

James (Jim) Walton interview
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Note

This interview was not transcribed at the time of the interview project. This transcript was auto-generated using YouTube captioning then manually edited, corrected, and QCd by Archivist A. Demeter, 8/2024.

Summary

In this interview with Jim Walton, he describes his upbringing in Texas and education, his military service and original career plans prior to coming to Tacoma. The bulk of the interview discusses his long history in Tacoma, beginning with his first job in the city and playing football, to his role as an adult student at TCC forming the Black student group the Obi Society. Walton discusses Obi's fight for greater representation of Black culture in the curriculum, support for Black students, and more Black students and employees on campus; bringing Muhammad Ali to speak in Tacoma; violence on campus and off, including his involvement in calming the Hilltop incident. He also discusses the new community group the Black Collective and changes in the city that came out of that experience, and his decision to work for the city. He reflects on his achievements and the ways that TCC and students have changed over the years.

Table of Contents

- I. Family history in Texas p.3-4
- II. Family expectation of education p. 4-5
- III. Religious upbringing p.5
- IV. Living in segregated society p.5
- V. Military service and schooling p.5-6
- VI. Early career plans and role models p.6
- VII. Living in the Hilltop neighborhood, starting at TCC as an adult p.6-8
- VIII. Playing football p.8
- IX. Forming the Obi Society with Black students at TCC p.9
- X. TCC role models p.9
- XI. Incident at The Rock p.10
- XII. Coverage of Obi news in the student newspaper p.10-11
- XIII. Obi leadership p.11-12
- XIV. The 11 demands p.11-12
- XV. The death of Martin Luther King, Jr. p.12-13
- XVI. Muhammad Ali p.13
- XVII. Working for change p.13-14
- XVIII. Hilltop Incident p.14
- XIX. The Black Collective p.14-15
- XX. Carl Brown p.15-16
- XXI. Work at City of Tacoma p.16-17
- XXII. Career achievements p.17
- XXIII. Wife serving as TCC Trustee p.18

- XXIV. Work with Tacoma youth p.18-19
- XXV. Student involvement then vs. now p.19
- XXVI. Perspective on TCC over time p. 19-20

Interview

INTERVIEWER DAN SMALL: Welcome Jim, I'm glad you could be here today.

JAMES WALTON: Thank you.

INTERVIEWER: Today we're interviewing Mr. James Walton, who's a longtime supporter of the college and was our distinguished alumnus a few years ago, went to school here in the sixties and has had a distinguished career working for the city of Tacoma and retired a number of years ago after being City Manager. We really wanted to thank you for your distinguished service to the community and your support over the years of the college, and as part of our history project, our archives project, we're interviewing a lot of different people that made a difference for the college and can give us some perspective about a period of time that maybe we don't know so much about, that we want to make sure we have some information about. Okay so could you start out-- is it okay to call you Jim?

JIM WALTON: Oh yeah that's fine, yeah.

0:00:53

INTERVIEWER: Jim, could you start out by telling us a little bit about your life story? Where you grew up, and when you came up to Washington, where you went to school along the way and that kind of stuff?

WALTON: Well I'm first and foremost, I guess I'm a proud Texan. I was born in Dallas, Texas, one of five children and was the youngest of five and the only one that was born in a hospital. The segregated history of that time, most African-Americans during that period of time were not extended those privileges so... I was able to be born in a hospital. Was raised in Mineola, Texas, which is a small town 80 miles from Dallas as I said in segregated southern Texas. A town of about 4,000 people, maybe 800 or so African-Americans. And like I said went through a segregated school system and lived in a segregated environment, but also was raised in a very supportive and encouraging environment from family and community and teachers and everybody took responsibility for everybody else and so that was a great upbringing for all of us. We were raised by our mother and grandmother. My mother worked as a domestic in private homes in Dallas for very rich people and she lived in what they call the maid quarters. And of course in Highland Park, Dallas, very exclusive rich area, there's no way that five Black kids could be in the middle of this rich, white enclave in Dallas so my grandmother was the day-to-day raiser of us so to speak, and with support from my mother and my uncles. So that's that part of it and of course for and I have one brother and three sisters. When my brother and I graduated from high school, the plan was for us to get out of Texas. And so we had two uncles living in San Francisco and when my brother graduated he then left and went to San Francisco to live and to go to school and et cetera. And when I finished I had a sister in San Diego, California, and I went to live with her and her family to do the same thing, to relocate and go to school and et cetera. So I ended up in San Diego and went to San Diego Community College. It was my first experience with a two-year institution and I couldn't figure out how to pay for my education other than maybe the GI Bill, so I volunteered for the draft so I could get the GI benefits. And so I went in service, and served in an Airborne unit, 101st Airborne Division in Kentucky, and the first time that I was ever on an aircraft I jumped out the side of it, so you might have some appreciation for the fear that's associated with that. But they paid us extra money for jumping out of a plane so I needed the money. And so I had a great career there in the Airborne Division.

INTERVIEWER: So what year did – just for the record, what year were you born?

WALTON: 1939.

INTERVIEWER: '39. And then did you graduate from high school? What year was that?

WALTON: '57.

INTERVIEWER: '57 okay. So then when you moved to California that was right after you graduated from high school?

WALTON: Yes.

00:05:35

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Backing up a little bit, you had uncles and extended family around when you were growing up. Did you have, was there anybody in your immediate family or teachers you had that encouraged you that college was something you should do?

