Khafra Kambon (KK): Well, 1970, I had just, because I went to UWI [the University of the West Indies] from 66 to 69. And it is during the period of, you know, at the university, because even from secondary school, which was Trinity College, things that I observed in so many aspects of life made me very conscious of what was the position of African people in our society. And I was very conscious about racism. Even from Tunapuna, before I had the language, but I could see the gap in how some lived as opposed to others.

And I'm talking specifically in terms of Whites and Blacks and the attitudes that were conveyed. But what made me most conscious of it was going to secondary school, you know, and you could see the gaps. Now, one day I'd say for Trinity College, where the principal was from England.

He was a man who sought to be fair. I can't, he was a White man from England. But he was philosophically inclined to fairness and justice. And I think he managed fairly well where that was concerned. You know, and he also paid some attention to the students who he felt were bright and had something to prove, whether you were Black or White. You know, it didn't matter. So you did have a couple of pupils who were White. You had a number of Whites going to Trinity College at the time. Some of them had a little bit of an attitude, you know.

But I think that the principal set a tone for people to be able to get along. His name was Helps, Peter Helps. But, you know, in an environment where you, because when I grew up in Tunapuna, you know, because that's where I was born and grew up in Tunapuna.

And there, the issue didn't hit you so much in your face. You could see things, some things, but it wasn't something like, it didn't affect your life really. You know, because it was kind of outside of, kind of outside of it.

So I think it is going to, going to a college where you had a lot of Whites as well, that sharpen your awareness of the divisions in the society. And then you're also reading a lot more at the time. So you're getting it both from the reading and from your experiences.

And then you come across things like the 60s, that period of the 1960s. You know, from quite early o'clock in the 60s, you know, you begin to get a lot of the, with what is happening in the United States in particular, where the racism is so blatant and it is made more public internationally because of the resistance that is developing to it. So that in that period, there was quite an awakening that was, that was taking place and making people very conscious of things.

And you become more aware of discrimination, even in your own society. When I say our own society, because it was there in your face, you know. So I think that was the, that was the foundation.

And then from there it was on to the university and I went fortunately at the time in the late 1960s. I think I was there from 66 to 69. And the late 60s was a real period of awakening. Because that's when you had the Black Power Movement. I think Stokely Carmichael's

declaration of "Black Power" was in 1966. And that was just the power of that declaration of "Black Power".

The terminology in itself and the way it was expressed had a certain psychological impact. It was not just ideological, it was psychological as well because it did bring about a certain awakening. It did send people on a search for their roots and identity.

And did help to focus your attention on the nature, not just of global society and societies all over the world, but it starts to focus your attention on your own society. It sharpens that focus on your own society. And by the time he made his declaration in 66, I would have been a first year student at the university.

Already in the university, you know, we were developing a consciousness of public society and having a sense of responsibility to our society. Makandal Daaga was the president of the Guild Council. You know the name Makandal Daaga? He was president of the Guild Council.

I was on the council as well, I can't remember what, as publications officer or something. On the Guild Council. It was basically a council that was a progressive council in terms of its outlook for the society. And along came Kwame Ture's shout of "Black Power". And that resonated. That really, really resonated in this society.

And helped to sharpen the focus on issues which we were dealing with. And that became something very transformative. And we started to develop Black Power, not just the slogan, but give it an ideological content. And that's what took place in the 60s there. I was at UWI between 66, 69. And that was a very radical period in the society.

I think a lot of it had to do with just the way people reacted to that slogan. You had Trinidad and Tobago where you had just a handful– I think in the book I would have the statistics and so – but you know such a small minority in this society controlling so much of the world. You would have grown up in a society that's very different. You know, but at that time it was very stark.

Very small minority, very much in control of everything. When you dominate the economy you also have a – your influence on the politics is very strong. So the majority of people in society would have felt a strong sense of dispossession.

Another issue which we were very concerned about as students on campus was that divide between Africans and Indians in the society. Not on campus specifically, but in the society in general. So both groups were oppressed.

The Whites dominated and were able to dominate and continue that domination. Partly because of the ideology they had. Kind of brainwashed the society into seeing them in a certain light and seeing ourselves in a certain light.

Where even though you saw discrimination, there's anti-discrimination, but people were not as passionate about it as they ought to be. And the Black Power Movement in the United

States therefore had a certain resonance here. And it really gave people a greater sense of who they are.

That is, African people and Indian people. A greater sense of who they are. And made you see, helped you to see the society in a clearer light. So that outside influence was also important. And the fact that things were so blatant and obvious in the society. So on the campus we started to organize to say, we have a responsibility to help create an equal society.

The other thing about that period is that we got very involved with the trade union movement. In fact we used to have meetings between ourselves and trade union leaders on the campus. So we used to meet with – because in that period of the 60s, we had very militant trade unions.

And we used to be interfaced with them. OWTU [Oilfield Workers Trade Union], Transport and Industrial Workers Union [TIWU], there was a Union of National Food, Beverages and Allied Workers, NUGE [National Union of Government Employees], that died out. And those three unions had very radical leadership.

And because the way we functioned on campus, we used to have a lot of meetings with trade union leaders. Makandal Daaga was the president of the guild. I was a member of the guild.

Aiyegoro [Ome] was another member of the guild. You had some members of the guild who were very, who were aware of what was going on in the society. We were focused on changing it. And we built a relationship with the radical trade union leaders. Transport and Industrial Workers Union, the Oilfield Workers Trade Union. We used to meet with the radical unions on the campus.

And we used to get involved in trade union affairs. And what the group of trade unions that were called the progressive trade unions, they were very militant. And they were not just militant on union affairs, which is where the militancy developed, but they had a strong sense of the politics.

And therefore, when Stokely Carmichael's cry of "Black Power" resonated in the society, and it had its resonance precisely because of the structure of the society, where the wealth was controlled by a 1% minority. It could have been 2%, you know. But that gives you a sense of what the structure was like. A very small minority controlling a substantial portion of the wealth of the society. And what was very irritating to us is that it is people who look like us, who were in political office. And they inherited such a structure, but lived quite comfortably with it.

To us, it was intolerable, that structure in the society. And that is why the cry of Black power by Stokely Carmichael in 1966, that's why it had a resonance in the society here. Because if the society didn't have the kind of structure that it had, then hearing about Black power in the United States, you'd say, okay, we sympathize with those people there. And that would

have been it. But it radicalized the way we looked at things. And the Guild, from 1966 to 1969, I can't remember now, the students were very oriented to the rest of the society.

Whatever gave it to us, but we had a sense that we were privileged in some way. Because the proportion of students who would have the opportunity to have university education was relatively quite small. And therefore, our philosophical outlook was, we have a certain privilege here.

It had nothing to do with whether we worked for it, because you had to work for it because you had to get a certain number of passes, and qualifications, and all of that. But the thing is that whatever the structure was that put us there, it means that we now became part of a small, privileged minority in that sense. Most of us were poor, ketch-ass people.

But we were on a path that could lead us to a different status in the society. And we had to say, what about all those people out there? And that is why the Guild under Makandal Daaga, who was Geddes Granger at the time, the name changes hadn't taken place yet. And one of our commitments was, work with the people who were in the grassroots communities.

And you find that we in the Guild at that time, organized students to go and interact, interface with grassroots people. And one of the areas of connection, people used to lime on the blocks, what we called the blocks. I think you'll be familiar with the term.

And in the 60s, especially because of that Black power and the way it resonated with people, you found that grassroots brothers, including those who could barely read, but you'd always have somebody who gets a secondary education at least, and that kind of thing. And they would sit down with books, including Frantz Fanon. And I suspected if I pick up a Fanon book now, I'm going to pick up a dictionary too.

