

Dr. Isadore Ramos
Interviewed by Will Thomas and Cayce Kenny
May 1, 1998

Will Thomas/Cayce Kenny: This is Cayce Kenny and Will Thomas, interviewing Isadore Ramos on May First, 1998, 'The Whole World Was Watching', in 1968. Take it, Will.

When and where were you born?

Isadore Ramos: I was born in East Providence, Rhode Island, in 1937.

WT/CK: So, did you grow up in East Providence?

IR: Yeah, I grew up in East Providence, yeah.

WT/CK: Could you briefly describe your family and your neighborhood?

IR: My family is Cape Verdeans. My dad comes from the Cape Verde Islands, my mother's parents come from the Cape Verde Islands. My mother was born here, whereas my dad immigrated here when he was a very young man.

WT/CK: Did your parents have any political views? Like, any affiliations with political leaders in the area?

IR: Not really. They were too busy, you know, working. They had six children, six of us, and most of their time is spent, was spent trying to raise the children.

WT/CK: So did you go to, you went to high school in East Providence?

IR: I went to high school in East Providence.

WT/CK: Where did you go to college?

IR: Southern Illinois, and I got my Ph.D. at University of Connecticut.

WT/CK: I know she had said you got involved in the Civil Rights Movement. Could you describe how you got involved?

IR: Well, basically, I, being a person of color, at that time you just gonna be automatically involved, if you want to or not. I, I think my first awakening of total discrimination was when I went to Southern Illinois. Although it was done up in the north here, in East Providence, it was done at a level that it was very undercurrent, and so what ends up happening is that in East Providence, although I grew up there, there were certain underlying things that would be done that you wouldn't know if you wasn't really looking. But when I really got the first rude awakening, you see, because I grew up as being a Cape Verdean, and so therefore my family and also many of us had the attitude, you know, we were different, but we weren't different. We're still people of color. Whether you're the Afro-American, Cape Verdean, Spanish or whatever.

And so what ends up happening, when I went to Southern Illinois, I went there as an athlete, and when I went to Southern Illinois it was a rude awakening, because now my color played a big part. And so there was things that happened to me in Southern Illinois, even as an athlete when I was off campus, that caused me to really take a look at myself and look at me as a person, because you know, when you, when you was traveling as much as I traveled, as an athlete, you would find that you had to kind of plot your way through the country, you know, where you could eat, where you could sleep, where you could stay, and that never happened to me before. And so, many times I had been told that "You can't come through this front door, you gonna get food, you go to the back door". I mean, I was told those things.

I, I was like in the Ozark mountains one time, we were riding to, matter of fact, I was going to Oklahoma to wrestle. And we pulled up to a shanty, I mean like a shack, it was halfway, I wouldn't send my dog in the shack. But there was a gentleman sitting on the porch, and we got out of the cars 'cause we were all from the, Southern Illinois University, 'cause we traveled in cars, and when I got out of the car, I went to go in to get a candy bar, which everybody said "only buy candy for track," and, when I was going to the door, this gentleman told me "Nigger, you can't come in here". And I mean, so, those are the things.

My very first episode was when I went to Southern Illinois and I was supposed to be an outstanding wrestler, I go to, they send me to St. Louis, Missouri, and I can still remember the place we were in now. And I didn't know it, and they didn't know me, and when I went into the town, all the wrestling team had places to stay at the homes, and I didn't. I had to stay outside the town and stay in a hotel, I mean a motel, and I didn't know what was really going on until when I wanted to go eat, I couldn't go in town to eat, they had to bring my food to me.

WT/CK: How did your teammates treat you?

IR: Team, the teammates were from all over, but the teammates were okay. Everybody was okay once you was on the campus. Once you got off the campus, you, you know, we would go down the main drag on campus, off of campus, and there were some stores you couldn't go into. Matter of fact, in 1960, when I got to Southern Illinois, they just opened the theaters to let the people of color come down and stay on the first floor. They would make everybody go up on the second floor, and even when I was there, in some of the cases, there was some stores that I couldn't go in to eat. They wouldn't serve you.

So that was my first rude awakening. And, and so I got involved that way through the University, 'cause then what happened was I lived in, sort of on campus, and then when I moved off campus, to find a place, I can tell you, I went to a home that was rented. There was a, now you gotta remember something, it was across the tracks in the northern part of Illinois, Carbondale, where the school is, and

across the tracks in the north section of Carbondale, was where the people of color were. And they had the shanties and all that, and you go on the other side, on the west side of the tracks, and that's where the whites lived, and they had the sewer lines, and they had all the make-ups and all the great things. So when I, when you're off campus and you want to live off campus, you end up, you know, trying to go to a home and rent a home. And rent, cause there were many homes they had for rent for students.

