

**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

**Teresa Kelly**

Interviewed by

PETER BLACKMER AND ORIANA YILMA

April 5, 2019

Detroit, MI

## Narrator

Teresa Kelly is currently a trustee on the Highland Park School Board of Trustees. She is most recognized as the co-founder of *the Michigan Citizen* with her husband, Charles Kelly, who passed away in 2006. The couple had two daughters. Along with her work for the schools and newspaper, she is an activist particularly interested in the water shut-offs in Detroit, Michigan. She is very interested in ways that she can help the African American community.

## 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

This interview features the activist Teresa Kelly talking about her experiences working as a journalist, owning and operating a newspaper, and participating in protest activities. She details her work on the *Michigan Citizen*, an editorial-based African American community-focused paper founded in Benton Harbor, Michigan. She also shares her views on journalism in the city of Detroit, Michigan and how the *Michigan Citizen's* coverage differed from that of other publications such as the *Detroit Free Press*. She also discusses the Maurice Carter case that she investigated while writing for the *Michigan Chronicle*. Ms. Kelly recounts her experiences protesting such issues as the water shut offs in Detroit. Of particular interest is her account of the Homrich Nine case. Emergency management and its impact on the city of Detroit is discussed extensively, especially how it impacted Detroit schools.

## Keywords

Benton Harbor, Michigan; Detroit bankruptcy; Detroit, Michigan; Diane Bukowski; Education; Education Achievement Authority; Emergency management; Foreclosure crisis; Gentrification; Highland Park, Michigan; Homrich Nine; Jerry Goldberg; Journalism; Lila Cabbil; Maurice Carter; Michigan Citizen; Police brutality; Policing; Privatization; Teach for America; Water shutoffs

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Transcript of interview conducted April 5, 2019 with:

Teresa Kelly [TK]

Detroit, MI

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

**TK:** My name is Teresa Kelly. I live in Highland Park, Michigan, and I'm on the Highland Park School Board. I've been a member of the water protests. Used to work for the Michigan Citizen newspaper before it shut down in 20--the end of 2015.

[0:00:28]

**OY:** So, could you describe your neighborhood when you got here?

**TK:** Where I live now, neighborhood?

**OY:** Yeah.

**TK:** Because we used to live in Green Acres.

**OY:** Oh, really? You could describe there, too.

**TK:** Okay. We came to Detroit [Michigan] in 1985 from Benton Harbor [Michigan] where we had begun the Michigan--my ex-husband and I and my two daughters--and we had started the Michigan Citizen there on our dining room table and moved here in 1985 because it was just too hard to keep the paper going in Benton Harbor. There was no market.

And, we came here and stationed ourselves in Highland Park [Michigan] because we had been subject to so much political pressure in Benton Harbor that we didn't want to be in Detroit proper. We figured if we were in Highland Park, we were a little sheltered. We became the paper of record for the city of Highland Park. Mayor Bob Blackwell did that. We opened--we had an office in Highland Park. We moved to Detroit office in 2003. We finally found a building for our office in [20]07 right here in Corktown down on Trumbull, and we ran the newspaper, my husband and I. He passed in 2006. My daughter came back from California and helped. She took over what he did.

And, we always viewed ourselves as a grassroots paper because when we started it back in Benton Harbor--we had gone to Benton Harbor with the idea of being...starting a community organization and doing the newspaper because in D--in Chicago [Illinois], where we met, we were community organizers. In fact, we were helpful in getting the first regional library in the Chicago Public Sch--Public Library system, the Carter G. Woodson on Halsted and 101st [actually at Halsted and 95th Street], but it's--it was a repository for African American history. So, we were community activists, community organizers, and we're going to do a newspaper and a community organization in Benton Harbor, which had its first Black mayor [Charles Joseph]. But, we learned, and under advice of the...a foundation that Saul Alinsky started that Benton Harbor was too small. The incestuous relationships ran too deep. So, we just did the paper, and we always took a pro-community stance that was...it was always our position even when we came to Detroit, and especially during emergency management.

[0:03:10]

**OY:** So, how has the city changed since you first moved to the area?

**TK:** Oh, my. Alright, well, we--when we moved here, we moved into Green Acres and raised the kids there, and Detroit was totally different then it is now. Our kids were in the Detroit Public School system. They were happy, getting a good education, motivated there. They had connections. There was a real sense of community in Detroit. Now, there's a whole lot of blight. There is a whole lot of dissension. There is hardly any Black control of any institution anymore. There's a depletion of resources.

Like in Highland Park, where I live, the library's been closed, the school--high school library, which was famous around the nation for being a repository of Black thought. Some books, in fact, were out of print, they were that, you know, old and unique, and the library had been put together by African scholars from Howard University and different institutions, and that had been destroyed throughout. We were in at...at midnight out in the dumpster picking the books out of the dumpster that the EM [emergency manager] had thrown away. So, Blacks have lost Eastern Market, the [Detroit-Windsor?] Tunnel, Cobo Hall. I mean, there's a whole...just about anything that wasn't sellable did they--under emergency management, they could take and carve out and sell off and put the authority in charge, they've done it. So, that's the loss of Black control, loss of community control has been one of the biggest things that has changed.

[0:05:00]

**OY:** So, you mentioned some of your work back in Chicago. How did you first get involved in activism and organizing work?

**TK:** Chicago public library system decided to change its organization to a regional structure. The plan was to build 10 regional libraries, and I had been teaching at St. Sabina's [Academy], and--on the South Side--and a neighborhood organization called the Organization for the Southwest Community, OSC--couple books have been written about it. It was an Alinsky organization, and he trained us, which is where I met my hus--soon-to-be husband, Charles Kelly. He trained us, but he would never put his name on it because he thought it was doomed to failure because the purpose of the organization was to inte--help integrate the South

Side, and the funding came from the Catholic church, the Methodists, and the Presbyterians primarily. They funded it, and it reached all the way to Morgan Park from State from the Dan Ryan [Expressway] to Western Avenue, and we focused on that area.

We had 20-some different organizations under our umbrella, and the first project we organized against was the regional library system where it would be placed in Beverly. Beverly was an affluent community, primarily all white, and we said, “No, if anybody needs a library, it’s our community,” and we were successful. It was placed at--on Halsted right in the middle of the a--very rapidly changing from white to Black. The turnover, like at St. Sabina’s, was in three years. So, there was a lot of chaos in the community and turnover, and people would be--some kid would come to school one day. They’d be moved out the next out to the far west and south side suburbs. So, that’s what...that’s where I met my husband, and that was what we were involved in, making sure that first regional library stayed in the Black community, did not go out to Beverly. [clears throat]

[0:07:14]

**OY:** So, what would have been some of your greatest influences in your activism?

**TK:** Influences upon us, upon me?

**OY:** Um-hm.

**TK:** Oh... Actually, the injustice that you see is what really motivates you. You’re like, “That’s not right,” and so you...you find other people that agree, you know. You don’t even have to look for them. There’s a groundswell, usually, against some injustice, and so you just join forces, try to help direct it.

[0:07:51]

**OY:** So, what does racism look like in Detroit today?

**TK:** [laughs] It looks like Campus Martius. It looks like Downtown. It looks like Twitter Detroit. If you saw that last week where they had all these white people in this Twitter Detroit launch, like--was it a launch? I don't know. It's a lack of...it's a lack of control. It's a real division between Downtown and Midtown and the rest of Detroit. It's blight in the neighborhoods and boom-boom-sizzle Downtown. It's the absence of Black people in all these fancy restaurants. You know, if you go to one of these "Aw, it's a great place to eat," you go there, and not even in the kitchen washing dishes do you see--you know, you may...you may or may not see one Black face, and that's just like how can this be?

[0:08:51]

**PB:** Could you talk a little bit--you mentioned about the formation and the founding of Michigan Citizen in Benton Harbor. Could you talk about why a newspaper, what the motivation there was?

**TK:** Oh. Communication is essential. It's like--just before we started the Michigan Citizen, the local newspaper The Herald Palladium had a story on the front page and it was--you had a picture, a two-column picture, of a white woman grasping her white daughter, but the headline above it was something about rapist--a Black rapist threatens something, and this was one story about busing, and the headline was about a different story, but it was the juxtaposition of those two images or thoughts that was like, oh, I'm not raising my kids in a city where this is, you know, what they see. That...just that non-verbal message was stark. So, what the conditions were?

**PB:** Yeah.

**TK:** So, you had a newspaper there, The Herald Palladium, that Saturday was the Black issue 'cause they would put in--you'd see stories about prosecutor hunts



down father of six by three different women. Just unbelievable things would be printed in that paper and never would you see any story about, you know, what a church was doing or what somebody was doing. They wrote about city government, which was Black-controlled in Benton Harbor at that time, with just disdain and selective facts and, you know, just not a comprehensive... So, we really tried to present things that were pro-community, and we would get accused of being racist. They'd say, "Aw, you're all that Black stuff. You're racist," and then you'd try to explain the definition of racism. You know, well, where's the power? But anyway, it was a struggle. It was a struggle.

[0:11:08]

**PB:** You mentioned before that one of the reasons why you moved, relocated, the paper out to Highland Park was the pressures that you were facing in Benton Harbor. Could you talk a little bit about that?