WALTON: Well, we were raised and— I don't know why today, to this day that my mother and grandmother and uncles, everyone put a strong emphasis on education. I guess, even then, they figured out if there were to be a better life for us then it was, for them, education would be at the base of that. And of course the wonderful teachers and principals that taught us we were all in the same bag and so they emphasized the importance of education as well, even though my grandmother never graduated from school and my mother did, but... So it was it was kind of a given, and that was part of the reason for wanting the males in particular to leave Texas. And my three older sisters went to school, continued to go to school in Texas. And this probably wasn't unusual that families would be more inclined to keep the girls close to home and they're willing to let the sons venture out.

INTERVIEWER: But it was more an idea that the kids need to do better than we are, and they understood that education was a way to get there.

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WALTON: A way to get there. That was an absolute. That was the expectation. But a greater expectation is that we would have a better life. Like I said education was a part of that, but the whole upbringing about work ethic and values, which is rooted in our religious orientation, and so everything that was in place for us was designed to give us a better chance at life that the people who raised us – the church, the school, the extended family, and et cetera – was pushing that you need to prepare to be better, not knowing where those opportunities might happen and certainly were not in evidence when we were in Texas.

INTERVIEWER: It was great that you had that support and that—

WALTON: Absolutely.

INTERVIEWER: —pushing. Yeah, religious background, strong religion, your mom and grandma.

WALTON: Yes, I can't ever remember not going to church. We were raised in the Methodist Church – I later switched to Baptist – but that was the foundation for the value systems and et cetera, evolved around church and that faith and belief, and it has shaped my life and our lives and et cetera going forward.

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INTERVIEWER: As a child, growing up in a segregated society, how did that affect you? What would you say-- I mean, it was what it was—

WALTON: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: --as a child, you, it's what you knew, I'm sure you've reflected on that later but...

WALTON: Yes. And of course as a child you, as you said, you just think that's the way the world is. But in our upbringing, of course, we knew the segregated situation and the things we could do and the things we could not do and how we had to go about doing things. That's just how you survive given that kind of situation. But we never dwelled on, "oh, how bad it is." We were never raised to be victims, but to be successful. And the way you do that is trust in God, you get your education, you work, you respect family, et cetera. And so as I look back on it, all of the things I needed to prepare me for every aspect of my life, I had it in place by the time I left Mineola. Of course you don't think of that at the time because you haven't faced many challenges in the world, but as I look back, all I've ever needed, I had. And it just somehow continues to play back like a reel in my life, you know, that when I would venture off and do things that I know I shouldn't be doing, I could self-correct because it's like my mother and grandmother was, she's in one ear and the other one is in the in the other ear and so I could always find-- that was kind of my GPS system, was that kind of upbringing, that you know you venture off but you could find your way back. And when times were tough you had this reserve to call on. So it was in retrospect a great upbringing in the worst of circumstances. And unbeknownst to me at the time but looking back and looking at history over a period of time, those were the things that make you strong. That kind of oppression and resistance and et cetera, makes you strong. It was never designed to make you weaker, but stronger, because I liken it to just – and I used to love to do this – fly a kite. The kite will soar into the atmosphere when there's resistance from wind. It made it stronger, and allowed it to soar. And so life is pretty much the same way, in that many things we had to go through made us stronger, even though the people who were subjecting us to this thought it was a way to destroy and control it, et cetera, but it made us stronger as a people.

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INTERVIEWER: Great. So I was digressing there but I appreciate you talking about that. So after you were in the service, is that how you ended up in Tacoma?

WALTON: Well I went in service for two years, so like I said, so I would have the GI benefits. And I went back to San Diego to continue schooling, and I was able to go back to San Diego Community College and work in the aircraft industry, which was a big industry in San Diego at that time. And I was able to do that at night and go to school in the daytime. And then the Vietnam era, for the buildup for that, they activated a guard unit from Wisconsin and sent up to Fort Lewis, and they had to bring it up to strength so they called people from the west coast who was not a part of a guard unit, had an exemption for school or whatever it might have been, and my number came up, and I was sent up here to Fort Lewis as a part of that buildup for the Vietnam War, and--

INTERVIEWER: What year was that?

WALTON: I think it was '65. And then, I stayed up here I think in the service nine months, and then they let me out and by the time that I was released, the bottom had fallen out of the aircraft industry in San Diego, so there's no job to go back to. And I actually thought I would stay up here and maybe get a job at [Boeing] and continue to go to school, and that never happened. And I stayed up here and fell in love with the place and decided to stay here, even though I love the San Diego area, but I decided to stay and as I said the rest is history.

INTERVIEWER: So did you end up going to Vietnam?

WALTON: No. I'm considered a Vietnam—

INTERVIEWER: You were just here—

WALTON: —I was in the service during that period of time and was not sent actually to Vietnam which I'm grateful for, but no I never did.

INTERVIEWER: So when you were here in that... '65 and you started school here maybe '68 or somewhere in there?

WALTON: Yes. And was here in '69 primarily, but started in '68, September '68—

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INTERVIEWER: So when you were in San Diego, did you at that point or earlier have an idea what you wanted to have as sort of a career path, or did you know?

WALTON: Well I thought I knew, and it was because of a role model of mine. I thought I wanted to be a teacher and a coach, because in Mineola, you know, you couldn't just teach. The faculty was so small and you had to teach and do whatever else, and so one of my favorite teachers was our football coach. I played football, and so he was a father figure for me in a way. And so I admired him and that combination. So that's what I thought I wanted to do, just because, you know, that's one of the role models that was, you know-- teaching and preaching and undertaking was pretty much the role models that was in the world we came up in, so I greatly admired teachers.