I remember when I went to this home, and I wanted to rent the home, and the lady looked at me and she says "I can't rent to you". I said, "Why not?" She said, "When you people leave, you leave a distinct odor." And I looked at her, and I said to her, "Lady, if you don't wash, you leave an odor also." And she didn't even know what I was talking about. But to her, blacks leave odors.

And so that's the kind of problems I faced. And then on the other hand, on the other hand, being Cape Verdean, many blacks didn't accept me. Because I wasn't like them. So, so I was like, stuck in the middle, until they got to know me for, for my ability to speak and for my ability not to sit back. See, because many people of color in, that was there were so used to it, and they were like humble and timid, and you didn't find many talking out. But when I, I didn't go there for that. I didn't go there to solve anybody's problems, I went there to get an education. And I had to go to wrestle, and that's what I went for, a wrestling scholarship.

WT/CK: Now, were you like, the only colored person on the wrestling team?

IR: No, at the time, no. There were more, but see they come, some of them came from St. Louis, and some came from Harvey, Illinois, up, up the northern part, but you know, they, they already lived that kind of stuff, and I just never did.

WT/CK: So they, then, they were treated the same way, like living in the hotel outside of town and such?

IR: Oh yeah, oh yeah. And what happened was when I came back, I went to the Dean and I told him "I'm not here for that, and that will never happen to me again." But the funny part of it is when I was wrestling, there was a big tournament, and everybody got beat and it just left me, and I was the only person of color from all the other teams, right, and some of the guys on our team that they didn't take were of color. They didn't just take them. What they were doing, they were just going to test my skills, so they put me in this big tournament, and when I, I was there, and I couldn't stay in anybody's home, I had to stay outside of town, and then what ended up happening is I, I was wrestling and there was a team there from, from St. Louis or someplace, and they were an all, it must've been an all black school, and so they kept losing and I kept winning.

And so I was the last one on the mat, but I was from Southern Illinois, so when I walked on the mat, the stands were not from, no further from here to that, those cabinets there, and I was warming up, and I was just getting ready to take my clothes off to go out and wrestle, and the lady says "Kill him, kill him." And she says, "Get that nigger." She was telling the other kid. And I took my headgear off and I turned and I whipped it at her, and it went right by her head, cause I wasn't taking that from nobody. And everybody came out of the stands, but then the wrestlers all stood too. So that stopped it, and the coach said to me, cause he didn't know any better, either. He said to me, "See what you caused? You could have almost caused a riot in here." I said, "Let me tell you something, okay? I don't know how you talk to people of color when you deal with them, but me, I'm not taking that from nobody." And so, when I came back to campus, I went to the Dean, I talked to them, and they made some changes. But the ironic part was when I start to wrestle, I start getting a reputation, then the following year we went back, and everybody want me to stay in their house.

WT/CK: Oh really?

IR: Yeah, 'cause I had a reputation, but,

WT/CK: Until you had your reputation,

IR: Yeah, but the fact that of the matter is I'm still the same person. They didn't want to accept me before, as being of color, now all of a sudden I have a reputation. Now I'm different? No. So I decided no, I stayed in a hotel. I signed autographs and all that, but I stayed in a hotel, because I felt that I'm still the same person and I haven't changed. So that's basically my really, really introduction into people actually denying me access to anything is when I went to Southern Illinois.

And when I came back to the community, I kinda looked at the community somewhat different, at these projects. I lived there all my life, all right? And then, I realized then, I came back to East Providence when I graduated, and this time I had two children, and by the way, my wife was from East Providence, all right, and when I came back, we went to go rent a house. And there was a 'for rent' sign in the window, and I went to that house. Now remember, I was a golden hair boy, nice great kid, outstanding athlete, good student, everybody knew me in the community, and I went to go rent that room, "Just rented it out."

So I ended up moving to South Providence, and that's what I'm going to tell you, when all the, where my whole career started, because I ended up moving to South Providence, and I lived right on Prairie Avenue in South Providence, and I lived there for two or three years, and then I came back to East Providence. 'Cause I built my own home. And my parents, my mom's house is still there. And she still lives in that house, and now I have property there, and, but, that's what happened when it came to housing, you know, they were very, at the time.

