

**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

**Tom Pedroni**

Interviewed by

PETER BLACKMER AND ORIANA YILMA

May 4, 2019

Detroit, MI

## Narrator

Tom Pedroni was born in New Jersey and grew up in Oxford, Ohio. He has been an activist in various movements since his teen years. He received his Ph.D. in education from the University of Wisconsin in 2003. He taught in New Orleans, Louisiana and Saint Paul, Minnesota before becoming an Associate Professor of Curriculum Studies and Policy Sociology at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. He studies Detroit educational politics and is also involved in many educational activist groups in the Detroit area, including Keep the Vote/No Takeover, Detroit Life Coalition, Michigan We Choose (an affiliate of the national Journey for Justice Alliance), and the We the People of Detroit Community Research Collective. He is the Director of the Detroit Data and Democracy Project, which creates “policy briefs, public testimony, and authoritative perspective on education issues for regional education reporters, community leaders, and community-based organizations.” (Detroit Data and Democracy Project website)

## 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

Tom Pedroni discusses the history of Detroit Public Schools from the 1990s to the present and his own involvement in educational activism. Topics include the first state takeover in 1999, the bipartisan nature of the dismantling of the public school system in Detroit, how he went from research to activism around 2010, how he made relationships with community activists and found his role in the movement, the racial biases of various emergency managers, issues with press coverage of education in Michigan, the Michigan Education Achievement Authority and how he uncovered lies in their claims of great progress at charter schools, the Skillman Foundation and its market-based education agenda, how community groups in both Detroit and Chicago have worked with teachers’ unions to coordinate their messages, the 2016 Detroit Public Schools teacher walkouts

and how union leadership opposed the walkouts, the central role of the Dexter-Elmhurst Center in Detroit political movements, what he has learned from educational activist Helen Moore, and what other activists should be interviewed for the oral history project. He also discusses what he has learned about effective activism and how to pressure politicians, why coalitions across the state and across multiple educational and political sectors are more powerful, how his position as a white male with a Ph.D. can be a form of leverage for the movement or help to reinforce a racist system, and how he and community groups have reckoned with that dichotomy and used it strategically.

### Keywords

1999 Detroit Public Schools state takeover; 2016 Detroit teachers' strike; Detroit, Michigan; Dexter-Elmhurst Center; Education; Education Achievement Authority; Emergency management; Helen Moore; Journalism; Labor unions; Skillman Foundation;

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None

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Transcript of interview conducted May 4, 2019 with:

Tom Pedroni [TP]

Detroit, MI

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

**TP:** So, I'm Thomas Pedroni. I'm an associate professor of Curriculum Studies here at Wayne State University. I live in Ypsilanti, Michigan, and besides being a professor of education, I've been involved in both studying metro Detroit [Michigan] and specifically Detroit educational politics, and I've been involved in a lot of different community-based organizations, like Keep the Vote/No Takeover, Detroit Life Coalition, which is affiliation of national Journey for Justice Alliance, was part of a group called Michigan Network for Equity in Education for a long time, and I maintain a website called Detroit Data and Democracy Project where...used as sort of a sounding board to try to contest a lot of things that were being said in the press during emergency management that were not correct.

[0:01:01]

**PB:** So, in our last interview we did--talked a lot about analysis. And this time, I hope you can kind of go through some of the...the histories as you understand them or as you were involved with the...the processes of state takeover and some emergency managers...

**TP:** Right.

**PB:** ...and all that as we talked about it before. So, could you just start us off on, like, what the state of the school district was when you first started getting active in organizing work here?

**TP:** Sure. So there's...there's two important touchstones, and probably the last time we talked, I talked about 1999 going forward and a lot of the decline that happened during the first period of state takeover. So I...I wasn't here for that, but I do know that and can speak to it. I don't know if I should or if I should go straight to--okay. So you know, basically, in the late [19]90s, the Detroit Public School District, no one would say that it was a phenomenally successful district, but given the decline that Detroit as a whole had been going through because of the flight of industry, of the white flight and even middle-class Black flight, and a number of other factors, that would get you to believe that the district would be similarly declining. The district was actually doing pretty alright given that context.

So before the first state takeover, which started in 1999, the district was gradually gaining enrollment and a really...in a way that was very sustainable, about a thousand students per year. It was...its test scores were generally climbing relative to the state average and in social studies had already passed the state average, and that's remarkable given that those tests are most strongly associated with socio-economic status and family attainment and to have a district like Detroit with its economic decline doing so well is...is sort of astounding. And, the district was also doing well financially. It had a...a budget surplus of, I believe, about 93 million dollars before the state takeover.

And the state takeover, which lasted from 1991 to the beginning of 2006, really moved the district in a...in a very negative way. So, you had the beginning of a process that lasted for about...more than 10 years of losing 10,000 students per year, of schools being closed, and of academics declining relative to the rest of the state, so that when the district was handed back to the elected board--you know, a district that was one that before the state took it over was one that I heard about when I was a graduate student getting, you know, my certification to teach that it was a place that people would travel to from urban districts all across the United States to see the innovative things that were being done in special education and African-centered curriculum.

Now by the end of the first period of state takeover, yeah, there were...there were tremendous debt obligations which resulted in large debt service, a lot of the per pupil monies being steered away from...from the classroom and from direct use with students. And so...and because the district was in such poor shape, charters were really booming. And so, you know, student--given the way funding works in Michigan--when students leave, at 8,000 dollars a...per year a pop roughly now, you know, the equivalent of that back then, it had a really negative effect and continued this negative spiral, which...which resulted in a situation in... When the regular elected board took back power, I believe in--after a vote--in... They...they came back to power, I believe it was, January 1, 2006--they soon started to recognize the difficult financial circumstances of the district, did some controversial things, closed a number of schools to try to get a handle on the financial situation, and actually invited in emergency financial management under Governor [Jennifer] Granholm at that time with the idea being that they felt, well, the state should contribute its knowledge and resources to help us solve the problem which, after all, the state played a large role in controlling--in causing and contributing to.

And this is about the time that I became involved personally, not just sort of studying it from afar, but actually, you know, recognizing what was being done and the damage it was causing and feeling like as...as a public university professor who had this knowledge, my role wasn't just to make my career reporting on the increasing misery of Black folks in schools in places like Detroit, but to actually share some of what, as a public servant, the public had helped me to realize, you know. I felt like that was information that needed to be shared, and so I spent as...as...as the first emergency management was starting and it became clear that, from the perspective of the state, this wasn't just about helping you solve your financial problems quickly, you know, using the state's resources to get you back on track and then giving the district back, but that this was actually a takeover and, you know, Robert Bobb, who was the first emergency manager who was appointed by Jennifer Granholm--I always like to emphasize that Democrats have been almost equally complicit in the dismantling of predominantly Black school districts in Detroit and other places as well--that the first emergency manager appointed by Jennifer Granholm was introduced to Jennifer Granholm at [Barack] Obama's first inauguration in January 2009 and...by Eli Broad, also a life-long, lifetime Democrat, big supporter of charter schools, educational markets, union busting, you know, all these things that we traditionally think of as conservative

causes but have become what we now call neoliberal or market-based causes that Democrats have been part--equally participating in, particularly in the educational sector.

[0:07:20]

So you know, my role then was, you know, as...as I realized...as I heard things in the press that were claims by emergency managers that were trashing the way the district had been run before and things that I recognized that clearly were not true--were not true--and that the media wasn't--for whatever reason--wasn't calling out emergency managers on, I decided that I needed to see how I could make myself useful to community groups. And to be honest, I mean, some of it was me falling on my face and...and, you know, showing up to... I remember one of the first things I went to was at Frederick Douglass [Academy], an all-boys school. There had been a walkout there, and Helen Moore, who I had never met at...you know, I didn't know who she was at this point. She...she was leading the meeting. She had been called in to meet with parents and with other school staff who had been in, you know, who were supportive of the walkout. The students were being punished, to decide what to do next. I remember kind of sitting there and just feeling like a voyeur in the corner of the room. You know, nobody really knew who I was, and I...I was trying to think of ways to make myself useful or relevant in how I was there, and it took a while to sort of figure out the ways that I could connect with community groups.

But around then, 2010 or so, when the school board...the elected school board had... It hadn't lost all of its power, it was still legally had academic power, but Robert Bobb, the first emergency manager, had basically said that he was controlling everything. He said that he was in charge of finances and because everything a penny touches included academics, he controlled academics, he controlled the whole district. He argued that he needed to control academics because if they didn't improve academics, the district would dis...you know, would...would...would fall apart financially. The...the logic of it is actually right, but--I mean, not the legal claim, but the idea that finances and academics, especially in the current environment, are closely intertwined. The only problem is that he sent both in extremely negative directions.



So, I feel like I've covered some of this ground before. I want to be a little cautious 'cause I think I actually did tell many of these stories the last time I was here, and I don't want to be repetitive, but I'm also not sure that I told them. I do have a lot of stories from this era. So, you know, basically what I can share is I eventually... One of the first events I went to where I began to feel more useful, like I was actually connecting to people, was when the...a number of the elected board members, who had begun to realize what was being done to them, that they were basically being sidelined, were done playing nice, and they called themselves the DPS [Detroit Public Schools] Board in Exile, and it was the majority. I believe it was seven out of eleven of the regular board members who were...who... They started to meet an extra time a month beyond their usual meeting time. They started to meet as the DPS Board in Exile to sort of plan how to push back against emergency management. It wasn't everyone. I mean, there were three or four members who were either undecided or who were, you know, actually, you know, either, you know, said that they believed that emergency management was actually a good thing, that their disempowerment was a good thing and, you know, maybe who were being sort of opportunistic, positioning themselves for gain under emergency management.

