortgage crisis wiped out 53 percent of Black wealth in a five year period. Five years! Never came back. We were the city. It was a civil rights issue. It's a human rights issue. It should have been taken on by the whole country, and

that was one of our frustrations, and we think that's a little bit of--I mean, the struggle was treated as a local struggle.

[0:33:01]

**PB:** So, let's bridge that gap between--since you touched upon it with the bankruptcy and emergency management, can you take us from the first wave of the foreclosure crisis to the subprime mortgages up through the imposition of the emergency manager?

**JG:** Sure. Well, once Detroit started suffering all the foreclosures, the city of course went into a financial crunch because you can't sustain--you lost a quarter of your population, and you lost a lot of your tax base. So at that point, the city started floating bonds to try to sustain itself. One of the bonds that was floated--and they're really not legal because they weren't really bonds--was called pension obligation certificates. They floated them in the mid 2000s around. But, what they did is the banks would come to the city, and they would say, "Here. We'll give you a bond, and it'll be an adjustable rate bond." So, the bond is you pay a half percent margin, and then it's tied to an index, one of the--the federal reserve index. The main index they use for these bonds were called LIBOR [London Interbank Offered Rate], which in fact is fraudulent in themselves but was the index. So what they did, the banks would then come and say, "Here's what we'll do. You know, because adjustable rate can go up or down, so you can budget more steadily, we'll put you into what's called a swap. You pay us a 5 percent interest rate guaranteed, and we'll pay whatever the adjustable rate is, and whoever comes out ahead on that year--if the adjustable rate's lower so we're paying less, you have to pay us the difference, and if the adjustable rate's higher, we pay you the difference." So, they tied in these bonds they were putting us in, particularly the pension obligation certificates. They did the same thing with water bonds. They tied them into these interest rate swaps, and the problem was--these were done around 2005.

When 2008, when the whole housing bubble collapsed, interest rates went down to zero as part of the bailout of the banks, and it's hard for me to believe that the banks didn't anticipate this was going to happen. So suddenly, these interest rate swaps are completely favorable to the banks. So, the city, on top of what it's

paying off in bonds, is paying a 50 million dollars penalty every year to basically UBS [Group] and Bank of America, every year. And then, they would build in the termination event. If your ratings went down, they could terminate the banks. So in 2008, they declared a termination event in 2009, and all the casino tax dollars that were supposed to save Detroit, they went into a fund operated by US Bank to pay off the swaps. So, the city wasn't getting any revenue from them. So, this is a lot of what led--so basically, when we started looking at what was going on, we realized that what was going on was that the city was basically being put into predatory loans, just like its people had been, by the same banks that caused the crisis, Bank of America, which was the biggest subprime lender here, Countrywide was one of the people that had the swaps.

So, what happened was when they started the process towards emergency manager, emergency management was based on the city couldn't maintain its finances, and there was tremendous opposition to emergency management on the basis that it was the usurping of Black voting rights, taking away a Black city's right to elect its own officials by a racist white governor, which it was, and there were big rallies. But, we researched the law, and we found what the emergency manager law stated was the emergency manager was empowered to do all sorts of--break all sorts of contracts and including union contracts and all that, but he was mandated to pay off debt service to the banks. So, it was written into it. So, we looked into it and said, "Wait a second, this is a bankers' bill. That's really what's at the core of emergency management is they're putting a manager to make sure the banks get paid," and we started raising that idea.

So within the context of the broader movement against emergency management, we started popularizing this idea, and not in contradiction to the other groups. So, there was a big rally. The first big rally was at the church with several thousand, and we were invited to speak on the banks. So, we became the group that would be talking about the banks in the context of the emergency management struggle, though we completely solidarized on the basis of racism and self determination, and that's kind of how we got really involved, and it gave us a unique role within that broader movement, and it's a role that we like to have, the anti-capitalist role, you know, and we became the group that focused on that a lot.

And then, the bankruptcy occurred. When the bankruptcy was essentially because they couldn't go after the pensions, the pensions were constitutionally guaranteed, so they had to use bankruptcy to go after the pensions. And so, we intervened. I basically intervened representing one pensioner, David Sole, and we used that to get into the bankruptcy. We actually intervened in the bankruptcy specifically to make a focus of these issues during the bankruptcy and did a pretty good--and then, we--at all our demonstrations, we would point out the role of the banks at the core of the bankruptcy. In fact, the city--the whole bankruptcy ended up being resolved off the backs of retirees, and the 5.8 billion of the 7.1 billion dollars in savings were based on off the retirees, and we were pointing this out.

[0:38:42]

**PB:** You mentioned the rally at the church. Is that the one at St. Peter's [Episcopal Church]?

**JG:** This rally was. It was a large rally. It was like several thousand people, early on.

**PB:** So, was this all in conjunction with Detroiters Resisting Emergency Management?

**JG:** It was before that. Detroiters Resisting was just one of the smaller groups. This was a broader rally that had almost all of the groups in the end, even the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] at that point. This was a big rally. I mean, it was a big issue, emergency management. It was bigger than any one group was, any one coalition. It was way way bigger. Because they passed emergency management, it was actually overturned, and so there was a lot of opposition.

[0:39:21]

**PB:** Can you describe what the atmosphere, what the collective mood was like in the city as this is unfolding?

**JG:** Yeah, that's a good question. I mean, what happened was originally there was a lot of opposition to the emergency management, and a lot of it was led by the unions, by AFSCME [American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees], and they hired unions to be--and even the police union and the firefighters union, and there was a lot of big actions that were occurring, and they were the group that all from an organizational standpoint had more resources and were more established. There were big demonstrations early on in the bankruptcy that we had. There were several demonstrations of thousands of people, and we would always participate in solidarity with them. And, we--actually, we were the only Left group that was in the bankruptcy. But, what happened--and so for a while, there was a lot of potential to fight it.

But then what happened, they were threatening like 60 to 80 percent pension cuts. The first ruling that [Judge Steven] Rhodes did--and the most important ruling--was to say they could go after the pensions, and that wasn't a given, and he knew it wasn't a given because he actually reversed himself later on somewhat, but that was a critical ruling because that was the reason for the bankruptcy was to go after the pensions. And once he ruled that, then it kind of changed the tenor of the bankruptcy. And so, then what happened was they started negotiating, and they came up with the grand bargain and all this stuff, but essentially the unions gave up the fight. They felt that the best they could get--what ended up occurring in the bankruptcy was a 4.5 percent cut in base bankruptcy. They did the annuity clawbacks which was...could be about another 15 percent. So, they were taking 20 percent of the base, they eliminated cost of living which was another 20 percent over years, and they took away all the pensioners' health care. So once the unions kind of came in on it--but, they felt that that was the best deal they were going to get, and they kind of gave up the fight.