So I got, you know, now I'm starting to look and starting to observe, but now I'm living in South Providence, and that's where many of the people of color that were poor lived, and that's where a lot of things happen, like riots, that's how it was in Providence. I was there for that. And that's how, and I was involved in the poverty program, Progress for Providence. And my job there was working with inner city kids, and those kids, who were supposedly hard core, and they ended up, you know, either helping them in school, finding jobs, getting them back in school, helping them with the courts and all that.

So what was happening, as a Phys. Ed. [Physical Education] teacher, I worked in East Providence, I started in 1966, as a Phys. Ed. teacher at East Providence, but I also worked at night in the streets. When the kids congregate on the corners, I was there with them. And we had something like eleven or twelve people all over the city of Providence doing that, and so,

WT/CK: Just standing around with them and just like, hanging out with them?

IR: Hanging out with them. And, and when you do that, you start gaining their trust, and then we, we opened up what you call community centers, recreation centers, and, and those kids would go to those recreation centers so we could be able to get them some counseling, we could get them any type of, you know, employment, or find out what some of their deep problems are. We used to also have automotive centers, where they could bring their cars in and get them fixed. So we used to have all that all over the city of Providence. And so, and we would use that, those stopping areas as part of our trips going in there, just sitting with the kids, talking with them, and then hanging out with them on the street corner.

WT: *It's a good idea.*

CK: *Before we go on about the experience with South Providence, could you just explain to me what exactly Cape Verdeans are?*

IR: What Cape Verdeans are? Okay. Cape Verdeans are a group of people that are Portuguese, African, or any other ethnic group that went through Cape Verde. And Cape Verde is a community off the west coast of Africa, and it's just south of Portugal, and that's the Sahile region, where they have droughts all the time, so Cape Verde is very dry, arid and poor.

They were colonized by the Portuguese government, so when you see Cape Verdeans, they could look like you, they could have blond hair, blue eyes, be very, very light. They could be my complexion, straight hair. They could look like any Afro-American. But there's, there's something, there's so many islands, and every island, and they never had an opportunity at the time, because they were poor, and so what you find is Cape Verdeans were people of the water. They would sail. And like my great-grandfather came here as a whaler, and where they settled was near the water, like in New Bedford, and the Cape, and those kind of areas, Providence. And so, cause they would come in on the ships and that's how my dad got here. All right. So they were more sailors. So they didn't, they didn't come here, as, you know, like Afro-Americans brought here, slaves.

Cape Verdeans came here as a group of people of, at the time, and see, and there's where you had a lot of conflicts in the early Sixties, too, because what ends up happening when you have Gomes, Ramos, Santos, Lima, those names are all Portuguese or Spanish sounding names. And so what you have is, you have a very, conflict, because you could have people that were Cape Verdeans look like any Afro-American that was out there. And then you could have people that would sit in a classroom, and the teachers would have to count the number of minorities in the classroom, and the person that would be sitting in the classroom would be my cousin, they would say I'm a minority, but my cousin was Caucasian. So you get that in a family, too. Right in the same family, cause in a family you get people brown skin and one with blond hair and blue eyes. That's genetics, see, so that's how Cape Verde is, and so now, you know, but on the other hand, we also have African in us, also. So you can't, you see, like some Cape Verdeans don't like to identify with the African part, some identify with the European part. But we are all Cape Verdeans. And it's, Cape Verde is a group of people, the same thing as with Spanish. You know, you have Spanish and you have the different countries, but they're all Spanish. And some look very white, some look very Afro-American, and some look very mulatto, and that's how Cape Verdeans are.

WT/CK: *Interesting, it's just that I didn't know that.*

IR: Yeah. You didn't know about Cape Verde, huh? I've been to Cape Verde,

WT/CK: *I've heard it, but I wasn't quite sure.*

IR: Last year, I've been to Cape Verde six times to speak to them at the National Assembly Hall on education. And, and I spent a lot of time there. 'Cause, see, my father was born there, in Brava, and the islands are all different. When you, when you're just like in Fogue, which is fire, volcano, you're born in Fogue, and Brava, and those islands, you're going to find people very fair complexioned, because that's where a lot assimilation of the Portuguese was. On some other islands, were not as assimilated, so the people are more dark complexioned. But that's Cape Verde.