And they would be pouring over Fanon, and that kind of thing. There was such an eagerness. That's the spirit of the 60s. It was a very special time. We were not such special people. We were just people in a special time. And they would be pouring over. We used to encourage students. Go out into the communities. Talk to the people. And Daaga, myself, brother call Aiyegoro Ome, and so on. We used to go on the blocks. Sit down with the guys under the streetlights. We got one or two lecturers. We would sometimes go, and we did some bold things too. Like we'd go in, as you go around the bridge, if you go east on Park Street, you go and you come around the bridge. Just as you went around there on the left-hand side, there used to be a club. And that's the first club we went to.

So we'd go into the club, and people are there doing the gambling and so on. And Daaga had a boldness about him. We'd go in the club, and we'd say, "Hey, good night brothers" and so on. Brothers there, there are no sisters there. You might have a woman or two somewhere, but mainly brothers. And Brinsley Samaroo used to go with us sometimes, very often, Brinsley Samaroo, who died recently. He was a lecturer on campus at the time. But he had that very progressive inclination. People say all kinds of things about him, but Brinsley, students who hated Brinsley Samaroo, hated him because he didn't give a bligh. And he

didn't want to know if you're Indian, if you're African. There was no bligh with Brinsley. You had to do the work.

Whereas a lot of lecturers, they may like a woman, they may like this. With Brinsley, strict. But Brinsley had that kind of commitment to people. And he used to go with us, and he was a history lecturer. I don't know if you ever encountered him, Brinsley Samaroo. You don't even know him? You know about him.

Avah Atherton (AA): I know about him. Yes.

KK: Right? And so he's one of the guys who used to go with us. There was another guy, I'm not sure, his name is not coming to me right now. He went a few times, but Brinsley was the most consistent of the lecturers who would go with us. And we'd go and people, imagine you go into a place where people are drinking and they play in a pool. And Daaga would say, "Brothers, we want to have a little talk with you. And we have Dr. Samaroo with us."

Let's have a little talk about–. And the spirit of the times was such that people would interrupt their game and listen to a lecture by Brinsley Samaroo. Right? I mean, it's unbelievable. I can't see that happening today at all. And we do that down there, that place going down the block. We go all up Laventille Hill. And I remember a club that was on Laventille, on Laventille Hill. And we go in there, the same approach. We come to talk about some serious matters and that kind of thing.

And nobody showed any vexation. The 1960s had a special spirit to it because I don't think you could do that now. You know, so we go there and say we come to talk to you and that kind of thing. And people would stop playing. Some people in that situation would say, they go elsewhere to play. But they would not get on. But if the people who feel they can't take the talk, they would say, okay, well, we'll go. And they'd leave and most of the people would stay. And we'd have a talk with them and that kind of thing. We'd go on the blocks and talk to people as well.

AA: So this was before the 70?

KK: Yeah, this is the 60s, the late 60s. Because we were on the guild from 66 to 69. Right? So all this would be 68, 69.

AA: What were the tangible changes that were taking place? Both within yourself and in that community of people who were sharing the same ideology?

KK: I think, one, you got a different sense of yourself. Because it was a period when a lot of information on African history, I don't know the Africans specifically, most of us were African, right? But you were getting information to give you a different sense of self.

And that was nothing unique with us, with the students at the time. Because you would go on the blocks where we were going out to meet people and all of that and talk to them. And sometimes you'd see people with Fanon. And Fanon is not easy to read.

AA: You'd meet them with Fanon?

KK: We'd meet them with a book by Fanon and trying to, you know, and dictionary, people on the blocks, you know, on the block, under streetlights, and trying to figure out what Fanon means by this or that. Because there was something in it that gave people something.

So we were just really reinforcing what they were already struggling with. Because the Black Power Movement in the United States had a tremendous influence. You only see it in terms of big demonstrations and all that.

But the big demonstrations were as powerful as they were because of the powerful influence. There was something in the environment that made grassroots brothers and sisters want to read, want to know about themselves. We were like an enabling group in it.

We can't say we started that. We were, as students ourselves, we had a commitment, and Daaga was important in this, emphasizing that, listen, we are a small, privileged minority. And you're not privileged because you come from an upper-class home and therefore they could pay for it and go to university.

Even though you had to work hard and have a certain amount of A-levels and whatnot. But the thing is that it ended up with a very small minority. And therefore we were privileged by that.

You could say we worked for it or not, but we didn't have that argument. The thing is, hey, there's a handful of us. What we're exposed to here, a lot of people aren't exposed to. And therefore we have a duty to give back to the society. And that came in the guild where you had Daaga was the president, and people like myself, Ayeigoro Ome, I think you know that name, used to be David Murray, and so on. But we were like three of the main figures.

At the time you also had Carl Blackwood. He took over the, he was a Jamaican, and he took over the guild from, after Daaga had gone was Blackwood who was there and so. And there's a brother called Andatio I should mention as well. He has passed on. So you ended up with a guild council that had a certain outlook on the society and also a sense of, we have a responsibility because we're like a privileged group. We didn't have no money, but we had privilege.

And people would arrogantly say that we worked for that. No, the thing is that plenty of people didn't have the opportunities that we had to be able to reach where we reached. You know, who go to St. Mary's, who go to QRC [Queen's Royal College], who well in my case was Trinity, Trinity College and so.

AA: So why did the– how did the collaboration with the trade union groups come about, and why?

KK: It comes from the same source, and that we felt that the people who had to fight for their rights in the society, we should be in alignment with them. And our university education, we shouldn't see it as preparing us… I can become a millionaire and this and that.

It should be preparing us to work with those who are the downtrodden, to build a better society. And so we had relationships with the people on the blocks, as I tell you, we used to go out and talk to them. We had relationships with the trade union, the radical trade union movement.

And the three major unions at the time with whom we had that kind of thing was Transport and Industrial Workers Union, Oilfield Workers Trade Union, and a union that was the National Union of Food, Beverages and Allied Workers. That is defunct. It was led by a guy called Beddoe.

So those were, the leadership of those unions was very radical. There might have been others that I'm not remembering right now, but those were the main, radical leadership. George Weeks is a big figure. That was a very big figure and that kind of thing.

AA: In what way were the trade unions militant? What were they doing?

KK: In fighting for workers' rights. You know, because you have some unions who, like they fraid to strike, you know, they don't really care too much about the workers. If they could get a two percent, they settled for that. Whereas we were dealing with 15 percenters and 20 percenters. Right? Because there were people who had a, you know, they had ideological belief.

They would not just, they would not just happen to have, to be able to talk and become leaders of a union, but they also had ideological belief. Right? Radical ideology was part of their thing as trade unions. So that is what allowed us and them to build the kind of relationship. I remember repression took it, repression by the government forces took it a little further. But by the time they come with the repression, we, all those students, had a rapport with the blocks.

And that was a very, very important thing. Because we didn't go out there with that in mind. We went out there to see, let us talk to them, let us try to lift, you know, in whatever way we can. We wanted the university and the community to be integrated and that kind of thing. And also we figured the trade unions, which was tough, which were dealing with workers, grassroots people, natural allies. And you had at least three radical trade unions.

Others, three, three, three. The sugar workers under [Basdeo] Panday, the bus workers, and the Transport and Industrial Workers Union. And of course George Weekes was the biggest figure in the trade union, trade union movement.

So we just, you see, we, we, the international environment is what I think influenced the way we thought about things or helped to influence it. Because like, you know, you felt you had a responsibility for the downtrodden. A few years, I said, look, we are privileged.

I come from no rich family, but because it was free to go to university and because I managed to, you know, whatever qualifications you get from going to secondary school and all that. But you still are very tiny. It's not like now most people get that opportunity.

We were a much smaller minority in terms of that kind of opportunity. And therefore there was a strong sense that I must say that Daaga had a lot to do with it. But, you know, a number of us came into it with that kind of passion that this is privilege that we have.

We are no money, but we are privileged. That could allow us to make money in the future, you know, and take our lives somewhere. And we can't have what so many people are denied and not try to lift them up.