When the unions gave up the fight, then it was really the rank-and-file organizations that sustained it, but it changed the dynamic. It was less powerful because we didn't have the base that the unions had. And then, the NAACP, they went along with it. All of the more established groups went along with this deal.



Well, there were a lot of people opposed to it in Detroit. One of the things that was interesting was that 600 people filed independent objections to the bankruptcy, which meant they had standing in the case. It was a very good tactic that we helped and a few other groups developed. I think Detroiters, DREM [Detroiters Resisting Emergency Management], there were a lot of us, and we all kind of worked together, somewhat apart but somewhat together. But, that was a great technique. It meant that rank-and-file people had initiative in the bankruptcy. So, there was that, and there was a group developed that came out of working with us called DAREA, Detroit Active and Retired Employees Association, that kept on the fight for the retirees even after the official groups kind of sold it out. But, it changed the dynamic.

So, we sustained after that. I felt it took a lot of the edge. The struggle was less strong once they cut that deal, but we sustained it, and there was actually a trial on interest rate swaps during the bankruptcy that I participated in. It was me and all of the--none of the unions would participate in it. By then, they had backed out of it. The only people who took on the swaps was the retirement board for a while, and they backed off of it too--and he was actually quite helpful to me, their lawyer, but we stayed in it. There was a trial. It was quite a trial. It was a trial against the banks during the bailout. It was an unprecedented trial. It was me and the insurance companies for the bankers, and we put them on trial, grilled them on the foreclosures, put the whole context of the economic crisis on record for the city. And actually, Rhodes ended up in [Nathan] Bomey's book [*Detroit Resurrected: To Bankruptcy and Back*] and said it was his most important ruling because what he did is he reduced the termination payments from 280 million to 89 million, which still, to me, was way more, but it was interesting because he gave them a little credibility. But, that's kinda--and then, it's kinda after that the struggle just kind of wore on, and the retiree groups did take it all the way up to the Supreme Court on their own, but didn't win, but, I felt, the decisive moment in the bankruptcy, even though we kept the fight alive. And, we were the main group that really kept fighting--DREM too--but we were the main ones who really focused on the role of the banks.

It was a hard struggle, but we would be up every day picketing. But for a while once the unions came down on the grand bargain, it took the thrust out of the struggle. It doomed it, and they were relieved. One time, they interviewed [Kevyn] Orr after the bankruptcy, and they asked him what was his greatest

accomplishment in Detroit, and he said it was avoiding civil unrest. They were very nervous about what they were doing. They were taking away pension rights. Pension rights are constitutionally guaranteed. I mean, think about it, constitutionally guaranteed. Workers work their whole life. And in 25 states, they do it. So, it set a bad precedent. It's interesting that they haven't done it in more cities up to now, but they're thinking about it, but it's because the bond holders actually didn't like having to take any kind of cut. But, it was quite a dynamic struggle. It was fascinating, and we were in there every day, and we would picket every day, all through the winters. If you read in the New York Times, if you saw the pictures of the Detroit bankruptcy, most of them have our signs say, "Cancel the debt to the banks." So, you would have thought that was the demand, the main demand, but that was our demand. We raised that all the time. We raised that the banks had no right to anything. The same banks that destroyed Detroit should not be rewarded.

[0:45:10]

**PB:** Which is one of the main demands of Puerto Rico is to cancel the debt.

**JG:** Exactly right. It's very similar, the situation in Puerto Rico, except it's like Detroit on steroids. They have 72 billion dollars, not 18 billion dollars, in debt, but it's very similar, the same banks, and the group that helped us a lot during the bankruptcy was a group called ReFund America Project that does a lot of research on these--because we knew nothing about it. The way we learned it, we FOIA'd [Freedom of Information Act] all the bonds, and we knew nothing. None of us are economists. None of us knew what an interest rate swap was, but we just learned it. We researched it, and we reached out, and this one group was quite helpful, and we became kind of the experts on Detroit. So, we would start going. We would be invited to speak at churches for people. We did a PowerPoint presentation. And, it wasn't like--I mean, the thing about it, we weren't experts. There's this idea that you've got to hire experts is a bunch of bull. It's not that complicated. It's plain old robbery. It don't take a whole lot to see it, and we became kind of the voice for doing it, and we educated people to do it, grassroots people.

And when we would speak about it, a lot of the movement people would say--it's interesting--a lot of the activists would say, "It's too hard to talk about the banks." And, it's funny, we would go to a crowd, and we would rally against the banks, and everyone loved it because most of the people who had been affected by the banks. Like I said, when you lose your home, you learn what the banks are. So, we would always get great responses, but it was hard to convince the activists that you can take on a frontal struggle against capitalism. It's not easy. It's hard all over the world. Look, even in Greece, they took it a while and backed off, but it's what has to be done. And in Puerto Rico, I'm still optimistic. The movement there is stronger than it is here, I believe. So, we'll see what happens, but they're getting--but the proceedings are very similar, and I've been following pretty closely.

[0:47:08]

**PB:** I want to ask for your analysis on--like, if we're looking back on that period of resisting emergency management and fighting against bankruptcy, you mentioned that notorious Kevyn Orr lie about his greatest accomplishment being that there wasn't civic unrest.

**JG:** I don't think it was a lie. I think that's what he viewed. That was the one moment he told the truth that that's what they were nervous about.

**PB:** So, why wasn't there? Why wasn't there?

**JG:** Well, as I said, I think the main reason that held it--there were two reasons, I would say. The first, even prior to emergency management, the city council and mayor--the mayor right before emergency management was Dave Bing, and I'm absolutely convinced he was put in to do nothing, to just be a--he wasn't a politician. He didn't come out of a struggle. He was a great basketball player, but he was not a civic leader. He's not like a Coleman Young. If Coleman Young was the mayor, with all of Young's contradictions, this would never have happened. Bing was put in to pave the way for bankruptcy, to go along.

I represented Head Start workers who--you know, they privatized Head Start. Why would you privatize Head Start? It was like federally funded program for city workers. And actually, I was able to get them the 10 percent of hikes while they were cutting wages. They were terr--and it made no sense. Why privatize it? There was no--they stopped emergency needs money from coming into the city for a year and a half under--what's her name?--[Maura] Corrigan when she was head. They wouldn't allow it in. This was money that people needed--because they wanted to privatize the administration and emergency needs from the Department of Human Services to Wyandotte [Michigan], which is what they ended up doing so no one could get it.