WT/CK: *Okay, when you moved to South Providence, what was the first interaction you had with the rioting or what, how did you contribute to?*

IR: (?) Let me just say when I moved to South Providence, I was also a street worker, so my interaction was out in the street, not only in South Providence and Federal Hill, Olneyville, East Side, all those communities. We had people that were out there working in all those various communities, in Fox Point, and so we used to intermingle and, work out. So when I lived in South Providence, I already had a base where I was working out in the street with people, in that nature. But what the funny part of South Providence, even though it was made up of many people, the funny part of South Providence, when I went there, and for example, if I'm not mistaken, I can't remember, but the riots all started I think when King got assassinated.

And at the time, before that happened, there were many things that were, that people were grumbling about. A lot of the social issues, better jobs, better schooling, and all those kinds of issues, and the upkeep of their properties, and all that. So there was all kinds of issues that were ongoing. And they faced a lot of discrimination, right? So, what ends up happening is when, when Martin Luther King's assassination, people start to get to moving around, and getting upset, and furious. Now, most of the stores that were down on, in South Providence were like liquor stores and hardware stores, and there were some markets and things like that, but it was a little mall. And they, when they started the riot, they started to break those stores and windows and things, and the police came, in force.

And I actually was involved to that point, because of being a street worker, and what they used to call us was Soul Patrol, because most of the guys that were in South Providence and working and trying to work to stem, quell the riot were people of color, so they said Soul Patrol. So we used to have yellow hats and we'd walk around, around the streets and talk to the people. The problem I had was I didn't know if the cops were going to get me, shoot me from across the street that was up there on the building shooting at people, or the people that were standing behind me. And the problem I had is when I stood out in front and tell them, "Hey", to the policemen, "Don't shoot. Keep, you know," I didn't know if the people were going to get me, cause the people were so angry they were saying to me, "We know you're one of them East Providence guys. You're not poor like us. Who do you think you are? You're not one of us" See? So, I wasn't too sure at that time.

And I had to develop a relationship with them to let them know that I didn't think I was any different, and I was there for the same

reasons, same causes as they were. So, I faced that. But on the other hand, I was law abiding, I never, I wasn't looking for any problems, but I felt that you know, they were being treated unjust at the time. But then I thought there was some people that were there just using it as an excuse. You know, they were, they were using it as an excuse. And I, to this day, always had a problem. Why are you burning up your own community? If you're so adamant about the system, and it was wrong, why are you burning down, I have to go here and live here and do the things here, so why are you doing that? And matter of fact, I said to some of the people that were out there, if you're that adamant about it, why don't you get in your car and go over there on Blackstone Boulevard? You know, why you won't go? Because you know that man will be out there waiting for you.

So you know, they got two cars, and they all got in the car, and they start, they rode up the street, but I seen them riding back, and I hollered out "Did you get there?" See, so that was all rhetoric, and so what happened was in the meantime, they had some legitimate things. I was, I remember standing near the center, and there were cars around us, and all of a sudden they were ricocheting off the wall. And there were cops across the way up on the roof, and, and they were shooting. And it was ricocheting, and I remember pulling a lady down to the ground and, and she was down, and there was one young man who got shot in the stomach. And when I worked my way around to the side of the building, I was leaning on the building, and the cops that were up on the top of the building didn't know I was there, they were hollering. "Feel the gun, how hot it is", right, and they were making comments and I said "Hey!" And he looked down, he saw me, and they backed off like, you know, they wasn't doing anything.

And so we sat down with the Police Department at the time, and we talked to the Police Department about it, and we had some hearings and everything, and there was a news article about it and all that, but they tried to say, this kid, someone walked all the way from Broad Street down there and shot this kid, and that's not the truth. And so, can you prove who did it? No. But I, I feel I know it happened during that time.

And then I had a pretty good, somewhat pretty good relationship with the police officers, cause they knew who we were and so I, and I think the Chief of Police in Providence at the time was McQueeny, so I was able to work with him. He was an outstanding chief, and we were able to do some things, because at the time there were some black officers, I mean, there were no black officers, there were black patrolmen, and there was a Cape Verdean guy, Manny Gonzales, Manny Rodericks, rather, who didn't think the Police Department discriminated. But yet he's still walking out on the streets and guys were passing him by as officers.

And one day he stopped me on the road, after he blasted me out because I said that the police department discriminated. He got angry with me. And he says, "You know, you grew up in these parts, you know, you're family and our family were close there. They were Cape Verdeans." And I said, "Manny, look, please, don't give me that. If you're so adamant about that Police Department, then why aren't you an officer?" And so he finally started to look around, open up his eyes, and I said, "I'll tell you something else, Manny. If you're in that police station, and when you bring kids of color in there, or people of color in there, and you're sounding off the magic word 'nigger, nigger,' you're just as guilty. Even if you're not saying anything, you're just as guilty." So he really thought about it. He came back and he talked to me. And because now he realized he wanted to move. And he didn't get the opportunity to move.