But in any case, I mean, you know, I...I know I participated in a lot of fora very early on, some of them that involved emergency managers, who, you know...who were part of panels as well. But, you know, I...I...I think that...I think that one of the roles that I started to play relative to some of the community groups was...was as someone who...who...who could do research to show, to demonstrate in ways that were sort of irrefutable on a factual basis that a lot of the intuitions of the activists, that they were correct, right? Like so, their...you know, their...their intuition was often, like, you know, they're steering money away from our kids, this is about bringing in consultants, this is about padding contracts, and...and I could actually do the research to show that, yes, they were right, those things were actually happening and make it really clear. And I guess you could say because of my white privilege, my male privilege, and the fact that there's a Ph.D. after my name, I was eventually able to break the sort of...the sort of deadlock on anything critical of emergency management getting into the regular press. And...and I think I told that story last time, and I want to be cautious about not repeating it, but just as a reference point, you know, I...I went through, just as an individual, a process which I think I detailed about...about pushing hard and having a lot of resistance to getting stories that were critical of--not just critical,

but just factual--about, you know, things that were not true that emergency managers had gotten away with. I think when I was here before I outlined my relation to...to some reporters and feeding stories to them, so I... That is sort of what you're asking about now, which is that period of my actual involvement, but I think that I've told those stories, and I don't want to be real repetitive.

[0:12:47]

**PB:** Yeah, I want to dig in a little bit...

**TP:** Okay.

**PB:** ...since we were kinda talking about this earlier about that dynamic, whether it was in forums or whether it was...

**TP:** Yeah.

**PB:** ...internal in the organizations of the positionality...

**TP:** Right.

**PB:** ...that you kind of brought with your...with being a white man,...

**TP:** Right.

**PB:** ...having the Ph.D,....

**TP:** Yep.

**PB:** ...the way that you were responded to...

**TP:** Yeah.

**PB:** ...and how it was different...

**TP:** Yeah.

**PB:** ...compared to some of the Black women activists...

**TP:** Exactly. Right, right.

**PB:** ...that were in this period. So, could you share, like, some of the...if there are specific stories that are coming to mind about that?

**TP:** Yeah, yeah, I can. And...and, you know, I think that's a very important dynamic to talk about because it's...it's, you know, to frame it, it's...it's...it's a mixed bag, right? So, on the one hand, advocacy--advocacy groups want to be seen as credible, and if they can do that because we're in a white supremacist, patriarchal system where...where white males with degrees will be listened to... You know, on the one hand, you want that 'cause you want them to be finally like, "Oh my gosh, what these people have been talking about is actually seems to be true!" you know. But, the tradeoff of that is that you're kind of reinscribing the very thing that you're pushing against. You're again basically laying out a scenario where the expertise of the African American women warriors is not accepted until a white male says that it's true, right? So, it's reinscribing racism in some ways, some very specific ways.

And, you know, I mean, so... There have been some very public examples of that that have just been mind-blowing to see. One of them was toward the end of the period of emergency management when emergency manager Judge [Steven] Rhodes, he tried--he didn't like the name emergency manager, but he was, so we're gonna use that word. Emergency Manager Judge Rhodes, I...I believe at that point for the first time, went to a board meeting--actually, I...I think the first one was actually just a forum. It was a forum that he held, and you could tell how...you could tell the biases that he brought with him. He was, of course, a white man, not... [laughs] I certainly don't want to say that the African American emergency managers were any better in terms of their respect of educators, their concern for African American students, but he... I guess, in addition to that, he brought in--probably a lot of the Black emergency managers had this as well, but--a lot of ideas about Black governance and Black leadership that, probably, he wasn't even aware of, but that were very obvious to anybody who was listening and paying attention. So...

[0:15:21]

**PB:** Can I stop you for just a second? Just so we have, like, a clear...

**TP:** Yeah.

**PB:** ...kind of like...if, you know, if we clip this into a sound bite, could you just start again with Judge Rhodes and the public forum?

**TP:** Yes, okay. And I'm, you know, I'm kind of unpacking it in my own memory right now.

**PB:** Oh no, that's fine, I don't mean to like...

**TP:** No, that's okay. I'm just trying to organize it. So, the...the final emergency manager of the Detroit Public Schools before it was split into two districts and

returned to a different elected board... The final emergency manager was Judge Rhodes, [Jump cut. Background changes.] and Judge Rhodes was European American, and he had really not interacted with the elected board much at all, certainly not in any sort of respectful way of let's try to get along and work things out together. But, he did organize a forum for the community. It was at one of the high schools, and several members of the elected board were there, as were a large number of people from the community, you know, a couple hundred people if I remember correctly, and after him... After he spoke for a while, he sort of opened it up to questions, and filmmaker Kate Levy really helped to make this clear, and the film that she put together was then carried by Allie Gross and the [Detroit] Metro Times as well, to sort of...so, you know, it's...it's very well-documented.

But what was amazing is that, you know, I got in line to speak like many other people did, and several African American community activists got up there and said basically the same thing that I said later which was this is a legitimately elected board. They...they have a long history of resisting actions by previous emergency managers that everyone agrees were destructive, like, you know, giving contracts for textbooks, 40 million to previous employers of the number two...to emergency manager, Robert Bobb, and that really...that they represented the will of the electorate, that they had been elected, many of them serving on the board at that time, a year after [Mike] Duggan had first been elected mayor, and that if we were going to be applauding the electorate--as many people like Judge Rhodes and suburban observers did--if we were gonna applaud Detroiters for electing Duggan, then we should also be applauding them for a year later electing these board members, and they should be respected as the will of the electorate as much as Duggan is, right? And it's funny, because I...I, you know, I...we probably all laid it out a little bit differently, but I was essentially laying out an argument about why the elected board should be listened to, why they should be respected, and it...it...he...he was... I'm sure he wasn't aware of how rude he was, but that's oftentimes how racism works, right?

I mean, he was, he was deeply rude to... I mean, I remember there was one speaker--I believe it was actually Tawanna Simpson, who was an elected board member--who had just made similar points to me before I made them, and she ended up asking him a question, like, something like, "Will you meet with us?" And he's said, "Okay, who's next?" Like...like, she had asked a question, and

he...he didn't respond. She said...she said, "Wait a minute, I asked you a question." So when I finally got up there, and I had my turn, and I shared what I just shared now, he said, "I can see that you're making some really good points, that you've thought about this a lot. You've convinced me." And of course, you know, I mean, I have a mixed emotion to that, too, because I'm glad that I convinced him, I'm glad he listened, but it was sort of like, what about all the other people? You know, like, I'm...I'm a professor who doesn't even live in Detroit. You know, I'm a researcher. I should be respected, I feel. But, you know, I...I live in Ypsilanti, and why is it that I'm able to get through to you and you're not hearing what these other folks are... So...so, what he said was something like--I...I'm...I think I'm conflict...There were two meetings that happened.

There was a forum that he called, and then he agreed to come to the next school board meeting, and I spoke at the next school board meeting as well, and it was also filmed. I mean, the whole meeting was filmed, and similar dynamics happened where, you know, Judge Rhodes is now, you know, better than before, he's actually sitting up there with the elected board, and they're having a conversation, and it's public comment period and I...and Mother Helen Moore asked me to go and to again raise some questions, so I did. And, you know, similar dynamics happened where he said, you know, "I can tell you're really passionate about this," you know, that sort of thing. "Would you be willing to meet with me one-on-one so we can talk about this stuff further?" You know, so in my mind, it was sort of like, well, that's a victory if he's willing to listen, but why me? And so, what I said was the best thing I could think of to say at that moment, which was, "I'll meet with you, but only if you let me bring along Mother Helen Moore and a couple other people because I think that you should be listening to them, too."

[0:20:41]

And he agreed to that, and when it actually came time for the meeting--and I think we actually had a series of meetings, maybe two or three--I brought along a whole cadre of people, all of whom were African American and who were deeply invested in the Detroit Public Schools struggle. So, one of them was Mother Helen Moore. One of them was elected board member Tawanna Simpson, one of the very people he really wasn't listening to. One of them was Aliya Moore, the parent who you're also interviewing. One of them was William Weir, who is, you know,

rank-and-file African American teacher, union activist, now he's on the executive board--well, I think he just retired, but he had been on the executive board of the union. And I'm probably forgetting someone, but...but the point being, a whole...people who represented all kinds of different educational sectors, you know, related to, you know, a parent, a community activist, a teacher, an elected board member, and basically what we looked at it as was this was a chance for us not to be co-opted. I mean, there was a lot of talk about should we even meet with him in the first place, but we eventually decided that we should meet with him, but it was basically... I...I think that what we were trying to do was, given that he was certain and we were certain that power was gonna be, you know, that emergency management was about to come to an end, what to do to leave the district as intact as possible, and so, you know... We...we laid out, we educated him on a lot of the problematic partners that he was working with in our view, like the Detroit Parent Network, which is sort of like an astroturf parent organization that actually had a key role in dismantling parent organizations in schools. You know...and...and, you know, he seemed to be listening.