AA: So then the march on February 26th, how did that come about? Was it impromptu?

KK: No, it was not impromptu. Because February 26th had to do a lot with the trade unions. The Transport and Industrial Workers' Union. And what was significant is that the... No, 26th was the Caroni March?

AA: No, 26th was the march to the cathedral.

KK: Right, okay, yes.

AA: So what brought that about?

KK: Yes, that came with the... Let me get the little details. Because February 26th, it had a lot to do with the trade unions.

AA: Was it also linked to what was happening with the Caribbean students in Canada?

KK: Yes, yes, yes, yes. And because of our links that we had built up with the trade union movement, you find that they all felt that when NJAC[National Joint Action Committee], or let's say the Students' Guild, I can't remember if we had adopted the name NJAC yet or not. I have to think that through carefully. The book will tell me, but I have to think that through carefully. But as students, we used to get very involved with the trade unions. That was part of it. We used to be involved with the communities. Me eh know where we find time to study. We used to be involved. So the trade unions were the institutional bodies we were involved with. We always used to get involved with strikes and this and that. And as well as used to get involved with the grassroots brothers and sisters on the blocks and in the communities and that kind of thing. So those two kinds of involvement were very important in building relationship between the university and the wider community.

So February 26 had to do with a strike by the Transport and Industrial Workers' Union, which was one of the unions we had that close relationship with. Because TIWU, a union, which

was called National Food, Beverages, and Allied Workers, which was led by a guy called Beddoe, and the OWTU, those were the main radical trade unions at the time. You also had Panday with the sugar workers as another thing. So that was the radical core of the trade union movement. Most of the other trade unions were very kind of passive.

AA: So is it that TIWU decided to have a protest on the 26th and the guild decided to join?

KK: No, what happened is that it's not that they decided to have a protest, but strikes were illegal from 1966, if I remember correctly. You could not, you know, they took away the workers' right to strike. Or they might have encumbered it so much with having to get permission and all. You know, whereas before, a union had a thing with an employer and they called a strike.

Now, striking just so became illegal, you know, breaking the law. And transport was, because the transport workers, that's the bus service for the entire country. And they were the first union, if I remember correctly, to say, we are not going to take on this ISA, Industrial Stabilization Act, we are going to strike.

So their strike was against the law. And in order for all not to fall down, the government decided that they were going to, they had to break the strike. And they were going to break it with violence. That was a conscious decision, we have to break the strike. But by that time, this was in 1969, and by that time, we've had this longstanding relationship with the trade union, because we have gotten involved in their struggles, they have gotten involved with us at the university, there's a close collaboration between us. So if transport industrial workers union have a serious problem, we have a problem, we moving with them.

So we went down, we became part of the strike. And when they decided that they were going to break up what was then an illegal strike, by force, so we had a meeting, Panday was part of it, Panday was a trade unionist, he down Central and South, they come up for the meeting, we had a few other unions, and then you had us students from UWI at the time, so we met at the office of the Transport and Industrial Workers Union the night before, took the decision for the strike, knowing it would be illegal, and knowing that the police were going to, because the police were ordering the end of the strike, that was the order, the end of the strike, they start there and so, so we went out to defend the strike. When we went out that morning, they had buses, the police were ordering the bus drivers to go and drive the buses.

Most of the workers were not taking them on, but most of the workers were there on strike until they got what they were fighting for. But you know in any situation, you get men who will break. So we had some drivers who decided they were going to drive, the police were out in full force that morning, because they knew that they were going to have some, some real confrontation, so they were out in full, full force, riot gear, massive police out there, and the drivers who were intimidated, they started to get them to move the buses out.

So we decided we have to block from the first bus, and so when the bus was moving out, we went and we put our bodies against it. Of course the driver stopped, because there's people in front of him to knock down, and the police keep saying, "Drive the bus, drive the bus!" So

he do it [indicates start and stop motion] you know, and we, all of us, and bodies against the bus, and being pushed backwards bit by bit. It could have gone very bad. But you know the driver himself, he was afraid to just roll over people like that, when the police were coming in the morning.

And then eventually the police came and they started to hit us with batons, and drag us and throw us in a waiting bus, the Black Maria, they used to call it, you know the police van? The Black Maria, so they were grabbing us and throwing us in the van and that kind of thing. So eventually they did get the bus to move, because the night before, we had spoken to the leadership of the Transport Industrial Workers Union, which key people were Clive Nunez, I think you know that name, and Joe Young. They had others, [indecipherable] and a couple of others, but they were the key figures in it. So that's what happened that morning, and the police action really helped to inflame what was already, this is late 60s, you have a very radical environment in the country. That whole shout of Black Power has transformed the place, and you have a very active student body holding meetings all over the country and all kind of areas having meetings. You have– strikes are banned, and that's a big war for the trade unions, so you have this combination of students, grassroots communities, wider communities, because we had meetings all over the country and all these strikes.

So when they came and they moved against the strike in that way, well that really turns things against the government, in a way, strongly. So that was a very, one of the very major steps in this whole thing. That was after that State of Emergency, the call, it was already a State of Emergency, I can't remember– might have been a State of Emergency, that call already, but from there on, the militancy took on new levels in the society.

So it was a very significant moment in the development of the union. That was in 1969.

AA: And what about 1970? Now based on reports in the newspaper, you all were trying to get into the Royal Bank of Canada, and didn't manage to get in there.

KK: Didn't get there in time. I suppose it must have been early closing hours.

AA: Okay. [laughter] And then you all headed to the Cathedral on Independence. So tell me about that date.

KK: Okay, now what happens at the, well we got into one bank.

AA: Okay, but where did the march start from?

KK: The march started, it might have started somewhere down on South Quay. We might have gathered for the march, because we came up from where we started, and the first place that we went was into the bank. As you come up Broadway, turn left on Independence Square. That bank, it must be still there, could have been a Republic Bank, it was all foreign banks at that time. I think it was Republic Bank there from that time. I can't swear. It might have been a Canadian bank.

AA: Royal Bank of Canada, I think it was.

KK: Yes, because you had the students. One of the issues there that brought people together was how they were treating the students in Canada. And that is why the Canadian assets here became targets. So when we had that march at the, because that march now, that is not about the bus strike. The bus strike has already taken place. This is now about, so there's a radicalism in the society. And now we are going to deal with this issue, and of course a lot of trade unionists are out there with us too, and deal with this issue of the Canadians.

And we say, well, they can't have our students lock up in Canada and have assets in Trinidad. So we decided to go into the Royal Bank of Canada, which was right on the corner as you come up from South Quay and then straight into the, so we went straight into the bank. And then of course they would call the police, and the police would come to move people out with force.

And they came and were dragging people out to the bank and all that kind of thing. So you could imagine the mood of the demonstration now. There was no big, big, big demonstration yet, you know. But as that happened and it hit the news and all of that, after all these weeks of mobilization, not for that specifically, but you know, re-education, we were giving people all that, and now you have a big following. So as people hear, what? So we go into the bank, must be 20, 30 of us or whatever it was, and the police come and they're beating people out of the bank. With you know the riot staff and so.

By the time we come out of that bank and start to walk, people were just coming more and more from everywhere as it made the news. So we crossed the street and then start to head east on Independence Square. And somebody say– and what we were doing is we were walking through, because across the street you had a store. It was Montano's. We don't know what is there now. It was just right opposite the Royal Bank, but it was owned by the brother of one of the PNM ministers. Montano was a member of parliament. Big shot in the, that Montano was government, but it was a big business family. So from the bank into that shop.

We said, okay, we're just walking through. Nobody interfere with anything. Just walk through and have a look at what's happening. And going through, walking through the whole demonstration, going walking through the Montano store. And then we start to head up, head east now. Along Independence Square, on the northern side of Independence Square, heading east. And somebody say– and everywhere closing up because the word spread. So you had nowhere else to walk through. Everywhere closing up, except church.

