

**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

**Helen Moore**

Interviewed by

PETER BLACKMER AND ORIANA YILMA

March 2, 2019

Detroit, MI

## Narrator

Helen Moore is a long-time organizer in the fight for equal and quality education in Detroit. She has organized on the issue of education for over 50 years and is known for her tireless efforts and creative tactics. Moore is the state director of the Michigan chapter of the National Action Network. She is also a co-founder of the Detroit organization Keep the Vote/No Takeover and a member of the Journey to Justice coalition based out of Chicago.

## Interviewer

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

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

## Abstract

In this interview, Helen Moore tells us her perspective of where we are in the fight for education in Detroit and beyond. Moore shares in detail the journey that Detroit Public Schools (DPS) traveled including time spent under emergency management and the long-term consequences of the state takeover. Moore shares with us foundational struggles and wins made by organizers, specifically from an organization she co-founded called Keep the Vote/No Takeover. She shares lessons learned from her decades of experience with organizing and key strategies as we move forward in the fight for equal and quality education for Detroit.

## Keywords

1943 Detroit race riot; Aliya Moore; Charter schools; Detroit Public Schools; Detroit, Michigan; Education; Education Achievement Authority; Emergency management; Journey for Justice Alliance; Keep the Vote/No Takeover; Let's Read program; Right to literacy lawsuit; Yolanda Peoples

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Detroit Equity Action Lab  
Damon J. Keith Center for Civil Rights  
Wayne State University Law School  
Detroit, MI

Transcript of interview conducted March 2, 2019 with:

Helen Moore [HM]

Detroit, MI

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

**HM:** My name is Helen Moore, and I live in Detroit, Michigan, and I'm associated with National Action Network. I'm the director of the state of Michigan, and I'm also with the coalition for Keep the Vote/No Takeover that deals with education problems in the city of Detroit.

[0:00:27]

**PB:** I want to take you back a little bit. Could you describe the neighborhood when you were growing up in Detroit?

**HM:** Well, all the way back to when I came here when I was three years old, I lived on Buchanan. And, it was a neighborhood with only about four Black families in that neighborhood, and we were the only Black family that went to Chaney [Elementary] School. It was during the time that the first riot broke out, and we were part of that riot. So, I think that kind of shaped my life because of what my family and I went through and the other people that lived in the apartment building with us. I was five years old, in kindergarten, and the whites in the community broke out with guns and bats and all kinds of things to get rid of us in their school, Chaney School. It's probably all history now. You probably can read about it.

And so, we were locked in by the principal. My brothers and sisters and I were locked in by the principal, and the other Black families that were in our building, the only building Black building in that whole community. And as I looked through the door and saw all these angry white people looking at us and trying to harm us, the principal stood with us and nobody came to rescue us. They called us all kind of names, and they were really ready to kill us. And as we looked out the door about two, three hours later, my father and the people in the building, the fathers of the children, came down the street with their rifles on their shoulders, and they were able to take us out of the building without us being harmed. But, we could not walk through the white community. We had to walk all the way around to the Latino community to get to our house, and that's when the riots started. And, I think it had bearing on my actions today and what I do with our Black children, Brown children and how much I fight for them.

[0:02:41]

**PB:** Could you talk a little bit more about that in terms of how that moment has shaped the work that you're doing now?

**HM:** Well, it's very hard for a little five-year-old child and brothers and sister of seven, nine, 11, and 13 standing at the door waiting for someone to save us, very difficult when you're looking out at all the anger that was going on. And so when we got home, I was really molded into what I knew I had to do in my life at the early age of five. And so right after that--this will give you an example of what happened. My family came here to Detroit because my dad wanted to work for Ford Motor Company. And so, we all came up here expecting a better life and everything, but after that happened and there was so much commotion in the streets with like my cousins were trying to get on the trolley at that time and they were beat down and everybody was getting hit in the head and all this, and I'm sitting there listening to all of this.

So when things quieted down and all these folks got murdered and killed in the streets, I went back to school with a different attitude. I was the only Black child in my class, and I thought I was real smart, and everybody else thought I was smart too. So, there was a girl in my class named Helen. My name is Helen. She was

white. I was Black. Report cards came out. Took my report card home and looked on it, and I saw that I had one failing grade, took it to my mother and father. And, you know, when you're from the South and you're in the midst of all of this that's going on, you have a different attitude, but I guess I was pretty militant at the age of five or six years old. So, I told my dad, "This is not my grade. I did not get that bad grade." They said, "We know you didn't, but you just gon to have to understand that's the way it is. All your teachers are white. Everybody is white, and this is the way it is."

I'm angry. I get up the next morning. I take my report card to the teacher--my parents signed it--take my report card to the teacher, and I said, "Miss whatever-her-name-is, this is not my grade. You gave me the wrong grade. Apparently, you gave me Helen's grade because she's dumb and I'm not." Now, this is the way I started off as a little girl. And, she looked at me, and she looked at the grade and said, "You're right. That is not your grade." I ran home after school shouting all the way down the white neighborhood to my house and went in the house and told my parents, "I told you that that was not my grade," and they hugged me and apologized and said, "You'll understand one day why we did what we did." So, that was the beginning.

[0:05:59]

**PB:** So from that early start of more or less raising hell in school, what was your first jumping-off point for actually getting into organized activity or organized protest?

**HM:** I went to another school that was called the High School of Commerce. Only certain people could be accepted. I guess I was militant then because at that school I became the president of the class. The majority of the people were white. I became the president of the 12B and the vice president of the 12A at the High School of Commerce back in [19]54. And then, I went to Wayne State University, which you're sitting right in the middle of campus, and the first year was a terrible year. Very few of us Blacks were in the class, and my grades were like Cs, and one of the professors and I had it out. He gave me a C. I wrote this beautiful essay--I thought it was beautiful. I took it to him. I said, "Why is it that you always give me

a C?" And he said, "C is for colored," and I said, "C is for colored?" And he said, "Yes, you'll never get anything higher than a C." Well, that destroyed my whole everything, and I left school after the first year.

And then the next year, I got married, and I had four children, raised four children in Detroit. Soon, we left for Texas College. My husband taught there. Then, we came back because we were always in the middle of something. We were in the middle of the president getting assassinated down in Texas, in Dallas [Texas], and everybody was up in arms. So, we took our three little children, and we went to Dallas, and my husband got a job there, and we raised enough money to come back to Detroit.

And then, the journey continued from Detroit. After I had these children, I made sure I was in the schools all the time. I volunteered. I made sure they got the proper education. Back then it wasn't choice as we know it now, but I as a parent had a choice. If I went to this class and the teacher wasn't doing what she was supposed to do with my children, I had choice. You take my children out of that class, or you do something with the teacher. You make sure that you go to Miss Smith's class because she's teaching and doing a good job, and that's how I had choice. It wasn't necessary to go through all these changes we're going through now with the children because actually all it is is to place us into second-class citizenship and to turn us into a Black community that has no rights and no power. Split us up, disunify us, and we're in trouble.