**TK:** Okay. We started the paper in late November of 1970...78, and the third week we published, we had an editorial saying that Berrien County [Michigan], where Benton Harbor is located, was nothing but a plantation, and we broke down how the county jobs, if there was a Black person in that job, it was a--probably a student from the Caribbean at Andrews University in Berrien Springs [Michigan], they got the job. No native quote unquote Black persons, African Americans, ever got a job with the county. There wasn't one. We went through like a re--we had a arrest rates out. It was, you know, way lopsided for the population in Berrien County.

We printed that as a front-page editorial because we were new and starting. It was difficult to gather news, and my husband was arrested. He ran a tavern that was what was financing the paper, and he got called--he was home in bed, asleep, and like three A.M., we got a call, and the police said there was a problem at the tavern, and they needed him to go down there. So, he got up, pulled his trousers on over his PJs and went down, and he called me in a few minutes. We were like five minutes away, and he said, "Well, there's nobody here. I went to the police station. They told me to just wait in the parking lot. Well, I didn't see him." He didn't come back, and he had been arrested. They took him over to jail. They had

a warrant for a Frank Kelly, a different phone number and a different address, but he was older, and we always attributed that to that editorial that we had written.

Then maybe a year later or less, the police chief--Andrew Rodez was his name. He had come out of Evanston to--Evanston, Illinois--to Benton Harbor, and he walked in, sent two police officers into the tavern to take the license off the wall. Well, under that State of Michigan Liquor Control Commission, you could not operate if you didn't have a liquor license on the wall. So, we had to close up, and my husband bought--was in the process of buying the tavern from a woman who had cancer and wanted out of the business. So, the arrangement they had worked was he would run and manage the tavern and pay weekly or monthly, I forget, but, you know, to pay her for the business, and she could go home and have an income and sell the thing over a while and battle her cancer. So, the daughter--she died. She died suddenly, unexpectedly.

And so, her two daughters said that he, my husband Charles, was cheating her. And so without a hearing, without any due process, they--Rodez sent the cops over there to take the license off the wall. We had to hire an attorney, set up an estate, produce the evidence, and litigate. It was a three-month process during which my car was repossessed, all kinds of financial chaos because that supported us. We kept putting out the paper though, and we were determined not to buckle, and again we contributed--attributed that to the, you know, the stance of the paper. So, those were two...two examples. You want more?

[0:14:53]

**PB:** I think that probably...

**TK:** Covers it?

**PB:** Yeah. That paints a very clear picture, I think.

**TK:** Yes.

**PB:** So, could you talk a little bit about--did you have a background in journalism, in reporting? How did you get into this line?

**TK:** My husband did. He had worked for--when he came out of the army, he had worked for the South Town Economist and the Woodlawn [Booster and] Bulletin, and he taught me. And then, I worked for Gus Savage, who later went on to become a congressman. I worked for him on the Citizen [Newspapers] in Chicago, which was a paper. My husband had been one of about six men who started that. So, I learned it that way. I had had a course in journalism in high school. It was an excellent course, great teacher, but that was the only academic preparation I had. The rest we just learned, and...

[0:15:47]

**PB:** So, could you talk a little bit about what the...like, what the media landscape was when you got to Highland Park and where the Michigan Citizen fit in?

**TK:** Well, the fact that we even came this way instead of going back to Chicago. In Chicago at the time, there were seven Black papers, so it was very competitive. And in Detroit, there was one, the Michigan Chronicle, which really, given the statistics of and the demographics, kind of blew us away. How could this be? So, we came this way and--to bring the paper. We always kept an office open in Benton Harbor. We never quit Benton Harbor, but when we came this way to Detroit, one of the reasons was there was no other--other than the Chronicle, and the Chronicle was pretty staid, you know. It wasn't very political, and we were always very political. The media--again, the media was not as bad as it is now. It really was a--Detroit Free Press particularly was more relevant. The Detroit News was terribly racist, but the Free Press at least was more relevant. I would say more relevant than it is today.

**PB:** So, at that time--and I guess we can go forward--what have been some of the priorities of the paper, some of the major themes or topics that the paper prioritizes coverage?

**TK:** We always tried to cover things from the grassroots, and I think that's because of our organizing background. That what people in the community had to say was important more so than some, you know, the head of DTE [Detroit Edison Energy], or the head of Michigan Gas or, you know. Where people were and what their concerns were have always been and were always our focus.

[0:17:42]

**PB:** I'm also curious about, in some of the research that I've done, like what the distribution strategy was? How did you get the paper into the hands of people in the city?

**TK:** That was always the big struggle. Yeah, that was hard. We had...the circulation people would... They'd drop papers at, like, nurse--you know, senior centers, apartments, churches. We had--I still remember who our first paid subscriber was. We had paid subscriptions, but that was mostly--we did bulk mail, and we did some home delivery. We did all the routes as the paper, you know, grew and developed routes where people would go and, you know, throw it. We'd do promotions in areas. Throw 'em, you know, with a subscription card attached. It was always a huge struggle, though.

**PB:** And what was the peak circulation that the paper had?

**TK:** I think it was about 50...50,000.

**PB:** So, you...you were serving as editor and a reporter for the paper?

**TK:** Hm-mm. Everybody did everything. It was small, always was small, always pressed, but everybody did everything.

[0:19:06]

**PB:** What were some of--when you were writing stories, what kind of stories were you personally more drawn to? What did you take? What were you most excited about writing about?

**TK:** Well, when we were in Benton Harbor, I would cover the...every city commission meeting because I was a stringer for the South Bend Tribune at the same time. So, that meant my activity earned money, so that was [laughs], you know, good when you have to feed children. I always liked to cover stories of struggle, you know, where people were--would resist something that was wrong that was being done to them, and they would stand up and fight back. I really liked those stories.

**PB:** Could you--I've noticed in kinda going through the archives of the Michigan State Assembly, you've had some illustrious guest columnists over the years or reoccurring columnists. Could you talk about some of the folks that have written for the Michigan Citizen?

**TK:** You mean nationally or locally?

**PB:** Locally, any major names that you think...

**TK:** Well, JoAnn Watson would do occasional--that was always an honor to have her thoughts. Sam Riddle, when he came out of prison, we asked him to write for us because--for numerous reasons. He has a good take on the community, had a great political analysis, and had a great way of talking, writing. Dr. Gloria House wrote for us. For a while, she was our arts and culture editor. I'm kind of blanking right now.

**PB:** Grace Lee Boggs?

**TK:** Oh, yes! How can I forget? And Shea Howell. Yes, Grace--well, Grace and Shea came to us in the middle of the newspaper strike when the Free Press and the News were going to become a Detroit newspaper agency, and they laid off all the--you know, there was a walk out or a lay...I forget the details now, but the writers, particularly the journalists, went on strike and picketed the building, and there was a lot of, you know, confusion, and Shea and Grace came to us then and said they wanted to see the paper more widely circulated to cover more issues and to become more prominent. They saw it as a way of replacing what was dying with the major media, and so then Grace would write for us every week. And when Grace became unable and passed, then Shea took it up, and they really helped promote the paper.

**PB:** So, did it grow after their involvement?

**TK:** Absolutely, yes. And, it especially grew in value, I think. They brought a...they made a tremendous contribution to the quality of the news and the breadth of the news.

[0:22:13]

**PB:** When I'm thinking about Grace Lee Boggs and Shea Howell, I'm thinking about the importance that they placed upon analysis. Could you talk a little bit about that relationship in terms of operating a paper, the relationship between reporting on news and the analysis and the balance, or how that is presented?

**TK:** Well, personally, I always felt that our greatest value to any reader was our opinions, our analysis, and I could remember once David Rambo challenged us for not publishing Republicans, and I said, "They have access to everything, and so why would we waste our time, space or--you know, precious space on them?" So,

everybody accused us of--I know when we--my daughter went... The first year she went to the Mackinac [Policy] Conference and she met Roy Roberts, who was then the EM [emergency manager] of the schools and his sidekick who helped close down and destroy so many schools--I'm drawing a blank on his name right now, but any--he was the PR guy, and I can--I remember my daughter was really offended because he said, "Well, that's not a real newspaper," although we were. We met every state requirement. We, you know, we...we were an adjudicated paper for the city of Highland Park. We had published the Wayne County tax sale notices. We had published legal notices for Benton Harbor, Highland Park, City of Detroit. So, there was no way in which he could legally say we were not a legal paper, and we were always conscious from the beginning of what it took to be a legal newspaper and, you know, made sure that we came out 52 weeks of the year etcetera--[coughs] but, lost my train of thought. You had asked me a question that I was getting to.

**PB:** The balance between...

**TK:** Oh! The analysis and the news. Yeah, so our news, in one way, it had a slant because our source of news was community spokespeople, activists, block club presidents, residents, people that were involved in whatever the issue was. So in that way, just by doing that, you know, you take a certain stance that is not reflected in the major media, and my husband always said, "Yes, you can have an opinion and, yes, you can have a point of view, but you have to be fair. As long as you get all the points of view, and you put them out there." And, actually, that's such a myth, if you think about it.