INTERVIEWER: And a lot of I think it's great that a lot of people there's a lot of really good coaches out there that are inspirational, and teachers that people have along the way that really affect their lives so that's really great. So when you were here in with the military and up to the end of that time when you went to college here, did you live in certain parts of town? Did you become familiar with different areas of town with the African-American community?

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WALTON: Well when I got out of service I lived in what was the heart and kind of soul of the African-American community in the Hilltop. So that's where I lived, for a very long time, was in the Hilltop area. And played some semi-pro football here. And was working at American Lake Hospital, which in one sense was really great because I worked the night shift and except when it was full moon and the patients were kind of agitated, it was a great time to study. I was working but I could study and then when I would get off work, I'd come to school here, and the coach of the team that I was playing on was working at West Coast Grocery and—

INTERVIEWER: What was the name of that team?

WALTON: The Tyees.

INTERVIEWER: The Tyees.

WALTON: Right.

INTERVIEWER: And it was based out of Tacoma?

WALTON: Yes. We, you know, had to provide our own insurance, our own everything, except uniforms, so it was it was an activity of love, you had to love to do that to be-- to risk the bodily harm to do it. But anyway, he worked at West Coast Grocery, and I just happened to mention to him that I'd been going down there trying to get a job, and soon as I walk in the door they said we're not hiring. And he said well let me see if I can help you with that and he was able to do it, and I went to work at West Coast Grocery. I thought it was the best job in the world. It was a union wage job, with a profit-sharing plan, and I could work swing shift and then continue schooling here at TCC, so I was on a roll. At least, the stars had started to line up for me and I thought I had the best of all worlds, because I was trying to piece together this education thing but at the same time I had to make a living. So when I came to TCC, I was 30 years old. And so I was not the typical student going from high school to college, because I had bounced around trying to figure out what I wanted to do with the rest of my life.

INTERVIEWER: So that was in '67 or 8 when you started here, or '69 mostly?

WALTON: Well mostly '69.

INTERVIEWER: So you were an early version of all the adult students that we have now. Our average age is about 29 or 30.

WALTON: Okay.

INTERVIEWER: We have a lot of students that come back that are older than that—

WALTON: Right.

INTERVIEWER: Heavy group of people from 30 to 45.

WALTON: Sure. Well that's one of the great things to me about a community college, you know, for people who are place-bound, you know, can't go somewhere else to go to school, people who may want to go in a different direction and need some education and training to be able to do that, the price was reasonable – at least I thought at that point it was in reach for me to be able to do that. So there was awful lot of good things about two-year institutions for a person in my situation and of course later I found out that there were quite a few people in my demographic in my situation just because it's probably one of the reasons why we have two-year institutions like this, so it was a great--

INTERVIEWER: Yeah and you know, historically that was the reason the Truman Commission said we needed community colleges...

WALTON: Right. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: ...and people here just didn't have an option other than UPS [University of Puget Sound] or PLU [Pacific Lutheran University] or going to the U [University of Washington]...

WALTON: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: ...and a lot of people wanted to stay here and work and raise families—

WALTON: Well some people *had* to do that, you know, it's not like going from high school and maybe your family is taking care of all that it and et cetera. I was 30 years old. My plan was to get rich through investing in residential real estate and so I was working and buying properties and going to school at TCC and life was good.

INTERVIEWER: You were doing lots of things.

WALTON: I was doing lots of things, all good. Life was good.

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INTERVIEWER: What position did you play in football, In high school and on the semi-pro team?

WALTON: Well, and it all has a tinge of race in it now, when in high school of course all-Black high schools and of course we only played against other Black schools and so I was quarterback. But when you're in a small town, you're a quarterback and something else because we didn't have that many males. So I was quarterback and a linebacker. And then when I went to San Diego, I was number four on the depth chart as a quarterback. It wasn't, they weren't too keen on Black quarterbacks from Texas. They had some local guys who had a local reputation there, and so the chances of my getting on the field wasn't very good. And so, but they had a shortage of running back, I said, I can play that. And so they switched me to running back, and I found that people were loading up on me, seemingly they would tackle me pretty hard and I said, that's not too good of a position. So they needed someone at corner, I said, I can do that. And so I started playing cornerback and fell in love with that, because I found out that I enjoyed hitting people as opposed to being hit [interviewer laughs]. And so I played corner there and in the semi-pro I played cornerback and I love that.

INTERVIEWER: When you... It sounds like, and you can tell me if I'm wrong, but you already had had an experience with a two-year school in San Diego, it was a good fit for you relative to work, being able to work and pay your way through, and so that was probably your obvious choice when you got here to try to get started again on your education.

WALTON: True.

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INTERVIEWER: What were your initial impressions when you came to TCC, at the time – '68, '69 – college started in September '65. I've seen the statistics of our demographics at that time, probably not that many African-American students in '68, '69, when you were here.

WALTON: Right.

INTERVIEWER: What were your initial thoughts, when you were here and what were your impressions?