So, I fight the Detroit schools and all of the things that Betsy DeVos and the president [Donald Trump] and all these vouchers and everything, and we won. Almost every fight, we won. Every time we win, they change the law. Check it out. Every time we win--took us 18 years to get our elected school board back. Now, 18 years and we never stopped. We even went to the Supreme Court in 2000, filed a class action case. We went to the Supreme Court saying that we wanted our right to vote back, and we wanted to maintain a traditional public school. At that time, Kwame Kilpatrick was the mayor. He was a little different than what we thought he should be, and he was sort of supporting like Johnny Engler, the governor at that time, and they were helping on taking our rights from us and making sure we were second-class citizens.

So, I told them when I went to Lansing [Michigan] to fight for our children in the gallery every day and every night, “We don't do second-class citizenship, and you got a fight on your hand with us.” If you look up the history, you'll see us fighting for our children's right, and you'll probably see me throwing tea bags on the top of the heads of the legislators, the racist legislators that were under us, when I'm shouting out, “No Justice, no Peace.” That is something you can pull up. Of course, they said, “Arrest her.” They always say arrest me. It doesn't scare me. So, the Muslim folks that were with us said, “You put your hands on her, you got a fight on your hand.” So, they threw us out the building. We stayed downstairs in an office that they didn't know where we were. And all night long, they went through this process of trying to make sure they took our rights to vote in our school system from us. We stayed there all night. And in the middle of the night, they passed the law. We did not stop fighting all those years to get our right to vote back and maintain our school system.

And, we're still doing that today, even though they returned everything again and again. Every time, we win. Four months later, they changed the law. Every time, we win. That's how they were after us not having the same rights as white people in the suburban schools have. They keep their schools. They maintain their schools, but the Black and Brown children in cities like Detroit and all over the United States are always fighting for their rights to be first class citizen and for their children to have the same kind of school and the same kind of education. Maybe not the same kind, but the education that is right for our children.

So, I also belong to an organization that is an alliance across the United States, and it's called Journey for Justice Alliance. It is situated in Chicago, Illinois. We just had a conference a week ago, and it all ended up where we all went to Chicago. 34 school districts across the United States telling the same story in different stages of takeovers, and it ended with us not finishing our conference because it was so strong and so horrible that all of us started crying. Men, women, children started crying over how our children had been treated in the United States of America in our school system, which we believe the path to freedom is through education. That is what we stand on. So, we all left there, and I was drained when I was left there. They had to put a whole box of Kleenex in front of me, and I'm tough. I don't cry. I just grow and multiply people. I don't cry.



But at that session when I heard what all these folks were going through and their children, especially Mississippi--we had the niece of Fannie Lou Hamer and her daughter and the daughter's daughter, little baby, were in the room with us. They all told their story. They say, "You got two and a half minutes to tell your story." Everybody started talking and telling what had happened to them, even the Night Riders down in Mississippi in this day and age. What kind of crap is that, to go after children and people that are human beings? All we want is an education for our children so they can be free. And so, they told their stories. The parent told their stories. After about three stories, I couldn't take it no more. They got fired from their jobs. They couldn't make it with their children. Some of their children aren't in school, go to--let me see. Where was the worst story that I heard?

[0:14:08]

I guess it was Florida, Mississippi, Louisiana where they got all charter schools. You got to get a slip or something, a lottery, for your child to go to school. And then, they told us about how their children had to go out in the boondock like 15, 20 miles from their school. So, the kids got up--well, they got on the bus at six o'clock in the morning. They had to ride all the way around these different plantations--probably nowadays you call it farm--and they would have to pick up John over here, Miss Lucy's child over here. So when they got to school, it was eight o'clock. Then when they got out, they had to do the same thing. And when they got home, it was six o'clock in the evening. How you gon do your homework, eat your food, do all the things that's necessary to be a family, and go to bed and get back up and do the same thing over and over? If that's not slavery, I don't know what is.

So, that's where we are now. That's with Journey for Justice Alliance. Now, we flip back to Helen coming back to Detroit, Michigan. It never stopped. It never ceases. You can never rest. What we're working on now in Detroit is a law that was put in place while we didn't have our rights back, and that law was put in place by the Republicans that said--'cause we're fighting them so much and winning--they said, "Okay, we'll put a stipulation in a law on those children in Detroit. If they don't pass the third grade in reading literacy, then we will retain them." Now, here we are fighting. We filed another lawsuit. It is national. It's called the Literacy Lawsuit.

It's--our lawyer is Mr. [Mark] Rosenbaum, California, one of the best-known lawyers. His daughter worked with us in Detroit and a whole lot of other things. So, Mr. Rosenbaum stepped in to appeal the case because--guess what?--the court said that children do not have the right to literacy because it's not spelled out in the Constitution of the United States of America. The words are not there. So, in other words, because the words are not there, you don't have the right to literacy, and you can look this up. It's the gospel truth.

So, I'm angry. I said, "How can we read and our children read and progress if they don't have the right to read?" That's like back when it was a...it was a crime for Black people to read, and they hid themselves under haystacks, and sometimes some of the white folks would help them read. But if they got caught, they were killed or other punishment. Here we are, 2000, you know, 2018, [20]19, and they're saying we don't have a right to read. So, guess what we did? And, this just happened. We had our hands so full with everything going on with education: getting our right to vote back, establishing our people for the committees, all of those things, fighting the new board, saying, "You not coming in here doing the same thing these takeover folks did. You're going to do what we say."

So, I got thrown out of the meeting. You'll see it on television. It's only been three months ago--three months ago, or four months ago? They told me I had to leave, and I said, "I'm not going anywhere," and they said, "Well, arrest her." I said, "Here we go again." So, the police came. I'm sitting up in front. I figured they were lying, and I didn't see the police coming behind me, and they grabbed me up without my purse, and they started pulling me up the steps, and the whole audience got up and said, "You better take your hands off of her." Thank God I've lived good so that people will protect me. And, they came from all over, and they broke up the meeting. And guess what happened? The new board came running across the stage since they were the ones who told the police to come and arrest me, and they ran out when they saw all these people standing up ready for a riot, and they said, "Take your hands off of her." And, I looked at them and said, "You're the ones that said, 'Arrest me,'" and they said, "No, don't arrest her." So, they took me back in, and I'm sitting there saying, "This is so confusing," and the meeting was adjourned.

But the next meeting, JoAnn Watson, city council member, people all over the city--the gallery was full. The whole place was full. We lined up. They said, "Don't you say a word. We're going to stand up for you," and they said, "Don't you put your hands on her anymore. Don't you arrest her. Don't you do anything. She's standing up for our children." Now, how has it changed since then?