We signed up with the Michigan State [University] School of Journalism Capital News Service, and every semester a student would be--a student reporter, journalism student--would be assigned to us, and we could help before--they would be interviewing the health director one week, and they would call us, and we'd give them questions that we wanted answered from our point of view, and they would always talk about, "Well, you, you know, you can't have a point of view," but yet their whole experience a kid from rural someplace in rural Michigan came with a certain point of view because their experience didn't give them any other, you know. They didn't know about at the--long time ago--hip-hop or whatever, you know. They're just...your experience governs what you think about or what

you wonder about or what you know about. And so for that whole myth, you gotta have a--you know, you can't be pred...prejudiced, or you can't have a... It's a myth. It's truly a myth. [coughs]

**PB:** Would you like some water?

**TK:** Oh, yeah. Thank you.

[pause while interviewee takes a drink]

[0:26:17]

**PB:** So, did you have advertisers in the paper as well?

**TK:** The eternal struggle. Yes. Yes, that's what my husband mainly did, and then my daughter Catherine [Kelly], when she took his place, she did that, and that's when we stopped publishing, when we just--you know, Black papers for a long time were a niche, and there was a...there were advertisers. Used to be Kool cigarettes, used to be Coca-Cola, you know, the national brands. Every time Jesse Jackson shook the tree, some, you know, money would fall to the Black media across the country. And, yes, that advertising was important, and my daughter was very good at it, but there became a point where even that niche didn't matter to advertisers anymore because the internet had opened up, and it was access to customers in more efficient ways.

**PB:** So, did those advertisers that at any point try to pull influence from the paper or...?

**TK:** Not the national ones so much, but the local ones that's--if you go back and look through our paper and the [Michigan] Chronicle, you'll see this tremendous difference. We went in--when our ad salesman went into one of the local men's



clothing stores, and the owner took a look at it and said, “That’s that socialist paper!” and tossed it aside. So, yeah. We always had that locally. Locally, we had much more difficult time getting advertisement than we did nationally.

[0:27:51]

**PB:** So, you mentioned that most of the sources that you would draw your stories from were community folks, organizers. What was the--could you talk a little bit about the relationship between community organizations and the paper? Like, what--was the system seen as the mouthpiece for organizers, or what did that day-to-day relationship look like?

**TK:** Well, they was good stories, I always felt, you know, with a...a certain or vitality that you didn’t always find when...when people just--other media sometimes just reworks news releases, or they use the news release to launch into what they are going to put into the paper that week, and we were always trying to: what were people talking about? What were the concerns? And, try to go that way. But, we--I don’t think we were seen as a mouthpiece. I think we tried to keep it diverse and vary our sources.

[0:28:46]

**PB:** When we’ve been talking to folks who have been activists in the city for the last two decades, really particularly talking about our emergency management, both Shea [Howell] and Elena [Herrada] have both said like, “Oh, you need to consult the Michigan Citizen. You need to talk to Teresa Kelly.” So, I’m wondering if you could kind of walk us through from your perspective what the Michigan Citizen...what--I mean, your take on the history of state takeovers in the area. It’s a big question, I know--what that looked like from a reporting standpoint?

**TK:** Oh, well, it’s--emergency management was so destructive, first of all. I mean, it was a rip-off. I mean, if you look at the cities where it started, Benton Harbor, Highland Park, those two cities had done what the state called emergency loans

back in the early [19]80s. You could buy one million at a time, and you had so many years to pay it off--I'm talking about cities now--and there were requirements around the loan. A consultant would come once a month and look at your books and report. Those consultants were paid 6,000 dollars a month. That came out of Benton Harbor, came out of Highland Park, which really doesn't help if you're trying to pay off a million dollars. 6,000 a month is, what? 60,000, 70...72[000] in a year? And, which is by city standards not a big deal, but year after year after year, and especially when they never caught anything. You had somebody looking through the books of Benton Harbor when EM [emergency manager] took over, the same with Highland Park. Ironically, two of these gentlemen became emergency managers, Jack Martin and--I forget the gentlemen out of Battle Creek [Michigan] [Michael Stampfler], but they were state-appointed, Republican-leaning experts, financial experts, that were to help keep the city on the up and up and pay back this million dollar loan.

The other preparation for emergency management came with the state's own failure to pay what it owed. The Michigan Municipal League came out--a couple years into emergency management, the Michigan Municipal League published a study of how much each municipality had been short-changed by the state, and it's all part of a lawsuit right now pending that with the Headlee Amendment where cities--where the financial structure was changed and money went to Lansing [Michigan], and then Lansing was supposed to send back a certain amount according to a formula which this lawsuit that's now pending has challenged was the state bent the rules so it didn't have to pay back or send to the cities what they was due.

When they first published that, for example, they didn't publish where Highland Park fit in. So, I called the League, and they--took them two days, but they got back. Highland Park had been cheated over 11 billion dollars. Well, had they had the 11 billion, would they have had to, you know, be in financial difficulty? Maybe, maybe not. That was what Chrysler used to pay a year in taxes, and Chrysler left in [19]88. Highland Park wasn't the world headquarters, and the state of Michigan helped Chrysler move to Auburn Hills [Michigan], paved roads, put in sewer systems, etcetera. And yet, Highland Park missed that tax base but didn't even get what it was owed by the state of Michigan.

So, you had those two elements of preparation for emergency management that were directly under the control of the state. The extra cost for supervising the million-dollar loans and the failure to send the cities what they were due--And school districts, the school districts as well. So, it was really a scam. Emergency management was a scam perpetrated on Black cities mostly. I think there were two exceptions. Three Oaks [Michigan] down in Berrien County came in and out of emergency management in a matter of months. It was all-white community. And, I think Allen Park [Michigan] was the other one--or Lincoln Park [Michigan], one or the other. But when we--when the ci--Detroit Public Schools were taken over by emergency management. I think we did a story, and there were 11 school districts in the immediate Southeast Michigan area that were financially worse off than Detroit, and we printed that. One of the cities called us up--I think it was Fowlerville [Michigan] or something like that--they called us up and threatened to sue us and because that wasn't true. Well, it was true, and we had the facts and figures to, you know, to make it true.

So, it was a...it was a racial thing, totally, and there wasn't--it was an effort to seize control, siphon that--you know, the faucet of public money runs steadily, and that's a nice thing if you can cash in on it. An EM was a way, definitely, to do it in the state's poorest communities, some of them. Highland Park, Benton Harbor were always the poorest on the bottom, you know. Which is poorer, one year's one, one year it's the next. So, it was bad news.

[0:35:04]

**PB:** How did--so, we can talk about either the state takeover of the schools in [19]99 or emergency management or, like, this whole period of state takeover is--how did the coverage in the Michigan Citizen differ from coverage in the Free Press or the Detroit News?

**TK:** There's...there's a book to be written, a Ph.D. thesis, if not 10 of them. It was very different because we would...we would take what people said, you know, like, and if it wasn't opposed to the takeover, we would print that. But if you read the Free Press, everything was just hunky-dory, and this was the best thing ever for Detroit, what was happening. It just had--you know, if you accept the status quo, if

you accept authority figures' positions and statements, or if you listen to the people, but, you know, it's just totally 180 degrees different. And, I used to get angry at what was omitted by the Free Press, especially in the coverage of schools and the EM's running of the schools or running down of the schools.

[0:36:18]

**PB:** Do you recall any of like--if--I guess we can talk specifically about the schools, state takeover there. Do you remember any particular stories that are coming to mind that the Citizen ran that...?

**TK:** EAA...EAA was a big one. Have you heard of--yeah, the Educational Achievement Authority, was that it? Yeah. And, that took the lowest five percent. Well, there're always going to be the lowest five percent. If every school in the state were perfect, there's still the lowest five percent. So, it was...that was never noted by the papers, and the whole thing about testing, about, you know, where if you test these--this massive effort to test came after No Child Left Behind. One of the Bush brothers [Neil Bush], you know, was a big manufacturer of tests, but then you...you test kids with where the test is culturally, racially biased. Certain kids that aren't in that racial or cultural group are not going to do as well as the kids that are in that. So, you set kids up for failure, then you call them a failure, and you use that failure to then take them over and fail them worse.

There were kids that went into the EAA that were on point, and they fell down. I think when EAA, after three years of that experiment, were behind, they were behind. They fell down. They fell behind because the leaders of the EAA, all appointed by [Rick] Snyder, Mayor [Mike] Duggan included, would test--I mean, were experimenting on the kids. They were giving work to the kids all on computers. That was supposed to be such a big deal. They were all on computers and writing programs, educational programs, based on what the kids were doing or not doing. So, they were using the kids as guinea pigs, failing the kids in terms of educating them. You went into an EAA school, and you never saw any kids' work hanging up. It was all on the computer.

They depended on the new schools. Mumford High School was brand new. East English Village [Preparatory Academy] was brand new. New buildings that had been financed or buildings that had been retrofitted with the bond money, and turned those over to the EAA for a dollar a year. Actually, it was--I think--it was based on their attendance, and Mother Helen Moore always said it was like the old slave days where the kids on the auction block 'cause that's how they made their money. The leases were ignored between DPS and the buildings that were given--taken--by the EAA. The kids at Mumford had a walkout protesting the inferior education they were receiving under the EAA.

Teach for America was involved. That was where [laughs] mostly--college graduates, many of them unaccustomed to the culture of the city, like Detroit, our community, like Highland Park. Teach for America had six weeks. They got out of college. They got their school bill, school loans, education loans paid off by being a TFA. Six weeks of training and sent into a classroom. My granddaughter was at Detroit School of the Arts, and she would come home almost in tears because in chemistry, her chemistry teacher would say one thing, but then the Teach for America aide that was in the classroom would be doing something totally different. And so, she was just totally confused. [pause] What was the question?