Church is God's thing, you eh go close that. And somebody said "To the church." Now the Catholic church in Canada had come out against the students. So therefore, that is something we used to be talking about on the platform, the role of the Catholic church in this.

So when somebody said "To the church." Boy, that real incite the crowd. And people just moved and went. And of course, the leadership said, "listen, nobody do anything." There's no damage or this or that. And the masses moved into the church. And Daaga went and he gave a sermon from on top, the altar and that kind of thing. But nobody interfered in

anything. The only thing that, some of the guys in the protest took a black cloth and put it over the face of some White saint. I don't know if it was Mary or, I can't remember. But one of the, right? But you had a discipline. You have all these people. Some of them grassroots people. Some of them is badjohn. Some of them violent. You know, all kind of thing.

But the spirit of the movement was such that you could go into a bank with people who are accustomed to jail, being jailed for violent crimes, all kind of thing. But the mood was such that once the leadership says, listen, this is the rules kind of thing. We're not going in here to do anything to, you know, we're making a statement.

And so the church was the same spirit. Daaga went and he talked from the thing. And everybody is calm, you know. I must say that the leadership had a lot of, was really able to manage people's behaviors. So people could say all kind of thing. But you never had incidents of people going and thiefing. You didn't have that kind of thing at all. Or you go in the bank and you, you know, you destroy this or destroy that. No. You go into the cathedral. You show respect for it. People who want to talk from the pulpit, of course, the very religious might consider it a disrespect, you know. But from the point of view of saying, take a chalice and throw it down or overturn benches or anything, which you could have done. Because compared to the police, we were real [indecipherable], you know. And all kinds of people.

And there was a tremendous rapport between the people identified as the leadership. And all those people, from all different kind of environments that used to come and be part of the parade. Because the parade had all classes. All classes, those demonstrations. It was like, these are all grassroots thing or middle class thing or anything. People came from all facets of the society. Of course, most of them would be grassroots people coming from the Laventille Hill and Morvant.

AA: What about ethnicities?

KK: Mainly African. You had a significant number of Indians as well. But it was mainly African. Because remember where this is taking place. In Port of Spain. But because you had leaders like Winston Leonard and Basdeo Panday, in particular, you would find that you had participation. Especially from Panday. Because Panday had major following down there. So you would have gotten a lot of people. A lot of Indians would come up. But they were predominantly African. And before that, we had been going down. We'd go down and sugar workers on strike. We'd be there. So bus workers strike, we'd be there. Sugar workers strike, we'd be there. That's those of us who come out of the university and so on. So it was, you know. So even though anything in the north, you would have it predominantly African. But you'd always have Indians. You had an Indian leader called Chan Maraj. A grassroots leader I talking about up from Arouca side. So he'd come down with his little side. You'd have those who'd come with Panday. And that kind of thing. So it was predominantly African. But it was a good number of Indians.

AA: Were you beaten on that day? That February 26th when you marched in the cathedral. Were you one of the people who were beaten on that day?

KK: No, they just grabbed me. I think– one person. I got one lash. Right? Because as they grabbed me, some policeman– I didn't feel it at the time. I didn't think about it. Somebody said, "Boy, that man wanted to lash you long time." [laughter] So as they took me, they threw me in the bus. I don't think he was able to get a good blow in. Because they were moving me, almost throwing me into the bus. And he couldn't. He wanted to do that long time. So I get something. I didn't feel it.

AA: Were you one of the people who gave– Was it only Daaga who spoke in the cathedral?

KK: I didn't speak in the cathedral. Daaga spoke. Who else spoke? I didn't speak. I didn't speak in the cathedral. So that, you would be surprised. Because this wasn't a huge, huge demonstration yet.

AA: It started as 30 people, about 30 people you said. By the time you finished at the cathedral, how much people would you estimate?

KK: The cathedral was packed up and outside was packed up. People just start to, it was like magic, you know. I think God must be issue a call, "All good people come here." [laughter] That was it. Like we wake up the African gods in the cathedral.

AA: And were you there for the march? So the significant marches were February 26, the march to the cathedral. Then the march to Caroni, which took place on March 12. Were you part of that march?

KK: Yes, I was part of everything. I was part of everything.

AA: So in between February 26th and March 12th, what would you describe that period as?

KK: A lot of mobilization was taking place because people are now fired up all along the blocks and that kind of thing. We would be going. I mean, I don't know how we managed to keep it up. The amount of meetings with people in different communities on the blocks and the mobilizing and that kind of thing. Because we now had the responsibility after the state's behavior in February 26th. I think it was with the strikes and all that. I think that's why they called it February 26th movement. Was that the time of the strikes? Or that was the time of the first big march after the strikes? I'll have to check back and see.

AA: Okay.

KK: Yeah, but we had those that... I'll have to go back. I'm talking a couple years back.

AA: Just a few years back. [laughter]

KK: Yeah, just a handful.

AA: So the march to Caroni, was Caroni chosen specifically?

KK: Yes, yes, yes. Because you had this division between Africans and Indians in the society. And of course, that's a very convenient thing for a government to use against a mass movement. And the march to Caroni was a march organized basically by university students. On the 12th of March, I think it was.

And we decided that we had to bring about this unity in the society. And because we had such a rapport with trade unions, you find that a number of trade unions became a part of that march to Caroni.

AA: So what was that day like?

KK: What was that day like? Oh, that was a fantastic day. Again, that started right down by the... If I remember correctly, that one also started down by the bus terminus down there. Yeah.

AA: Bus terminus being at City Gate?

KK: Yeah, what you call City Gate. You know, I forget. I'm talking in a different age group. I have to use a different language.

AA: So you marched from Port of Spain.

KK: So we marched from there. And that started off being a student march, in a sense. Because the students were going to do this march. Something had to happen. And remember, we had the links with the trade union movement with Panday and so on. And down in Central there. And I think you had a strike going on. I think you had a strike going on at the time.

And we decided we're going to march in solidarity with the workers. It was a way of bridging that racial divide. And that was the purpose of that march. To bridge that racial divide. And our – although we promoted ourselves as the Black Power Movement. And you know, a lot of people were Indian, even though they were the same shades as us. But nobody liked to be called Black. Until it became a revolutionary term in the late 60s. Before you called somebody Black, it was an insult.

Right, that created a thing of pride. And we said, you know, when you talk about Black people, you talking about both Africans and Indians. But no, this march to Caroni was basically organized by the university students. But because we had this integration with the trade union movement, you find that a lot of trade union leaders and leaders of other grassroots organizations, which had sprung up quite a lot in that period. Because that consciousness of Black power, which had a strong appeal on the blocks and everything. So even though you're having what is theoretically a student march, it has a mass of people.

All these other organizations we're dealing with. You know, so all came out and we did this march to, we say the march to Caroni. All kinds of efforts were made to stop this march from coming up, because there was a tremendous fear that once you pull the two major ethnic groups together, in this way, it's trouble for the government.

So, and I think the march was on March 12th, if I remember correctly. And we get together for this march. Lots of people, trade unionists, ordinary people, everybody decided to become part of this march. It was quite a large march. People tried all kinds of things to persuade us not to go ahead with it. You know how much calls I get from people who either claim to be police or this or that.

And people say, "Boy, them Indians will be waiting for alyuh down in the cane field." You know, people will get killed and all this kind of thing. But instead of having people in the cane field, what you had people with? Barrels. With water, ice, and bottles of juice and other things to drink. So all along the route, people were being given, you're not buying you know, this was to give. People were giving out those kinds of things. So it turned out to be much more than a student march.