I just told you about the third grade reading test, retainment test. Guess what? We went to the new superintendent from Florida, Dr. [Nikolai] Vitti. He is white, but he has Black children and a Black wife, and I'm always letting him know that this is a different world. You have Black children. You're in Detroit. You came from Florida. You have to stand with us because your children are Black. You must not forget that. And so, we went to Dr. Vitti. We said, "They have this law. You're new here. Maybe you've forgotten, but almost two years have passed, and the law clicks in next year. We have to teach our children how to read, third graders down to Kindergarten."

So, he says, "Come on into a meeting," and he met with us, myself and Dr. [John] Peoples, and we had a long conversation about what it means to us for our children to read. And, he accepted the program, and it shows you when you been out here as long as I have--I had all these books called Let's Read that was done by a Black woman that worked for the Michigan Chronicle [June Brown Garner] back then to help our children. And, the workbooks, I looked 'em up. I brought 'em to him. And, he looked at them, and he said, "This has got Hooked on Phonics, and it changed the system back then," and I knew it would change the system now.

So, we organized a whole community again, got the retired teachers. We got Black and white folks. We got parents and everybody. This is recent. I'm taking you all through the whole journey. Everybody is working together. We have posters all over the city. We have all kinds of meetings, and we just had one at Northwestern High School. I wish you could see what's happening in Detroit. Everyone is joining together. We have changed from throwing Helen Moore in jail to Helen Moore is leading, and Dr. Peoples and Keep the Vote and National Action Network are leading the Let's Read program, and it is turning out just great. So, I'm up to now.

**PB:** Thank you.

**HM:** You're welcome.

**PB:** That's a lot, I think, for all of us to digest. I want to take us back to the takeover in [19]99.

**HM:** Okay, you want me to tell all the stuff in [19]99?

**PB:** Well, what I want to start with is kind of why the schools were taken over by the state and then getting into the work that you all were doing organizing against the takeover. Does that sound like a good direction to take?

**HM:** Yeah, I got you. The schools were taken over in 1999 because we had money. There was over a hundred million dollars in our coffers. We also were rising in the test scores. All of this is history. In fact, I have the whole story. Somebody gave me a plaque with the whole story on it, and I carry it around with me. There was no need to take over the school system, but because there was money involved and because a group of people felt it necessary to stop us to maintain our children being second-class citizens, they took over the school, and they did a good job of that because many of our people didn't understand what was really happening.

And, we were out there in the neighborhood trying to tell them don't vote for this millage they're setting up, too. They set up a millage in the last minute, and many of our people said, "Oh, that's wonderful for Detroit." It was 1.5 million dollars on top of the money we had. You dangle 1.5 million dollars in front of corporations, in front of businesses in a Black community for repairing schools, building new schools, and what do you have? Greed. I'm running around saying, "Don't vote for it. They're going to take over our school system." I swear it's on record. If you vote for that type of money and we don't have all the interest in what we're going to do with that money and you're not a part of it, they're going to take over it. And

sure enough, that's exactly what they did. They took our school system over. We hired three managers of that money. None of them except one Black company got any of it. It was taken over by Barton Malow. They paid themselves like one million dollars a month. They took our school system. They did what they wanted to, and then we ended up in debt.

So now, we're in trouble. Now, the state is saying, "Hahaha," and Engler was part of it, the governor was. That was his boys. They helped him with his campaign. So now, they're saying, "Okay, they're really in debt," and that's when the trouble began. So then, we had to file a lawsuit. We got our lawyers together, and we met, a group of lawyers met, we filed, and it went all the way to Supreme Court. The Supreme Court said, "Well, Detroit is like Cleveland [Ohio]." At the same time, Cleveland was going through this. And so, there's a proposal, a proposal for it that Kwame Kilpatrick and some of his guys put together. And so, "If Detroit goes back to home, we won't do anything about it because they can vote on whether they want an elected board, and they want all this good stuff that they're suing us about."

So, it returns to Detroit. Here we are in the middle of this whole mess. So, what did we do? We organized the whole state of Michigan. We sent our white comrades to the white districts, and we took care of the Black districts. And guess what happened? The state of Michigan voted. 67 percent of the State of Michigan voted we want elected boards in the State of Michigan, and we won. Hallelujah. Thank God, we won. Four months later, the governor changes the law, and they take over our school system with appointed board, and the dean of Wayne State University was on that board, and several other people that were with them on that board, and we were taken over.

So, what happened? We fought. Every school board meeting, we got beat up. Folks got thrown in jail, and they found out if they threw me in jail, they threw me out of meetings in the jail, too many people come to the jail. So, they would take me and my people out of the school board meetings, and they would throw me aside, and they would arrest them, and I'm banging on the police doors saying, "I need to be jailed," and they said, "No, you're not going to be jailed." So then, we organized the entire community and said, "Our people are in jail." They came to

the jail. It was the biggest thing you've ever seen in the city of Detroit. And, we had to go to court often, but they threw--all our cases finally got thrown out.

In the meantime, we're taken over. So all these years, we're fighting appointed boards, people that didn't care about spending our money, emergency managers for--and one of them is being indicted in Flint [Michigan] for the water pollution and all that. These are the kind of people they put over our children, corporation people. Mr. [Roy] Roberts that was--I don't know. He worked for some General Motors. Didn't know what they were doing, took our money, more money. We were already in debt that they put us in and caused us to have today three billion dollars in debt. Why did they turn the school system back over to us? We continued to go to Lansing. We talked to all the legislators. We made trouble for everybody. Go home. Every time, we kept coming back. Every time they had the education meeting, we were there.

Finally, something broke for us, and guess what it was? Their own doing. They had taken over 15 schools in Detroit. Emergency managers and all them were taking over. It was called the EAA, Education Achievement Authority, ran those schools. So, we kept saying, "Why are you giving our children a standardized test? They're school system people. Why aren't you giving them standardized tests?" Finally, we won. They had to give them a standardized test, and guess what happened? All the thousands of children that were in the emergency education authority schools--and some of them were charter--flunked it but one little child in the third grade. That's all we needed. Went back to Lansing, called Coleman Young, Senator Coleman Young, got all our people together, and we just stood up and said, "But Governor, but legislators, but racists, only one child under your school system that you put up in Detroit passed the standardized test." Everywhere we went, we said that. And guess what happened? They finally folded, and they gave us our system back just a few years ago, and that's where we are now, trying to rebuild our system.

[0:30:22]

**PB:** So, what--could you tell about the formation of your organization Keep the Vote/No Takeover, how that came about, who was involved, what some of the organizing work looked like on a day-to-day basis?

**HM:** I can't name all the organizations. It was like--at that time, it was like 27 different organizations. Black Parents for Quality Education, which I led, was one, and we met at the Inner City Sub Center on the East side. JoAnn Watson and all the organizations that were like civil rights organizations, we met together, and we organized around the issue of school takeover, and we met like once a week and whenever there was a problem with the schools. We all helped each other. We were very unified. And so, it started in--let me see--1999, and it's continued till today. We have our meetings on the first Tuesday of every month, and we're now meeting at the Dexter-Elmhurst Center, and I'm the chairperson of that board at the Dexter-Elmhurst Center.