So what they were doing, they were eroding the city for a number of years. They were privatizing. Belle Isle was down to four workers administering the island right before, and it was done with the approval of Bing, or at least he did nothing, and city council was also very weak. We've had historically a strong city council, but by then Maryann Mahaffey died. The only one that was left that was a voice at all was JoAnn Watson. None of the rest of them spoke out, and they went along with it. We would go to them a lot. So, emergency management was kind of a... It was preceded by a lot of the things the emergency manager was doing, happening already.

So, it weakened the base, and the unions were weakened when they went in, and they hadn't fought for a lot of years. They were beaten down, and then they didn't put up a fight, like I said. They put up a fight for a while, but then took it as far as--their analysis was that if they fought longer, it would have been a disaster, which we completely disagreed with. And once they stepped out of it, it's kind of the organized forces that have--I mean, we would have meetings. We were going in fighting. I would go in--I always used to laugh--I would go into court fighting with these lawyers. There were a whole slew of them getting paid a thousand bucks an hour, 800 bucks an hour, and we would have--and fighting the biggest banks in the country, Bank of America and UBS, and we would have a collection and collect 50 dollars at our meeting to cover our expenses. So, that was kind of the balance of forces. Not that we did it for money, but it's just to say we were up against a colossal with very little resources, and that's I think what turned the tide. It was a combination then. The struggle had been weakened in Detroit, and also

over years the working class movement had been weakened. There's no question about it. It's not the movement it was years ago.

What disappointed me, it should have become a focus nationally. It was setting the tone for the rest of the country, and it didn't become that focus I didn't feel. It did originally around the foreclosures a little bit but not--and never on the bankruptcy, and even our own organization didn't quite get it, and that was a disappointment. And, I'd say in Chicago [Illinois] a lot of these issues, I think, are going to surface now because Chicago has a lot of interest rate swaps, but there you have a strong teacher's union. And the other thing, there was no one movement that was strong that fought it. The teachers' union had also been pretty decimated by emergency management and a lot of internal contradictions.

So, that's probably--but the biggest struggle ended up being around the water, and there was a trial on water during the bankruptcy too, and that was an amazing event. That was a trial on whether water is a human right, and actually the water issue was brought into the bankruptcy issue by my spouse, Chris, who is one of the rank-and-file objectors. And [Steven] Rhodes, one day he had a hearing where like 30--he picked out 30 names to go, and these were powerful hearings. You had a police woman talking up there about how she had to cut off her cancer treatment because she lost her health benefits. I mean, it was powerful, and my wife got there--my spouse Chris got up there and confronted them on the water issue, and he got so freaked out that he called a meeting there that afternoon about the water. And by Monday, a group of lawyers led by Alice Jennings, we filed a class action lawsuit on the right to water. We had a trial on water in the bankruptcy, and my role in the trial was to erase the swaps. You know, by then, he didn't want to hear anything about it. He was done with swaps. He thought he'd done enough, you know, even though the water swaps were even worse. As I said, there was 1.1 billion dollars in bonds were issued in 2010, 2011, and 537 million was to pay off swaps, and it was to pay off crooked debt. There was nothing left for interest. So every time the water floods, think about that. It's flooding because Chase got paid off. And then, what they did is they went to facilitate the transfer to Great Lakes Water [Authority]. Great Lakes Water took over all the bonds, but the condition was that they be paid. So, they mandated the shutoffs to pay the bonds. There's no question that's what was done. I think you're interviewing Tom Stephens. He can really tell you about that. He's really good on it.

But, that's what happened. So, the shutoffs started during the bankruptcy, the mass shutoffs, and they were mandated by the bond holders. There's no doubt about it. And so, we had this whole hearing on it, and Judge Rhodes actually ruled that while--it was for injunctive relief, and so you had to show irreconcilable harm. One of the things he said, while he agreed that a water shutoff to a poor person creates irreconcilable harm, there's no way--there's no remedy. They hadn't really come up with a way to ameliorate the harm, but that the harm to the bond holders was greater. I always thought that was the ruling of a lifetime. He didn't quite say it in those words, but pretty close, and that's what he ruled. But, water was a big fight too, but even there it peaked and then wasn't strong enough to sustain.

[0:54:31]

**PB:** So, I want to transition to moving past this period of emergency management and bankruptcy. But first, I want to kind of draw some analyses on there. So, as you mention--and as I think a lot of us feel--Detroit's not going to be the last city that's going to have an emergency manager imposed. It's probably going to happen elsewhere. So if you are looking back on this struggle against the imposition of the emergency manager, the declaration of bankruptcy, what lessons are you drawing from that struggle that you would posit to other places ahead of their own struggles?

**JG:** Well, the one thing I would posit to activists is that we would offer to support activists in doing it and do all the time is look beyond the surface, get to the root of it, and the root of it will take you to finance capital, the banks, and the bond deals. Examine them, don't be intimidated by them, get a handle on them, and take it on. So if you're going to take on the fight, don't take on just the surface fight because that's what you're really fighting, and that's what you gotta do, and if you don't do it, you're playing on their turf. That's the advice we have for every struggle, and that's what we would like to share, and that's the biggest lesson that we've learned.

And in a way, you know--and I'm not saying--you know, we believe in Detroit right now this city is owed reparations. They gotta rebuild the city. They talk about reparations, well, let's focus on the role of the banks. How are you going to rebuild the neighborhoods? I mean, now you have people cutting deals with [Dan] Gilbert to save 50 homes. I about puke when I hear it. And Gilbert, make no mistake, he made his money by underwriting the loan deals. He always wildly foreclosed on a thousand homes. Well, he wrote the original crooked deal that he then sold to Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.

And also, the thing on the foreclosure crisis, which I didn't say enough, was that part of what happened was after all the loans collapsed and the banks got bailed out--and they got bailed out by the federal government, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. They basically nationalized Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, which are like quasi-government agencies to back up loans. They nationalized them on behalf of the banks. So, what happened in Detroit is you'd get foreclosed on a loan for 80,000 dollars on a home that's worth 10,000 dollars, which of course also jacked up your property taxes, and the bank got paid full value for that home, 80 thou--by the federal government! And then, most of the evictions were carried out by Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae. So, that's why it happened, and that's why homes are abandoned here because they didn't give a damn about the home. What do they want, some home in a poor neighborhood in Detroit that's worth 5,000 dollars? They couldn't market it, so they just let them. They would either sell them off to investors for a buck who milked them for a few years and never paid their taxes, or they just let them sit vacant and get destroyed. See that was the other aspect of that.

But, my main lesson to people is if you're going to take on these fights, take 'em on! Take on who you're really--and a fight is a fight against capitalism, and it's against--and don't feel...feel intimidated. I mean, one thing we learned in the foreclosure work is how weak they really are. For a while, every time we picketed them we won because they were so nervous. I mean, who are they? A bunch of--a handful of billionaires who hide behind the system. But, they have no power. The only power they have is because the government backs them up, but when people rise up, we could counter.