WALTON: Well you're right. TCC was four years old I think when I started here and very few African-Americans or other students of color. But keep in mind that I was 30 years old, had a good job, still wanted the education. I had a full life, I didn't come here just to be a student if you will. And so my impression was probably more riveted on the education piece and et cetera, but what I found is there was people here who were very supportive and nurturing, and of course I needed all of that, they helped me immensely to try and map out a pathway forward for me. But then most of the other people – and maybe it's because of the newness of the campus – was really pretty much indifferent to the plight and interests of African-American students. And so, and then of course during that period of time, campuses across the country, Black student groups, Black Student Unions or whatever the name might be, was growing all over the place as we tried to have these public institutions to live up to their missions of inclusiveness and all of those kinds of things, but we were feeling excluded and not very welcome. And so that gave rise to the Black student movement across the country and the same happened with TCC. And so because of that situation we formed the, well we named it the Obi Society, we didn't want to just be thought of as a Black Student Union and Obi in Swahili the meaning was “soul.” And so we formed a group, because we wanted the better recognition to be able to use some of the Student Services money that was available for various activities for clubs and organizations on campus. And of course there might have been two or three Black teachers and Asian-American staff was very low, so we wanted that, and of course there was no representation of people of color on the board, it was almost unheard of.

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INTERVIEWER: So when you first came here, were there... who are some of the people that you remember as role models that were early faculty or counselors or whatever?

WALTON: Yeah there are two people that I... and I hope I'm not overstating, I really think saved if not if they didn't save my life, they saved me from bodily harm, and that was Bill Muse and Joe Kosai. Never met them before, but they were wonderful. They gave us great advice, they encouraged us, they supported us, and so it was wonderful--

INTERVIEWER: Was Joe... what was Joe's position at the time? Was he in charge of Student Services?

WALTON: I think he was.

INTERVIEWER: And Bill was faculty, right?

WALTON: He was faculty in biology, I think it was.

INTERVIEWER: Right, he taught biology.

WALTON: Yeah, but it was not so much their role definition, their activities and their job definition, it was the relationship part of it, because I would... I never took a course from Muse or had any other connections, but they were there for us because of the connection of what we were trying to deal with. And, unbeknownst to me of course, it's an obvious deal that they had gone through their trials and tribulations as well and so, the connection was there and they were just very supportive.

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WALTON: And I said that the bodily harm kind of notion was, we had an incident here on the campus. There was a big boulder in the middle of campus and--

INTERVIEWER: Still here.

WALTON: Oh is it? Okay. It was it became the symbol of us trying to get established here at Tacoma Community College and the resistance we were receiving from the other students to what we were doing. And so we had painted The Rock black to symbolize that we're here to stay and solid and all that kind of stuff. And then overnight a couple of times when we come back to campus it had been painted white and so we had this thing going on. And so I was at a meeting at the Urban League downtown and received a call – myself and about four other students because we were meeting with people from the community to see how they could be supportive of what was going on – and so they called and said you need to get back out at campus. The white students were painting The Rock there in midday and so we raced back out here and to the rock location. And it just seemed like every student on this campus was there. And we came up from the 12th Street side, it was about five of us, and I just happened to have my umbrella with me – it was a rainy day – and we stood between this big block of students and The Rock. And security was there and all that kind of stuff, and Tacoma Police plainclothes was all over the place. And they then challenged us to charge, the students who were standing there, and because of the boulder and the building was close by we were trapped. We were... trapped, and the security stepped out of the way. And it was Kosai and Bill Muse who stood between us and those students. I remember I had my umbrella, my defense was going to be trying to jab people with the umbrella because we were trapped. We were, our backs were against this building, and so if they would have been able to get to us, I don't know what would have happened to us. But they prevented that. And it was, they also told us at that moment that the President Ford had agreed to meet with the Obi Society representatives to discuss with him the demands that we had given to them and they had not acknowledged, they had no contact with us whatsoever but--

INTERVIEWER: At that time you'd already given him the list of the eleven demands?

WALTON: Yes.

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INTERVIEWER: The *Challenge* is a pretty good resource for that and talked about all of those... the student paper...

WALTON: Right, right.

INTERVIEWER: Did you feel like they were fairly accurate about what they were reporting was going on with what you were doing?

WALTON: The *Challenge*? Of course, people that's in that business, they have to have a little Hollywood in them, they have to be they had to kind of jazz it up but pretty much it was. But if you look at some of the writings, Fred Low was the Minister of Information for the Obi Society and was a great writer, he had some great articles in there as well, but for the most part my recollection is that it was reasonably well reported.

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INTERVIEWER: So how, were you president at the time when this incident happened?

WALTON: Yes. I was the original president and... because no one else would do it primarily, it was by-- it wasn't something that I ran for, it was the last one standing. And it wasn't something I wanted to do because I didn't have time, you know, when I finished class here, I was racing to work and all those kind of things. And so it wasn't a natural fit for me because I didn't spend a lot of time on campus and doing just the student kind of things. I had a life outside, a full life outside of that and didn't have a lot of time, but I decided to do it because no one else would do it.

INTERVIEWER: And you felt strongly about the situation and what needed to be done.

WALTON: Oh yeah, I felt very strongly about that, it was no question about that. But just trying to fit in you know the time and all the other things that was going on, and it wasn't a lot of support for what we were talking about, so we had to we had to hustle for everything that we were doing.

INTERVIEWER: So would you be able to estimate how many African-American students we had at the time at TCC when...?

WALTON: No, it would just be guessing but it was very, very small.

INTERVIEWER: And were they, how many people did you have involved in the Obi Society, do you know?

WALTON: Not really. Probably no more than 15 to 17. It was a small group. Because some of the students who were here, African-Americans, didn't want anything to do with the Black Student Union. And one example of that, we tried to get -- I think they had two or three Black basketball players and they were starters, I mean, the team was built around them, and we couldn't get the school to allow black women to be cheerleaders -- and so one of our strategies, we thought, was to, if we could get the basketball players to say that they wouldn't play unless African-American women would be able to be a part of the cheerleaders. And we even told them, just fake it, you don't have to-- let's be able to tell them that that's what would happen, because we know that they wanted you to play basketball, so that might help us to get inroads and they wouldn't they wouldn't do it. And so there were more students on campus than we had really involved in the Obi Society. That was a very small number of people who was really involved.