So, that's how we got started, and that's how we continue. Lots of activist parents, Malcolm X Academy, Aliya Moore over here at King High School, Yolanda Peoples. We got activists that really mean business with children in the schools, and they say, "Well, Miss Moore, you're too old to have children in the school," and I said, "All these children are mine," but what they don't know, I got a grandson in preschool. I got a niece over there at Cody [High School]--I don't tell them all this stuff--and I have children in the Detroit Public Schools from my church. I am the choir director. Well, I was, but I retired. I played the piano for the junior church. These kids are in Detroit Public Schools. I look out for their interests because isn't that what we supposed to do? So when they throw that in my face, "Go sit down. You're too old. You don't have any children," everybody has children. You pay taxes in Detroit Public School. So, don't you want me to make sure they have the best education that they could get? So, please don't attack me for being my age and being out there so long. These are all our children, and it's all our responsibility to make sure we do everything we can for them in order for them to have a good life. And so, shut up and go about your business and don't bother me no more. So, that's where we are now.

[0:33:06]

[jump cut]

**HM:** Okay, so you asked me the question?

**PB:** In your analysis, why was the city of Detroit placed under emergency management?

**HM:** Why was Detroit Public Schools taken over by emergency managers? Now, you got to remember, all the other Black schools all through the years just before they were taking us over, they were taking them over. In fact, Inkster [Michigan] doesn't even have a public school, but they still pay taxes, and we're helping them. They're part of our coalition. They wanted to make sure that we didn't succeed. We just kept whipping. See, people think we failed. The reason we are in the situation we were in is because we would win, and then they would change the law and do something different. So, they brought in people that they could control, didn't know anything about education. Check all of them out. They didn't know nothing about how to educate children and especially Black and brown children. So, they had no intention of making sure that our kids got an education.

All they wanted to do was make sure that our system went down, the enrollment dropped--and it did--and that they could put in charter schools because in charter schools, you break up a whole school district, and you only really pollute the Black and brown school districts. Now, some white suburban districts have charter schools which they chose, but you'll see in our district that it...it's dominated by charter schools. So, half of our traditional public schools--like, we went up in enrollment. When we killed the EAA, we're going up in enrollment. That's bothering them. And then, you have the same amount of children in charter schools. So, it should be 100,000 children in Detroit Public Schools, which means that the funding for our children should've gone in one pot like it used to be. They found a way to fool the parents and tell them, "These are better schools. You're going through all this stuff with Detroit Public Schools, so why don't you just do what we say and bring your children to the suburb or send them to the charter schools?" Charter schools are failing. They don't want to talk about that charter schools are closing, no accountability. So, the plan they set up is backfiring on them. If you do your research right, you will check it out, and you will see some of



the people in the churches that took and started charter schools. They ran out of funds, and they had to close some of them at the last minute.

We're holding to the dream, which is to build up our traditional public schools like they have in Grosse Pointe [Michigan], like they have in all the white districts surrounding us. We want our own school system, and we want to make it magnificent again like it was when I was growing up. That's all we're after. Just leave us alone. If some people want to go to charter schools because they don't understand what's going on and they want to be treated like second-class citizens, we can't stop that. But, those of us that are staying here and want to build our school system up so it can be magnificent and take care of the business that needs to be taken care of, where our children can be free and they can have the kind of education that they need--and that might entail Black studies and all that so they will know who they are, where they came from, and how they can get over in this world--we say, "You're welcome." So, that's what we're doing now. We're building a system, and the struggle continues.

[0:36:51]

**PB:** So, what would you say--over these past 20 years since the 1999 takeover, how has that state action impacted not just the Detroit Public School System but the city in general?

**HM:** Look at the city. I hope you drive around, go near closed schools, see the blight, see how the community had to leave. We kept telling them, "This will destroy our city," way back then. People will move. They will leave, and they will go where they can find a school system where they can walk, or they will get a charter and now get a bus where the kids can go to school. The law says they have to be in school till a certain age. So, they destroyed their own city, and now we're spending millions and trillions of dollars still trying to build us back up, and it's still not a city for us in our neighborhoods. The blight is all around us in our neighborhoods. We don't have the grocery stores we used to have. They destroyed us, and they're going around in the city of Detroit, and I talk to the Mayor [Mike Duggan]. I know he wants me to like him, but I don't like people who take advantage of the least of these, and that's what's happening. They have

money. They are taking over the schools, and he's involved in schools. I already told you all that, but they're taking over everything.

And then, they're telling us, "We're building this beautiful city." For whom? That's the question. I'm not moving out of my neighborhood, and I'm trying to help people to build it up. I'm staying there. I want our neighborhoods to grow, and I want our children to have decent housing, houses, and schools. I want us to reopen some of the schools we closed. That's the way I want to go. That's not their way. Their way is gentrification, get rid of these Black folks, especially these poor folks, and make sure that they don't have anything in their neighborhoods that they can use or benefits them. So, Detroit is not benefitting. The only people that are benefitting is the rich and the folks downtown. On our neighborhoods, we're still suffering. On some blocks, there's only one house still left, and they're talking about maybe they won't do the water, all that stuff, lights and all that. So, it's not over. We're still at war.

[0:39:39]

**PB:** So, one of the things I was hearing you talk about earlier was the struggle for an elected school board as opposed to appointing. For folks that might not have a clear understanding of why that's so important, could you just explain that?

**HM:** Because they're supposed to represent us. The school board is so important to our cities and our people. They actually have the power, if they use it, to represent the children and the community that pays taxes, and everything they do should benefit the people in the city. It is very important that they understand. But since they changed the school board from 11 down to seven--they're always minimizing everything--and people that's on the school board, many of them, are folks that they put on. We have a few that we put on, and we're going to make sure--next year when we vote again--we're going to make sure our people are on the school board. They want to make sure that they keep the status quo, and when they dictate to these school board people that they put on, they hope and pray that they will listen to them instead of us, the community, the children and people who pay taxes.

So, we still have a battle, but I think I'm getting to some of the school board people. You can change people, you know. You can make them feel like they are wrong. A few of them go to church, and so you can put the fear of God in them. There's always a method in my madness. There's always a method. And so now with the third grade retention program and bringing in these people including the school board people and we're all just working together for the benefit of our babies, how could you go against that?

[0:41:46]

**PB:** So when you say that all these individuals and all these organizations are getting together, what does that look like? How are you bringing folks together for this collective struggle?