**PB:** So, in your analysis--we've heard all the narratives about why Detroit was placed under emergency management, why bankruptcy was declared. In *your* analysis, why was Detroit put under emergency management?

**JG:** It was put under emergency management to make sure the banks got paid and their crooked deals that destroyed our city. That's exactly how I see it. It was put on, emergency management. If you look at austerity worldwide--austerity, which means when countries or states or cities are ordered to make massive cutbacks, they're being ordered to pay off debt service that they reported to the banks. And usually, austerity is coupled with them setting up a financial control board of some kind. They did the same thing in Greece. They did the same thing in Puerto Rico. That's all an emergency manager is. He's a financial control board on behalf of the banks to impose austerity onto people, and that's exactly what it is.

[0:59:25]

**PB:** So, we're coming out of emergency management. After bankruptcy, how is...what's the next stage of the foreclosure crisis?

**JG:** Well, I mean, the next stage was of course the tax foreclosures that came out of the--the tax foreclosures came directly out of the bank foreclosures because, like I said, when the banks foreclosed on these homes, they didn't even want them. So, they sold many of them off to investors who had no interest in doing anything with the homes. So a lot of times, they would put people in a land contract or a rental agreement for three years, never pay the taxes, and the home got--had taken on taxes. Half the time, they let them sit. And, the inflated mortgages, the inflated appraisals were a direct product of--that's part of what the subprime crisis was about. They would inflate the appraisals, do non-paper appraisals. I mean, Gilbert got indicted for this in a whole bunch of states, just not in Michigan, where our political leaders have absolutely no will to fight anybody. We've had the worst political leadership that I've seen when it comes to dealing with the banks, beginning with Granholm and ever since. It's non-partisan, lousy political leadership when it comes to fighting the banks. And so, that's what I



would say. That's a big part of it. And, I forgot exactly where we were going with this...

[1:00:46]

**PB:** No, that's fine. This is just something we've been asking everybody, just what's your analysis on why emergency management so that we can have those...

**JG:** No, no question. I see it as nothing but a bank-imposed austerity. And to fight it and move forward, the difficulty now is how do you move forward in this city that has been pretty devastated by all this stuff, with all this gentrification? One of the things going on now--the other thing we raised which was really grotesque to us and never took traction, which I still can't understand--is the one thing that the [Barack] Obama administration did is that while bailing out the banks to the tune of 700 billion--and really way more than that because of the takeover of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac as well as the lowering of interest rates--they created the Hardest Hit Homeowner Fund, and that was a fund that was supposed to help homeowners, poor people stay in their homes. When that fund was first created, there was a meeting of all the different anti-foreclosure groups that came together. We said, "Let's turn that into a community bank and use that to buy people's homes at eviction at their real value and turn them back to the people." And of course, Granholm said the money has to go through the banks.

Since then--well, we--of course, what's happened now is they eventually allowed those funds to be used to pay off delinquent property taxes, but they've taken 380 million of the 760 million they were supposed to keep people in their homes and turned it over for blight removal, which is the exact opposite of what these funds are supposed to be used for. So, we've been raising this demand all over again. We've raised the demand that the city or county that any home that's facing foreclosure can be taken out of the auction and then let's use Hardest Hit funds to pay off the delinquent bills and turn them over to the occupants. It's pretty easy, and it would bring money into the treasury. It's like a non-starter. But, you know, we've never been able to get traction on that demand, never. It's like wild. We've raised it for five years now, and it just shows how corrupt the leadership is, how determined they are to wipe out the neighborhoods. We've always seen it. It's

either a product of stupidity or corruption, and it's probably a combination of both.

[1:02:57]

**PB:** So, let's dig into that a little bit. Why is this city been so hellbent on using Hardest Hit funds for blight removal rather than keeping people in their homes?

**JG:** Well, I think it's come out pretty clearly. It's a criminal enterprise. I don't know what else to say. It's a way to reward a lot of cronies. I mean, obviously, there's a lot of people who want to see blight leave, and there's nothing wrong, and we do need that. But, we do believe that the people who should pay for the blight removal are those who caused the blight, which are the banks, first of all, instead of taking it out of homes that are supposed to save people's homes. And the other thing is of course when you tear down, when you use money to--in other words, by not paying property taxes, the home becomes blight. It's like a self-perpetuating prophecy.

It's hard for me--I can't--I'm the wrong person to ask that--I don't even--but all we can figure is that they're so determined to this narrative of--it's such a crooked deal. It's turned out to be nothing more than a crony operation, and they've known that for years. It's just that it didn't come out. So, that's all I can say. And of course, people sitting there, they're less worried about someone staying in their home. People don't like seeing a blighted home, which is understandable. No one wants to see it. But on the other hand, the way to avoid the blight is to keep people in their homes, but makes no sense to me. I'm the wrong person to ask.

[1:04:21]

**PB:** No, I think you're the right person to ask. You're trying to give... We know what their narrative is. We're not...

**JG:** Like I said, for some of the politicians, it's just stupidity. They don't bother looking at any issues beyond the surface.

**PB:** So, were there other clients of yours that stand out in your memory that you advocated for in their defending against the tax foreclosure?

**JG:** Well, I've done more mortgage foreclosures than tax. I actually just won a case against the Land Bank. Actually, the Land Bank now has a project that's similar to our project--except they do it to reward developers--where they'll take homes out of foreclosure and then offer to auction them back. They call it Action before Auction where they'll sell them back to the homeowner for the delinquent property taxes. Well, that's kind of what we were raising. We were raising the Hardest Hit funds to pay for that. So, they're actually doing some of that now, but they're doing it in a way that actually rewards developers. So, it's all done through developers so it ends up not amounting to anything, and it just shows how crooked they are in my opinion.

But, I've done a lot of cases that were fun, and we did the--the first case we did was a woman who was called--Rosie Lee Pinkens (??), I think was her name, a young woman. That was our first case where we picketed and won, and Countrywide got on TV and said, "She'll never get her home back." She would be picketing with her kid with an iron lung. She was an amazing woman. I won that case. I won a case for a guy [Chris Jaszczak] who had a building, 1515 [Broadway]. That's where Occupy used to meet, and they went to evict him, and he lived there, and he felt maybe--and I fought his case at eviction, and I never won, but I told him, "Organize a rally, Defend 1515." This is a community center. They had a theater, youth, kids theater, and the minute we put it up a flier, a web thing, the city bank came to my office. It was right in the prime real estate area.