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INTERVIEWER: So a while before this incident at the boulder that we were talking about, you had presented the list of demands to Dr. Ford and the administration a month or two ahead, or...?

WALTON: I can't--no, it wasn't, it was almost, things were in the moment, it wasn't months ahead and nothing's going on, things were happening pretty quickly and so it wasn't a long lag time from when we presented the demands, because this opposition was building on campus and the other students. And so after I think they realized that they needed to take some action, that would take some of the steam out of this hostility that was going on, and so they decided to meet with us and discuss the situation with us.

INTERVIEWER: But at the time that incident happened, I think it was May 5th, 1969, you hadn't heard anything back from them until Kosai and Muse told you at the time that, hey the president wants to meet--

WALTON: Said they'd meet with you.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. It seems it seems to me like your, well... you want to talk a little bit about what happened after that then? Because you did meet with them, and the board eventually did approve, agree to at least some of the demands.

WALTON: Right.

INTERVIEWER: I know five or six of them, I have a list here somewhere but...

WALTON: Yes. And so we started to make some progress after that, the recognition of the Obi Society, and funds to do some educational enrichment kind of things we thought was necessary. Which one of those things: bringing speakers to campus, and Muhammad Ali was one of those that we were able to bring to campus because of that. The other breakthrough was, we ended up getting the governor to appoint the first, a Black trustee, Dewey Tuggle, as a result of that. And so we had a chance to go down to Olympia to chat with the governor about that. And incidentally that's where I first met the woman who later became my wife. She was on the staff in the governor's office when we went down for that.

INTERVIEWER: I'm trying to remember which governor...

WALTON: That was... Evans.

INTERVIEWER: That's what I thinking. Well that's great. Well that's where you met Marilyn, okay I didn't know that story.

WALTON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: That's neat. Well she was working on his staff at the time.

WALTON: Right. Thought we were crazy.

INTERVIEWER: She thought you were crazy? [Laughs.]

WALTON: Oh yeah. well many African-Americans did. Not everyone, you know, was too keen on, you know, protests and making demands and all those kind of things. People were afraid of that, and especially people that had good jobs, that was not something they wanted to put at risk. And so it wasn't unusual for people not to be-- African-American people not to be supportive. It was that way in Texas, it was that way here, and so that wasn't unusual.

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INTERVIEWER: So as an African-American student growing up, how did, I mean... the assassination of Malcolm X, of Martin Luther King, John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, I mean those things had to have an effect on you.

WALTON: Well they... certainly. And the one thing that had a major impact on me was when Martin Luther King was assassinated, because, I as I said, I was working in West Coast Grocery at that time, and

the stars of my life had started to line up. I was doing okay. But when that happened, and I saw the reaction of other people who had work in the warehouse with me at that time, they were kind of elated, "he's got what was coming to him," that kind of thing. And then I had to take stock of my own life, you know, I said, what am I doing, that that someone would care enough about that they would want to take my life. So I must be doing the wrong thing because, I don't feel that kind of threatened, et cetera. And so I gave up that good job, and took a job in the Model Cities Program, a federally-funded Model Cities Program, to try to be more involved in bringing about the kind of change that King was talking about. And so, and of course the difference in pay and all that was enormous but, I just knew I needed something else, other than what I was doing. And so that was the big turnaround for me is when King was assassinated.

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INTERVIEWER: What was it like to be able to meet Muhammad Ali and to talk to him?

WALTON: Well of course Ali was, the image of him was bigger than life. Because, you know, of not only what he accomplished as one of the most socially significant athletes during the 20th century, and then to watch what was happening to a guy who was at the top of that profession, because he became a Muslim, he adopted Islam, and he refused to-- resisted the draft, and so he fell out of favor, just because of all of that. The system has a way of enforcing its rules, if they don't like your politics or what you're doing. So, I think it was only possible for us to get Ali on this campus, in part, because he had fallen out of favor. But it was a historic event for those of us who were involved to be able to do that and be in his presence, and we were just in awe of Ali and it was a historic moment for us.

0:43:28

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. That's great. It seems to me, just from a distance watching you and your career over time, that your experiences working with the establishment, the established hierarchy here, at the college, as a fairly young person, and trying to figure out how to negotiate that in a peaceful way to get some results, that that probably was a good skill for you in your history, the rest of your working life.

WALTON: Yes, very much so. But as I said earlier, that orientation, in my part, was ingrained in me from how I was raised. I wasn't raised any other way. I was not a revolutionary. I, consistent with what I think King was trying to do, we were trying to change the systems that we were all a part of. We were not trying to destroy, but to make better. And so, wanting the inclusion, and the fairness, and the equality on that, are all things you do to try to modify systems. It wasn't in me to try to destroy anything, I was trying to build. That became an issue with other members in the Obi Society, because they wanted to take a different tack that was being played out all over the country, and was in the newspapers and all of that, but I realized that there's no quicker way to self-destruction than to do that.

INTERVIEWER: With violence.

WALTON: With violence. Because the people in opposition have more guns, they have more power, they can justify almost anything they want to do to you, and so, to me, you have to operate in a different manner, using different skills, that are survivable, and still make a difference. It's just a matter of what you're trying to accomplish. And I just didn't see a win by being motivated by destroying as opposed to building. But that was real challenge for my leadership and others in the Obi Society. And so

TCC was kind of a place where all of those kind of values and things was tested, mightily, and they have paid off in the end, for me, and hopefully for others.