**HM:** Well, you just use the fact that the children would be harmed. Let me give you an example. If a third grader in Detroit is in a class with all these other students, and they're all getting together real well and everything, and all of a sudden, you take a test, and then you are the one that fails the test. Now, how many of us know our children teasing, doing some of the things that we tell them not to do? What do you think is going to happen to that child and the way they feel about themselves? We know they can read because we proved it before. I'll give you an example of what happened several years ago. We know they can read if you give them the attention, give them the support, but if they fail and they are only one, then they're isolated, and they're going to be treated badly by their fellow students. We trying to help them get over doing their fellow students the wrong way, but children do stuff like that.

So, we're trying to save those children that might be in jeopardy of failing, and it's called retention, and the only reason they put that law in place--let me tell you why--because we were--enrollment was coming up. We were doing our thing, but they wanted to make sure they could use it as a weapon and an instrument. See, these little Black, brown children, they dumb and stupid. They can't read, so we got to close some more schools. How many kids are affected? 3,000. How many schools would that be? Maybe six. You understand what I'm saying?

So, we study these things whenever an issue comes up. What is the harm? What is the advantage? And we said, "No, not in our days, not with our children." So in one year, if these children don't pass that reading test--unless Plan B is initiated, and I'm not going to tell you what Plan B. There's always something that we can do to help our children, and we don't just do one thing, action. We do several. So, we have a Plan B. But in the meantime, the law is still on the books. And next year, we're going to try to make sure that all our children read by the third grade, and it's working real well. And if they catch on to what we're doing, they'll probably come up with another law. But, I think we got enough support in places, high places, that are now listening and are being put into political positions and understand what we're all about, and they are supporting us. It's a new day, and we are going to make sure that our children are finally free. Maybe not in my lifetime, but sooner or later. It's going to happen.

[0:45:19]

**PB:** We know that since emergency management was imposed on the city that there have been so many problems with not just education, but with water crisis and foreclosure crisis and so many other issues. How would you describe a connection, or do you see a connection between the problems in the Detroit Public School system and water shutoffs and inequitable development in the city?

**HM:** Some people... All these things are happening at once in our city and, two, the people that really live in the city, water shutoffs and schools going down and the thrust to make sure that we don't move ahead in our city, that's called annihilation. We using all these other terms. It's called annihilation if the people are being poisoned. If they don't have enough money to survive, they might go out and do some criminal action just to get food and all this other kind of stuff. If they don't have an education, they never going to be free. They never gonna get the kind of job that will give them the kind of income they need. It's annihilation because they're trying to destroy a whole group of people by taking everything away from them that would help them to survive.

And if you don't get the education and all of that, you end up doing something crazy, and you go to prison. The prison pipeline is waiting for our people and our children. So, that's the name of the game. We know it because we've been a part of the other side, but there's a lot of our people that are so downtrodden, so misused, so everything you would think you can almost see the picture of the slaves in the cotton field dragging the bags full of cotton and singing those good old spiritual songs--which wasn't what the white folks thought it was. These were songs for freedom. You can almost see that happening now.

So, what do we do about it? We fight, and we never stop fighting, and we organize, and we keep our people going because we know we got the taste of freedom, and we know what it's all about, and our children and the people that we represent need to understand that right now they just tryna survive. You ain't got no milk at home, how you gon catch the bus for a school board meeting? You gon spend that money on some milk for your children. If you live in a neighborhood where there's no stores, how you gone get to the store? You got to get somebody to get you there. All of that is happening in Detroit. We see it everyday, but the people that are talking about how wonderful everything is, they don't bother to stop and think about those people in the city that are being destroyed.

[0:48:48]

**PB:** How would you... What I'm hearing... What we're talking about is this continuum of racism. It's impacting...

**HM:** I can't hear.

**PB:** I'm sorry. I have to speak up. What I'm hearing from our conversation so far is the legacies of racism that are really pervasive and still maintaining today. With that in mind, I'm wondering how you understand your current struggles around education in the context of long Black freedom struggle that has taken place in Detroit dating back to the [19]50s, [19]60s, [19]70s?

**HM:** Okay, it all ties together. How I understand the racism in our city and how far it goes back--I didn't live 400 years ago, but I bet you right now with the things that are happening in our city and across the United States with the president that we have that the racism is personified. We got people that are coming out of the woodwork that are killing Black people, that are making sure that the children don't get education. I mean, they're organizing. If you think that this is not organized and that it's not done on purpose, then you really aren't looking at what they don't want you to see. We are connected with people of all races in our group. They go into their communities, and some of them are in places, high places. They're connected with us. They can tell us what the next step is. They can tell us what's going on. They can tell us who's leading the gang of no good criminals that hate us, and they really are good people, and they're on our side.

So, we have all these people that don't like the way the country's going, don't like how they're treating the least of these, and they are organized to a great extent around freeing this nation of the racism that we experience everyday. So while they're organizing in their offices of high places, billionaires and millionaires and some very poor people that don't realize they're the same as us. You've got white folks that are poor, poorer than many of us, and they still are racists. Instead of freeing their mind and looking at each person as a human being, they keep these old ideas that because somebody's skin is a different color that they are superior. I never understood that, and I do a lot of history studying. It came all the way from the time that folks came to the United States of America. They weren't the first people here. But, something has gone wrong in their brain and in their heart where they have to--no matter how poor they are, no matter if they're even under class of Black people, they still hate Black people because their skin is white. Now, you tell me, what kind of sense does that make?

And in all my life, since I was that little girl, five years old being discriminated against, I keep looking at them and saying, "This is crazy." We got a mixture of all y'all in our families. Ain't no pure Black people. We couldn't help it. They were doing this to us the whole time we were on the plantation. So, some of us came out looking like me. Some of us came out looking white. Some of us came out darker. You planted the seed, but you hate your own people. That's insane. And so, is the United States insane? Have we not recovered from our insanity?

And, it's still going on till the day we die. It should stop right now. I hope you print this because I'm the little girl all my life that got white aunties and uncles down thru and always looked at them and said, "Why are you so happy to be Black and you look white?" And, some of them are more militant than me. It ain't about the color. It's about the heart and the mind, and it's about us being human beings and us working together to make sure that all our people strive and benefit from the work that we do now so that those in the future can see themselves free, and all of us will know that we had a part in doing that. How'd you like to get to the point in your life where you're on the deathbed and you look at yourself and you say, "Dang, I was a monster." Too late then. Too late then. So, all of us have to deal with ourselves.

[0:54:26]

**PB:** That leads me to my next question. What are the new ideas that will replace the old ones that kind of got us there?

**HM:** You got it, the new ideas.

**PB:** Right. So, as we're working towards these new ideas that you're talking about, how would you describe some of your, whether it's personal or organizational, greatest successes and shortcomings in getting us there?