So, we've won a lot of victories that were a lot of fun to beat them on. On tax foreclosure, it's been a little different. I mean, some young people that work with us did a great job after the ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union] announced that settlement on the--for the people who lost their homes who should have gotten hardship exemptions. Some young people with us went out and canvassed and got an extra 250 homes. So, that was good work too. So, all that stuff makes you

feel good. I believe very much that while you impress a community the broader political struggle with political demands, that what gives sustenance to activists is also winning concrete victories. We believe--I don't separate the significance of that whatsoever.

[1:07:08]

**PB:** That's a great point. I'm glad you raise that because I think that there is a lack of recognition about that relationship between the short-term victories and sustained movement building and provide a dire need for an individual longer-term analysis.

**JG:** And I think, you know, it's hard to keep fighting on broad ideas. It's nice to win some, to beat 'em once in a while, and you can beat 'em when you fight hard enough.

**PB:** So, in your work, can you talk--you started getting into this with that relationship between direct action and litigation, but can you kind of parse that out for us in terms of... In your organizing strategy or maybe a specific campaign, what's your...what's the interplay between direct action, between litigation, between legislation?

**JG:** Okay. Well, the foreclosure work was where we really played it out the most, and that's where we put a broader political demand on. We actually had a legislative focus, but we mobilized around that demand. We got contacted by people who were impacted by the foreclosures, and oftentimes we would go to court to try to save their homes. Even in eviction, we would go into eviction court, and we would use every legal argument we could find to win 'em. And occasionally, we won, but not too many. And as time wore on, once the courts got more used to--what happened was foreclosure became a popular area of litigation because there were so many of them. So, a lot of lawyers went into it more, just how to make a quick buck and also, you know, what they call *pro se* litigation, and judges got tired of the cases, to be honest, and it makes you sick to say that, but

they got tired of them. So, they would just give perfunctory rulings--even some of the best judges--against people.

So for a while, we did pretty good in litigation. But always when we would lose a litigation, we'd get ready to hit the streets. And so, we would--and the method we would use would usually be either a picket at the banks. We would usually--one of the techniques we used was--actually, a lot of cases we did with evictions, they would actually bring the dumpsters out to where--you know, in Detroit, they actually bring a dumpster out, and we would move the dumpsters. We would do that. I didn't personally do that, but people did that, and we used all sorts of different techniques, and they were pretty creative techniques, and we'd go into some neighborhoods too and mobilize the neighborhood, try to bring neighbors out to show some solidarity, and they were some of the good cases. And, like I said, eviction defense did a lot of--continues to do them too, and they do, I think, very good work. They don't always take our political approach, but in terms of the day-to-day work, they've done really good.

[1:09:48]

**PB:** Can you kind of go into one of those interesting techniques? Was there a particular story you can tell us that kind of illustrates the creative anti-eviction?

**JG:** Well, I mean, I'm not necessarily the one who's the best street person, but we had one case, one of the early cases, we actually did a move-in. That was tremendous, where people had a truck, they moved the stuff out, and we just all put it back in immediately, and I won her to stay in her house. And then, I went back in court afterwards, and I didn't know what the hell to do. We won that one. I won a squatter case one time. A woman went in, took over a home, and put money into rebuilding. I went to court for her and actually won. I was able to argue--the other lawyer was like appalled. I said, "You should be thanking her. She saved this home," and we were able to win her home, and that was a nice victory. And then, we had a number of actions where people would literally--they would bring the dumpsters up, and people would just push the dumpster two or three blocks away so when they would come back, there was no dumpster there to unload. So, that stopped a bunch of them too.

[1:10:57]

**PB:** And, this--I mean, these are old tactics. These are nothing new, Depression era. These are the kind of things--like the anti-eviction, moving people back into their apartments after they've been evicted. These have historically been actions that have served to radicalize people. Are you finding that to be true now?

**JG:** Definitely. I mean, the one thing that all this work would do was almost anyone that you represented became an activist. When someone goes through this struggle--some people think people just want to fight for themselves, but it's the opposite. Once you go through this struggle, you usually--you know, there's nothing like a struggle, and you feel--it's liberating, you know. People don't recognize that there's nothing more liberating than being in a struggle instead of just being depressed over your condition under this rotten-ass system. So, we found it and definitely activated many people, and people stay in it. People stay in the fight.

I had one guy I remember representing. He was a vet. He was kind of racist when I met him, and he wanted to denounce Obama all the time, and I said, "Listen, if I represent you, I won't allow it. I don't allow any kind of racism, and if you talk like that, we're done." And, you know, by the end, there would be rallies, almost all-Black rallies, and he'd speak, and he changed. There's nothing--you know, people--there is something transformative about the struggle, and a lot of the retirees that we worked with, they still work with us. They work with us on every issue now. We brought some Puerto Ricans--there were some Puerto Rican activists that came to one of our meetings. They wanted to interview us, and we said, "Why don't you stay for a meeting?" All the retirees, what a sense of solidarity. What's it to us what's going to happen to you, you know? We're with you.

Because you--once people get the struggle, there's nothing more liberating. It's not just--people have this kind of rotten conception, I think, underestimating people that just want to fight for themselves. But actually, once people

understand that it's a social movement that fights for them, there's nothing better than--what's more liberating than feeling like you're part of something bigger than, and I believe that's one of the worst parts of U.S. society is that it's so atomized and there's a lack of class consciousness--not a lack of understanding of exploitation, but a lack of operating as a broader class. That's how this country lives, along with of course racism.

[1:13:28]

**PB:** I guess to follow up with another question about historical continuity, do you see connections now between the foreclosure crisis, the mortgage foreclosure, tax foreclosure, and the effects of Black displacement in the city from those manufactured crises and urban renewal programs in Detroit in the 1950s and 1960s?

**JG:** Yeah, I wasn't so active when--and a lot of those programs were set up where they went through African American neighborhoods. But even then, the city was still mostly a Black--there's a whole history when you study housing, the housing question in Detroit, because racism has always been so much a part of it, and I read a book on it not that long ago that really laid it out. But still, as much as the urban renewal plans--at least in Detroit we still had--we're still a Black city. That's not what transformed the city, I don't believe. I mean, it destroyed neighborhoods. I remember when I first came here, the area around Chene had already been devastated because of the freeways and all of that.

But, I do--but I think now the bigger question is gentrification, and this is a pattern, not just in Detroit but everywhere, where they're moving--the cities, a lot of cities now, we grew up in a pattern where the city was kind of the urban poor area surrounded by rich suburbs, right? That was the Detroit pattern, intended to be the Midwest pattern, but now the pattern is that cities are where the wealth is, and workers live 40 and 50 miles away. So, my brother's in Portland [Oregon]. You can't find a home in Portland for less than half a million bucks. You can't--I mean, a bungalow is half a million bucks, and they move almost all of the African Americans out. So people, workers have to live 50, 60 miles away, and they're still workers, and it's not like they pay workers well, but to get--so, it's the same with

San Francisco [California]. The city is all pretty much wealth, and it's surrounded by poor. They're trying to do that in Seattle [Washington] too.