0:46:17

INTERVIEWER: So there are some reports about some violence in the Hilltop at that time where you stepped in and helped calm that situation down? was that in that same year, '69?

WALTON: Yes, Mother's Day there was a – and this wasn't unusual, very typical – a confrontation between police officers and African-American males. And that happened, I think it was some kind of a traffic violation. But anyway that was in the Hilltop area, and that situation kind of exploded. And people, with all this pent-up anger I guess, kind of took to the streets and you know, burning and looting and all those kind of things was going on everywhere else, started to happen. And most of it happened where I was living, in the apartments I was living in, it was just less than a block away, off of K Street then, which is Martin Luther King Jr. Way now, is where that was kind of the epicenter of that explosion. And so myself and other people from the Urban League and ministers in the community – because most of us lived in that area – just spontaneously came together to try and put a lid on that, because we were more concerned with the people who were engaging and what was going to happen to them, because there's no way the police was going to stand for that, and we'd end up losing people and getting people killed and beat up and in jail and et cetera. So we were able to buy some time to allow people to get over their anger. But we didn't have much resource to make sure that the kind of things people were concerned about, we could make them happen. You know, you're trying to be the peacemakers but what are you going to do? And so we came together, and again, put together a list of demands that we presented to the City Council then, to make things better in the Hilltop area, which was the predominant neighborhood for African-Americans in Tacoma that time.

INTERVIEWER: Did-- how did that work, did the City Council agree with...?

WALTON: Somewhat. There was some meaningful inroads, a lot of window dressing is a part of that. You know, they're doing the least they can to try to buy time to try to get to a different place, but what was put in place is more of a unifying drive on the part of the African-American community to unify, and stay engaged, and move forward and et cetera. So it was not so much what the city was able to do but what we realized we needed to do to continue to be proactive and involved. Because many of the things we wanted to change were very systemic, and it would take time, and then many of the efforts in other parts of the country, they died because – without being completely successful – because one of the tactics is, time will take care of it, many of those same people will give up and get tired and get on with their lives, and so nothing really changed. So we need to have an organizational approach that would allow us to stay engaged if we wanted to make things better for the African-American community.

0:50:31

INTERVIEWER: So when did the Black Collective start?

WALTON: Well the Black Collective, as we know it now, really started then. The notion of we need to stay together and work outside of organizational boundaries, be more focused on what's in the best interest of the community, we need to stay together. And so we went through name changes, and different strategies and et cetera, and what ended up is what we know now as the Black Collective. So,

that is the really, the big benefit for the African-American community is that stick-to-it-ness that is the Black Collective now.

INTERVIEWER: And that group as I understand it is a group of influential African-American folks that are preachers or business people, and people from colleges and others that get together to talk about issues that affect the population, for African-Americans, and keep working that within the system, to have things move forward.

WALTON: Sure.

INTERVIEWER: But is that a good assessment or...?

WALTON: It is, but with one expansion on that, and it's that it was a sign of great growth on our part. It wasn't just the-- we started off with the people with the titles and positional leadership people. But now the Collective evolved to just people who have an interest in trying to make things better for African-Americans. Doesn't matter what your title or job, you know what I mean? So we we've evolved from that, even though that's where we started and we're still reflective of people with positions in the community, et cetera, but more importantly, just any and every person is a member of that, just out of their interest.

0:52:41

INTERVIEWER: I would be remiss if I didn't talk to you a bit about your friend Carl and my friend Carl Brown, who single-handedly helped African-American students and lots of other students here the many years he was here, that I worked with him. And he ran his own little loan fund out of his office for students who'd come in who didn't have enough money for books or for tuition and they'd pay him back or they wouldn't. A lot of it was his own money and people gave him donations. He was he was just a great guy. And I know he was involved in the Collective and he was a great role model for African-American students here.

WALTON: Absolutely. And Carl came to TCC in response to TCC finally coming around and dealing with the issues that we had presented to Dr. Ford, is the diversity of staff and all of that. And of course the standard line is "we would, but we can't find people" and et cetera. And so Carl was an educator in the Clover Park school district, and then came to work here at TCC and was a great contributor over the years in a number of different positions. So Carl coming to TCC was in in response to what the Obi Society was pushing for here at TCC.

INTERVIEWER: And he was, he held a lot of positions here: he was HR Director, he was in Student Services, and no matter where he was he was always helping students, and he was keeping them accountable, and making sure they were-- I especially remember him really keeping an eye on male students, and to this day we really have a hard time—

WALTON: Still a challenge, that's right.

INTERVIEWER: --with male students staying engaged and getting through their programs. And he knew them all and he took them aside and said, "Hey what do you need to do here?"

WALTON: He was great, he was--

INTERVIEWER: Sort of a tough love approach, sometimes that he had to...

WALTON: Absolutely. And it was necessary.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. So it's taking longer than I thought we would, but I appreciate your time and I don't want to skip your all of your work at Tacoma, because that's really important and...

0:55:04

INTERVIEWER: When did you start working for the city and how did that evolve?