**PB:** I guess broadly, we were just speaking about your coverage of...

**TK:** Okay, oh--yes! And then, what the media didn't cover. So, the media. I'll never forget one. Oakman [Elementary] school was being shut down. Oakman was--it will bring you to tears if you had been in that school and seen the students. It was for--was an orthopedic school, was for a--children that had disabilities, and there were railings along the hall that children used to, you know, walk who had trouble walking. The halls were wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs. There was a room with washing machines and a bath tubs and showers in case the kids need to, you know, had an accident, needed a cleanup. There were nurses stationed there to help administer medicine to children that needed it during the day. Was just a school that you walked into it, you could feel the, you know, the sense of community that was in that school, and Aliya Moore was one of the mothers, the PTA [Parent-Teacher Association] president who led the effort to keep the school open.

She--but Roy Roberts was the emergency manager, and he was dead set on closing that school. He said the problem was the furnace was bad, the roof was bad, and the parent group got a person who earns his living--he's certified professional, especially big apartment buildings--saying the condition of the heating system and the condition of the roof for potential buyers. So, this man knew what he was talking about. Parent group brought him into the school to discount what the emergency manager was saying about the school, that there were two furnaces, two heating plants. One of them was working fine. One needed something, but it was not--nothing was disabled or ready to be thrown out, and they were doing the job. The building had never been cold. The roof, again, was just fabricated, but the Free Press just ignored that.

I mean, this was really crucial. You don't have that many orthopedic schools, and nor do you have anyplace else that can accommodate these children now, and they had just...they were in the process of building new houses in the neighborhood right across from the street and down one block where 15 brand new houses, all three bedroom, were for...were obviously geared towards families. And if you're building houses, why are you tearing down the one school in the neighborhood? Because the school not only took disabled children, but they also took just regular kids that wanted to attend a school. It was, you know, it was a community school, but it was closed, vandalized, left open and abandoned, and it's gone, and those kids are still out there in the school system struggling to find places that can accommodate them.

And the Free Press, you know, that wasn't a big deal. They gotta write about...I don't know what they write about, but I mean... And then, Chastity Pratt, the reporter for the Free Press, came to that press conference and did not... She just didn't get what the parents were saying. She reported a small piece on it, but it didn't in no way convey the agony that those parents felt over the future of their kid's education. School for the Deaf, again, was an agonizing fight to keep the School for the Deaf, but they lost it. Emergency manager had total power, wasn't checked, wasn't challenged, and that aspect of it really never came across in the paper. It would be more like a regular--you would presume it was a regular school system with duly elected people in charge making decisions of benefit to the community. Not so. It was... That's what you got in the Free Press, but that wasn't what was going on.

[0:44:22]

**PB:** What do you attribute that to? And why wasn't the Free Press covering these stories that were critical to people in the city?

**TK:** I--you never get the idea the papers are of the city. They are in it, but not of it. Non--don't have kids in the system. It was that...that was the biggest challenge, I think, the fight to keep the EMs out of the schools or from totally destroying everything, was the fact that your people downtown didn't have kids in the system.

**PB:** We spoke with Tom Pedroni a couple weeks ago, and he was telling some--a couple really damning stories about the Free Press shutting down pieces that he was trying to publish as op eds that were calling attention to some really important discrepancies with the emergency managers. Did you experience any repression or resistance in your coverage of emergency management?

**TK:** Only by the emergency managers. They never spent a nickel with our paper. They bought time on something-something show. They bought pages in the Michigan Chronicle, but that's--we were not a real paper.

**PB:** So, I'm--the Michigan Chronicle has a long history in Detroit, and I'm not asking you to like cast shade upon the Michigan Chronicle, but...

**TK:** I will!

[0:46:00]

**PB:** [laughs] So, let's go there. The coverage that I've seen of community issues in the Citizen had far surpassed what the Chronicle has done in recent years. What do you attribute that to?

**TK:** They're bought and sold. They care about money. They're in publishing to make money. We were kind of weird ducks. We went into it 'cause we had that passion for like community organizers, you know. Just, when you do that, and you see the power people have when they get together and organize and strategize and have a goal that--you know, you kind of...money, kind of, you need it, and so you do things to get it, but it doesn't become your--you won't sell your soul for it, and the Chronicle literally sold its soul. How could you support a--Snyder? How could you come out on your front page, let Snyder write the front-page article the week before the election telling people who to vote when Snyder had done this to your schools, you know, your children? You know, you couldn't. It's hard to believe, but that's what...that's what happened. And they--'cause they had full-page ads. They got a building downtown, you know. They were rewarded, and we're out of business. [laughs]

[0:47:25]

**PB:** I wanna take it back a little bit because the Citizen was reporting on water shutoffs in Highland Park when nobody else was reporting on it. Could you talk about that period in Highland Park's history and the start of the water shutoffs and the organizing work that was being done against that?

**TK:** Yes. That was Marian Kramer and Mrs. [Valerie] Johnson. I forget Mrs. Johnson's name, may she rest in peace, but her husband was my husband's barber. Yeah, the water bills were out of control. We--that was back to the time when Highland Park had a crackhead mayor. It's just sad, but it's part of history. It's part of the way things are, which this state oversight person didn't catch, but anyway... So, there were some bad decisions being made, and, like I said, Chrysler had left and took its 11,000 a year--11 billion a year in taxes with it, which had just, you know. There was some money left to kinda ease the transition, but it...it wasn't enough, or it wasn't well managed, and the loss of that 11 million a year just... You can imagine what that would do to a small community. There were like



19,000 people there then. There are 11[000] now, probably 10[000] or 9[000] now.

But so, people were, you know, just again... It was where the community was. It was the need, and Highland Park has its own pipe from Lake St. Clair that comes to Dequindre where the water plant is. We had our own water plant at that time that was functioning. There was a lot of talk then because water had started to become a commodity bottled in plastic and sold readily available. So, there was a lot of talk to do that, but there wasn't the--something was missing at city hall to make that happen. And instead, city hall just clapped down on users and people who needed water. That's when the first shut-offs came in Highland Park.

**PB:** Do you recall any--like, are there any stories coming to mind of the reporting that the Citizen did during that period of like the impacts of the water shut-offs or the organizing work that was going on around that?

**TK:** I don't...I just know...I can't even think of her first name, and I knew her. We didn't live in Highland Park then. We had a--actually, our office was in Detroit, and we probably didn't cover it as well as we should've. But, I can't...I can't really...I just know there was a battle earnestly fought, and, you know, it was...drew a wide base in the community, but I really can't. Marian Kramer would know.

[0:50:40]

**PB:** So, in going back through those archives, it was clear from the Citizen's reporting that I've seen that there were concerns about privatization of water. Could you talk about what it was like to report on that kind of looming threat, to see the privatization of water and then to see that progress over the years forward into the situation in Detroit and the concerns now?

**TK:** Well, privatization period was bad. You know, whether it was in the schools in terms of janitorial service, bus service, all the things that were broken off and given to big privatization. And the cities, it started with garbage collection. That

was the first element. Benton Harbor, Highland Park, Detroit, they got privatized--well, Detroit now not till just recently, but there was never... It was supposed to be so businesslike, and yet there was never any rational financial basis on which the decisions were made or continued. You'd ask--reporters would ask, "Well, do you have the figures to show where this saves money?" They could never and still don't. You know, I don't know if any city's ever done a study to show--what they do save are legacy costs, you know, the pension, because pension began to loom as a real burden for cities, and that drove a lot of the privatization.

Now, the privatization of water that really Highland Park has kind of stumbled around because it's a smaller community, and so activists can have a bigger impact on your elected leaders. Like, you know, the elected officials, they live down the street. You go actually and knock on their door. You see them taking out their trash or something, so there's that human contact face-to-face, makes it easier to--for the public good to be expressed. And, some change--Detroit, it came with Mayor Duggan, Mike Duggan, and Kevyn Orr, and it's kind of astounding that disconnect between elected officials and community. It's probably never been more apparent than with the water issue.

I mean, if you just... I think about one of the young attorneys from--that stood up in court when the...the Homrich Nine, the first day of their trial, was a young attorney. He was actually--I don't even think he had been admitted to the bar yet, or he was his first, one of his first, but he was a public-service-minded attorney, and he talked about, "As I was getting ready for court," he said, "I brushed my teeth. I washed my face. I made my coffee, and I needed water for every one of those things," and that disconnect between a mayor and the people that he's took an oath that he's gonna serve, that, I don't understand it. I don't understand it. And, it continues, continues, you know? 80-year-olds trying to get water out of a bucket, a rain barrel, you know. It's...you don't even--third-world countries are better off than that!

But, just that total disregard. Now, you see that disregard when you think of Downtown and Midtown and all the investment that has gone there and the city dollars and the state and federal dollars, and then the neighborhoods, the blight and the fight just to keep it clean and straightened up. But, that water thing--and I

was involved in the first Homrich protest where we sat down. They didn't take us to trial--we were like two weeks ahead of the second group--because, I think, it was so bloody, the--it was so much of the bad. The tapes woulda come out that showed--the videos that showed...but there was, and they just kept on. Nothing seemed to penetrate that indifference.