Detroit never was the opposite, but now they're trying to make it like Detroit with downtown. I mean, downtown's almost all white and everything. So, I never believed I'd see this much gentrification in Detroit as I see now, to be honest with you, to the extent that they're doing it. And, of course, they're doing it in a way that has no benefit. I mean, most--what Gilbert gets, [Mike] Ilitch gets, Ford's about to get it, Chrysler's gonna--they give them not just tax breaks, they give them tax captures where they get all the tax revenue. Have you studied that stuff? It's like wild. I mean, they have bills where they keep the sales tax, they keep the income tax. It's like from that movie *It's A Wonderful Life*, you know, literally it's like Pottersville.

So, the money that Gilbert gets--they don't just get tax breaks, which they do get, the traditional tax abatements, they get also any increase value in property taxes. So, they're getting these properties for nothing, and any increase in value they keep the taxes on. They're capturing tax revenues. And, of course, they just had a study where Detroit public schools require 500 million just to do infrastructure repair, and yet they're giving all of these free funds, all the tax dollars that get diverted from schools because that's where they're--I mean, property taxes are mandated for schools. They're going right into the pockets of Gilbert, Ilitch. Ford's going to get them now, Chrysler--I know they're getting ready to pass this with Chrysler. It's like grotesque. These are the worst of all, and of course in Michigan, on top of that they give them these mega tax credits where any year a corporation makes profit they get a credit on it. That's how GM's doing the closings, which are violating.

[1:17:16]

**PB:** I remember when I first started getting up on this, looking at the development going on, when I first came across the tax capture I was like, what the hell are they...?



**JG:** Right, [laughs] it's madness. It's hard to believe! And, people don't get it. People talk about tax breaks. Part of it is that people gotta learn to get behind the surface, even activists. The other thing they do is they have these bills now they brag about where they mandate a 20 percent for affordable housing, but of course affordable housing is defined based on a 56,000 dollar income for the Metro Detroit where the income in Detroit is half of that, so what kind of a joke are you doing when you do this? But, that's what they passed. That's what they brag about in city council. Go read your own bill, you know? You know what's in it. I mean, it's kind of grotesque what's going on right now. You know, another example in terms of gentrification, the community reinvestment act, that's an act where the banks are mandated to make low-interest loans into distressed communities. They're using those funds to gentrify. So when a white person buys a home, it was a formerly distressed community, they're the ones getting those loans. So by and large, community reinvestment act, which was made to help poor people and people from oppressed communities, is going to help gentrify it. The system sucks. It's so corrupt on so many levels.

[1:18:44]

**PB:** So on the topic of systems, coming out of--if we're looking at emergency management and bankruptcy as a backdrop, how do you connect the dots between the tax foreclosure crisis, public education crisis, the water crisis, inequitable development, gentrification that's going on in the wake of the emergency management?

**JG:** Well, I mean, the education crisis was brought on by emergency management because they didn't have its own emergency manager over the schools. And of course, I've never studied those bonds, but there were like 3 billion dollars in construction bonds, and everyone's wondering how do we have schools that have water that's undrinkable when all this money? And, you know, [Steven] Rhodes, when he was in charge of the schools, they raised the demand for an audit, and he didn't allow it, which was pretty wild considering he's a bankruptcy judge. And, I still have not seen anyone put forth the analysis of the school bonds in a way that needs to be done, and I feel that would be a really critical thing. I think it's really critical to do an analysis of those because I'm sure that if someone did it, there was all sorts of corruption to those bonds, and we're not talking a penny, we're

talking a lot of money. That was all done under emergency management. So, that's a big part of it.

But, I think the rest of it is--like I said, tax foreclosures I see as directly coming out of the bank foreclosures, that the banks basically took all of these homes and then dumped the properties either to investors or just didn't bother paying them themselves, and so the property tax--and they were at the root of inflating the assessments too. So, I see it really as a direct outgrowth of the bank foreclosure crisis as the continual--and unfortunately, the political leadership has always refused to take on anything. And more and more, you know, now [Eric] Sabree's being implicated with the investors. So, there's a lot more to it than meets the eye probably.

[1:20:48]

**PB:** So, if we're looking back on--if we take this moment to kind of reflect back on the career of Moratorium NOW!, what kind of lessons do you take away from some of the victories that you've scored, and what lessons do you bring away from maybe the shortcomings?

**JG:** Sure. Well, I mean, like I said, the main contribution that I think we made as a radical organization was bringing an overtly anticapitalist program in a mass way and not shying away from that but doing it in a way that's non-rhetorical and is living, and I feel that's the biggest contribution we've made, and I think it's a contribution that we'd like to share more. I think that it's somewhat sorely still lacking within the broader revolutionary movement, and I think it's necessary to move forward, and it's a lesson that I think a lot of organizers can benefit, and I really do feel that we did a pretty good job of developing those techniques. I mean, we were part of a national group that advocated it, but most of the national efforts were done through Detroit because of our experience, and we would like to share that experience. There are groups now that are coming up that are grappling--there's a Marxist center that's all based on base-building. I mean, there are groups that are--I think a lot of young people are grappling with how to do that.

I mean, we reject kind of the [James and Grace] Boggs model here that says it's all based on building urban farms and community networks without challenging the system. We're not against anything that serves the people, but we believe to do that in a way that doesn't challenge the roots of the crisis is not going to go anywhere. And, capitalism will tolerate too much. You have to challenge the system itself. So, we have a difference in that model, and that model's somewhat popular now because it's attractive to people who want to do some good immediately, but it diverts them from challenging the system, and we very much challenge the nonprofit model that's all over the place now because the tendency there too is that nonprofits--and it's hard for someone who is a young progressive. You've got to make a living, but unfortunately most of the nonprofits are funded, and the limits of how far they'll take a struggle is the limits of their funding. We don't have those fetters. We don't have any funding so we've been able to carry out the struggle, and we feel that's still--anyone who's serious, you can't be serious without challenging the system, and that's what we'd like to popularize.