A lot of students were on it, but because you already had that kind of thing with the trade unions, and we had a lot of working communities and that kind of thing. So you had them brothers from the blocks, you had the trade unionists, and you had the students. Plus other people who said that this is a real, significant thing happening in society, I'm going to be part of it. So it turned out to be a massive march. And it just grew as it went along. We went down to Couva. We didn't just go Caroni, we reached to Couva. It was a– It really upset the– They knew that the... This was like the writing on the wall, because the fact that a group of Africans could go down and get the kind of welcome we did in Caroni. Because all along you had big barrels, with bottles of juice, soft drinks, and they were just giving out, you know.

They prepared for it. So whilst people thought they'd be waiting with guns, and all the rumors about guns, the only gun we saw was by Bhadase [Maraj], when we passed by Bhadase house on the main road. You know where Bhadase lived, right? On the main road there.

So Bhadase had a rifle at his foot, and a revolver. And he and some other guy, there was plenty of them, I remember him, and other guys out there, just watching the march. But you see that broke his... What 1970 did was broke that power of Bhadase.

And a lot of Indians were glad for it, too. Because Bhadase used to go and treat... It's as though he was a massa. And other Indians were like... Because he was a major trade unionist for the Indian people, and sugar workers, and all of that. And he held on to it by terror. Because he used his terror. He had guns then, but Bhadase was for real.

Bhadase was not like... Bhadase was for real. So he had a... If I remember correctly, a rifle. They said maybe a shotgun or something. Visible. Because he have it legally. So he have it visible at his feet, as he's standing there watching the march. But you can't watch a march of 10,000 people and decide you're going to shoot somebody. You're getting wiped out. Your whole household getting wiped out one time. And of course you would have had people in the march who have guns, too. So you have police with guns. You have people with guns. And Bhadase with guns. So it would have been a very serious situation. Right? So we...

So that march was really the groundbreaking march. In terms of the relationship between Africans and Indians. It was an absolute major breakthrough. After that march... Because this thing finished up in the night. It finished up in the night. And the government stopped... PTSC [Public Transport Service Corporation] stopped buses from running. So a mass of people stranded. Africans stranded in central Trinidad. But you know what? People couldn't find transport home. Because very few taxi or anything. But they stopped the buses from running. This was the major form of transport they took. It was a deliberate thing. They stopped the buses from running. And meeting over in the night. Because this was a very long day and night. But there was a car park opposite where the meeting was held. It was held along... When you go down, right down. And you turn right and then left to go further down to San Fernando. It was along the main road there. Where the meeting was held.

And one of the car parks was close by. So a lot of people spent the night in the car park. Because there was no transport to go home.

AA: So you just slept on the ground?

KK: Yeah. Where people bring all kinds of... They bring food, they bring drinks. They bring all kinds of… Not the marchers I talking about, you know. I'm talking about the community. Because they realized all these people are stranded. Some people helped with transport. People might have had a maxi taxi. Or a car or something. So a lot of people helped with transport. Because that mass of people would have been plenty. But a lot of people couldn't make... We didn't have enough. We couldn't muster enough for everybody. So a lot of people ended up spending the night there. And were very well taken care of. Mainly Africans. Ninety percent Africans. Ninety something percent Africans. And the Indian community just brought everything they could want for them.

AA: So during that march that march to Caroni, were you all stopping and talking? It was mostly onward movement?

AA: It was onward movement. And people were joining. Yes, onward movement and people were joining. The most that would happen along the way is that people would be providing water, juice, everything. And we didn't organize that.

AA: Is that where the African and Indians Unite sign– was that the march–?

KK: Yes, Indians and Africans Unite. Yes, that sign came out for that Caroni march.

AA: Who made that sign?

KK: The students at the university. Indians and Africans Unite now. I think it had a "now" at the end of it.

AA: Yes.

KK: So that was done at the university. We are the ones who got that sign done. For that march. It is the march that–boy. The amount of people calling me on the phone. They called

Daaga. They called Ayeigoro. Everybody said this is dangerous. You have Bhadase. Bhadase have gunmen waiting in the cane fields. Call this off. It is dangerous. People are going to get killed and all kinds of things. Because it was the most fearsome thing. Both to the African government as well as to a lot of the Indian political figures. Because both of them saw this as something with the potential to break that deep racist thing that entrenched them. Whether as opposition leaders or as government leaders. So both sides were worried about that. You know how much police come to, not to threaten, but the guy might say, listen, you should call this off. Kambon, I telling you this is something. And warning you how dangerous it is going to be. And all of that. And it wasn't me uniquely. Anybody they could identify and talk to, they were talking to and–you know. Because the government was extremely afraid of this march. Because if it turned out to be what we wanted it to be, it would be worrying.

But remember that time, Basdeo Panday, who was on all the marches with us. Panday was the effective leader in the Sugar Belt. Bhadase, who had a lot of clout, but a lot of people were very anti-Bhadase. But because he had power, he had guns, he had boldness, so he was a very dominant figure. People were afraid of him. So what we did, we broke the fear of Bhadase. Because when Bhadase could not retaliate against us, that broke that spell that Bhadase had. And Panday, as a trade union leader, he was very highly respected as a trade union leader. Very well known in his politics, his labor, his everything. He was well respected. So he was an asset. The anti-Bhadase thing was an asset.

Because Bhadase was so dominant. He was dominant by using violence and intimidation and that against the Indian people themselves. They were so happy that somebody was putting Bhadase in his place, so to speak. So that was a good thing. But we were not afraid of anybody or anything. So that was a dramatic–

AA: So you had a successful march on March 12th?

KK: March 12th, I think it was. Very, very, very successful beyond what we thought.

AA: So I was told that the result of that march was Caroni becoming a national company, becoming nationalized, and the formation of the official Caroni 1975 Limited. Is that accurate?

KK: Yes, but I wouldn't say because of that. It's because of all the messages of 1970. All together. You know, the messages of 1970 had to do with us taking control of our major resources. That was a philosophical position of the movement, that you had to take control of your resources. And of course, that march had a specific thing to... that was within the context of that message. Because government took over quite a lot of the economy. In that period.

AA: And what about the follow-up? So it was supposed to be Caroni was supposed to march to Port of Spain.

KK: Yes, a follow-up march. That's when they declared a State of Emergency. The very morning, the very day that we were going to have the march from Caroni to Port of Spain, that's when the State of Emergency was declared.

AA: So where were you on that day? That was April 20th.

KK: Well, I was... Yes, I... Actually, the police picked me up at my home very early that morning. Before I could leave to go to march. They come and they pick me up at four o'clock in the morning. So it was next day –

AA: Okay, so the government knew that you were planning to march?

KK: Yeah, because it was a big open thing. You know, it was advertised, it was promoted. April 21st, march to Port of Spain. March from Caoni. And the march, actually, it started from... Because it was not just Caroni, it was Sugar Belt altogether. So all down San Fernando side, you had people line up to start the march. So it wasn't just a march like starting in Caroni. It was starting way down in San Fernando. You can remember George Weeks was part of the whole thing. So oil workers were mobilized down in the south. And those communities in the south were mobilized. And George Weeks had a lot of weight.

So they had a big demonstration starting in the south. They were going to be meeting the people organized by Panday and others in Central and coming to Port of Spain. And of course, we had all the unions and communities along the east-west corridor coming out for that day.

So the government really was worried that that would be the end of the PNM [People's National Movement]. So they struck in the wee hours of the morning.

AA: Everyone was arrested that morning.

KK: Yes, they had a widespread arrest that morning. And I don't know, my mind was not to go home. Because I had not... I hardly used to go home. I could sleep by this one, sleep by that one. I was sleeping in a different place. And stupidly, that night before that march... And why this boy... Because somebody said... Somebody said that it was not... I can't remember who it is now, but somebody said... Because we were expecting a state of emergency at any time. But of course, the date had come in. And we were calculating if it's safe to be home that night. Because they may want to do it then. But we figured, no, they may calculate that that may cause a backlash and postpone it. So we were debating that in our own minds and whatnot, becoming unsure what was going to happen. And I made the mistake and I went home to sleep that night. I hadnt had much sleep. I went home and said, boy, let me get a rest. Because if anything, I may be in good shape. So... Oh gosh, and...