[0:54:58]

**PB:** Could you walk us through that story of the first Homrich case?

**TK:** The Homrich Nine, that was, yes. The first time they went to court, it was a woman judge, Cynthia--I can't think of her last name. But anyway, she didn't keep the case. She was the first appearance. She appeared to be very pro-community, that she understood the people. She understood their demands, why they had put up this protest and granted most of the motions, etcetera. Then, she had to have surgery, and she--the case was handed off to the second judge.

The second this--the second judge [Ruth Garrett??] did an excellent job, and she let Bill Wylie-Kellermann bring his witnesses on. He was trying to do a defense that had just won in Connecticut last week where 11 pipeline protestors were allowed to use the--that moral...but it means this is an injustice, and so I have a right to break a law in order to highlight it is an injustice and protest it and hopefully change it. And, Bill Wylie-Kellermann and Marian Kramer, Marianne McGuire--there were nine people, and they stood there before the judge, and the first trial--so, the first judge is gone. The second judge, she let them bring witnesses and testify about the situation, trying to convey to the jury what the situation was for people who didn't have water and why it was necessary to stop a trucking company with the trucks from coming out through the gate whose job, sole job, was to go turn somebody's water off, and they marched in front, they held arms, and they prayed, and the police dragged them off so the trucks could go shut off people's water.

The trial--the jury was after the trial was--I don't know, two weeks, maybe ten days--and the jury was sent out. They got their instructions. They were sent out to

deliberate, and there was all kinds of legal finagling. The city attorneys--hired by the people, paid by the people to do something for the city--fought tooth and nail through the whole trial trying to keep JoAnn Watson out of the witness stand, trying to keep the people who were affected by the water shutoffs out of the stand, trying to keep people that had the facts and figures about what it meant to turn off this many folks' water, and city attorney had run over to another court, did something that was illegal.

But, that court was--there was a sympathetic judge [Michael Hathaway]. He granted them whatever it was, but it brought the whole thing to a stop. The jury was sent home before they could deliberate. A whole...I think it was like a year dragged on, and that jury never was reconvened. Eventually, they were...the charges were dropped, and the thing just disappeared because actually it was hard to imagine that that case would--any money would have been spent defending shutting off people's water, but it was, and the Homrich Nine, three years--three years--they were in front of the court.

[0:58:29]

**PB:** Do you think that was strategic in stretching out that case?

**TK:** Yes. Absolutely. Yes, I think that jury just as--'cause I sat in that courtroom and covered it. And I as I sat in that, got the sense that that jury knew darn well the harm that was being done to people who didn't have water. And for the most part, I think it would have come back with a favorable--and I think the city attorneys felt that too, and that's why they moved to stop it. And then, it was brought before a third judge [Ronald Giles] who was very all-business. He wasn't gonna have anybody shedding any tears in his courtroom, and it was gonna run by the book, and there wasn't going to be any kind of a moral defense. And then, the city dropped it.

**PB:** So, you mentioned that you were involved in the first...

**TK:** Protest. Yes, I was being very un-journalistic.

**PB:** Could you talk us through your goal during that, what that protest served?

**TK:** Actually, it was--we decided to do it. Bill Wylie-Kellermann, Elena Herrada, and I, and there was two other people there. I can't recall who they were, but we sitting at a downtown café eating hotdogs and having a beer and decided that the one thing that we could do to stop those shutoffs was to stop the trucks. So, everybody had an assignment. Somebody was going to case when the time the trucks left the grounds on West Grand Boulevard, and somebody was gonna make the signs, and somebody--you know, everybody had a job.

So, we did it and picked a date and went out there. They were shocked. They got--they were very nasty. We stood in front of the gate. It was just a double gate, two-car double gate. So, I think there were 10 of us or 11 of us. And then, other people who didn't want to get arrested--we had decided we'd be willing to get arrested, but others came to support but didn't want to get arrested. We all brought our hundred dollars cash so we could post bail and stood out there, and they left us alone for about three hours.

And then, one red truck pickup truck pulled right up to us, and it was...it was scary. It was very scary because you're like six inches from this truck, and what if he knocks you down and keeps coming, or, you know. It was...it was frightening. So, we're standing there singing. And then, Agnes Hitchcock had my arm, and she dropped to the ground. We hadn't planned...hadn't planned that well, whether we were going to sit down or what we were going to do when they came for us. And so, we're on the ground, and this woman police officer who had Love in her name--L-O-V-E was half of her name, how ironic--but she was really vicious, and she was pulling on me, and I'm yelling, "I'll get up! Let me alone! I'll get up! Just let me get up!" but she wouldn't. So, I couldn't really get my feet under me to get up, and they put us in the police car. I had the cuffs' marks for a couple weeks and her bruises on my fingers on my arm, and they took us to the police station and booked us and gave us--took our hundred dollars, and that was it.

**PB:** So, the charges were dropped?

**TK:** They're out there somewhere. No, they never wrote us--we got our 100 dollar bail back, but they never said--I don't know if I get pulled over, if some day they are gonna bring that up. I don't know. I have no idea. It's just out there.

[1:02:15]

**PB:** So, I guess, could you...could you talk a little bit about how you first got involved in the water struggle outside of your journalistic capacities?

**TK:** Oh, well, that would be it. Yeah, that would be it.

**PB:** So, what was the...what was the leap there, right? 'Cause you're--we talked, had this conversation about kind of fighting injustice with a pen. So, how did you obviously come to...

**TK:** Participate? Well, I had always tried to keep the line between being a participant and then the reporter, but it was...I was close to...we were a few months to--no, it was earlier than that--but I was just tired of not participating. Things had gotten so drastic, and things were so critical. Water for people, I mean, you know, there comes a point where that professional ethics of not being a participant, you're like, "I can't deal. That's just too false." And so, much to my daughter's chagrin and dismay--'cause she's still working with the paper. She didn't like that I would, you know, break that line, but I did. I just got tired of it, you know. It was like the whole city should be up in arms.

**PB:** And if you were to, I guess, project, then why wasn't the whole city up in arms?

**TK:** Now, that's a good one 'cause that was a real question that activists wrestled with for years now. It's been years. The schools have been destroyed, neighborhoods destroyed, everything gone. You know, why aren't people upset? It's a good one. I think that life for so many people in Detroit is such a struggle, and you saw that if you went to the...there were...Duggan in all of his mercy was going to have an amnesty. He wanted everybody whose water had been shut off or threatened to be shut off to come to one of the two payment centers, one on the West side and one on the East side, and work out a deal.

So, I went that Saturday to take pictures and talk to people, and, you know, the poverty will hit you in the face when you get into the neighborhoods in Detroit, and you saw people--it was a hot, hot day, and you had...you saw people who had--just the way they were dressed, you could tell, you know, that flip flops and those two-dollar dresses from the dollar store, and just the anguish that people would express, you know. They'd make arrangements. They made arrangements knowing full well they didn't have the money to pay it. You know, it just was being charged. It was all just so unreasonable with no recognition of where people were at. So, I think that that poverty that--so, you see in almost every neighborhood that you go into and the blight and everything that that poverty, I think, and people struggling just to survive, I think, just becomes... That's the only way I can look at it.

[1:05:40]

**PB:** I wanna ask you to go a little bit further into--I think we've touched upon this a couple of times now. Is that line that you saw between being a journalist on one hand and then being an organizer or an activist on the other side, and if that line was one that you thought that you couldn't breach? So, do you think that that is...do you think that line between being a journalist and objective, so to speak, journalist and observer is in direct oppositional conflict to being a participant, or can the two...can you do both things?

**TK:** I think you can do both things because, I mean, look at the Free Press. They certainly keep the professional line supposedly, although not really. You hear about [Nolan] Finley hosting the governor, having a party at his house that isn't a

fundraiser, you know. Well, my guideline was always [Joseph] Pulitzer. Pulitzer would never let his journalists go to anything where they were fed or shared a drink or any social event 'cause he said, "If you're friends or even just acquaintances, you can't write honestly about them." Well, I have always erred in the opposite, I mean, in terms of with the activists. I'm with the community. And so, it's basically--in one way, it's the same thing because you take what people say about their condition as truth, but yet I, you know, question everything that authority says.

So, yeah. I think you're--in one way, you are with the participants. You're there. Your heart is with 'em, you know. You believe in them, whereas a reporter from Downtown would come out and--like that closing of Oakman [Oakman Elementary/Orthopedic School], that *Free Press* reporter, actually showed up, and just you could see the disdain and the distance and the disbelief was like, "Oh, it doesn't matter." You know, it was just...just that dismissal, that objectivity that I talked about back with Capital News Service where, you know, they sometimes--the questions you'd want them to ask, the young reporters, the students would question objectivity. How do you keep your objectivity? And to me, it was such a myth because you're...you can't divorce your experiences from your point of view. You can't.

So, technically, I would still say that reporters should not be participants like getting thrown to the ground and dragged around by the police. But, yeah, you know, go walk a picket line and find out how people feel and what they say and what they're, you know. You'll find a lot of validity. I don't know if I answered that.

[1:08:35]

**PB:** No, you did. You definitely did. If I had a puzzled look on my face, it was because I was thinking about something else in terms of journalists both domestically and abroad being targeted for those reasons or the role that journalists can and should play in social movements for human rights, for justice, for equity. I'm curious if you or any of your other reporters on staff or writers or anyone affiliated with the Michigan Citizen faced any kind of repression or backlash during emergency management cases or in general?