**HM:** It's called training leadership. Everybody in our group is a leader. Everybody. We got lawyers, we got people that on welfare, we got people in all stages of life, but we have one aim, and that's our children, and that's not to be second-class citizenship. We believe it. We teach it. We work it everyday in our families and our neighborhoods and when we come out in the open. When one person is in trouble, we're all in trouble. So, I believe that the unity and belief that our people have because we talk it at the meetings. We share information. You don't have a lot of hollering and fighting amongst us. Now, you do in some other organizations, and I been in those organizations. What you have is people knowing where they're going, what the outcome must be, and the journey might be longer than what we

live, but the journey continues. And, these are the people that will lead to the promised land, and that's freedom for our people and a better life.

So, it's simple, but I been raised in the church all my life. So, I believe in the good Lord is going to deliver us. And, when the people were singing all them good ol' spirituals and everything--I still sing 'em in my church. I say, "O freedom, o freedom, o freedom over me. Before I be a slave, I be buried in my grave and go home to my Lord and be free." All my children know that song. And when things get rough, we might break out in the service in the junior church, and all the kids get up and--just like they did when they were working in the cotton field and start singing those songs which means we getting ready to get the hell out of here 'cause we getting ready for our person to come and get us and to lead us to the North and follow that North Star. Everybody thought they were singing because they were just so happy to be slaves and be killed and be destroyed. They weren't dumb. They were singing because Harriet Tubman was on her way, and she was going to deliver them to freedom, and they knew when they got in that Underground Railroad and they decided it was too rough and they were gon turn back, she put that gun on, and she said, "You gon drop right here in this spot if you turn back, so you better keep going." That's the way I am with my people. Sometime, they call me Harriet Tubman. Sometime, I act like her, and I think we need more Harriet Tubmans, and we do have them in our group. Okay.

[0:57:52]

**PB:** So, it is very clear that history, African American history, histories of freedom struggles are central to the work that you're doing.

**HM:** Never forget.

**PB:** So, what--could you tell us a little bit about what you think current organizers in struggles for racial equity, racial justice in Detroit can learn from these histories that impacted you, particularly within Detroit where there's such deep and rich histories?



**HM:** Oh, I think that the people in Detroit can learn from our history because actually all the different organizations that are civil rights people, welfare rights, all these folks, we all pretty much are represented in one united group. When something breaks out in my group, they come to our rescue. They may not come to meetings all the time, but they're out there, and they're looking at everything we have, and we have a communication system. Some people will say, "Well, it's like the underground railroad, and it's making noise." Whoop, you know, letting you know that they're signals. We have a way to communicate with each other. Don't need the newspapers 'cause they stopped printing us. They blackballed us a long time ago. Our stories are not printed like they used to be. Don't need them. Don't need to be on television all the time 'cause we better not take a chance with Mrs. Moore getting on there because she gon say what she wants to say, and we can't stop her unless we cut it out and all that, and she calls us back and says, "Why did you cut that out?" See, I'm a nuisance.

So, what I'm saying is this. We can learn from each other, and they have one of their persons or--in these different organizations, in our group. Some of the people are in two and three organizations, groups that work together. We're all one family, and we all protect each other, and we stay together, and we talk. Telephone rings morning. I sound like the slaves. Morning to night, telephones ringing at my house, and everybody's reporting stuff. What's going on in schools? What's going on in the city? What we need to do? So, we have our own system. Some have caught on it, but that's all right. They can't hurt us. They can only help us.

[1:00:27]

**PB:** So, I want to ask you about what are... So, you're offering a lot of lessons and a lot of knowledge for current and future generations of organizers. If you had to identify a few lessons that you learned as an experienced organizer in Detroit that you thought were critical for future organizers to know, what would those be?

**HM:** If I wanted the people that's in Detroit to know what is critical when we're organizing and everything, be careful. Be careful who you get in the bed with, and

that is political. I'm not talking about the other bed. Be careful when they come to you. Do your history. Check them out because you may end up doing something that you will regret later on because you fallen into a trap. That's the most important thing an organizer can do.

We don't take money from anybody. How do you do all the things you do? Well, we take a collection at our meeting and all that type of stuff, but because we do it ourselves--like, if I'm going down to the City-County Building and there's an issue about the school, whatever, I use my own car, my own money, or I pick up people. We are just so independent, and it's worked for us over the years. We have a little money put in the treasure, and we only use it like if we have to go to Lansing and got to get carpools and stuff. Everybody's gas may be paid for, if they need it. That's how we survived. In other words, we don't owe anybody anything but the people we work for, which is our children, and you got to stay away from these politicians that come to you and say, "Look, I got some money for you." If you all knew how much money I've been offered to shut my big mouth up all these years, you would not believe it--and the jobs, including the school system. If they take us out of the fight, we lose the whole war. And, you get out of the fight when the people can't trust you and they know that all you are doing is after money.

Most people don't even know that I have a law degree. Most people don't even know that. But, some people say, "Why aren't you out here making money?" I made enough money in my days to keep me going, take care of my family, and all that. What I'm after right now is freedom and our children getting a better shake in life, and that's it. That's all I'm after. So, everybody that wants to give me money, I don't want it. I want our children to be free, and I want them to have a better education. Now, if you want to gift that money to Detroit Public Schools, thank you very much because we need it. But, I'm not here to be bought off. I'm only here to help get these kids an education, and that's all it's about--and a good one.

[1:03:51]

**PB:** So, say when folks come across this interview, this video footage--we'll have up on the DEAL [Detroit Equity Action Lab] website. One of the big parts of this

project is that the voices of folks who are on the frontlines of doing this work that you're doing are celebrated, and your profiles are elevated through the platforms that we have. So, when people find this video and they say, "I'm inspired to get involved. I'm inspired to help," how can they do so?

**HM:** You know, when we do videos--and I've done a lot of them--and they're done to inspire our people, it's the best thing in the world. You know, like even on Facebook. When we put things on there, we want people to pick it up, and you get all these folks through their comments and everything. It's a wonderful--if they can pass it on, what we're doing today, letting the world know that there are people in Detroit like Helen Moore and activists all over the place that are really working for the right reason, I think that people will pick that up and they will come forth, just like they're doing with the third-grade retention. You ought to come and see what's happening.

I am really thrilled because I think the people are seeing people who have been out in the struggle a long time like myself with the Keep the Vote/No Takeover, National Action Network, and the other groups that we're associated with. They believe us. They know that we're serious and that we mean well for their people. So now, when they were turned off by the emergency managers and they were treated like second-class citizens, they see us in the forefront, and they're saying, "Wait a minute. These are the people that's been working with us for our children and everything?" So, they're coming out, and it's going to help really boost what is good for our children and boost their education, and people are magnificent. I wish you had been there at Northwestern High School. We had another one before that. We're having them all over the city. The people are coming, and this is all we wanted.

When the people unite for their babies and their children, then everything works out for the children, and we know that it's happened before. We used to be so united in the [19]70s. When I would get on that television when they were beating me up and everything, and people--and I would say, "We need your help," I swear to God, thousands of people would show up, and it changed when the people started. The rights got taken away from them. Emergency managers didn't mean our kids any good stealing our money and all that. People went home and got disgusted. They lost the desire to really work for the children. Now, it's coming

back, and I think we can maintain and hold it as long as the people understand that we're there for them and their children and they need to jump in to help their own children.