WALTON: Well, it evolved because of the demands that we had made on the city back in the Mother's Day Riot spin-off and et cetera. And the city hired a new City Manager from Scottsdale, Arizona, and when he came to the town and was looking at the demands made by the African-American community, he basically said, "I agree in principle with what you're talking about, but I don't know how to do what you're talking about, because I've never served a community with an appreciable number of African-American in the population. So I need help to figure out how to do what you're talking about. I'm not opposed to it, but I don't have any expertise in that area. And so, I need help." And so what he wanted then is for people who would be willing to come to work for the city to help them figure out how to do some of the things we talked about, because there was no interest or momentum in that happening in any real sense, because we were talking about some system change stuff, real meat of the coconut. The placating kind of stuff was... had happened just like that in order to buy some time. So he had talked to me about filling a vacant position heading up the Human Rights Department, it was called at the time, and I had absolutely no interest in that, because governmental resources had been used to deny rights and opportunity and dignity to African-American students. To me, the governmental units were part of the-- they were the enemy. They were the leaders of putting in place systems that quote, keep us in our place. So I had no interest. And so, and I told him so. I thought he was probably trying to buy me off or the movement off by, you know, finding a good cushy job for one of the leaders, and people kind of back off. And so he then, unbeknownst to me, went to my pastor, Reverend E. S. Brazill, to see if he would talk to me about the possibility, and give him a chance to do what he was talking about and et cetera. So Rev. Brazill and some of the other ministers in town and Tom Dixon from the Urban League and others, people that I respected, we had a series of conversations about that, and their promise to me is that if I would come to work for the city they would they would make sure that they would stay engaged and et cetera, and it wouldn't be a matter of my being bought off and muzzled because I all of a sudden had a government job and was no longer relevant to the community. So with that kind of promise, I then took the job and... one of the best decisions I ever made, because being a systems guy – wanting to change and make things better – there was no better way to do that on the local level than being a part of, being an insider in the governmental organization, because if you could get them to move, that's an enormous resource, as opposed to thinking you can accomplish those things from the outside, because people would play games on you, they'll string you out, or they'll do something minor and they would see that as a success. So, it really worked out. It was very difficult, because the organization wasn't inclined to want to do some of the things we were trying to put into place, but it all worked out. And so it kind of confirms my notion is that, if you're part of systems you can help to bring about those changes that are forever and you impact a lot of people – you never know them, and they probably never know you – but you've made a difference and that difference is in place and continue to get better over time.

INTERVIEWER: Well and as you said earlier and as you know, with systems like a big organization like the city or a college or whatever it is, it's an effort in persistence, on your part, because you got to go the long haul—

WALTON: Absolutely.

INTERVIEWER: --like you did to get those things to happen and keep them going.

WALTON: Absolutely. It is tough, but someone needs to do it. And it's challenging--

INTERVIEWER: And they're incremental, and they're so slow.

WALTON: It's very incremental, very incremental. Our institutions, they don't change, they don't spin on a dime. It is a long climb but if you don't start, you can't finish and that's where the courage and patience and really being smart about what you do, because you have to think about so many different ways that people will come up with a reason why you can't. And so you have to stay ahead of the game in order to make those little incremental changes. You're absolutely right.

INTERVIEWER: At the time you started with the city, were you one of only a few African-Americans on the staff at those levels?

WALTON: Oh yeah. Well, when you say those levels, I was the *only* one. And very few African-Americans worked in even entry level, you know, jobs, just basic good governmental jobs and maintaining streets and all that. We were very few in that population, so it was-- And being a department director in my first position, there was *no* one else and so... But it all worked out.

1:01:52

INTERVIEWER: So, your list of accomplishments in your work at the city is truly impressive and is very long and I'm not going to read them all, but, you know, I know there are a number of them. The Youth Build Award that stands out in your mind, your work with youth, I'd like you to talk a minute about that. And, you know, the Municipal League Distinguished Citizen Award, your alumnus award here, I mean, working with Rotary Clubs, I mean the list goes on and on, but of all those things do you... Is there something that stands out as most meaningful to you that you've done in that career? For the community, for yourself, for your family?

WALTON: Well it would be pretty hard to say one thing really stood out. I have been blessed in so many ways to be able to do those kinds of things and receive that kind of recognition, but, to me they're part and parcel of how you live your overall life. Those are just things that people do for you to say, here's a plaque and here's that kind of thing. But again going back to my upbringing is, that service to people and trying to be helpful is essentially in my DNA, and so, it's just a part of who I am and what I was allowed to do. And I must say that timing is everything. My generation, I like to think of, is the one generation that really benefited from equal opportunity coming into play. Just... the window opened for a short period of time for some inroads to be made. And I was able to benefit and step in from some of those benefits just, time and place and all those kind of things, that I had absolutely nothing to do with. Those are just blessings. You know, doors opened that I thought was a wall. And so I'm reluctant to take great credit for all of that, but I hope that I served the purpose when those opportunities were available to me to make a difference.

INTERVIEWER: Oh I think you really did. And I you know that-- something I wrote here, I mean I'm a little younger than you, but that period of the late sixties, early seventies was a culmination of a lot of change of, African-Americans, Latinos, the women's movement, Vietnam war protests, all that stuff... And so there was an opportunity for a lot of change right then.

WALTON: Right, right. Yeah, yeah. The whole... You know, we're so much better at dealing with issues related to people with disabilities. And it all of that came into play over that that period of time. And so it was a great time and to be a part of that.

1:05:13

WALTON: But the one job if you will, or opportunity that I wanted, but I didn't get, but I got it anyway, and that was to serve as a trustee here at TCC. Governor Gardner wanted to appoint me as a trustee for the board, but I was working with the city and the city charter would not allow me to be, what they-- an officer twice. You can only-- Under our charter, I couldn't serve in that other capacity. But to show you how good God is, then my wife ended up being a trustee here at TCC. So I had a chance to serve through her at TCC. I never served, but in fact I did.