**TK:** Not that comes to mind other than funds, advertising, you know, were cut off.

[1:09:25]

**PB:** There was one story-I guess maybe one of the reasons why I'm asking is I saw there was a lot of coverage around Diane Bukowski--this isn't directly related to emergency management--but that she had been arrested for her coverage of the police?

**TK:** Two times.

**PB:** So, the frame that I saw in the coverage was that this was political retaliation. Could you tell us about those stories of--about Diane's coverage of the police and...?

**TK:** First of all, let me say, the Justice Department came in here and--what did those orders they work out with renegade police departments?

**PB:** Consent decrees.

**TK:** Consent decrees. The Justice Department came into Detroit and did a consent decree because of the stories, partially, that Diane Bukowski wrote. So, big hats off to her. She...that's, you know. She did something with her reporting. She was the one that talked about Eugene Brown, the killer cop. He killed three, four young men all on separate occasions, shot in the back, and he's still at the Police Department collecting his pay. But so, she was very active in the police--now, she was somebody who was both. She was an activist in the police brutality group, and she was a reporter for us. Not on...she...you know, we just paid her by story, a freelancer.

She was first of all put out of a school board meeting and her camera seized by Lamont Satchel, I think, who was attorney for the school board, and we had--we hired an attorney to represent her, and she was vindicated and got a settlement and... Then, the second time she was arrested, she covered a motorcycle accident off on the Davison--where the Davison comes up off of being a freeway and a stree...it becomes a street over by Hamtramck East--and she was there and covered that, but she went inside the police tape. Now, she had a letter from Charles Pugh, who at the time was head of the council--he's now in prison, unfortunately, but he was head of the council, and he had been a big reporter at Channel 2 News--and she had a letter from him where many times he went into the tape and wasn't bothered by the police at all. But that day because she was inside the yellow tape covering that accident, she was arrested. And, again, we helped get a lawyer to represent her and pay some of her legal expenses, and she lost that trial, and there are reasons for it. But, yes, she was somebody that was both activist and reporter, and she did a great job of uncovering police brutality and reporting on it.

**PB:** Do you think that her arrest on that particular case was...

**TK:** Personal?

**PB:** ...coincidental or personal?

**TK:** [pause] Coincidental, I think, because the officers on it were police--Michigan State police. And, I think it was...I wouldn't say that it was retaliation, no.

**PB:** There was a question...

**TK:** Oh, and the reason that I told you that the Justice Department... Because the Justice Department, a woman called us and said did we...that they had read...they were trying to see if we had written anything that was not yet posted on LexisNexis. They read the paper on LexisNexis and read all of her police stories

over the years and told me that that was a big reason they were there was because of her reporting.

[1:13:37]

**PB:** From your perspective, what role did the police play in the course of emergency management and its wake in terms of school closures or water shutoffs or tax foreclosures?

**TK:** Well, you're gonna have me telling on myself now. There was another time I was a participant. That was 'Slow Down in Motown,' and that had been organized by two people, and Elena [Herrada] and I did it. There were...there were maybe four or five of us, but the cop that pulled us over one morning doing that--you know what Slowdown in Motown was? We'd get on the freeway, and we'd be three across. And then, we'd slow down, and it was really kind of dangerous because some idiots would be trying to get around us, and one guy waved a gun. We didn't do it after that. But, police pulled us over one morning to ticket us, and the cop said, "Look, I'm totally with you guys, understand what you're doing, so I'm gonna write this ticket, but I'm not gonna turn it in." It disappeared. We never had to go to court. Now, other people had to go to court on their tickets.

But again, the water protests, there were police officers that would say, "We are totally with you. We understand, but we gotta do our job." Well, I think the Nazis said that too, didn't they? But overall, I think all the police, although they obeyed orders, I would say they seemed to express sympathy for our point of view.

**PB:** So, the Slow town- Slowdown in Motown, was that DREM [Detroiters Resisting Emergency Management] action?

**TK:** I think so--No. No, it wasn't. I think it was a superfluous--Bill was in it, Bill Wylie-Kellermann. Two people that started I really don't wanna name 'cause I know they don't wanna be named, but--and they would come out and participate,

but they didn't want to be...and they had to go to court and pay their fines out of their own pocket.

**PB:** What was the objective there?

**TK:** To draw attention to this injustice that was going on. It--no other way could you get anybody to pay attention, you know. It was just, didn't matter, was a Black city. Blacks can't run anything, you know, that attitude was prevalent. So...

**PB:** Did you see any like positive impacts come out of that? Or, in terms of raising awareness or raising...

**TK:** I think we raised awareness, definitely, but didn't stop anybody. There was too much money to be made, you know, by the bankruptcy and Judge [Steven] Rhodes and all that.

[1:16:27]

**PB:** So, I guess along those lines in terms of the money to be made, what's...how do you see the connection, or if you were to connect the dots between the foreclosure prices, school closures, and the water shutoff, what does the picture look like when the dots are connected?

**TK:** The foreclosures started with--have you interviewed Jerry Goldberg? Oh my gosh, you really need to interview 'cause on the banks and foreclosures, he's just an expert. He's an attorney. The foreclosures, big result of subprime lending, and Detroit, I think, was the capital of subprime lending. Devastated the neighborhoods, just destroyed. 72,000 families gone, houses gone in a year. So, that...that led to then--so, you had the devastation of the neighborhoods with the foreclosures as a result of subprime lending and the [20]09 crash, slow down, whatever it was called, big depression.

You had a governor, Snyder, who took--got as much cash as he could out of Detroit's hands and just--like, welfare mothers that were receiving aid. He cut cash payments in one month to like 11,000 people, and I always remember this woman who came to my block club meeting. She lives across the street from me, and she works for a church doing social service work, outreach work, and what she--the comment she made stuck with me. She said--talking about how Snyder had cut the money off to few folks--she said, "Think about it." She said, "Some teenage boys' momma doesn't have cash for bus fare. Now, what's he gonna do? His mother has to go to work. His mother has to--so, crime. Supposedly, crime, but you could say it's a reaction to a social situation created by elected officials."

So, you had a draining of money that the bankruptcy--the false bankruptcy--imposed upon Detroit by community--by emergency management, doubled retirees' healthcare costs and stripped them of money they had been saving, some of it. I forget the kind of saving, but that was taken from them. And so, they...they lost. And in this city, there are a lot of families dependent on that pension from the city. City workers--the city, at one point, was the largest employer in the city of Detroit. So, you take that pension money. You charge more for healthcare. So, there's just been a sucking of money out of the community, cash.

And, the water bills were incorrect. They weren't read correctly many times. Landlords didn't pay them, tenants got stuck with them, leaks in pipes, meters that were bad, misreading. So, huge accounts. And so, people couldn't afford to pay water bills. There was no mercy, no mercy given on them. 'Cause when people lined up on a hot summer day to go make a settlement with the payment company, they were agreeing they had to agree to pay what was due, and what they were asked to make a monthly payment on the arrears was sometimes more than what the bill was for the current month.

So, it was just an impossible situation. You just have this piling on of money leaving. You'd close 45 schools in one week. That's a lot of teachers gone. Gone. That money doesn't circulate. You cut people's food stamps or throw them off of food stamps, that hits the local store owner. It hits the employees that he might

have had. I mean, it just...so many ramifications for just the smallest cut has a big ripple effect.

[1:20:46]

And in the meantime, you're not really adding any employment, you know. The unemployment in the city is way more than what the government says it is, you know. People don't even bother going to unemployment office. And then, you have that whole scandal that was going on there with Snyder telling people they were cheating and sending them arrest notices and whatnot, and it was his own system that was faulty. One fed upon the other, I think. But, I think the real thing was that it started everything down pell-mell, the foreclosures, the bankruptcy, and that, you know, Judge Rhodes presided over the bankruptcy, then he got a job, right? Running the schools as EM, our last...Detroit's last EM. You gotta reward the folks that help ya.

Andy Dillon--you know the story of Andy Dillon? Andy Dillon was a Democrat. He ran for governor against Snyder. He lost in the primary to Virg [Virgil] Bernero, the mayor of Lansing. Virg Bernero emerged as the Democratic candidate across the state of Michigan for the Democrats for governor. The Democratic party didn't support him. They were still in Andy Dillon's corner. Andy Dillon, eventually turned out, was uncovered. He was an alcoholic, cocaine user, an open racist, but Andy Dillon was appointed treasurer by Snyder although he had been the one-time candidate in the primary for governor on the Democratic ticket. So, Andy Dillon as treasurer, he was the one of the ones that sent the first the consent decree and then the Jones Day and the bankruptcy into Detroit. [Background noise, firetrucks and police] Andy Dillon got a job with a law--a big financial firm, a law firm up in Bloomfield Hills [Michigan] who made 60,000 dollars in travel costs alone off of the bankruptcy traveling from Bloomfield to Detroit to deal with bankruptcy matters, and Andy Dillon had a job with them. Now, you talk about money. [laughs]

**PB:** So, could you talk about Jones Day's role in all of this?

**TK:** Ah, they talk about reporters' ethics. Let's talk about lawyers' ethics. Jones Day. Kevyn Orr was our emergency management in Detroit. He worked for Jones Day until he didn't work for Jones Day, but he hires Jones Day to come in and be the law firm of record for the city of Detroit. I mean, it's right there in a nutshell, and they made--how much did they make? I'd forgotten the figure. It was so stunning and overwhelming, but they made a huge amount of money and perfected the art of taking municipalities into bankruptcy and went down there to Puerto Rico with Rhodes, Judge Rhodes in tow and Kevyn Orr, the same little cra--the motley crew that was here destroying Detroit went down to Puerto Rico.