I...I mean, I would refer to him as, you know, obviously his power was dictatorial, you know, nobody elected him, but he was sort of a benign white racist benefactor, I would say. You know, clearly, you know, had all of that, you know, dys...dysconscious racist belief where, you know, he was listening to a white guy but he wouldn't list...wouldn't listen to other people, where he had said at that first forum things like that he was willing to listen to people in this crowd that is 99 percent African American if you're willing to be civil, not understanding what...what does it mean for a white person who has dictatorial power to sit up there and tell the audience to be civil, you know. He seemed to conflate in his mind, you know--there...there were actually two elected board members. I believe it was two who were at that meeting. But he...he...he... There's a lot of slippage in...in him speaking to the audience as if they're all board members, you know, even if it's 200 or 300 people, only two people who hadn't even identified themselves at that point yet are actually board members. But I guess to him, I mean, I'm just...I'm not trying to be unduly harsh. I think in his own mind, there was this slippage between this is the Black masses of people, you know, these are the natives who are upset with me and, you know... So to him, if you're an elected board member, you're just this part of amorphous mob. Please, just be civil, you know, recognize that I am not a willing colonial master, you know, that I've...I...I'm doing this to be good, and I don't want to be, you know... Yeah, I mean, you...you know, that was sort of his, you know, his perspective and that's how he acted,

and...and... I mean, he was the first person who was an emergency manager who I actually believe honestly saw some of the power dynamics, not...not around race, but between Lansing [Michigan] and Detroit and began to understand that there were some people who really were interested in destroying the district and not only recognizing that but trying...but he didn't want that to be his legacy for sure.

[0:24:44]

I mean, a...another emergency manager also went through that sort of transition, but not in a way that ever really meant anything meaningful. I mean, Roy Roberts, who was the second emergency manager--and I probably talked about this last time--he...he was appointed by [Rick] Snyder, and he resigned at one point unexpectedly before his term was up, and he called a meeting with the elected board and with the union leadership and told them that he had been brought in to blow up the district, and he...that's...those were his instructions, to blow up the district. And he...he basically had decided he didn't want to do that, and he talked about how he...he had pushed back and was trying to convince them that the district was worth salvaging and...and he was resigning, and eventually--I...

And I think I might have mentioned some of this last time, that it was for... It was actually reported in an article by Chastity Pratt in the [Detroit] Free Press that he had made these comments and that, you know, there were a number of people who had witnessed it who were all talking about it in the Press. They were quoted. And, you know, fortunately I Evernoted it, you know, I got a scr...I got screen grabs of it, so I could...and then, within a couple hou--'cause I...just because I was...I was doing that with everything at that point, you know, 'cause I wanted to make sure that I had it on file--and a couple hours later, her story was taken down and changed, and those parts were removed, but I still have the original. And, you know...and I've asked Chastity Pratt, who I've had a difficult relationship with over the years, why it was taken down. You know, for all I know, it might have been an editor, and she had nothing to do with it, but, you know, she never responded. And...and what happened in the end was his [Roy Roberts'] term was extended for about six months, I believe, by the governor [Rick Snyder], and so he unresigned and stopped talking about how he'd been told to blow up the district.



But...but...but, so all of this was to talk about Judge [Steven] Rhodes a little bit more and say, you know, like...like... Judge Rhodes, just from talking to him a great deal, I could sense that despite [laughs] everything that was so problematic about him, he really did seem like he was aware that there were sort of wolves out there who were trying to finish off the district, and that he was, you know, in his mind, he certainly was--and I believe he really did feel that way, like he was doing something to try to retain the district--and...and, you know, like, he like... He did things, you know. When different amounts were proposed as por--part of the restructuring, he said very clearly in public testimony that, you know, in...in both bills--there was a bill going through the House and the bill going through the Senate at the state level--you know, he said neither of these is close to the amount that the state would need to provide to get the district out of its current predicament. You know, he...he said things that...that actually did put him in a position of disagreement with the governor [Rick Snyder] and, you know, the very people who put him there, so...

But...but, the thing that we were talking about was this dynamic of...of, you know, the mixed bag. You know, it's the same thing with breaking through the press. Why is it that, you know... I...I mean it was really hard, even for...I mean, it was surprisingly ridiculously difficult for someone who's an educational researcher, who's respected as someone who's, you know, one of the people who knows most about Detroit education to not be able to get something in the paper in an opinion piece, you know--and I think I laid that whole story out last time--and I was eventually able to sort of shame them into produ--But...but it is still sort of like, well, you know, why...why are you being listened to? And there's some value... I mean, it's not just because I'm a white male, it's also because, you know, I...I've done research and...and I'm able to put together a lot of facts and point to where I got them and...and that's compelling, too. But...but, there's certainly a dimension of it, of, you know, well, other people have been saying what I've been saying for a long time.

[0:29:07]

And I saw this again just recently, I mean--I guess... I...I don't want to be too specific 'cause I don't want to undermine current relationships, but I'll say a little bit that I... Just this past Monday, I was up with six educational advocates, five of

whom were African American who were from different communities across the state from districts that are predominantly Black, all of which have been severely impaired during either emergency management or state intervention, so... You know, there were a couple of people who were invited that weren't able to be there, but basically you have two districts that were dissolved in their entirety--you know, these are all predominantly Black districts and all state-level intervention. So, you had Buena Vista [Michigan], which is near Saginaw [Michigan], and you have Inkster [Michigan], which were both dissolved in 2013, districts gone and their students sent elsewhere, which has caused all sorts of problems for those children that nobody really seems to care about. Two districts were chartered and where--were given over to emergency management and then chartered in the fall. Highland Park [Michigan] was handed over to the Leona Group which closed the high school when that was not profitable enough. They kept the K to eight. So, if you're in Highland Park, once you finish eighth grade, you've gotta go to school somewhere else 'cause your district doesn't have a high school anymore. And Muskegon Heights [Michigan], which had Mosaica [Education, Inc.] which also left because it decided it couldn't make enough profit, so it...it just left. And then, you know, you have a lot of other districts, like Benton Harbor [Michigan] Area Schools, which is still under threat right now. There's a state-appointed CEO [Chief Executive Officer], which is a politer word for emergency manager, who has been threatening to dissolve or charterize or have the district annexed by another district.

So anyway, the six of us, those six folks representing six of those districts, plus me, were there. And you know, the meeting had been instigated by Marletta Seats, who is a community advocate for Benton Harbor Area Schools, and she realized that, you know--we reached out to her as a network of other deeply afflicted African American predominantly districts, you know. Helen Moore was part of the network and everything, and she was there for this meeting as well. And you know, I mean, there were certainly good things that happened in the meeting, but it was so obvious that they kept turning to me as the expert, as the contact person, as, I don't know, the reasonable person in the room, you know...and... So like, like, it started out--and you know, it could be that the people just really...they just didn't know. I don't know how much of it is the bias and how much is really not knowing, but you know. So, the meeting starts and they're like, "Well, Tom, thank you for convening this." And I say, "Well, actually it was Marletta Seats from Benton Harbor Area Schools who proposed this idea. And yes, I helped to put these people together, but it was something we did in tandem."

You know, and again at the end, when people from the meeting came up to us, you know, when we were done to sort of thank us and say goodbye, they came to me, and I had to keep saying, like, "Our representative from Buena Vista, she's a researcher. She's getting published. She has her doctorate, you know. She's..." You know...and it...it...so you know, I mean, it's...it's...I... I think that this sort of dynamic is something that you see in just about any struggle, right? And it..it does...it is... You do think a lot about what your role is, you know, and...and I guess my basic philosophy is I try to make it clear that I'm there to support community organizations.

There...there's a part of me sometimes--because we also have a lot of, I think, anti-intellectuality in the U.S. [United States] that where the fact that people do research is also not respected. So like, what I try to put up forward sometimes is you shouldn't respect me because I'm a white male with a degree. You should respect me because I'm bringing some facts here which represent my labor--and it's labor that, you know, I always point out, is publicly subsidized. You know, I went to public schools. I'm at a public university, so on and so forth. I'm, you know, part of the middle class. I get lots of welfare, you know, through tax exempt--so, you know, I always try to highlight stuff like that, but...but, you know, we... We also have a tendency to dismiss experts, and I...I don't even like the word expert, but I guess I would put it in terms of people who have done the work and spent the time in a set of facts to think about them. That...that's what I bring to the table, right? But sometimes, it's...it is useful to work that Ph.D. and to work that white maleness because it can get you through doors, you know, and that's both to do horrible things, which is what most white males are doing with their privilege, or, you know... But, it can also be a mixed bag in...in trying to get people to listen, you know. But, it's a mix. It's always a mixed bag.

[0:34:06]

**PB:** Can you talk a...I mean, can you talk a little bit about the...I guess the flip side where you talk about the external implications of that compositionality. But, are there conversations that are taking place within the organizations you're working

with about either leveraging that positionality in strategic ways, or are there conversations of discomfort about that? Like how...what does...

**TP:** Yeah.

**PB:** What does that look like internally within organizations?

**TP:** Yeah. I can think of examples where it's been talked about explicitly, but the first thing that I wanted to mention was just that the faux pas that I've made. So you know, I...I think a lot of advocacy groups are very protective of themselves in a way that they don't want to work with someone else unless they have deep trust of that person. And so twice, I've made the mistake of--[laughs] and I hope I don't make it again--of bringing someone to We the People meetings, We the People of Detroit meetings, where first we were working on water and now we're working on education and schools, without the permission of the whole group. I mean, of course, I...I didn't look at it that way. I looked at it like, "Heck, it's this great person! They have something great to contribute!" But people were like, "We don't know who..." you know. I mean, they were polite about it, but you know, "We don't know who this person is, and you've got to go through a process before you just bring someone." And you know, in...in both cases those people have turned out to be great, amazing people who have supported the organization, but...but it was...it's...it's a learning curve for me of sort of being like, you know, there's an issue of positionality here where if you're part of a group--and especially a resisting group that is doing things that are vital and that therefore people don't want you to be doing, you know, because you're doing important work--that, you know...that you have to respect those processes. And, I think there have been times that I've been sort of like, just like, "Oh, every..it's like, it's okay, these people are fine," you know. And...and...and I don't think that I... I think that these people were fine, [laughs] and I knew that. I knew they weren't a risk, but...but I still have to be respectful of the sort of protocol of people who are not used to dealing with things quite that way, you know, where it's more cautious.