INTERVIEWER: Well that was really great and Marilyn, you know how I feel about her and what a great person she was. She really made a difference her whole career and everything she did, especially Tacoma District work and here in support of us, for students. She was always looking out for the students.

WALTON: Yeah it was a wonderful outcome for me, it's just a blessing.

INTERVIEWER: Well I'm sorry that you didn't get appointed on the board.

WALTON: That's okay. No, no, the better half ended up serving TCC.

1:06:47

INTERVIEWER: Do you want... I know you did a lot with Tacoma youth. Do you want to talk a minute about that?

WALTON: Well I guess it's because, if we are to make genuine progress, it has to start with how we care for our young, our children, whether they be biological or just there in the community, because I benefited from that. And those kind of changes are lifetime changes. So, I have always gravitated in that way. My job with the city, with the Youth Build kinds of things, and they're still going on as an indication of that. One of my great passions now is the Elizabeth Wesley Youth Merit Incentive Awards program to try and encourage and support African-American students to get through high school, in a good position, so that when they finish high school, they can have choice of what they choose to do. If it's to go on to more education, or if it's to go into a trade, whatever it might be, you can say, I can make that happen because I have the foundation for a good education. And if we can't do that, it doesn't matter how many scholarships is available. It serves no purpose for students to come to TCC and have to retake courses they should have mastered in high school. That remediation, it causes people to give up, drop out, and all of those kind of things. So we have to win it from day one. You can't wait until they show up at TCC and think you can then put all the fixes in place. And so focusing on youth and education and training and that kind of upbringing is our best investment as a society.

INTERVIEWER: So, *Barbara Wesley* was a board member here, when I got here. Any relation to Elizabeth Wesley?

WALTON: No. Not that I'm aware of.

INTERVIEWER: Did you know Barbara?

WALTON: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: I figured you did. She was here as a trustee when I came in '78.

WALTON: Yeah but two different families. Right.

INTERVIEWER: Two different families. Right. What else was I going to ask you, I lost my train of thought...

1:09:45

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I wanted to ask you, and I think you're like me, you kind of hate to make generalizations about things, but I've observed students here for the 35 years I've been around, and in the sixties, I think you might agree that the... I guess I'd like your perspective about how readily interested were students to get involved in things when you were here in the sixties, and do you see differences in that over time. I mean, I think the college had opportunities for students to form groups and clubs and has always thought that was important, but student involvement seems to come and go and...

WALTON: No question about it. And been a little biased, the kind of drive and determination to be involved and to make a difference as you go through these institutions was much more alive and engaging during that period of time just because of, it was a great time of very significant changes. So it was a different mindset. And in part I think because of a lot of changes that were made, that we have made, maybe this generation they take a lot of those things for granted. You know they didn't have to put up with the kind of things that I've gone through and others, and so, maybe they don't have enough appreciation for all the hard work and challenges associated with that. So in one sense, it's good that those opportunities and things were available, it's bad that people don't see themselves as a link in the chain, that that they have benefited and they need to try to leave things a little better for someone else who is coming after them. They don't know but they need to do that kind of preparatory thing as a way to give back. And so to some extent I guess we're suffering because of our own successes, these are the kind of things we wanted we wanted more African-American students and students of color and women and all those kind of things in these institutions, and that is happening to a great degree, but the drive and determination to be a part of what we were a part of is almost something in the past.

1:12:28

INTERVIEWER: Maybe the last question, unless you have something else you want to add, but I wanted to just ask you your perspective of TCC as an institution in the community. Obviously the college has grown and changed and morphed and developed based on community needs over time, and you've witnessed that through Marilyn's work plus from a distance your work with other people that have come here and students and other things with... What would you say about how the college is doing and how it's how it's changed over time to help different groups and our community as a whole?

WALTON: Well one of the things I am so glad to see change here at TCC, and it's not directly related to what your question but, I'm so glad to see the infilling of buildings – I don't know where this design for campus came from, like a California model that that was stretched out all over the place – and now TCC feels like a college, an institution of higher learning. The design of the buildings, the proximity, and the other things you're doing to enhance it, it's wonderful. But in a larger sense over the, what, sixty some

years TCC has been here, it is a major player in this community for whole hosts of people who come with dreams and aspirations then they have a chance to make those things happen. A much higher scale of impactfulness than when we started. But when I was here, TCC was only four years old, and so you-- the institution has changed tremendously, but still making progress in terms of creating community *within* this community, while serving the larger community. And what we were trying to put into place was a sense of community in this community, and that's what we had to fight for, because we needed to feel like our community was a part of this temporary community when we come on campus. And I think you made tremendous progress in doing that. There's still things you can do, but moving in the right direction in terms of the campus community as well as being a player in the larger community.

INTERVIEWER: Appreciate that. Are there other things that we haven't talked about that you'd like to mention, or things that I've forgotten?

WALTON: No, I think we have pretty much covered the waterfront. But I've been so appreciative of people who were here when I started, but you know like you-- Carl Brown and Clara Cox and the whole host of other people that has come and contributed, and others continue to do so. And so that was really what the whole sixties and the student movement was really all about, is being inclusive and being appreciated for the unique geniuses that is in those different populations.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, I agree with you. I mean, I think we've made big strides in that regard, there's always more work.

WALTON: Oh yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Well I really appreciate you coming and your contribution to this place over the years, in a lot of different ways, and your great work that you've done in the community, it's been fabulous. I'm glad to see that you're still involved and still helping out.

WALTON: Yeah well I'm still being blessed so I'm just trying to pass them on.

INTERVIEWER: That's great. Thanks a lot.

WALTON: Right.