[1:07:06]

**PB:** So as we go forward with doing more interviews with folks, if we want to understand what's going on with education in the city of Detroit from a grassroots perspective, who else do we need to talk to?

**HM:** Listen. I would say you need to talk to some of our parents that have their own parent groups. You need to talk to Yolanda Peoples. You need to talk to Reverend Charles Williams, National Action Network. You need to talk to the people at Malcolm X [Academy], the parents at Malcolm X, strong parents, led by Aliya Moore, their PTA groups. You need to talk to the people on the ground floor. Now, there's some higher-ups that we work with, but they hardly ever tell our story. There are a whole lot of us that are doing the same thing that I'm doing, but when we work together, it all makes it better for a whole lot of people. So, those are two. Oh, there's so many parents out there. Once you hit those places, you're going to hit a whole lot of parents. I would say King [High School] on the East side--that's how we are organized--and on the West side, Malcolm X, Paul Roberson-Malcolm X Academy. The principals and all of them, we all work together.

[1:08:32]

**PB:** So, I have just a couple more questions for you. We're getting to about five after 10. You okay for now?

**HM:** I'm fine.

**PB:** Water or anything?

**HM:** No.

**PB:** I want to give Oriana--do you have any questions or comments in mind that you'd want to ask?

**HM:** I talk a lot, cover everything.

**OY:** You talked about how, like, the experiences that you had when you were younger, like, impacted your attitudes. Did you see that impacting other people in your community or people around you having that same fire?

**HM:** I can only speak from my experience, but you need to talk to my children and my grandchildren. I have four children, three males and one female. They're a trip, and they don't take no second-class citizenship either, and they're all in their professions, engineers, all kinds of--see, they don't want to let their mama down because she told 'em she would kill em, and they believed that. That's a joke. Anyway, yeah. The way you raise your children and other people's children--I think I raised like 10,000 kids in the city. I'm serious. I had a part in their lives through the church, through their neighborhood, through their family members, and ain't been too many failures because I can walk down the street right now and run into a student from Wayne State, "Hey, Ms. Moore. Remember when you did this? Remember when you did that?"

That's the type of life you should be living. Everybody should try to help somebody, especially a child. So, all that from five years old all the way up to now has bearing on my life, and I ain't going backwards. You can kill me right today, and I'm not going backwards. I don't regret anything that I've done in my life for our children, nothing. Snatching me out of meeting, this finger, the police officer just about broke and sprained. It ain't never been right, but that's alright. We got 'em fired, but you just live your life like you know is right and don't take a stand back. Just stand up to all of this stuff that's happening to our children.

When we all stand together, we win. People going around saying, “Every time you look up, they’re failing.” We have won every fight. Check it out. Go back to the history. Go back through to when they took our vote how long we fought, how we did it, how many lawsuits we filed. We still filing lawsuits. We are. We got lawyers working for us all the time. You never read about it because they don't want the people to know that there’s a group out there that is fighting for the right thing, and as long as they keep you in the dark, the people will not know that things are happening and that somebody is out there trying to help them. So, they really go way out of their way. I wouldn't be surprised if you put this together and they tried to stop you from printing. Seriously, it’s happened before in order to keep people slaves. You take away their communication, and that’s what they’ve done here, but we have to build our own communication system. So, as I keep saying, the struggle continues. I don't think it's going to stop in mine. It sure ain't gon stop in your lifetime. Who's the youngest person in here? Okay, well, you might have a chance, dear. Keep on struggling. [chuckles]

[1:12:42]

**PB:** I was doing my research, and I came across an article on the Michigan Chronicle probably 10 years ago. In one of the op-eds, they describe you as some--like, the godmother of political theatrics.

**HM:** No, they call me queen mother of education.

**PB:** I seen that too. This one seemed like a little more of a dig on you.

**HM:** Okay.

**PB:** What do you make of that?

**HM:** What, they call me the godmother?

**PB:** The godmother of political theatrics.

**HM:** Like the Godfather.

**PB:** Yeah, they were talking about...

**HM:** Like, in the Mafia.

**PB:** I think the context was how you had gotten thrown out of some meetings, and so they said that, "She was the godmother of political theatrics."

**HM:** Yeah, they don't like me. They sued me. The mayor sued me and all that. They did. There's a method in my madness, and if you been with me long enough, then you know why that is. I told you about communication. How you gon get communication if you sit up in a meeting? That's funny. I never read that story. If you sit up in a meeting and you see them on the stage making announcements about how wonderful the school system is and how we built this up over there.

Let's take the Barton [Elementary] school, my schooling, and, "We did all this wonderful stuff," and you're sitting there saying, "Naw, they didn't." Do you sit there and shut up and let it go where it can harm somebody, or do you act, as my mother would say, a fool? I don't like doing all this stuff I do, but it is a strategy to get attention to the issue. Now, they caught on to that, so they ain't gone arrest me no more. But anyway, that's how you bring out the issues that are confronting our community and our children. Yes, I'm guilty. I did it all, and I don't sit there in a meeting and say, "Let it go. Don't say nothing. You got to be a nice lady. After all, you went to law school." You should hear my law professors talking. "After all, you went to law school, and that's the way we act." No, we don't. As a mother and as a Black person that's been discriminated against and has seen the discrimination, I ain't taking a job.

So, I don't care what they say about me. It ain't hurt me yet, and it ain't going to. They been trying to kill me over the years. I think they stopped now because I then said too much stuff they can't take away, but the point is you have to stand up, and if that's the only way you can get attention to the issue, then you do it. Because if I went home and I heard them saying something how they're going to destroy our school or a child or whatever and I went home and I tried to go to sleep at night, I couldn't sleep. I sleep good because everything that happened during the daytime that I thought was wrong, I spoke about it. I didn't let it go on.

That goes for the mayor and me too. We've had some knock-down, drag-out arguments. That goes for me and the governor. In his face, "You racist, you." "Miss Moore, why did you call me a racist?" I said, "Governor, because everything you do has an impact upon Black people, disparate impact,"--I got that from law school--"and that's how you are, and I know who you are. So, yes, you're a racist." That's me. So now, y'all just saw me in action. How'd you like to come up in my face and see this? Okay, that's just me, and everybody knows that's me, and I'm not a phony.