AA? That was not the first time that you were arrested?

KK: I was arrested as a result of the... Which of the marches? 26th of February

AA: 26th of March, the march to the cathedral.

KK: Yes, yes, people got arrested for that.

AA: So you were arrested?

KK: I was arrested for that.

AA: And were you charged?

KK: Yes. Disorderly behavior in a place of public worship. I was charged for that. But we were very orderly. I can't, I don't remember if those charges were ever heard. I don't remember those charges being heard. If they were heard, they were just dismissed or something, you know? It was some old, old... You see, they used some very old law, old ordinance or something. And... They were thrown out. They were either thrown out or they were never heard. I can't remember for sure.

AA: So you never spent any time in jail after the February cathedral march?

KK: Time in jail when the emergency was declared.

AA: Okay, that's when it happened. So how long were you–

KK: I think they had us for about eight months or something.

AA: What was that experience like?

KK: I think it was interesting, a good experience. You see, yes. It was an interesting experience.

AA: Most people would not describe jail as a good, interesting experience.

KK: You see, what happened is that when you get involved in this thing and you realize that the government feels threatened, you expect jail, you expect death. You know, you expect anything. You know, you can't go into that and be one of the major identified people and expect to come away scot-free. They are going to strike back at some point and one or two people were killed by the police. And therefore, you don't know when it's your turn. You know? But you know, you kind of set your mind for that. If yuh dead, yuh dead. So it doesn't matter. But the police who came for me... Was that the morning that Babb was one of the people–? I think Babb was one of the people who came for me. Yeah, Babb. Randy Babb. So when they came... Right. [interruption]

KK: Because we knew at the end of the day we'd either be in jail or dead. I had no illusions about that. So I prepared myself for either. Whichever one comes first. You know? So it didn't... I was not troubled at all.

AA: But how did you spend your time in jail? What was the treatment like? Coming from someone who hasn't been jailed. [laughter]

KK: OK, OK, OK. Well, the first thing they did is they took us down to Nelson Island. Right? They didn't take us straight to jail. Because I suppose they had to prepare the cells first and

all of that. So they picked up a lot, a lot, a lot of people. Not just those who end up in jail. But a lot of people. And they detained us under a State of Emergency. On Nelson Island. Where Butler had been detained. So we were there. It was like a nice holiday spot. You know? [laughter] And then... From there they took us up to the– Up to the Royal Jail. But they just took a handful of us to Royal Jail. And... That time they still had people detained on the island. But they came and they took... Because when they first picked me up, it was... It was Nelson Island. We didn't know where we were going. Because I... I hadn't got a clue. It was only... See them taking me down Carenage. I said, "Where the ass is this boy, where are we going?" You know? But nobody saying anything. So that was Nelson Island.

And at some point they came and they took off. Because we had a good organisation on Nelson Island. We started having classes with everybody who was there. [laughter] You know? So every day was classes. And the prison officers used to get their education. Because they'd come... Come around and listen. You know? They got a good education. And so... And of course the government decided... "We ent put nobody there to be teachers or students. Especially to be teachers." So... They came and they took off a few of us. Couldn't be many because... We fit into a cell block in the jail. We were in one cell block. Fifteen, twenty, however many. It's not like a huge number. A lot of people were arrested. But the bulk were kept on Nelson Island. And those like Daaga, myself, Ayeigoro and so on. They took to the Royal Jail. So we spent... Almost the entire emergency. In the Royal Jail. Eight months or whatever it was. It was just another experience. No, you see, I adapt to any situation. I adapt to any situation. I don't make jail a problem.

AA: But Daaga was not arrested until a couple of days afterwards.

KK: Yes, they held Daaga a couple of days after. But he came down to Nelson. That's where they put him. Must have been a day after. It wasn't many days, you know. It had to be within a three-day period or something. It wasn't a long time after. From what I remember, it wasn't a long time after.

AA: So what about your release? What about your release? From jail?

KK: It was when the Emergency was over. Because they had no basis on which to hold us after the Emergency. They used the State of the Emergency. So somebody doesn't have to be charged with any specific thing. But they did put charges on us which they never pursued. So we were charged for political... What was the charge with that boy? Defamation in a place of public worship or... What was it? Desecration of a place of public worship. That was one of the charges. There were a couple of others also. So they used that to put us in the jail as opposed to be detained in the center. So we were in jail as actual prisoners awaiting trial. Although the trials never came.

AA: So when the State of Emergency ended, they just let you all go?

KK: Yeah. So after eight months, they just opened the gates and say 'Alyuh go alyuh way."

AA: And then what happened next?

KK: Well, that was the end of that phase. And then a more armed sort of thing took over. That was the end of that phase. After that time.

AA: Are you talking about NUFF [National Union of Freedom Fighters]?

Yes, NUFF came on the scene shortly after. There were a few things before NUFF and then NUFF. But NUFF became the major group when it came to that.

AA: Were you all in contact with them? Was there any kind of collaboration between NUFF and NJAC? Well, at that point there was NJAC, yes?

KK: Yeah, NJAC. Nuff was an independent organization. It was independent of us. We knew a number of the people in it. Some people left NJAC and they went to NUFF. Because they said, "This is a waste of time. You have to use guns." Take over with guns. Some people who felt very thing. You see this kind of thing. It's guns you have to use. Actually, Asha [Kambon] and I lived in a house where NUFF members used to sleep. Some of the leadership, the main leadership. It was an upstairs and downstairs house. So when the guys wanted a break, they used to be on the hills and all kinds of things. When they wanted a little break, they used to come and stay downstairs there. Somehow the police never caught them. And that's a house they raided quite a few times.

AA: Where was that house?

KK: Bellsmythe Street. If you come along Ariapita Avenue, you turn right to go up Bellsmythe Street. The first house on the corner on the left-hand side. It looks very different now. Because it was always upstairs and downstairs. But the structure, I don't know if it's just a modification. Or if somebody had broken down and built something completely new. But it was a high house. You had a high downstairs. It was blocked around. But it was, you know. And upstairs is where the living quarters was. And the family there, which was the Adams family. Asha and I actually lived with them at the time. You know, the NUFF guys used to come in quietly. Not in a group. They'd come in by one or two. One, one or two. You know, kind of thing. Slip in quietly. And go and sleep over there.

AA: Do you remember who they were? Do you remember their names?

KK: Yeah, Jeffers was like one of the leading figures and Guy Harewood. They were among those who used to sleep over there. When they come up the hill or, you know. They used to come and sit over there. And sleep. So sometimes we didn't see them at all. You know. And then they'd get up. Wee hours in the morning. So they were there most nights. They used to be there. So when the police looking for them all about the place they were there lying down comfortable sleeping.

AA: So is that where you were when you came out from? When you were released?

KK: Mhmm

AA: So you were released around November 1970? And so you didn't go back to Tunapuna?

KK: No, no, no, no. I had. I might have. I left Tunapuna. When I was locked up. I was not living in Tunapuna.

AA: Okay.

KK: I was living in Port of Spain. Right by the jail. [laughter] I lived on Gordon Street.

AA: So you were released from jail and you just walked next door–

KK: Yeah.

AA: – and went home.

KK: Yeah. [laughter] No, it was a convenient place. You know. But I think when jail came. At that time I was no longer there. Because it was my mother who was renting that house. And when she went abroad. I didn't continue to stay there. I didn't continue to stay there. Even though the house was available. In fact that's a house that– What caused me not to stay there too long is that so many of the folks used to come. That's where they used to come and sleep. Sometimes the guys from up in the hills and so on would come and sleep there and that kind of thing. And a lot of other people who would come and take part in the marches looking for a place to rest you know. And sometimes the only way I could get to get a sleep is to go somewhere else to sleep. And so I used to go by the Adams house on Bellsmythe Street. That way I could get a rest. Because people used to come there too. But there was a downstairs.