So, I...I've had a lot of learning to do. I think those are, you know, culturally embedded things. You know, I...I mean, it's...it's... Sometimes it's a matter of even

just joking about it, of like, you know, let's put Tom up there because they'll always listen to him or... I mean, I rememb--I... It's funny because sometimes when you hang out with predominantly African American advocates, you...you...you learn firsthand, at least in a small way, what it's like to not be treated like a white person. [laughs] And I don't want to...I don't want to--'cause usually the white prevails anyway in terms of, you know, getting treated decently, but I...I remember one time when we went--and it was...it was...it was a few years ago. I went with the elected, several elected board members, and we went to the federal building... And I'm...I'm trying to remember what our specific purpose was. I think it was about filing a complaint, a federal complaint. And we had to go through security, and the way that I was treated was so offensive, you know, just in terms of, like, being treated with disrespect, like...like of, just, you know, like you're...you're trouble, and you're no good, and we don't want you here. And I'm like, I'm just a professor with some facts and...and...and...and, you know, what I...what...what...what I started to realize was this is what it's like to be treated like a Black person in these circumstances very often. I'm sort of like, at least in this one case--I mean, 'cause I'm, you know, I'm...I'm one of six people, and the others were all African Americans. So you know, I kinda had that sense of, you know, at least in that institution, I must be willing to be treated like the people I was associated with, and...you know...I mean, some things...I've had some real... It's not exactly getting at your question, but...but it is getting at the idea of my identity as a white male person.

I...I know a huge wakeup call for me was when we basically had just irrefutably proved that all the reasons given for closing down Oakman [Elementary School] were false, had been fabricated, whatever, that...that...you know, that we...you know, it was a slam dunk, and to me...my... What I learned at that time was like, I still believed--it's like you don't recognize these beliefs until they're actually challenged, right?--but I still believed that if you had the facts and you showed powerful people those facts, they had to do something about it, you know, and...and...and I realized that that wasn't true, you know. It's like we...we showed convincingly--we went to the state board, met with the governor's people--that these were all fabricated. We went to the Detroit city council with the emergency manager there, and...and I just had this idea like, "Okay, so now we won. Now, you have to put the school back together." Nope.

And so, it was sort of a wake-up call too of, you know, that...that's nice of you that you believe in that. That's a nice vision, isn't it, that you believe that if you have the facts and you show that you're right, you're gonna get what's right, you know. But, welcome to a different reality of, you know, we're talking about the lives of a lot of African American low-income folks with, you know, children with disabilities, and who gives a fuck about them, you know. So...so, we don't ca--nobody cares. I mean, like to them, it was maybe an inconvenience. Like, you know, normally, we...Tom, we would have just been able to do this and nobody would have said--you know, nobody who we listen to would say anything, and this is a real inconvenience that you're opening your mouth up because now it's easy...it...it's not as easy to just sort of plough everything under, you know, like we want and we're gonna do. I mean, that's...that's kind of how I felt. Like, it was a wake-up call to be like, "Wow, it is not enough just to have..." You...you know, that was my middle-class reality growing up was that if you did have those things on your side, you won. Game over, right? There'd be justice, you know. I...and...and I, you know, like... So, I started realizing when I tell people stories about things in Detroit they're like, "Yeah, but that's illegal!" You know, like, not just that story, but other stories too. And, you know, I've sort of learned, like, right, it's illegal. And if there's no one there, there's not a movement to effectively represent that and pressure people, it doesn't matter that it's illegal. It just doesn't matter, right?

[0:40:55]

And so, I mean, so me... For me, the take-away of that struggle and that learning experience of oh yeah, you were wrong in your supposition that just 'cause you proved them wrong, now justice would happen, is...is what I realized--and, you know, I've grown from these kinds of things too--is you need to actually form movements that have...that are strong, strong enough to expose people and to threaten them in terms of what they value, right? So, you know, I...I think since then we've been a lot more successful, like we...we succeeded, you know, with others as well, in shutting down the EAA [Education Achievement Authority] and turning its name into basically toxic. We stopped schools from closing across the state--and this is a very broad 'we' that I'm using here--and...and...and I guess what's important is that 'we' isn't just... Like with Oakman [Elementary School], the 'we' was sort of our cadre of people, like Helen Moore and Elena Herrada and this building inspector and maybe Kate Levy later on and...and the activists from the school. Now the 'we' is, no, we got state board members on board, we got

representatives on board, we have community leaders, you know, of just sort of broadening it out so that... You know, like with the Benton Harbor thing that's going on right now, we're actually able to have people to go into the governor's office and put this and...and...and, you know... So we've had Pamela Pugh, who's the one African Am--well, no, no, there are two, but for a long time she was the one African American member of the state Board of Education. She's the head of the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] education in Michigan, I believe still, and she work...she worked with Karen Weaver on the health crisis in Flint [Michigan]. She's amazing, and, you know, she's been a great advocate. Sherry Gay-Dagnogo has been elected as a representative from Detroit, and she's the urban education rep for the state, or, you know, she has a particular role vis-a-vis the governor.

And so now, I mean, especially with a Democratic governor [Gretchen Whitmer], we're actually able to be like, no, you're...you're not gonna--I'm not gonna say that, like, Gretchen Whitmer is on the right side of things at all. I think she's still listening to a lot of the wrong people, a lot of the corporate--'cause a lot of them are Democrats--the corporate privatizing education people. But we're able to really kind of light a fire by going...by saying, you know, well, Sherry's gonna get in there, and she's gonna talk to [Dana] Nessel and treasury, and she's gonna talk to Whitmer directly, which she has, and basically let them know... Like, you know, she doesn't even say, "I, Sherry, am mad at you," but what she'll say is, "Gosh, there's all these people that I'm hearing from who are paying attention," and...and that creates a cert--this...

What I'm trying to portray is the idea of building enough social movement and enough relationships that...that they can't just ignore you even though you've proven the facts, right? Like, so with the EAA [Education Achievement Authority], we worked with people at Eastern Michigan [University] to help that. There was a youth movement started at Eastern Michigan because they were...they played a role in authorizing the EAA, their Board of Trustees did, you know. So we got their faculty to rise up again, and it was that sort of relationship building and changing political conditions. You know, Gretchen Whitmer at least has, you know... She's gone on national television talking about what a defender of public education she is. So whether she really is or not, you can use those wor--use her words to leverage her to certain positions.

And I think that that's...you know, I...I've recognized now that just having the facts is not enough, you know, that you've gotta...you've gotta build...it's...it's building relationships that can put pressure on people in quantifiable ways that...that you can really get things done. Like, where you're not...you're not...you're no longer saying, "Please do the right thing because these people are people that you're hurting, and we have the facts." No, we're now...we're not just appealing to your conscience because we've seen how that goes, you know. Maybe you have a conscience, but you have other things that you're putting way before that. We...we need to pressure you directly, your political viability directly. If you have aspirations, Whitmer, for a second term, for wanting to get parts of your agenda done, maybe higher political office, you can...you can go with us and we won't raise holy hell, or if you...if you lean the wrong way, we're gonna make you pay the political price. We're gonna make...we're gonna...we're gonna make you look bad in the press, and I think...I think we can, you know...I think we can, I really do believe we can do that, and I believe that... I do believe that Benton Harbor Schools--Area Schools--would already be gone if we hadn't, like, in...in...in...in 36 hours, we were able... 36 hours after community advocate Marletta Seats contacted Pamela Pugh and Sherry Gay-Dagnogo and they connected her to me and I connected them to my networks, we had...we had a...a national conference call that involved people within...the executive director of the national Journey for Justice Alliance [Jitu Brown], people all across the state, within 36 hours of Marletta Seats contacting us, and she contacted us in response to the CEO's [Chief Executive Officer]-- [air quotes] the "emergency manager's"--threat against the district to close it or charterize it. You know, we have this national network in place. We had people from the governor's office who were listening in on the call. We had Democratic strategists who were listening in on the call...and yeah.

[0:46:16]

So all this to say, I've had some learning to do as a white male and...you know, and...and part of what I've learned is the importance of building those relationships, and...and we've helped to do that, you know. I...I mean, here's another way that that issue has come up--'cause you were asking about, you know, my positionality and whether there have been explicit conversations. So, when I first became involved, I mean, the first thing I had to do was get trust and support from local activists, and that took a while. Like, I remember, like, with



Russ Bellant, for example, you know, I...I kind of felt like he kept sort of not taking me seriously and pay--and...and I don't know if he was conscious about it--but it was almost like he thought that I was just there maybe for a year and then I'd be gone or something. And...and you know, I just begged him, like, Russ, I'm serious! I'm really about this work. I'm not about...I'm not trying to make a name for myself, a career. And...and you know... And finally, he believed me. It took a while, over a year, I'd say, you know. He introduced...he was the one that introduced me to Helen Moore for the first time and...

And anyway, so once we had built up this trust and we were working together, then...then it became, well, when we're in public, do we sit separately from each other? Is it our advantage to think...to make them think that we're separate, even though we're on the same page, or is it better for us to sit together, right? And...and I remember, like, thinking about that a lot and talking about it a lot, and what we did--and it was certainly my opinion--was to...was to purposely be together because I felt like, you know, they're treating [laughs] Helen Moore like she's crazy--you know, people who are powerful--like, she's just, you don't need to listen to her 'cause she's crazy, she doesn't know what she's talking about. That was how white power basically viewed her, you know, or the corporate community or whatever, but she had a lot of credibility in...you know, in the African American community in Detroit. And...and then you had me, who could be respected by those very people, white powerful people, but who had, at least initially, no credibility in the Black community in Detroit. And once we were, like, explicitly being seen together--you know, again, it goes into that whole thing about, like, what are you reproducing?--but it was sort of like she was saying to African Americans in Detroit that I was okay. I mean, she calls...she introduces me as her son, and...and I could...I could be there saying, you're right. Helen Moore is right. Here's the facts to back it up. And...and that totally undermined the ability to say that she was crazy, right? Which is itself built into, you know, all kinds of racist stuff, but...but you know that...