**PB:** That's funny. They've got your portrait in the DIA [Detroit Institute of Arts].

**HM:** Yeah, and that was a surprise. My grandson Mario Moore--my portrait is in the DIA, shock of the city. He said, "Grandma, the DIA--you know, my mother teaches at Center for Creative Studies," and he was educated there. He was educated in Rome. He's educated because I pushed education with all my grandchildren. They're lawyers, they're all kind of good people. So, he says, "They want a picture of, you know, one of my portraits," and I said, "Well, go ahead then," and he said, "But, they selected you." I said, "Oh my God, all I need is a picture in the DIA where everybody can come and see me." [laughs] Remember the good and the bad. So, he said, "No, Grandma. It's gonna be good. They paying for it and everything," and he said, "You need to be in the DIA forever." So, I'm in the DIA forever. So, I must've done something right. [laughs]



**PB:** That's right. Just a couple more. This is gonna sound like a stop question, but I think it's important for us to ask. We planned to ask this to everyone we speak with, but what's your vision for an equitable society in Detroit?

**HM:** What's my vision? [pause] That everybody gets an opportunity to live their dream--the children, the elderly like me--even if you haven't gotten there but the opportunity may not ever been afforded to you, that the people in this city are not hungry, that they have a place to stay, that there are no homeless people in the street, and that everybody is my brother's keeper. That's my dream, and that's how I've lived.

**PB:** Is there... I want to open it up, the space, if there's anybody else that has questions that they want to ask--or Oriana, if you have questions. But before I do so, I want to ask if there's anything--in the questions that I've asked--if there's anything I missed that you would want to get on the record?

**HM:** No, I think you hit everything that you need because if I went back to [19]71, that was the days. He's got part of it. He done told you all the stuff we were. Look, we shouldn't've done all the stuff we did, so maybe we better not put that on camera. Okay. [all laugh]

**PB:** We can talk about that after.

**HM:** I'm serious. Okay, and that's how it started. It got milder, just... Stuff I told you from the [19]90s, that's mild stuff. But back in those days, mm.

**PB:** Can you give us a little taste of it?

**HM:** [deep breath] Well, they tried to stop us from protesting. And in one of the meetings, we blocked the entire school board in the room. We closed the doors.

We put chains on doors. We made sure that they didn't get out until we got our message across. That's all I'm gonna say. We got our message across.

**PB:** When was that?

**HM:** That was in the [19]70s, and we had--I hope she still living. I'm going to say her name. Margareta Morgan weighed about 450 pounds. The door was about this big. I said, "Margareta, go block that door." She did. They couldn't get out. So, the rest of us surrounded her and put our arms together. Police came, and they marched the board out through. We was on both sides of the room. They marched the board out and held us back and protected the board. And as every board member came past us, we hit 'em. Bam! Yeah, we were looking out for our children. We hit all the board members as they passed by us, as the police was trying to hold us back. Did you put that on camera? Erase it, okay? I think the statute of limitations, they can't put us in jail now.

**PB:** We can erase it if you want.

**HM:** So, that's just the Black parents. And then, we went into school takeover, which was Keep the Vote/No Takeover. He's got a lot of the Black parents work. You've got Keep the Vote/No Takeover coalition, okay.

**PB:** Okay, so right where we left off... Do you have anything you want to add?

**OY:** A lot of, like, different groups throughout African American history and throughout different activist groups have argued that you shouldn't work within the existing system because it's always going to fail because the goal post is always moving. So, how do you respond to that?

**HM:** Unity. Teach the people. Get into their minds. Let them look at their own children and see the damage that you're doing to your children when you don't fight back and when you don't stand up. We were some of those, too. Back in the

[19]70s, school system ain't no good. We gon have our own school system. We tried our best. We--in fact, we have freedom schools. Teachers went on strike, and we organized five freedom schools in the city. When they went off of strike, we voted: what should we do? And, they were good freedom schools. I'm telling you it was working. So, what should we do? Should we keep our freedom schools, or should we go back and try to make the public schools better? The majority of the people--and Jesse Jackson was in the mix coming in and out of Detroit. We were working together. The majority of people said, "Let's go back to our schools, and we'll all stay together, and we'll work to make them better." One lady stood up, and she said, "I ain't going back." She said, "I'm organizing my own school." She passed away two years ago, and she organized her own school, and the school failed. It became a charter school, but that school failed, but she kept it going for all those years.

But, we went back to Detroit school system, and we have been fighting ever since. But, you got to fight. If we give up, then we have no dominant school system. Charters, privates are all divided. They have their own school boards or boards or whatever. If you want to make something strong--I heard a story on our reservation about--this man's name was Turtle...Turtle something [the quote is actually from Sitting Bull], and he was fighting for the freedom of Native Americans, and he said, "We lose--take this hand--we lose when we're all divided. But if make a mighty fist, it's stronger and keeps it together." I never forgot that. Folks in my hometown used to talk about it all the time. So, we know if we go to all these charters and all these other stuff and we don't have a dominant school system in our community--that's what Journey for Justice is all about--then we know we will be seperated, and they can kill us off. One school--and that's what they're doing. One school by one school at a time, but keep unit together, and that's what we're trying to do stronger.

**PB:** So, how do you--alright, I promise this will be the last one. You talked a little bit about just before how you've gone to Illinois, to Chicago to this national network of activists...

**HM:** Journey for Justice Alliance, they're the ones that had the hunger strike to keep one of the schools, open their schools, Dyett [High School], and they had

that hunger strike for 30-something days. And, the leader Jitu Brown, he's our leader of that alliance, and they got their school open, kept it open.

**PB:** So, it seems clear to me and what--the way you've been explaining it to us that this...that you don't see this as a specifically Detroit problem, right? Could you talk a little bit about what the connection is between takeovers in Detroit and throughout the country?

**HM:** Yeah. It's organized by a certain group. It's like the Betsy DeVos that's over education and everything, and they're moving around the United States trying to make sure they change all the school districts into charters or make sure that the children that can afford goes to private schools, and they only mess with Black and brown school districts. You need to get in touch--I should have brought that pamphlet--with the Journey for Justice, Jitu Brown in Chicago. You can pull it up, and he will give you the whole history. They brought me into the whole group years ago because they read about me, and they said, "Well, this is a person that's fighting, and we need her." So, I joined, and they picked out certain people that were going through the takeovers, and we all joined together.

But, guess what's happening? Many of the people that's in our group, according to the folks that came to Chicago, they're getting their school system back, and they're getting elected boards. He will give you all that information you need. In other words, the tide is shifting, but the people don't know it. They trying to entice people to keep going to these charter schools and these private schools. If you don't have the news or the hookup, you don't know. You thinking that, "Oh, everything's fine." It is not. Okay. So, you need to check. He will give you the list of the schools. We had several in Detroit that folded in the last minute, one last year, and the kids had to scramble and come back to public schools or go across Eight Mile to a school. We shouldn't have to go through all that. All the schools should be up to par, and the kids should be able to go to school in the neighborhood instead of them getting on a bus and going somewhere where they're an hour away from home. That's what we're working on, okay.

**PB:** Thank you so much for taking the time.

**HM:** Well, you're welcome. I enjoyed it. Did y'all enjoy it in the peanut gallery? [all laugh] I saw you. I saw you. I was trying to keep from laughing.