AA: So the Adams were– They were part of the– They were supporters of the movement?

KK: Oh they were very much a part of it. Alvin and Rosetta Adams. Very much a part of it. Took a lot of risk. Because you had these armed guys. Right downstairs there. They took a lot of risk. Yeah.

AA: So how did NJAC come about? The naming of it. The formalization of it. Because like you said it was just the student guild mixed with different trade unions. And you know. Just people who were following that same ideology. So at what point did you, did you all decide to formally have an organization called NJAC?

KK: I suppose when a number of us were no longer students. But we had organized all these people. Came up with a different name: NJAC. It was a lot of groups because what happens is that– Because the students were so active in communities while we were there at the guild, you find that– And that's why you had so many. Because we were active with trade unions. The radical trade unions. We were very active with them. We used to be on strike line. All kinds of things. Plus we used to be going out. In the communities. Organizing people and forming links with other groups and that kind of thing. When the thing moved to another phase where you had the formation of– A lot of them had been in NJAC before. But we still – People come, "Oh this thing had to be armed. It had to be armed struggle." This kind of thing. You wasting time if it's not that and so on. So that was a lot of people that we

knew. And we decided, you know, after two states of emergency. I can't remember if it was in between the two emergencies. It was after the two states of emergency. But whenever it was. That they decide…no no no no no, is only armed struggle.

AA: So is it that you didn't agree with it?

KK: I did not believe that armed struggle– You're not going to overthrow the government so easy with armed struggle. That's a whole different kind, level of organizing. But in whatever ways you know. Because they used to, the leaders, the main leaders used to stay downstairs that house there. The house looks very different now. I don't know if it's the same structure that was modified. If it has been completely rebuilt or what. But the guys used to come here in the night. Late late night. In the morning, by the time you get up in the morning, they're gone.

AA: So what stopped NJAC from remobilizing again. After the State of Emergency ended.

KK: NJAC continued to mobilize, you know, after the emergency NJAC continued. It still continues to some extent. But after– It's two states of emergency. One after the other. So it's two. Right. And then you really had to think about what are you going to do. So the organization started to move to different kinds of activities. And eventually, you know, for internal reasons which I would not talk about. In terms of you know what was going on. So a few of us left the organization at some point. But that's after the second State of Emergency, you know, because you, when you get differences. You know, people in the leadership, you don't make any public thing out of it. You step away, you still have a friendly relationship with those who are left there but you're no longer part of the organization. So that took place I think after the, after the second emergency perhaps.

AA: Do you think NJAC achieved its aim during that time?

KK: Well. I think it achieved a lot. I won't say it achieved its aim to transform– because without wielding political power, you can't really change in any fundamental, in any fundamental way. It certainly transformed the consciousness of the society and put a new pride and self-respect in the Africans in the community for sure. It had a major transformative impact on how people saw themselves.

Because we had an education system that was teaching us how to be fools. You know nothing in the education system was making African people take pride in themselves and so many of the things institutionalized in the society were against the development of a positive self-consciousness among Africans. And also bridging the gap between Africans and Indians because the Whites are the minority who dominated the society. Even though they were not the political leaders but they dominated the society. Because they had the wealth, you know, and the, all the psychological things in the society that were embedded in the society from colonialism continued in the education system.

And all that, even though that spell was broken by 1970 but you did not have any institutional development to keep consciousness going. Because in the end of the 1970, NJAC leadership in jail. Come out for a few months. Back in jail again. And then by the time

you come out, there was a whole set of restrictions. To hold a meeting you had to go through long processes. You know. So the way you could have just mobilize quick quick call meeting you know. They used the law to take that ability away from you. And then what happened to, is that you had the development of armed resistance as well with NUFF. So that, it changed the environment now.

AA: Now the words that are used. To describe these events. Do you think they are accurate? Black power. Black power revolution. Guerrilla warfare. Guerrillas. Gangs. Do you think those words are accurately applied?

KK: Well. Those guys fought a guerrilla war. You know, They went up to the bushes. They went up on the hills. They got guns. They. You know they had gun battles. You know, guerrilla warfare. I don't think they were equipped for it. You know. But you see sometimes with idealism And you don't have enough. So you had the bravery. The boldness. Everything. The courage. You had all of that. But what it did not have the sense of organization, the tactics to be able to do that kind of thing. So they were hopelessly outgunned in everything. And it was unfortunate. It was tragic.

AA: But you agree with Black power. And you agree with revolution.

KK: Yeah if you don't have revolution. If you don't have revolutionary change. In some societies. You must have change in society, sometimes you need very radical action. To ensure you get change in a certain way. I mean we live in a society where such a small minority controlled the wealth of the society. And you have such a mass of poverty and people neglected. And there are people who didn't have any kind of, you know, especially among our people, you didn't have that strong sense of self. You didn't have an education system that made you proud of yourself. You know you go to school and it make you almost worshipful of Whites because you don't know anything about your own heroes. You know in the formal system. You know, most of my education really came from outside of the system. And to think that you have people in office who look like you for all these years but never really addressed the fundamentals of the education system that made it through–That, it would kill certain things in you.

You know you have. I remember somebody singing a calypso. I think is Sparrow who say if my head was bright, I woulda be a damn fool. And the problem is that too many of us were bright. And that is what made us damn fools in a sense. Because what is the point that you could calculate all kind of big mathematics and this and that but no sense of self. So the Black Power Movement came like something that was ading that dimension to the education. Giving people a different perspective of themselves.

AA: And what about the term Black Power?

KK: In the late 1960s, you had a Trinidadian, Stokely Carmichael is the person who, who made that slogan a very powerful one in the mobilization of African Americans. And it also resonated around the world. Wherever you had African people, it resonated. That term Black Power to we ourselves. That term to me personally. This is it you know. This is it you

know. It's the most powerful slogan. And so we said look we have to give it a ideological content because it's, there as a reality. It's– to talk Black Power, you're mobilizing people. Give it a ideological content and so we gave it more and more ideological content. As NJAC

So in this way. I had to say Black Power., before it had nothing like that you know. Because if you don't follow [Karl] Marx or somebody else. You have no ideology you know. I mean it's all part of the colonial domination you know. You could take anything you want. Call it anything you want. And you shape it and make it serve you. And that's what we did. So. The National Joint Action Committee ain't go for no Marxism. I mean, you read Marx if you want. And no problem in learning from somebody else's thought, absorb that and internalize that and make it your own. You go for it with evaluation and look at something to see whether or not what in this resembles what you are doing. What your ideals are and everything. But don't let that shape you. Some people got caught up. Because this is the science of this and that. I ain't see it as no science up to now.

So I figured that okay Black power was a terminology. It started off in the United States. We would give it ideological content. Because since it is something that stirred people in their very souls. Take it and move it from slogan to give it a lot of – more meaning and ideological depth. You know. That kind of thing. So I think what the National Joint Action Committee did was really begin to give it ideological content. It came as a slogan but we built ideological content into it.
AA: So when did you leave NJAC? Formally.

KK: Long time. I cant remember. It could have been after sometime after the second State of Emergency.

AA: Were you arrested in that second state of emergency too?

KK: Mm-hmm. I've known a few arrests.

AA: But you were never formally charged with anything?

KK: Yes, desecration in a place of public worship. Desecration of a public place that was when I was in the cathedral. I was charged with desecration. Assault on a police officer. What else? I have a couple charges. Different things. Did they ever try to– Stick me with–Yeah, I think they tried to. I think they tried to put an arms and ammunition charge on me at one time. It had no substance and it didn't stick. They couldn't hold it, they couldn't provide any evidence about that. Those are the main, are the main ones.

AA: So they were all thrown out? Yeah. They used everything. They were thrown out.

KK: Because the desecration of a public place of worship, we were very respectful–

AA: What about the assault on the police officer?