In terms of how Detroit moves forward, it's difficult because we were hit so hard that it's hard for me to see a comeback in Detroit without a broader political struggle on the role of the banks, and...and it's good this discussion of reparations. I mean, I think the Green New Deal, you know, it has a lot of potential, anything that raises the idea of rebuilding the infrastructure, but the question is who's going to rebuild it. And to me, rebuilding it means to focus on the source of the problem, which is to make the demands on the banks depending on those who really are responsible for the destruction. I feel optimistic. I actually feel the rise in the fact that there's a new socialist current and even--hell, some politicians in Congress are willing to speak out, and they're younger, and they're women, and they're from low-class communities. That's positive, and we believe we--our view is how to reach out to people and work together, and hopefully we can share our perspective and learn from people too.

[1:24:16]

**PB:** I want to ask about that analysis of the Boggs model. Do you see that as incompatible with your point? Because I'm thinking there seems like there can be an and/both situation in terms of that local model of--if it's just for base building,

right, that that's a critical component of developing the capacity to challenge those institutional structures.

**JG:** Well, let's be clear. I'm not opposed to any kind of serving the people, and a lot of what we do is we take on very living struggles for people, but the Boggs model was set up as a counter to fighting capitalism. There's no question about it, and I know the people quite well, and we've been in a political struggle with them. So, it's more than just doing it. I mean, Grace Boggs put on her last will and testament that it was to counter the Bolshevik legacy. Well, I'm not for countering the Bolshevik--I like the Bolshevik legacy, so we have a difference. And, I believe that that model is a very conscious. I'm not here to attack them. I know the people well, and I get along with most of the people, but still it's a difference in model. It's more than just a difference in approach within a broader approach.

There's a lot of room--we in our office, I'd love for us to use it more for setting up food distributions and stuff. I mean that anything that helps people, we're for, and--but even when the [Black] Panthers used to do talking about that, but the Panthers always did it from the perspective of challenging the system. We believe that that's at the root of it, and then it's just bringing people together and giving them food and then preaching at them about fighting the system. It's engaging them in fights that actually challenge the system. I believe that very much. So, it's a difference in approach. It's one saying that you can kind of counter--you can work around the edges of capitalism versus an approach that says we reject that approach, we believe you gotta confront the system.

[1:26:12]

**PB:** So, I want to kind of use this as a moment to compare--to come back to the conversation we were having before we started. You came into Detroit in a period of--almost like a zenith of radical activity in the city's history, and there was this revolutionary fervor and this revolutionary consciousness that's popularized in the city at that moment. Do you see reverberations now of that? What's still present and what's lacking that makes the periods different?

**JG:** Sure, that's a good question. I mean, there still are--there's a legacy of people that have been that kind of transcend that, and it's funny that we all kind of are probably closer. Back when we--some groups wouldn't talk because of ideologic, Trotsky and Stalin and all that kind of stuff. We've all kind of transcended that degree just based on our own common experience of fighting. It's a contradictory period. On the one hand, the--I believe there's a lot more interest in socialism than there ever has been. The word socialism is not a bugaboo, so you can raise ideas of socialism more broadly. On the other hand, the working class as a class has weakened. What made Detroit unusual was that there were so many Black workers in the plants so they had the power to shut down production. So, it was strong, there was a sense of your strength, and they were actually making a fairly decent living though super exploited to make it. But so, Detroit, the working class as a class had more strength back then, and it's been somewhat atomized and especially in the city, and I think that's kind of a weakness. It makes it a little more difficult for organizing.

And also back then, you can't take what was happening in Detroit away from what was happening internationally, and there was a much stronger revolution. I mean, the Soviet Union was still strong. China was in its most radical period as a cultural revolution. I went to Cuba in 1970. It was like--I'm still very much for Cuba, but back then it was at its heyday. So, the world revolution--when I became a radical, the idea of a revolution in ten years seemed like a long time. I mean, the problem was there was so much division between the oppressed communities, the Blacks, Latino, Native, and whites who were still doing pretty well. Now, whites--in general, the working class standards have been lowered in general. In some ways, there's more bases for unity, but there's no radical coming from the outside. You gotta kind of generate it more internally, and that's a little bit tough in this country with the propaganda machine is still pretty strong.

[1:29:01]

**PB:** So, there's a lot of ways we could go after that. I want to ask you about interracial organizing in Detroit. As a white man organizing in a majority Black community, what advice would you give to white folks that are trying to do this kind of work?

**JG:** Well, I'm a very strong believer in the right of oppressed nations to self determination. What that means is that if you're a white person, you have to take into account the depth of racism every day in all the work you do. And then your relations within the struggle, you have to keep that in mind too, and you have to build solidarity. You can't just, "I have a right to attack this person." Well, no, that's not true. You have to understand the dynamic of what you say and how it comes across. You have to be respectful of Black institutions that come from the community even if you may not agree with them all the time. You have to respect Black leaders who you may not agree with. I mean, we've--when [Louis] Farrakhan was under attack, we had meetings to defend Farrakhan. You know, we're not--I'm not--we're pretty different from revolutionaries from the Muslim model, but so what? We defended him when he was under the gun from the state.

I've met young people who want to go around attacking [Ilhan?] Omar for not being radical enough. Well, the time to attack--you don't attack people who are being attacked for standing up. So, the first thing you have to show is solidarity, and that's really on the backs of white people to show that kind of solidarity and build trust and confidence. And if you do that, the divisions aren't as great as sometimes they seem. The divisions that are transcended when there is true solidarity, but that takes a lot to build, and you have to be conscious of it every step of the way.

[1:31:00]

**PB:** This is a tangent, but, are you in an impact zone for the Fiat/Chrysler CBA [Community Benefits Ordinance]?

**JG:** I don't think so. I'm in East English Village. I don't think it's all the way out there.

**PB:** Since we're sitting here at Wayne State Law School and this is where you got your law degree from, can you talk a little bit about why you pursued the law degree and what you see as the role of lawyers in movement work?

**JG:** I went to law school just because I was getting a little old, and I lived my life on a disability with a fixed income, and I used to actually hustle peanuts and almost anything just to make a living to survive. And as I got a little older--I was very bold when I was younger. You know, you get more conservative, and physically you can't do what you used to. So, I had to figure out something to do, and then--I was not someone who aspired to be a lawyer and saw that as a solution to being a revolutionary. I believe being a revolutionary is what I am first, and I went to law school just because I had to figure out a way to make a living. So, that was kind of--but, you know, to the extent that I have been able to use it in the struggle, that's been good, especially the foreclosure work and the bankruptcy, and, you know, I am very proud of what I was able to do in that stuff, but I never see myself as being a lawyer first.

[1:32:21]

**PB:** So, I guess within the context of Detroit's history of radical Black lawyers--and radical white lawyers for that matter too--what can and should young people who are entering the legal profession know about the possibilities and limitations of lawyers within this kind of work?