[1:24:11]

**PB:** So, that leads me to ask, like, do you see broader global systems and processes at play in Detroit during the emergency management during the bankruptcy?

**TK:** Did we know [Donald] Trump before Trump? Yes. Basically, it's that right-wing, you know. You squelched democracy. You squeeze every penny out of everybody that isn't your friend. You privatize the heck out of everything. You de-democratize this, the whole works, get rid of regulations, get rid of public oversight, public control. It's like--I'm on the school board in Highland Park. We came out of emergency management a year ago. The emergency manager wrote orders that under the law we have to obey for two years. Even though technically we're free, the law says you cannot hire a superintendent, you must have a charter, you cannot have your own community school.

So then, the emergency manager gets hired as our director of operations. Now, we can't have a superintendent, but just by coincidence, he has no education experience so it fits his--the job description fits him perfectly, and he gets--the treasury's paying half of his salary. He got a 30 percent raise to start running the school. I mean, it's just...it's just corrupt. And because there's no accountability--there's no accountability built into emergency manager at any step of the way. They're just basically like little gods. Highland Park Schools were not audited in the six years they were in emergency management. Now, what is the guy in there for? To help straighten the finances out, right? Doubled our debt,

never audited the books, destroyed our library, tore down all the schools, left us with one school, 360 students.

**PB:** And that's the formula behind privatization structural adjustment, right? Remove democracy, impose outside managers, and then pillage the entire...

**TK:** Pillage. It's the best word, pillage. Right in front of everybody, and the media kind of goes along. That's...that was always our...just that they would never see exactly, wouldn't call it what it was. They didn't see or refused to see. Now, a lot of reporters from the Free Press will tell you, "Well, I couldn't get it past my editor." Well...

**PB:** So, they did see?

**TK:** I think so. Yeah. You couldn't help but. So glaring.

**PB:** So, I mean what were your emotions? Was there frustration, like, watching this unfold?

**TK:** Why do I have white hair? [laughs] No, I had the white hair long before. Yes, anger. A lot of anger. You get really angry because it's just so blatant and so bad. Anger, lots of frustration.

[1:27:20]

**PB:** So, in this a--could you talk...could you walk us through the closing of the paper, why it happened?

**TK:** Well, like I said, we were, you know. We fit that niche. We were part of the National Black Press Association, and a lot of the advertising just dried up, and my



daughter was ready to go on and try something else. This wasn't her, you know, life career. It was my husband and myself, and I was tired. We had done 38 years of every single week. It's a lot of papers. I was tired. So, basically financial, and then the personnel wanted out.

[1:28:07]

**PB:** So, if you're looking back over the...the life of the paper, could you talk about, like, where you see some of the greatest impacts of the paper or the greatest contributions that the paper made?

**TK:** Some days, I tell ya, I felt like we didn't do diddly. [laughs] I mean, really, because it just goes on, you know. It goes on. And then, you come to the realization that, you know, where there are human beings, there's going to be corruption, period.

But, one of the stories that was closest to my heart was the Maurice Carter case. We were in our first year probably of publishing at Benton Harbor, and I got this letter to the editor. I always printed every letter to the editor 'cause a...I needed space filled, and, you know, I was in the--he was a prisoner. He said he had been falsely convicted in Berrien County. His home was Gary, Indiana, and he pointed out all of the problems he had had in court with his court-appointed attorney who had since been disbarred, and I printed it. Well, one of the people mentioned in the letter was Lieutenant [AI] Edwards from the Benton Harbor police department who called me up the day the paper came out, and, oh my God, he ranted. He went to the hospital that day with a heart...heart attack. He ranted and raved, I was this, and I was that, and the paper was this, and Maurice Carter was nothing but a liar.

Well, I thought, "Wow, this is something to look into." So, I did, and it was such a miscarriage of justice. So, wrote some stories about his case, and he--any development, you know, we put it in the paper. He mailed our series of articles out to everybody. He sent it to CNN [Cable News Network], and CNN had just started, and CNN got a hold of us, came to Benton Harbor, did a story, hired a lie

detector, one of the most--the best in the country, to go to prison and interview Maurice. Said absolutely, the guy was telling the truth without a shadow of a doubt. Did the story.

As a result, a couple in Traverse City [Michigan] saw the CNN report and put up 10,000 dollars for an appeals attorney. He hired Tarnow [Arthur Tarnow], who's now a federal judge, and it was Maurice's decision, and Tarnow did just kind of an iron boiler plate appeal, and Maurice was devastated. He didn't call me for two years after that appeal was done. And, the investigator on it, Warren Hansen, who I'm still in communication with--he lives here in Detroit--Warren Hansen apologized to me later. He said, you know, that he admitted he had not done an investigation. He hadn't gone and interviewed some of these key people that...who refused to talk to me but--you know, in my stories.

And eventually, Maurice got a call from the Innocence Project. The University of Wisconsin took it up. Now, it was the only non-DNA case they ever took, that Innocence Project ever took up. They only do DNA cases, but as the guy at the Wisconsin--Findley, Paul Findley [Correct name is Keith Findley] from the Innocence Project of the University of Wisconsin--got a hold of me and said the case was so egregious he could not not take it. So, he took it, worked on it two years. It just went nowhere 'cause one thing Berrien County knows how to do is close ranks, and it just went nowhere. So, Maurice was--he didn't have his sentence commuted, but he was let out. Jennifer Granholm let him out. He died 90 days later, to the day. He had kidney disease that they wouldn't treat which somehow violates some UN [United Nations] statute and--but the Maurice Carter case, I think, was the-'cause it got so personal, you know. He was in our life for so long.

[1:32:43]

**PB:** So, you've are have...you've taken a front row seat to so many just awful periods of oppression in this region, in the state, and this world. What have these experiences taught you about the systems that we live in?

**TK:** Are you asking me about my cynicism?

**PB:** However you wanna take it.

**TK:** You know, we're--what has it taught me? Well, I've become a real cynic, you know. I am--government is the enemy, basically. The law is the tool of the enemy. And, you know, if government would just back off, back out of people's lives, do--provide for people so that they can provide for themselves, you know, create an infrastructure where people can work and, you know, educate kids, but I'm a bit jaundiced.

**PB:** Understandably so. I mean, do you attribute that to government at large or the people and the institutions?

**TK:** Both. It's both. Mhm.

**PB:** So, I wanna take us away from that line of questioning, if that's okay.

**TK:** It's quite depressing. [laughs]

**PB:** Yes. So I wanna ask a question that I think might be an interest of Martina [Guzmán] 'cause she does the fellowship program for young journalists of color. What...what lessons would you share with aspiring journalists that are seeking to get involved in exposing and opposing injustice in the region?

**TK:** Go to community meetings. Yes. That's where--the one thing we always asked reporters to do, go to a community meeting because you learn that there's some BS-ers in the community and then there is some, you know, and you learn what you hear and see and feel what the real issues are. And, you don't get it by calling up somebody after a meeting and, you know, somebody on a, you know, that's the

president of the organization. Well, he may be, but that's not...may not be who you really wanna talk to. Go to meetings.

[1:35:14]

**PB:** Do you have any questions that are coming to your mind?

**OY:** That mostly answers everything I can think of. [laughs]

**PB:** One thing we've been asking everyone is--this kinda like a survey part--is we wanna have...we wanna come away from this series of interviews with an idea about how people are envisioning a more equitable society or equitable city or just city. So, if we're looking in--if you're looking into the future or looking into ideals, like, what's your vision for an equitable Detroit?

**TK:** Honest elections, number one. There should be provision in the law that mandates public media to accommodate candidates. Candidates shouldn't have to reach into their pocket for money. There should be time permitted on TV that--news for everybody running for an office. That would be a start. The--get away from the idea that a private business can do a better job than a government agency. I mean, there's so much corruption in that, just that concept. The charter schools. They're all, "Well, it's a non-profit charter." Pfft. It's still--they're setting their own salaries. They're deciding where they buy their own textbooks. They're, you know. It's private, it's not public, and there is a value to public oversight, and that needs to be restored, the belief of--in it and its value and the practice of public oversight. See, I'm turning to all these government institutions to sell what I'm saying is the problem. That's three ways right there to start.

[1:37:23]

**PB:** So, when...when you're looking at the media landscape in Detroit today--we don't need to go into, like, you know, how bad it is--but where do you see...who or what do you see filling the void that the Citizen left?

**TK:** Nobody. But aside from that, I'm impressed by a couple of reports the Detroit Free Press has done recently. They've been in-depth. They've been extensive, and I was--'cause I just stopped reading it. I mean, it was so ridiculous. There was really no reason to. But, the report that--I'm trying to think of what they were about, but they were important. One was about the--after the banners flew yesterday over the game, there was an in-depth report about that doctor and her non-profit and the mayor and the connection and the use of city money in the process. And then, when...there was one about... Oh, yes. The foreclo--the county treasurer. Yes, that story was well done, I thought, and in-depth and--So, that was heartening. That was heartening.