KK: That did not work for them either. That did not work for them either. I don't think I ever got a conviction. I was in jail as a detainee. And also as a – well on a charge awaiting trial

kind of thing. But I don't think I ever lost any case. I don't remember any criminal conviction. I was in jail after the Emergency when I was held again. After there was no Emergency. I was held but I was on bail. Because I was charged but the charge could not hold. It was no good. It was just. It wasn't. There was nothing solid behind it. It couldn't stand up in court at all. So. So I knew what it was like to be. Not just a detainee. But I knew what it was like to be like a prisoner in jail. Once you're waiting for trial. They eh giving you no bail and all this kind of thing. It had no substance.

AA: So how did it feel after having endured all of those things by the hands of the law and then to turn around and be awarded the Chaconia Silver medal.

KK: Well I don't quite link the two. Now you make me think about it. I don't quite. I don't quite link the two. I think after decades after an event when people have had extremely strong emotions about something on either side. "That is the kind of person society dont need." But then they begin to see you in a different light because you're no longer a threat to the government they support. You're no longer fighting against it. And so people begin to evaluate you for different reasons now. And then the way that people see 1970. Because even if you were a strong PNM [People's National Movement].

[interruption]
KK: Yeah. What we was talking about again?

AA: About the silver medal. The Chaconia Silver. You said that you don't think it necessarily have anything to do with that.

KK: That came long, that came a long time.

AA: So you don't think it had anything to do with your revolutionary period?

KK: Well, it's hard to say. I was not a, let me put it this way, I was not a public figure before that. But that made me a public figure in a certain way. Which might not have, which would have been very good in the eyes of some people and very bad in the eyes of others. But I think after a certain time passed and people began to look back at the period differently. And plus, you know, other things I've been involved in that are non-controversial.

AA: When did you start the Emancipation Support Committee?

KK: I have to think back carefully on that. It started because I [indecipherable], but I'm trying to remember exactly when. I wonder if Asha remembers that boy, well Asha was not around. [Calls out to Asha Kambon] Asha, when did the Emancipation Support Committee start? The birth of the Emancipation Support Committee was when?

AK: 1992.

KK: 92?

AK: Yes.

KK: What was the trigger?

AK: But remember before that, we were in 87, 88, 89, we were in TANA [Traditional African National Organisation]. That was the TANA celebrations of Emancipation. So the celebrations, right? And then informally we of course started ESCTT [Emancipation Support Committee of Trinidad and Tobago] in 1990, but only got it registered formally in 92. And then finally formal, it's 96. We got all our documents.

KK: But in 1990 we started.

AK: 1990 we started.

AA: So how did you two meet?

AK: [laughter] At a conference in Canada.

AA: He was in the middle of the bacchanal and you came just in time.

AK: Yes. [laughter] We met before that. There were Black writers conferences in Canada for a number of years. Stokely Carmichael attended some and Walter Rodney was at others and Baba [Khafra Kambon] was at one that he was going to speak at. And I was doing some journalistic work with a Caribbean, Afro-Caribbean newspaper that was based in Harlem. And got sent off to that conference to capture some bits and pieces of what he was saying and what others involved in the revolution were saying. And that's where we met. [laughter] It was Montreal, Canada.

KK: Oh, it was Montreal.

AK: Yeah, it was Montreal, definitely.

AA: You were there, right? [laughter]

AK: Innocent. He was there, innocent. [laughter]

AA: So, what was the impact of the revolution, not just personally, but on your family, your community? How were you viewed on the street after the fact?

KK: Good and bad. Remember, PNM was a big force in the society but amazingly, a lot of people, diehard PNM people, felt we had done a good thing. Because there was a certain amount of disillusionment with Eric Williams at the time. What Black Power did, even before we adopted that slogan and turned it into an ideology from here, is that it made people think. Because so many years after Independence, you look at the structure of the society, you look at the discrimination against people with dark skins in jobs. There are still clubs that you can't go into with a dark skin. You see, that is a part of the society you might have read of, but you wouldn't know from experience. But you had, you know, after we got independent in 1962. Why, in the 1970s, late 60s, early 70s, you can't go into certain clubs.

The Whites-only clubs, country club was a major one, but it was not the only one. There was another big one in the South, I can't remember the name of it. But you had a number of those kinds of enclaves for Whites-only. And there are certain areas in Trinidad, like up in the back of Maraval, that only Whites. I mean, this was a segregated society with Whites dominant, even though the political leadership was mainly African.

You know, you had your mixture of African and Indian, but mainly African leadership in that post-independence period. Because remember, in the 1970s, is after we done get independence already. And you were living in a society that was so White-dominated, and had actual White racism. Open, open, open White racism, you know. So that was a real irritation and that is what made the Black Power Movement take root here.

AA: Well, what impact did 1970, what impact do you think 1970 had on, just like, from a global perspective, and the treatment of Black people in the world overall?

KK: Well, if you remember, 1970 was like a local manifestation of a consciousness that was global. And the term Black power really came from the United States. In terms of political use, you had Richard Wright write a book called Black Power and so on. But Black Power was an important political slogan. It came up because of a Trinidadian, Stokely Carmichael. Kwame Ture have to call him now, because he was Stokely Carmichael at the time. And it came up as a result of that but it had a broad global impact. Trinidad was just one of the countries that was affected by it. And we decided to not just make it a mobilization slogan, but to turn it into an ideology. In the sense that you shape a view of the world where you are looking for the empowerment of people who are not White. Because you have a global situation where it is dominated by Whites. So whether you go to the African continent, you come to the Caribbean, and everything, you have this White domination coming out of the colonial period. And it's not just where they have the guns and the military power and therefore they seize the political control and all of that. But also in terms of the way people saw the world. So a large part of our concern had to do with the way you have your worldview shaped by somebody else.

And you judge yourself based on somebody else's worldview and that kind of thing. And it is when we brought those things up in a way that people could understand, people could begin to see it in their society. You know, because sometimes you living a society, you're born into it with certain patterns. And you see them, but you kind of take it for granted. But as you mature and your thought matures, you begin to see, "what the hell is this? Something is wrong here." And that is why you had Black Power was an awakening to what was always there in front of you. But which was almost like, that's the way the world is. But you begin to see it differently and you realize, no, this blasted thing is wrong and you not going to tolerate it. So that really reshaped people's minds and the way they saw the world. And that was it. It grew from there.

For some people it was a slogan, some people turned it into a whole ideological perspective like we did. But all based on the reality in which we live. And the reality is still very much there. It's a little more nuanced now. At least here in Trinidad and Tobago it's a little more nuanced. But if you look in this society you would still see a lot of leftovers from that period. Both from the viewpoint of the handful who dominated it, but who no longer had the same

power. And also from the point of view of those who suffered under that kind of regime. A lot of our people have not yet come to that real pride and self. If you look at our values and everything. The lighter skin is the prettier skin, the more beautiful, the more handsome, everything. You know, a lot of the values are still there. The after effects are still there. The Black Power made a lot of impact but it is hard to completely eradicate those things that are so deeply buried in the psyche. If you don't have a programmatic approach to getting rid of it.

So it's there even when you don't want it to be there. It's there and you have to be conscious of how it remains in the society. We're talking about centuries of indoctrination in a particular way. As much as it's broken I am not satisfied about where we are up to today. I'm still not satisfied about where we are up to today. I know we could do a lot better. I feel African people in particular need to come to terms with our African-ness. Have pride in it. So that we can really build ourselves as a people. Nobody has gone through the experience we have gone through to make us lose pride and confidence in ourselves. It's taken a beating and you see that education system is perpetuating it. Do you recognize that? It's very much perpetuated in the education system. It's sad but that is the challenge that we face. And we continue to face it. 1970 made a big breakthrough. But to sustain something you've got to have institutions to sustain it. If something as vital as the education system hasn't made that transformation yet, we're still in trouble. So it's your generation to do that now.