We had a meeting with McQueeny, Chief McQueeny, and we sat down, and it wasn't just me, we had a group of people doing it, and we sat down and we talked about white police officers working in a all black community. We wanted to see officers, and how come they don't become officers? And finally they start to move officers in, some of the guys made officer.

And we, not only did we do that for that, we did it for judges. I used to be on the Rhode Island Minority Caucus, and we even moved people of color to be a judge. We made, we talked to the governor, and they moved to that realm at that time. So there was a lot of things we worked on, education, I used to go into school and especially being an educator, going into the courts.

I can remember one situation with the Police Department. My brother, who you'll be interviewing, and he's very, very, very interesting. A lot more interesting than I am. You're going to find out that I brought him into, at Southern Illinois, I told you how my family was. All of a sudden, one day I'm walking on campus, and you want to know how adamant he is? I was, I was, we had what we call ROTC [Reserve Officers Training Corps], and it was an Air Force on campus, and every, and you had to pass that to graduate from that university, and that was a regular course, and every Wednesday, we'd have to put on the Air Force uniform, hat, shoes, all that stuff, and we had classes, and then we had drills, and all that. So my brother, he's much younger than I am, so I, he, I got him to come to Southern Illinois University, and he said he wasn't going to wear that uniform or do that, and I said, "You got to be kidding. I get you out here, and you're gonna." And he had the long hair, and I said, "Juan, Dad's going to shoot me. And you're here, holes in your pants? You've got to be kidding". I almost tripped on him, he was sitting on the ground, right. He said he's not doing it. He said, "If you wanted to do that, you did it cause you wanted to. I'm not doing it." I said, "You're not going to graduate." He says, "Yeah? Well, we'll see."

The next thing I know, they were picketing the President's house. There's a picture, a national picture, across the country. It was in the paper here, picketing the President's house. My brother, and you want to know what? He never wore that ROTC uniform. I did, and I resented every day I wore it. But he didn't. But what happened with my brother, and this is all part of what I was doing out there, my brother didn't go in the service, the Vietnam war, he said that was illegal, it was wrong, etc., etc. And he'll tell you more about it. And he can tell you much better, he's more eloquent than I am. And anyways, he says that he wasn't going to go in the war, to make a long story short. He left the country, went to Canada, then he said he wasn't going to do that, he came back.

And when he came back, he went to the, a church on Broad Street, I think it was the Church of the Mediator, and FBI broke the door down, broke in there, and picked him up, carried him out, and everybody laying out in the street and they were, he's, the FBI, put him in there, took him on into federal court, and charged him. And then he had to go to court. So he was released. He's out on the street, I was at Rhode Island College, making a presentation about civil rights, people's rights and all that, we were invited, we were on a panel, and I was up there and I got a note said they want to see you immediately, your brother. And I had to leave the panel at UR-, at Rhode Island College, and my brother was on, what's the name of the street near Brown University where the kids always on it, but anyways, he was on that street and was sitting on his car.

WT/CK: Thayer Street?

IR: Thayer, yeah. He was sitting on his car, and, but he wasn't sitting. He was sitting on the roof with his feet dangling on the window, down, and a cop came by and told him to get off. And then realized who he was, and dragged him off the car, dragged him down, called the squad, threw him in. And brought him down to the station.

What happened was when I got down to the station, because like I said I always knew, they always knew who I was, and I would go and check on people and make sure everything's all right, when I was walking down there, I said "You have a gentleman" never put it together "by the name of Tony Ramos?" "Yeah, we got that draft dodger." I said "Yeah?" He said "Yeah, we'll make an example of that draft dodger." "Oh", as I walked down to, walk down, and I got to the cell, his shirt was all ripped, scratches on his back. He says, "Look what they did to me, brother." The cop looked at me and looked at him, because we look alike. Only he's taller. And the cop said, "I had nothing to do, nothing to do!" And he backed out. And I said "Yeah, you're going to have something to do with this."