But, I really had tuned out. I didn't read the Free Press. I read the New York Times every morning, sit at my breakfast table and read the Free Pr--and I have issues with it. I read the Washington Post online, but I don't read like I used to. I can't read the long articles. It's--I don't know if I'm like the young people and so influenced by the screen, or if it's just age, but--or interest--but I don't read like I used to read stories.

[1:39:10]

**PB:** So, I guess that logically flows into a question about an increasingly digital world, a screenified world. What's the role of print journalism?

**TK:** Oh, I think it's needed. Well, at least reporters are needed, and there has to be a way like how the ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union] here does with Curt Guyette. I think that's a model. But, foundations and nonprofits are dangerous too. I mean, if you look at the role of Skillman [Foundation] in destroying Detroit Public Schools, you step back from that, but--that's one way. I think that that kind of relationship, a non-profit putting on an investigative reporter. But, you know, hey, we had our limitations and prejudices, and, you know, there was certain

people we wouldn't talk to if we, you know, thought it would be--So, every...if it's human, there are limitations.

**PB:** As a historian, I'm usually thinking to like the connections across time in particular themes. And so, what I really wanna ask is how you see the Michigan Citizen's place within this incredible history of Black newspapers. You know, we can think back to the North Star. We can think into like the Amsterdam News, Liberator Magazine. Where...how do you, when you're thinking about, like, your work in Michigan Citizen, how do you connect the Michigan Citizen within that legacy?

**TK:** Oh, I'll leave that to the historians. I'm gonna duck it. I don't... You know, it's different. There was a book put out--you know The [Chicago] Defender in Chicago? There was--they had a white editor, and he wrote a book. White...White on Black, or something like that [appears to be *The Defender: How the Legendary Black Newspaper Changed America* by Ethan Michaeli, although the title is quite different]. I have it on my shelf to read someday, but it's...that's been an issue, you know. I don't mean it as a contentious issue, but it has come up at different times over the life of the paper. I don't know. If you're struggling to, you know, help people get free, and I think information is one thing that helps, so. But all humankind needs to get free, you know?

[1:41:44]

**PB:** So, you said that you've been active in the water struggle. What is your involvement with--like, since the Homrich action that you're telling us about?

**TK:** Oh, I haven't done much. The actions kind of stopped, and we talk about it occasionally, like, "What can we do?" And if there was an action going on, I'd get in it. But, I haven't really... I kinda went home and collapsed. [laughs] I've tried 38 years. I was really tired.

**PB:** Understandably so. I can imagine that being a grind.

**TK:** Yes. Oh, yes. Sometimes, yeah. Sometimes it was a really exhilarating and exciting and tried to keep it that way, but there were times also it's just like, "If I could just stay home!"

**PB:** So, on those days how did you...

**TK:** Go to work? Get up and go to work? [laughs] What else do you do?

**PB:** So, I wanna wind this down. Is there any--we covered a lot of ground, a lot of different topics. Are there any, like, stories or topics that we didn't discuss that you want to bring up or get on...onto this record?

**TK:** Yeah, you were pretty inclusive. Right off the bat, I can't think of any.

**PB:** And, you mentioned Jerry Goldberg. Are there any other folks that are coming to mind that we need to be speaking with to get the story straight on this?

**TK:** Emergency management? Jerry Goldberg is important because he understood the finances that they used to, you know, subvert, and he was the only lawyer in court in the bankruptcy fighting against what they were doing, and he's with Moratorium NOW! He fought foreclosures. Still fighting foreclosures. He's become like an expert in foreclosure law, defends a lot of people. He defended us. We sued for the [Walter] Shoulders Report. That was when Diane [Bukowski] had been writing these stories about the killer cop, Eugene Brown, and there was a re...a directive to Walter Shoulders, a chief, one of the chief officers in the Police Department, to do a study on what Eugene's record was really, and we FOIA'd [Freedom of Information Act] for it, you know. They denied it. So, we went all the way to Michigan Supreme Court fighting for it, and Jerry Goldberg was our attorney. We weren't successful even though he got up, and, you know, the Republicans and the right wing-love what was the intent of the law makers, and he could read right from the legislative record to the court and what their intent





what was it in your life or what experience did you have that, I guess, caused you to want to, I guess, go against the grain?

**TK:** Fight evil?

**HT:** Yeah.

**TK:** You know, I've thought about that a lot, what radicalized me, and part of it is being married to a Black man and being a white--having white privilege in a...this country, and you see--I mean, I just marvel at what Black folks have endured. That's one thing for sure.

But as a young person, I was a, you know, in high school, I was--there was one incident. I had an alcoholic father. So, we were poor a lot. I mean, really poor. We lived in this apartment building, all seven of us in one little cramped room, and I was babysitting my brother. He was 10 years younger than I was, and there was--between the sidewalk and the building, there was a strip like this of dirt, and he was digging in the dirt. I was standing there, and this car pulled up, and it was a--this is back in the [19]50s. I graduated from high school in [19]57. It was back in the [19]50s, and there was this plush car, and it was this man and the woman in the car, older--this was Sioux Falls, South Dakota--and they sta...they sat there in that car looking at us, and the look that they gave us... You know, you get marginalized, that's where you get radicalized. And that look, just something about that look, just turned something in me and really made me angry, made me want to defend my little brother. I've just never forgotten. It was something about that...just that look. Crazy, but that was it.

[1:48:01]

**HT:** Thank you.

**PB:** I guess one other question that comes to mind, if you don't mind. We're asking this to to Shea [Howell] and Bill Wylie-Kellermann and Tom [Pedroni? Stephens?], too. What advice would you give to white folks that are, you know...

**TK:** Shut up and listen. Shut up and listen. I mean, that's really it. Yeah, they had a...they have an unsettling thing going on with the charter commission right now, and it's a very good person, white lady, but she's on a team. Well, if you're on a team, you do what the team wants to do, and you don't try to--you don't think that you know more or think that your way is better. You shut up and listen.

**PB:** Well, thank you.

**TK:** Mhm. What did they say?

**PB:** Well, that was part of it. I'm trying to think back...

[1:49:04]

**TK:** How are you going to publicize this--these?

**PB:** So, that's still to be determined.

**TK:** Oh, okay.

**PB:** The idea is that this is all going to be publicly accessible. We'll have an archive, an online archive, that people can watch the full-length interviews, and also we're thinking about how we can best use these personal narratives to work on broader narrative change in the city. So, we started developing like broader project structures to think about how we can use this kind of media production in service of, say, a particular campaign or building educational curricula for advocacy,

thinking how we can--like, if that looks like the two-minute explainer videos you see online about particular topics. Like, I could envision us making a short video about just compiling clips of people's [tape cuts out] "What's your vision for an equitable Detroit? What's your vision for the future of Detroit?" to encourage popular radical imagination. So, those kind of things. But, the idea being that we want these kind of stories, these kind of voices to be what's defining narratives in the city.

**TK:** 'Cause your one question about how to get people engaged, you know, and fight back against this, that's the key one.

**PB:** That's what we've been spending a lot of time in these conversations talking about and trying to find out is what are those conversations that organizers are having in their communities, like, how...what's the process by which people get engaged and activated so that we can then draw lessons from that work that's already been done and then replicate or learn from it.

**TK:** Yeah, my husband always said, you know, if--that was the reason for the paper was that if people have good information, they make good decisions, and it's hard to get good information, especially when there's so much today and kids aren't being taught, given analytic skills, you know. There's that inability, you know. People--so much information washes over, but how to pick and look at it is gone. I miss him.

**PB:** It's interesting what you said earlier when I asked about how...what you see as like impacts and influences of the paper, and what you mentioned was that sometimes you don't see what the impacts were. Are you familiar with *Liberator Magazine*? So, Pete Beveridge said the exact same thing about *Liberator*. Even now when he's looking back at--he's about 95 probably now--that's exactly what his position was. He's like, "I...you know, we did all this work, but these systems remain."

**TK:** Yes, the systems are the--yup.

**PB:** So, that just struck me.

**TK:** I always think of the--there's a Black university in Oklahoma [Langston University]--forget the name of it--but I remember--this was way back in the [19]80s after the integration and all of those struggles, and some Ph.D. did his thesis on--and they published it--on systems and how even though your community may be integrated, your banking staff may have Black faces, white faces mixed, but that you go to the bank, and it's a Black teller, and that Black teller has no more power than when it was a white teller, and that it was...it's the system in place that, you know, all the good old bank and the white president can relate to the white business man, but the Black business man, right away there's suspicion. There's, you know, a guard, and, you know, is he trying to scam me? All that. So, you can change pe...personnel, but the system stays.

**PB:** And that's--I mean, the work that we're doing, we're trying to encourage that more popular analysis of the system. Like, looking at structural racism, looking at systems to see past the superficial level and to like really think critically about systems change.

**TK:** But, the young people, they...they inspire me. They do. I mean, all across the country, you know. It's just...I never used to take too much to heart, but I guess I'm old enough now that young people give me heart 'cause I see, you know, I see they're not taking the crap, many of 'em. Not all, but most. Thank you.