I mean, so that kind of stuff was talked about explicitly, like...like how do you maximize your effect? Should you pretend that you're sort of not on the sa...that you're really a team so they don't know how powerful you really are, or do you do things where you are purpose--so they, you know, they can't dismiss... I mean, to be honest, I think that the people probably were...you know, I...I don't want to sound, like, self-aggrandizing of me and Helen Moore, but I think it probably did

terrify some people to see that there was someone who had research credibility who was saying that she was right, you know, and that...and that I...I imagine that must... I mean, 'cause to me, that is what... When you have people who are from various, very different sectors all on the same page working together, I think...I think that's what gets powerful.

So, I know that one thing we explicitly worked on was trying to get the unions, you know, DFT [Detroit Federation of Teachers]--and we knew, not from a position of leadership, but the rank-and-file--on the same page as community activists. I know in Chicago [Illinois] that that's one of the ways that the CORE [Caucus of Rank and File Educators] faction became prominent within the CTU, the Chicago Teachers' Union, the CORE Faction led by Karen Davis [I think he means Karen Lewis?]. They...they basically were like, "We are going to build political momentum by joining with community activists and talking about how what we are about is the kids and their learning conditions and what's doing...about...where about we're not the professionals who want to get as much money as possible, you know, we're framing ourselves now as we are fighting for the kids, just like community activists were." And so basically, what happened there is you started to have the...the community activists, you know, on the South Side of Chicago, for example, messaging the exact same way as the...as this faction of the teacher's union, and we tried to get that, and we had some success here as well. The...the...at...at a leadership level, the...the DFT has been horrible in terms of being willing to endorse the rank-and-file activists, the ones who were elected and who were resisting the emergency management. But rank-and-file, we were able to convince a lot of people, so that they began to say as well, you know, the elected board has to be returned to power, this elected board does.

You know, in...in Chicago, they still have a mayorally-appointed board. They're fighting for an elected board, so they don't have that third piece, but our objective was to get the elected board, the rank-and-file teachers, and the community advocates all asking for the same thing 'cause I think that's what's real--and researchers, as well--'cause I think that's what...that's when you become really powerful and difficult. I mean, you know, like I think, I don't want to romanticize, but--and I know that there are probably other dynamics that I'm not aware of--but the EAA [Education Achievement Authority]--I think I might have mentioned this before--the EAA had, you know, in the summer of 2013, I believe, at the Mackinac [Policy?] Conference, 63 million dollars of new commitments poured into it by

foundations, like the Bloomberg [Family] Foundation, the [Eli and Edythe] Broad Foundation, and Arne Duncan had--you know, who was the Secretary of Education under Barack Obama--he had come to...to one of the EAA schools and said, "This is the future of American education." And you know, within a couple years, we were--with no money--we were able to turn the EAA toxic.

I mean, one of my favorite stories is, you know, the...the person who was my dean at the College of Education [Carolyn Shields?], to my...to my great dissat...dissatisfaction, when I told her in 2012 that I was going to testify against the codification of the EAA and its expansion across the state, she laughed at me, and she's like, "Pfhhh, what are you gonna do, delay it for four days?" And like, I like to... Two years later, I was like, "Well, they still haven't expanded it. They still have not codified it into state law." And...and, you know, now I haven't gone to her yet. I don't want to go out and say it's gone. You know, to her, it was like, that train's left the station, there's nothing you can do about it. It's like, fuck you, you know. Maybe if you were helping, we could have done even more. But yeah. So that's--to me--that's, you know, I think those are really great...

You know what, Kate Levy would be a great person to ask, too. I don't know if you're... I know you know her, if you're interviewing, 'cause she...you know, she talk...she's from a--un...unlike me, she's actually from a fairly wealthy family and, you know, she gets a lot of support from the work she does from the patronage of her family, and, you know, obviously she's also a white Jewish woman, and I'm sure has, you know, she'd have some interesting things to say as well about these kind of questions. Yeah.

[0:53:26]

**PB:** I want...I want to dig into the EAA [Education Achievement Authority] a little bit in terms of, like, what...what particularly made that struggle against the EAA successful. What, like...what was it from an organizing perspective, what...what can you point to that were, like, some of the reasons why...

**TP:** Yeah.

**PB:** ...that succeeded?

**TP:** And of course, the only things I can point to are the ones that I know of, right? There's stuff that probably happened behind the scenes that I'll never know, no one will ever know, it will never be documented that was also part of the equation. But if...I mean, I...and...and... Obviously, the things I speak to are gonna be the ones that I know best, and things I know best are the things I was involved in, right? I mean, to the extent that it's possible, I'll try to mention things that I wasn't involved in, but I know that...I know that...I mean... I mean, one thing that happened early on is I...there was a representative that was the minority chair of the House Education Committee, and she had--Ellen Lipton, Ellen Cogen-Lipton. She had, during the time that the House Education Committee was having testimony on whether the EAA, which was brand-new then, should be codified into law--you know, become a regular part of state law. It had this very fragile existence, at first--and expanded across the state, which was certainly the objective of the people that created it. She wanted to find information, more information, about the EAA. And...and [laughs] although she was the minority chair of the House Education Committee, when she asked for that information, the EAA refused to give it to her, and so she had to FOIA [Freedom of Information Act] it. And to her credit, you know, think about this. She's on the committee that's deciding whether...and she has to FOIA information that she needs to make her decision. So, it made the press when she...she had to pay 2,700 dollars out of her own pocket--it was something...it was over 2,000 dollars--to get this information that was essential for her to make a dec--and...and that kind of caught people's, you know, like, what? You had to do what? You had to pay how much?

I...I know that one of the things that I did was... When I heard the EAA after its first half a year of existence make claims about the tremendous progress that had been made there, I know that one of the things I did--and I think I may have talked about this last time--was I...I did my own...I... You know, basically, all of the media were reporting these claims as simply factual that it was something like half of the students have made two years of progress in the first six months, and another half have made...you know, another large portion have made a year of progress within six months. And of course, I love good news, but I...I just was deeply skeptical, not

because I don't think--not because I think African American kids couldn't be that successful but because the very methods that they were using to teach students ran exactly counter to everything that researchers say that is effective teaching for folks in general and African American folks. You know, putting people in front of computers for most of the day and...and so, you know, so like, really?

And...and so, the first thing I did was I reached out to the media that reported it and said, "Well, so, did you get anything other than--like 'cause you reported it--anything other than the spokesperson declaring it?" And...and what I found is that nobody did. All they had was her declaration. I said, "You didn't... None of you saw the underlying reports or anything like that?" And they hadn't.

And one of the really important things that happened that I wasn't initially directly involved with was that Eclectablog, who is a, you know, a...a blogger from Michigan who has, you know, he's gotten some national attention for his blog. But he interviewed about 14 EAA teachers totally, you know, confidentially and...and just presented their testimony in Eclectablog. And...and so, that gave me a sense of what was probably really going on 'cause what they talked about were just abysmal conditions of teaching, computers broken, no WiFi, you know, the WiFi not working. And so, I started to hear that, you know, teachers saying, you know, the tests were ridiculous that they...they did, the baseline tests, that they were now doing this test later on in the year and saying that they made this incredible progress--and I...I think I may have already told this story, but--I...I FOIA'd all of the documents, all the emails pertaining to testing conditions at the EAA and got thousands of pages and basically realized, of course, that what teachers were saying was true and that there were all kinds of flaws in the way the test was administered. And I basically contacted Scantron, which was--'cause they had stupidly provided the phone numbers, the...the cell phone numbers for the people in Scantron who were their contracts, so I just called them--and...and...and shared all the facts that I had found and compiled and read statements that the EAA itself said and said, "Do you support their contention that...that all this progress was made?" And...and...and then just reported what they said in the newspaper in, like, an op-ed. And...I think that helped to sort of say, you know what? These claims probably aren't so true.

I did another study of...it was a MEAP [Michigan Educational Assessment Program] cohort study that looked at how much progress students had made on the ME...the MEAP, which was--now it's called the M-STEP [Michigan Student Test of Educational Progress]--and it basically showed that not only had students not been making progress, they'd actually been retrogressing in terms of proficiency, that a lot of students who were proficient were now no longer proficient. Just, you know, stunning stuff that, again, directly contradicted their claims of great progress. And you know, that got distributed across the...the legislature when they were debating whether to codify and expand the EAA [Education Achievement Authority]. You know, and Curt Guyette did this thing when he...he--I'm sure... I hope he spoke to it. And you know, obviously, he probably spoke to Flint [Michigan] as well--but about this FOIA that the ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union] paid for and that went through me that...where he was investigating, where they were investigating the Buzz software, and they basically uncovered that there were two for-profit companies based in Utah--I believe it was Agilix and School Improvement Network--who were using the EAA as a way of building a product that they could market to other Black districts across the country and claim that this was how Black kids learn. And you know, I mean... And we uncovered their--again, just using their own words against them--like their...their people in their development office saying, you know, like, "You can't sell this to Paducah, Kentucky yet because it's basically"--what was the word that they used? It was just mind-blowing--"This software is a hack." I mean, just, you know, I mean... I can speak about just this for hours, but just their own internal testimony about what garbage, nonfunctional garbage, this software was that they were using that they wanted to then peddle as this great succ--and make a hell of a lot of money, you know. And, you know, so Curt did a two-part series on that.