**JG:** Well, I think the first thing to know is the limitation. I mean, don't have an illusion that you're going to change the world through being a lawyer. I mean, a lawyer is a very conservative--you know, you're operating within the confines of a capitalist system, and the courts are very conservative, and they're way more conservative now than they were 20--I mean, since I've become a lawyer, they've gone--they were terrible when I became a lawyer, and they've gotten worse. I mean, back in the [19]70s, there was a lot more room in the law. You can talk to younger--to people who came out of that period, the law was different then. It was--you could argue policy. You could argue a lot more than you can now. The law is pretty constrained right now. I mean, not to--you can win big victories sometimes.

So, I don't know. I'm not really--I don't try to tell people what to do as a lawyer. I mean, I'm not a--I believe you can do some good, but the key is don't substitute yourself for the struggle. Don't believe you're above the struggle. Your role is just part of the struggle. You're subservient to the broader struggle. I don't believe lawyers should be at demonstrations telling people what they can and cannot do. Let the demonstrators figure it out and the lawyers back them up. And, that's how I feel. I'm an activist first. I'm not putting down any lawyers. There's a great history in this city of great lawyers, and there are many good lawyers, and there are a lot of good progressive young lawyers too that I think are great, so I'm not trying to put anybody down either, but it's not--I'm not the expert on law. [laughs]

[1:34:10]

**PB:** One thing we've been asking everybody as part of these interviews is kind of a survey question--and this is kind of a visioning question--what is your vision for the future of Detroit? If your vein of the struggle is successful, what would the city look like in your vision?

**JG:** Well, I mean, I think Detroit's a city that can really be rebuilt. We have a tremendous amount of land that's empty, that can be populated,. It can be a city where workers and poor people can have a decent place to live. It can be a city where we can deal with the environmental hazards that exist, but it's hard for me to picture that under this current system, to be honest with you, and I almost believe it will take a socialist revolution to rebuild Detroit. But in the meantime, I believe, you know, people need to fight for the resources to rebuild the city in a genuine way and not feel constrained. I mean, what I've seen in Detroit a lot is an accommodation to what's happened in the city, and people feel--so many people are working with nonprofits and all these groups to try to effectuate small change, and I'm not trying to--I don't put anybody down for doing good. I don't want to sound like that, I don't.

But on the other hand, it's like putting a--it's like when we would stop foreclosures, it always felt a thumb, you know. One group was mostly just direct action. Well, unfortunately, with direct action we're putting a thumb into a sinking dam, you know, trying to plug a hole, and I believe don't lose a vision for the



whole--the challenge to the system, and the resources are there to rebuild this, but they're not going to be done by cooperating with corporations. They're going to be done by challenging those who cause the destruction. And especially, [laughs] don't collaborate with those who cause the destruction because what you're doing is taking the guts out of the struggle, and it's a big problem that I have--and I don't want to put anybody down, and I'm not saying that people are. There's all sorts of well-meaning people, but my belief is we gotta fight the system for the resources to do it, and the people who will rebuild Detroit are not Ilitch and Gilbert and all these pigs but are the people themselves who know how to rebuild it, but we have to fight for the resources to do it, and we have a right to those resources because they've been stolen from us.

[1:36:45]

**PB:** I'm going to open it up if anybody else has questions that they have on their minds that they want to raise. [Pause] Did you know Lila Cabbil?

**JG:** Sure.

**PB:** So, Mama Lila was on our DEAL [Detroit Equity Action Lab] team. She helped put this project together. So, one thing we've been asking everybody also is if they have any memories of Mama Lila or like a testament to her legacy that you'd like to share?

**JG:** Well, she was a wonderful person, and one thing that Lila did, she was someone who was a bridge builder to different groups, including our group, because she worked somewhat in a milieu that was a little different. Well, you've probably--Boggs--but she was a bridge builder, and she knew how to create solidarity, and we worked closely with her, and we believe she took on some of what we raised, and we were very supportive of her. She's just a--she very much embodies the struggle here. I mean, I loved her very much, and I appreciated our relationship. She helped open the doors for us to some groups that may have been a little hesitant to deal with us, and we opened our doors to her as well

because we felt a real strong sense of solidarity. And, I think there is--she represents a lot of people who are like veterans in the struggle here.

As I have said, I've been active for 50 years, and I find in this day and age, the people I've worked with over the years, we all learn to respect each other, appreciate our differences but not as antagonistic, to see what brings us together is so much more important. When you fight in Detroit, it's hard not to want to come together because they've just done such a job on all of us, truthfully. None of us have walked--my biggest disappointment--I was very proud of the work we did in the bankruptcy and all of that, but we didn't win, you know. It took a toll on us, actually, because it wasn't like we were fighting just to fight. You see what the banks are doing, it makes you sick. Every time I drive through the city of Detroit, I'm sick these days. I can't help it. It takes a toll on you. You feel like, Jesus Christ, they got over on us, and I just want to help anyone who's willing to fight.

And especially in other areas, let's learn from what happened here. Somewhere, I believe very strongly, there's going to be a break in the struggle. When Greece happened, I was all excited because I saw--maybe Greece is where the fight against finance capital, the movement. There were mistakes. I have my own analysis of what happened, but I followed it. Puerto Rico, I've been following it because it was interesting that one of the top people in Puerto Rico, the head of the electrical union [Ricardo Santos Ramos, former president Electrical Industry and Irrigation Workers Union of Puerto Rico]. He came to our conference, and he got what we were doing. He said, "Come to Puerto Rico," and I asked him, "Why would you bring us in one day?" He said, "We saw you guys get it like we get it." Somewhere, the working class is going to rise up and throw these bankers into the history bin and trigger a shift to the left. It's going to happen, absolutely. It may happen in Spain. It may happen in Britain. We've hooked up with an anti-austerity group in Britain, the big groups in Britain that are protesting now. Somewhere.

That's why, to me, you look at international struggle because if it breaks in one place, it'll be a chain, and that's what happened--I mean, they used to talk about what happened in Vietnam syndrome and all of that, and they were worried. Well, they had a right to be worried, and the slogan we used to have, Che Guevara said, "Two, three, many Vietnams." Lin Biao used to say, "Long live the victory of people of who surround the imperial." Well, I believe it, and I'm looking for somewhere

we can win. And to the extent that we can share our experiences for Detroit to contribute to that victory, whether it's in Detroit, in Puerto Rico or anywhere, we're ready to do it at the drop of a hat because that's needed. We're not just fighting for one city, we're fighting for the savior of a planet. We're fighting to liberate humanity from a system that should have been tossed out a hundred years ago. That's really what I believe.

**PB:** Is there anything that we didn't touch on that you want to...

**JG:** I don't think so. [laughs] I appreciate the time.

**PB:** Thank you very much for your time.

**JG:** Thank you.