You know, and there were other scandals that happened too, like, you know, but they were things that to me were like not nearly as meaty, but they got more attention 'cause mainstream reporters reported on them, like... But we were the first to talk negatively about, you know, present facts that--not talk negatively but just present facts that made it look less than rosy, right? But eventually, you know, one...I mean, we knew that's when we had won was when mainstream reporters were coming, were...were...were able to say negative things about the EAA. So there were scandals about the money that [John] Covington had spent traveling, but to me, it's like, you know... You know, personally I believe that whether he

misspent or not, there is a value to traveling to conferences. I don't think that's scandalous, you know. But, those were the kinds of thing that got traction in the mainstream media and probably had a...an effect as well, was looked at like, you know, you're spending all this money on the dime of poor kids. I mean to me, what Kurt uncovered is much worse than that, but...and what I uncovered too in terms of fabricating positive results.

But you know, any...anyway, I mean, that, that's basically the process is, you know, we...we... It went from an environment of it being celebrated as this holy gee whiz success, look how much they've done, Arne Duncan flying in and being in an EAA school, and isn't this amazing, what, you know, this is the future of imagination, to...to finally breaking through and getting some stuff that raised questions, like maybe this isn't quite what we thought it was. And then when, you know, again, once the mainstream comes in, that's when you know you won, right? That's when you know that they...they...and they knew that they couldn't recover from that, you know. Anyway, there's--I could talk for hours about it, but I also think I might have talked about some of this before.

[1:02:56]

**PB:** No, that was great, thank you.

**TP:** Okay, great.

**PB:** [Inaudible] Okay, thanks. You mentioned before about, like, how--and this is...I've noticed this in researching newspaper coverage--the way that Helen Moore is treated...

**TP:** Yeah.

**PB:** ...in this city. Even the Michigan Chronicle...

**TP:** Yeah, yeah.

**PB:** ...gets into this too. Like, she's painted as somebody who's unreasonable, has unrealistic...

**TP:** Right.

**PB:** ...demands, or is like...

**TP:** Yeah.

**PB:** ...all of these things, the way that she's painted. Can you talk a little bit--like, in an effort to start balancing this out--can you talk about what you've learned from...here we call her Queen Mother Helen Moore. Can you talk about what you've learned...

**TP:** Yeah, I call her that too.

**PB:** ...from Queen Mother Moore and her importance within this long struggle for educational equity in the city?

**TP:** Yeah. Well, I mean, one of the first things that became clear to me is that everything that... [laughs] that she was saying was true. Like, she would say things that to me seemed--this was when I was first getting to know her--to me seemed to be dubious. You know, like, there seemed to be outlandish claims--and I'll try to remember some examples--but I would always find out that when I actually began to dig into it that, oh my God, she's right, you know, that what she was saying was actually backed up by facts. So, I mean, one thing is I think she's brilliant in terms of being able to sort of understand the battlefield and all the forces arranged in it and have an intuitive sense of what is really going on that underlies these things.



What...let's see, what do I want to say about...about her? I mean, I...I look at her as just having about as much moral authority as you can possibly imagine, you know. She's someone who, you know, she came to Detroit when she was very young. She...she's...she tells amazing stories about surviving the 1943 white riots--have you talked to her?

**PB:** Mmhmm.

**TP:** Yeah, as a little girl and, you know. So, she...she's been on the scene forever, probably close to 50 years now, as an educational advocate. And you know, I mean, she was a friend of Rosa Parks and she, you know. She...they filed--she and Rosa Parks--filed this lawsuit against the first state takeover. You know, and...and...and I can understand why people who are powerful would want to pillage her image because it potentially carries so much weight, right? If she...and if she's crazy, you know, if you can, like, paint her as just, you know, like, I...I've seen people trying to diminish it. Chastity Pratt was like, "You're scared of a little old lady?" It's like, "Well, you sh--" You know, it's... She was mocking emergency managers for being scared of a little old lady--or maybe it was the first...the elected board when they first came into power--and it was like, you should be scared of that little old lady, you know, 'cause the little old lady will kick your fucking ass.

She's...she is...she is...she's done things that are so outrageous, like, it's just, it's great. And you know, I think to some degree, she has enjoyed and even realized that there's a strategy to being perceived as crazy. It's very energizing, for one thing, I mean. I remember when...I remember when she just told Dan Varner, who was the head of Excellent Schools Detroit--and I...I refer to him as every suburbanites' favorite Detroiter, you know--who was head of Excellent Schools Detroit and was like, you know, we need to have markets competing for parents and just all this crap. And...and...and [laughs] she in a public forum, she threatened to kick his ass. Like just, and I just, it's just so funny, right? I mean, to think of, you know, I mean, you know, in...in some ways, she, you know, she is now 80, she was 75 or whatever then and, you know, Dan Varner's this tall man,

[reaches hand upward to indicate great height] you know, strong man, and it just... It's kind of disarming.

But, I don't know. I mean, you know, Helen Moore is just so pure of heart. I mean, I'm so...I'm so glad, given the way that she's been constantly derided that... You know, on the other hand, she's also, when the New York Times reported on the DIA's, the Detroit Institute of Arts' special exhibit on, you know, what is it, 50 years after the riots, [air quotes] "the uprising," they used a portrait of her in the New York Times, right? And...and, you know, it was something done by her son, it's gained huge attention as an artwork in itself. It's now part of their permanent exhibit, and I love that because people have tried so hard to pillory her image, you know.

I think she's... You know, everybody knows her [laughs], you know, certainly in Detroit. I...I remember when I was with her at the Fisher Building once. It's like everybody knew her, like, you know, the guy selling candy bars. It's like, "Hey, Mama Moore!" And she's like, "Hey, how are you doing? You've been blah blah blah blah blah." You know, that...that was just amazing.

And...and, you know, I could always tell that she was the only one who was like... She was...she was so crazy that she was willing to sound crazy beca--for defense of children in Detroit. She didn't care. You know, and...and...but you knew that everything was coming from a space of what really mattered, and it's sort of like if you were calling her crazy, then it's sort of also calling her cause crazy, you know. I mean...I mean, think about her. She's...she pursued a law...she got a law degree so that she could better decipher the way that the law was being used against kids in Detroit. And she...she got celebr--I went to, you know, and I filmed it, when she got an award from Michigan State [University] where she got her law degree. They were celebrating, you know, her advocacy work that she had done. I mean, I don't know, she's, to me she's a patron saint, sort of, of what's good and moral and...and sacred, really, in Detroit. And...and I know other people can see that 'cause I...I knew that as soon as she connected up with Jitu Brown, who's the executive director of...of Journey for Justice Alliance, that...that he would see it too, and...and he did. And he also, like, held her up as, like, a symbol of the movement nationally. You know, like I...I...

You know, it's...it's interesting because we were talking before the interview started about...about the Dexter-Elmhurst Center, you know, where so many meetings happened, and that is...that has been such an important place in resistance since 2010 or so. Like, I...I...I know that, you know, if...if... I often thought about how that place would be targeted, you know, and I think it has been targeted, probably, in some ways, like in terms of code violations and stuff like that, because that has been such an important part of so many political movements in this city. I'll stop there. If you have more questions...

[1:10:50]

**PB:** Oh, yeah. I mean, could you talk about, like, some of, like, just some memories of move...of...of movement building within Dexter-Elmhurst? Like...

**TP:** Yeah.

**PB:** ...you've mentioned before the 2016 teacher walkouts? Maybe we could use that as an example.

**TP:** Yeah, yeah. I mean, I...I'm not saying that was *the* space that the teacher walkout was talked about, but it was one of the places that it was talked about, and I remember very specifically a conversation there just before the walkouts started about the opportunity that was presented given that the whole country and really the world was paying attent...attention to the Flint water crisis and how emergency management had played a role in that, the disempowerment of the Black electorate had played a role of that, that...that there had been citizens, there had been alderpeople who had tried to interrupt it and weren't successful, largely because those sort of avenues, that sort of recourse and access to democracy had been shut off. And so, you...you know, teachers were gonna walk out because of the...they felt the learning conditions of students were horrible. But to them, learning conditions also meant class sizes, which were huge, which were part of the demands and the fact that you had a lot of substitute teachers who were, you know, over classrooms, and...and...and...and basically we...we

talked about the strategy of highlighting the health issues, the visible health issues in the school, and the threat to children's health because we knew that that would resonate with all of the conversation about the impact of Flint where kids were being poisoned. So, we talked about how, you know, if we connect the fact that Darnell Earley was the emergency manager who switched the water to the fact that he's now the DPS [Detroit Public Schools] emergency manager and that there are these deplorable conditions with rats and, you know, fungus, and mold and everything else, you know, either too much heat or not enough heat, or whatever it might be, that that would sort of capture, it would sort of just slip into that spot in the national consciousness. And, it...it worked that way, right?

I mean...I mean, one thing that I may have talked about last time or that other people talked about is that the...the DFT [Detroit Federation of Teachers] leadership was not...that was...they were not on board at all with the teacher sickouts and the teacher walkouts, that some people even have copies of the robocalls that the Teachers' Union--at a level of leadership--made telling teachers not to walk out. Yet when it did capture the national imagination and got reported, then eventually, you know, the leadership supported it, and Randi Weingarten flew in to claim victory--the head of the AFT [American Federation of Teachers].

But, you know, so that was a conversation that happened there. I mean, I...I know that, you know...you know, Keep the Vote/No Takeover met there, Detroit Independent Freedom Schools met there. You know, these were the groups that were the ones that were always at the center of resisting what was happening. And you know, it was--and you know, Mama Moore [laughs] was always having fundraisers where she was making the--I can't remember what it was she'd make, like she made some kind of pie and chicken wings, you know, and selling them at 10 dollars a plate, you know, to raise money for Dexter-Elmhurst. Russ Bellant always contributing his personal labor 'cause he has a lot of expertise in repairing plumbing and sprinkler systems and stuff like that, security. So, you know, it's just always been... It's always been right at the edge of not being able to be used anymore, and it's always been such an important part of...of all of those movements. I mean, I know I've been going there since roughly 2010, you know, since I became really involved, and you know, whenever... It just was a place where whenever there was something to report about, what was happening in the state level, we would go there, you know, like to share the data with the

people at the Keep the Vote/No Takeover. A lot of really packed, powerful meetings that happened there. You know, I remember meetings where...where we were freezing because there was no heat, and I remember one meeting was like minus 10 degrees, and...and all there was was--there was no light, and we were there meeting. There was a space heater, which provided some warmth, but it was really--but packed, kids there [laughs]. You know, and you know, really...I mean...I mean, it's not, it doesn't belong to Mother Helen Moore, but she's sort of become the patron saint of that too, and she's definitely helped to fight for its survival every step of the way. And I...you know, if that hadn't been there, I...I mean, maybe we would have found someplace else to go, but that was definitely... I always thought of it, like, wow, if I was powerful and I was all just invested in shutting down activism, this is the place I'd go after, right here, 'cause, you know, it's...it's where so many important things happened.

[1:15:50]

**PB:** This is gonna be a...a very different tangent.

**TP:** Okay.

**PB:** We talked a little bit last time about the role of nonprofits and philanthropy and how...what their role has been in, you know, public education...

**TP:** Yeah.

**PB:** ...in the city. I want to ask you specifically about Skillman [Foundation], ...

**TP:** Okay.

**PB:** ...the role that Skillman [Foundation] and others, too, have played in kind of this organizing sphere in this city with...with Coalition for the Future of Detroit School Children...

**TP:** Yeah.

**PB:** ...and the reports that they came out. So, could you kind of give us the landscape of...

**TP:** Sure.

**PB:** ...what came out with that and maybe, like, your critiques of...

**TP:** Yeah.

**PB:** ...what they've put out?

**TP:** Yep. Well, one thing I would say is Skillman is still at it. And so now, they're operating through an organization called Detroit Children's Fund, and they were just in the news last week because they're seeding several charters with millions of dollars, and the idea is they're saying, "Well, the big...the big corporate charters don't want to come to Detroit. So, we've got to seed our own local success stories." So, they're pumping lots of money into particular charter schools to make them more successful. And so, you know, I mean, I'll kind of... I mean, one thing that I notice in the press is if you...whenever they talk about Skillman, Skillman is always represented as a community-based organization, a Detroit community-based organization, and the face of it, the public face of it, is always Black. You know, it's Tonya Allen. Before Tonya Allen, it was Carol Goss, and, you know, leaders of some of the partnering organizations like Detroit Parent Network, for example, or Excellent Schools Detroit have always been Black leaders as well.

But, it doesn't take much to kind of carve that back a little bit and see what the organization really is, and, you know, this is sort of a nutshell. The...the Skillman Foundation is largely funded...its monies...its original monies come from the 3M [Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company] fortune and, you know, Mr. [Robert] Skillman worked for 3M and that's where he got lots of his money, and 3M is based in Minnesota, and it's a known polluter, right? So this is, first of all, this...where does...where did the assets come from? They come from the corporate sector, from a big polluter, 3M. And then, you could sort of say, well, you know, who are they and what have they done? Who are they really? Well, if you look at the board--and what I've been trying to understand is how much does...how much does Tonya Allen work on things on a day-to-day basis and how much does...is the board involved in making decisions?--but if you look at the board, who they are. Yes, they have Tonya Allen as a local Black face, but Denise Ilitch is... Their board has about eight people on it, and...you know, at least half of them are the following people--and I don't know if I remember all of their names but, you know--there's Denise Ilitch, who's now in charge of Ilitch Holdings, right? There's--I can't think of what his name is, but--and she's the vice chair. The chair [Bill Emerson]--I can't think of his name right now, but he's the Vice President of Quicken Loans and Rock Financial, and he is, nationally, the head of the Mortgage Builders' Association or something like that, like a chief mortgage, you know, affiliation, nationally. The President of DTE [Detroit Edison] [Jerry Norcia] is part of the Skillman board. There are a couple other people who are specifically involved in the financial industry, like, you know, uber-rich people, right?

And to me, that's who Skillman really is, right? And that's whose interests they represent, and one of their successes is that they are perceived as being this benevolent, locally-based Detroit organization. Like, where the hell did all this money come from? And you know, it's very--I mean, I would want to do the same thing if I wanted to fool a lot of people, I'd put--just like they always do with the emergency managers, they always made Black emergency--I mean, it's insulting, and Detroiters didn't fall for it, but like, "Oh, mustn't be so bad, it's a Black person who's in charge of us"--who's the puppet of the governor and is being directly controlled by Governor [Rick] Snyder.

So, what have they actually done and who have they partnered with nationally? You know, Skillman in 2010 rolled out Excellent Schools Detroit, and we know a lot about the planning for that rollout because when I... [laughs] when...when the

elected board--this is probably important history that I don't know if you've heard yet, but--when the elected board was suing the governor and the emergency manager, Robert Bobb, for academic control, they no longer had access to their attorneys because the attorneys required money and money was required--was controlled by the financial manager. So, the elected board didn't have access to its own attorneys, so they had to get pro bono attorneys, and they got... I'll try to keep it simple. The attorneys that they got were working pro bono, and they needed help with re...re... They...they needed a research consultant, and they'd heard about me, so they reached out to me, and that was actually one of the first roles I played. And they also wanted me to help line up national experts to come and testify, and so I brought in Pauline Lipman, who's amazing, from Chicago, who did testify, and Wendy Baxter in her decision favoring the elected board and giving it academic control cited Pauline Lipman's testimony again and again. And anyway, so...so I did all of this work with the attorneys as consult--giving them research background and telling them what to think about and what to say and all this kind of stuff, and so they basically, the attorneys said to me, well, we want to reward you, but we can't pay you. So, what I want to offer is we know you're a researcher and part of our power in this case is the power of discovery. So, what do you want to know? And I...I...I wanted to know about the origins of Excellent Schools Detroit. I wanted to see the e-mail communication, like especia--I think, especially that touched on DPS [Detroit Public Schools]. That's why we could get access to it because part of the conversation was with the people working for the emergency manager.

[1:22:08]

And so, we got it. We got thousands of pages, and there it is. It's laid out, you know. I mean, there's some...some examples that are just..it...it's hard to read 'em, you know. It...it's sort of like, you...you know. First of all, it's all the same players who then became members of the Excellent Schools Detroit Coalition. So, you have Louis Glazer, who is the head of Michigan Future Incorporated still, which is a charter incubator, and, you know, he's...he's basic... He was sort of the philosophical kingpin. This came out through the emails, right? He's...he's, you know, he's saying, you know, what matters much less is the choices, the...the choice of Detroiters as voters. What matters much more is the behavior as consumers, and our job is to turn them into educational consumers. To which I would respond, you know, in the public sphere, you're not an education



consumer, you're an educational owner. What's more powerful, to be the owner of a school or a customer of a school? I'd want to be the owner, right? And so, you're trading off being an owner for being a...a customer of it, you know. But...but anyway, that was his philosophical position, and some of the things that were more egregious that came out... I mean, you could just see them all talking with each other, you know, like Tonya Allen and Carol Goss and Steve Wasko, who was the communications person for DPS and...and...

And...and you know, so...so what...what were they rolling out? Well, they were rolling out--and you can still find this online--the Excellent Schools Detroit, it...it was called Taking Ownership, which I think is an apt name for it, and, you know, some of the primary things it did was it called for the abolition of the elected board. It called for mayoral control or a single point of accountability, and when Mayor [Dave] Bing wasn't willing to go along with it, they were happy to work with the emergency manager, Robert Bobb, and following emergency managers. It called for the creation of a recovery school district in Detroit, which was the EAA [Education Achievement Authority], and it called for parents to get quality measurements of schools largely based on test scores, which don't measure school performance or school quality but rather measure socio-economic status of the families that send their kids there. But the idea was that...that parents could identify the [air quotes] "more successful schools"--in other words, the ones that didn't have a lot of poor people in them--and then choose those schools, presumably because there'd be options there. And the idea was they didn't care if they were charters or Detroit Public Schools or inner-ring suburban schools--a lot of the schools that were promoted were inner-ring public schools, you know, just outside of Detroit. And...and you know...and...and also they...they brought in Teach for America in 2010.

So...so this was their agenda, and...and I really think that their agenda hasn't changed very much. But, one of the things that I always like to point out is that, at that time, Amber Arellano, who now is, or was until recently, the executive director of Education Trust-Midwest, which is the most-cited educational [air quotes] "expert" in the state even though it's an educational advocacy organization funded by the [Bill and Melinda] Gates Foundation and the Walton [Family] Foundation, as in Wal-Mart. So...so basically this...this...in this discovery, what we see is Omber--Amber Arellano working for the Detroit News saying, "Hey, Skillman people, I've gotten you really great coverage of your rollout of Excellent

Schools Detroit. We've given you prime, you know, [laughs] acreage in the paper, you know. There's this article, this article, this article, and what we did is we have it set up so that anybody who resists your agenda is pro...is...is framed as a supporter of an indefensible status quo." Right? Because that's what newspapers do, right, is act as the public relations arm of a...of a foundation that is based in 3M money and headed by people like Denise Ilitch and so on and so forth.

And...so...you know, I mean, the things that--besides supporting those particular positions, and Skillman has really gotten its way with the district. I mean, they got the EAA. They got in the public consciousness the mind...the idea that, you know, public schools suck in Detroit because of their test scores--which really just means that they serve low-income kids. You know, they...they basically got their way with everything--and in doing this, they partnered with... So...so...so, it's 3M money led by these corporate people with a Black face out front, and they partner nationally with the foundations that have been identified nationally as leading the way in market-based education, dismantling of public schools, particularly in Black city--Black and Latino city centers. So, the Walton Foundation based on Wal-Mart money, Eli Broad, who's from Detroit and is a Democrat, life-long Democrat, and the Gates Foundation, also Bill Gates is a life-long Democrat. If you look at the literature, you'll see that they have been the real force between high-stakes testing, merit pay, accountability for teachers in schools based on test scores, the idea that sch--that schools should compete for parents, you know, all of these things is their work. And Skillman partnered with them, like they brought Broad...Broad... I mean, the EAA was essentially a partnership between Eli Broad, Skillman, and Governor [Rick] Snyder.

So...so that was their agenda back in 2010. At the time that the Coalition was formed, one of the things that I know--I'll try to be quick 'cause I know I don't have much time, you don't have much time--but...but because [laughs] I was paying really close attention, I know that the very things that the...that the Co...Coalition for our School Children [Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren?], or whatever it's called, in 2015, 2016, somewhere in there, called for, Skillman had been--and Excellent Schools Detroit--had been calling for that very thing for months before the Coalition ever met or was assembled. Like, they had been calling for a portfolio system, a portfolio model--and these are things that take a while to unpack, but...but--they had been calling for single-enrollment system for the entire area between charters and regular public

schools and, you know, the very things that were endorsed also by the Coalition. At least two people endorsed me to be, like, nominated me to be in that Coalition, but Tonya Allen personally said--from what I hear from LaMar Lemmons, I believe--that she said that I was too negative, and so I shouldn't be on it. But...but I was still invited to give testimony at one of their meetings, at their... There was a governance committee, sub-committee or something, and I did give testimony and...and basically talked about why the elected board should be given the role of deciding on school opening and closings, much like the...the...the public schools in Chicago control all of the charters.

So, I mean... I mean, just to sort of jump ahead, one of the things that I pointed out with the recommendations of the Coalition is that it was reported in the press that they were calling for a return to elected board power and for the closure of the EAA. But when you read, actually read, the report--which I did and which many members of the Coalition didn't actually read themselves--it actually was returning the EAA to its original statewide role, partly closing down the EAA, and it was saying that the elected board should have power, but there should also be this Detroit Education Commission that decided some of the most important issues like school openings and closings, which is a major power of any elected, any other elect... You know, so what I would do is I'd, like, interview people with other boards and say, "What would it be like to have your power taken away to decide which schools you keep open and which you close?" And of course, they said, "Well, that's a huge amount of our power."

Anyway, all of that to say that, you know, Skillman is...is... They...they fundamentally believe in a market model of education. They believe in things that have been thoroughly disproven in the literature over decades and, you know, I think they're part of a network that just...that's how they roll, that's what they advocate, and they haven't changed their views despite... You know, you would hope there'd be some sort of learning curve based on what's actually happened in Detroit, but...

[1:30:25. Jump cut]

I...I mean, there...there's too much to unpack in just a few minutes, but there's a lot of stuff there about, like, whose interests are really at work. I mean, just some...some things--I...I don't know if I mentioned this one last time, but one of the things I still can't believe that was--that hasn't been reported in the press was that Sharlonda Buckman, who was this, you know, who's part of that whole Coalition who called--you know, she's...she was...or I think she still is actually the CEO of Detroit Parent Network, or if she's not, she...she was until very recently. Sharlonda Buckman in 2009, 2010 went on national television, on Fox News, and said that Detroit teachers should be put in jail because of the low test scores, and she...she was part of the board of the EAA when the EAA opened, and you can look back at the minutes of the meeting of--it's like August 15, it's in August 2012, right before the EAA opened its doors--where you...you look at the agenda and at the beginning of the agenda, it says we thank Sharlonda Buckman for her service. She's refine--resigning effective immediately. And later in the agenda, her company, Detroit Parent Network, that she's the CEO of is hired for a huge contract for the EAA, which it kept for multiple years in...in all--I mean, I think the original one was maybe 700,000 dollars, but in the end, it was well over a million dollars, right? It's like, why wasn't that in the press that...? I mean, to me, that seems really unethical. You're on the board, and the day you resign you get a huge contract with that very board? I don't know. Yeah, but... So, I'll stop there.

[1:32:10]

**PB:** Thank you.

**TP:** Sure.

**PB:** So that...so that we make sure that we're doing our due diligence in gettin--getting sources from the right people, I want to get your input on who else we should be speaking with. So, so far we've talked to Helen Moore, Elena Herrada, Malik Yakini, Aurora Harris. We have, as I mentioned, Aliya Moore, Yolanda Peoples, also lined up for interviews. Who else should we be talking to?

**TP:** Well, Russ Bellant, for sure. Victor Gibson. Trying to think who else... Maybe Jason Patton? I mean, I know you can't interview everybody, but... You know, Victor Gibson is a big rank-and-file DFT leader and very involved in the construction and defense of African-centered curriculum in the district. He's now one of the leaders of the retirees within the union.

**PB:** What's Jason Patton's position?

**TP:** I...I...you know... He was a principal who was dismissed by...under emergency management. He's also a long-time advocate for African-centered pedagogy and curriculum. Let's see, who else? I mean, I...I think Al--the reporter, Allie Gross, I think has a... You know, her very first story, I think, traced out a really important line about the Skillman Foundation that she published in Jacobin. You know, if she's available, she might be good to talk to. Tawanna Simpson, you know, I...she's come up a few times in what I've mentioned. Yeah. Maybe William Weir, who's now retired, but long-time DFT teacher.

**PB:** Oh, we also talked to John Telford, too, I didn't know if you...

**TP:** Okay. Emma Howland-Bolton. Do you know about her?

**PB:** No.

**TP:** She's a...she's amazing. She's a...she's a white teacher. She came here through Teach for America but stayed on and is incredibly critical of TFA and is just... She was interviewed on CBS after [Betsy] DeVos made some of her really stupid comments one of the times, and it got like a million hits, you know, just took down DeVos like no one ever has. Yeah, she's amazing.

**PB:** Emma Howland-Bolton?

**TP:** Yeah. Howland. H-O-W-L-A-N-D hyphen B-O-L-T-O-N. I mean, you know, there's a...there's the teachers who are the leaders of the sickouts. I don't know if you've talked to any of them. So, Vanessa Dawson, she'd be...she... I mean, she'd be probably the best starting point, but there'd be many others as well. Maybe Joel Berger, B-E-R-G-E-R. He's a white guy. He's also--both of those people eventually got elected to the DFT Board on a...on a...on a...an insurgent slate.

**PB:** Yeah, that's valuable, too, because that's something that really haven't spent much time talking about is the DFT's role in all of this.

**TP:** Yeah.

**PB:** So, I appreciate that you brought us there [inaudible]

**TP:** Yeah. And...and basically very problematic at the level of leadership, at like, you know, top leadership, and that's true of the union. But that's true at the national level, the Michigan level, and that's been true in the Detroit level as well. But, you know, rank-and-file teachers kick ass, and, you know, I mean, what I think is--I've probably went into this more depth before--but when that sickout happened, teachers voted... The...the union was discouraging them to walk out, and the teachers voted building by building, and 87 out of 91 buildings voted to walk out, and they just kicked ass, you know. They...they...they were so successful in...in getting attention to what was happening in Detroit schools, and, you know, as usual, the leadership's behavior was reprehensible, you know.

To the...I think...I think probably Emma Howland-Bolton could even speak about her and others, you know, who were the instigators a lot of this work being silenced at the same time that the union was pivoting to claim victory over the ver--So in other words, the way I've heard it, the very people who were the teachers, the rank-and-file, who had instigated the sickouts that were successful and that the leadership eventually claimed as their own even though they had discouraged them initially, they then silenced the very people who were--it's sort of like in Saudi Arabia. A lot of the women activists who were the ones who pushed for women to have the right to drive are in jail, even as the st--as Saudi

Arabia, fo...largely for PR [public relations] reasons, moved to...to accept women as drivers. It was the same sort of move, you know.

**PB:** That's a useful analogy.

**TP:** Yeah. Fun fact to close on: Someone who's very high-level in the state [laughs] shared with me about a week ago--and I can't say, just 'cause I got to protect, but--sent me video, which is probably publicly available of...of [Rick] Snyder's best buddy, what is his name? I don't know if...if you've been paying attention when he was governor... Baird. Richard Baird was like his... It was like his number two person that he...it was a... I don't even know if he had an official position, but he was, you know, well-known to be the person that Snyder turned to the most for advice. And he talked about when right-to-work was passed, which I believe was during lame duck in 2012, and about negotiating with the head of the teachers' unions in the state and how--and...and he revealed this, you know, for the first time this was made public, but it didn't surprise those of us who have been critics of union leadership--not rank-and-file but leadership--that...that at the state level, the union leaders were willing to accept the Right's demand that the state Board of Education be dissolved, and, you know, like to me, that is mind-blowing to know and not at all surprising in some ways, right?

I mean, it's just--to me--at a national, state, and local level, the leadership has often been very corporate and very problematic and is...has oftentimes collaborated with emergency management. Like, the union also participated in the first state takeover. They signed--I mean, I've seen the letters--they signed off on, as...as supportive of, the original takeover in 1999. And so, you know, one thing you'll hear from talking to Helen Moore and certainly to Elena Herrada and some of those people is incredible distrust of the union leadership which often gets construed as them being an anti-union, and nothing could be further from the truth. They're...they're...they are very critical of...of corrupted, co-opted, corporate union leadership and very supportive of rank-and-file teachers whether they're white or Black or whatever. Most of them have stood on the right side of things, I've...I've found, and I think that they've found as well. Yeah.

**PB:** Thank you.

**TP:** You're welcome.