But the funny part of it is, the next morning, we're in the court, so now he's got to get released. I'm waiting in the court, nothing. The judge is getting ready to get up because everybody's supposed to be done. And I said, "Oh, your honor, there's one more person" "One more?" So they start, they brought him up, and the clerk released him. But the funny part of it, you know what they were doing? In the police department at that time, now I'm not speaking of now, but at that time. They took him, brought him out of his cell, and all the rookie policemen and detectives, they were going to show them how you deal with a draft dodger and a resister. So my brother sat on the floor, said he's not going to go through this embarrassment from them or anybody else, and they dragged him down the stairs. They drag him down the stairs, his clothes are falling off him, they got him down to the bottom of the stairs, now they're going to show, they're going to use him as a training tool. In the meantime, the court was going on upstairs.

WT/CK: And this is while you were trying to tell the judge that there was one more person? While they were dragging him down?

IR: Yup. So he went through all that, he spent time in the prison, in, I think in Pennsylvania, spent time in prison over here and, and now he's out, and if you remember, I think Jimmy Carter pardoned all those other people that didn't go into war. My brother did about eighteen months, in prison. He's going to be very interesting when you talk with him. I'll tell you that.

And now he's been all over the world. I mean, he's been to China. When the Iraq, do you remember the Iraq hostage? He was there. Videotaping and taping. So I mean, and they loved him over there, because he looked like them. See, so, but he has his own story and he can tell you a heck of a lot more than I can. He's world, a worldly man. He did a lot of things. But that's how I, you know, that's another piece of you know, what I had to do, in those, with my brother.

WT/CK: How did his dodging the draft affect your family and yourself?

IR: Well, my family was very supportive of him. And the ironic part is, what he was saying then is what the government later on said. And not only that, Judge Petine, who in fact, and he'll tell you this, Judge Petine, who in fact, who had to try him and find him guilty and send him off to prison, well, when my brother came back, Judge Petine agreed and said those were the times, so that's what he had to do, even though now that they realized that war was unconstitutional and all the other things that they are saying now. And he was saying it back there when. But he did his time, 18 months, and some people did no time.

CK: [referring to list of questions-] I don't know, I'm not following this at all.

WT: Can we talk about 1968 a little bit? Do you remember in 1968, like what major things you did during doing that year?

IR: Well, most of the things that, like I said, I was doing was a lot of street work, a lot of community work. You know, you would find people were coming to us. We were bringing in, when I was in the caucus, Rhode Island Minority Caucus, we did a lot of things with the Governor, we did a lot of things with various colleges, we did a lot of things with community people. And most of the things we were dealing with was with civil rights issues, and even at that, when I was a teacher at East Providence, I had a lot of issues. Because, remember, my mother, my mother graduated from school in 1928. And that's pretty good, no matter what. For a female, no matter what color you are, she graduate. She graduated tops in her class.

From 1928 to 1966, when I walked through that door at East Providence High School, that I went to school at, I was the first person of color to teach there. So I was the first teacher of color in East Providence High School. Not the junior high school, but the high school. And I'll tell you another thing. Up until last year, I was the highest ranking minority educator in this state. Okay? And let me tell you something else, about the Sixties and to this day, okay? I can tell you that because of a lot of my activities in the Sixties and my feelings as I move along in my career, my career hasn't been very smooth say, and I can tell you that at one time, when I was a teacher, they had sit-ins at East Providence. All the kids of color sat in. And I can tell you this. I wasn't even a tenured teacher, and when they came to me and talked to me, I stood by them, because they were right. They, they were good enough to be on the athletic field, but they were never good enough to be chosen in any other activities. And it all stemmed from one little issue. Do you know what it was? A person of color to be a cheerleader.

WT/CK: Really?

IR: Yeah! They couldn't be cheerleaders, either. Never get selected. Till I got there in '66 and '67 and '68, around, '69, '70, I'm not sure what year, and all heck broke loose, just because of they wouldn't put one cheerleader on of color. Those kids sat in that school for a week, and what ends up happening from that week, and you want to talk about civil rights, what happens in that week, once I was there, and those kids sat, and I was the only person of color they could talk to, and by the way, 99% of the kids at that time that was in that school were Cape Verdeans. I knew mama, cousin, uncle, brother, you name it, I knew them. Okay? So, what ends up happening is they were never a people of, would do something like that. But in the community, many of the parents were very upset, you know why? Because the kids down in South Providence and Providence schools, they're the ones that did it, not our kids. We're Cape Verdeans. We don't do that. Okay? But those kids were being discriminated against, and I told them I would stand by them. And they, and I did.

Now, you know, when the kids come and say, "We have a problem, and you're the only one we can talk to, that we want to, we would like to, we're gonna, we're gonna tell you, we're not going to go to classes" and all that, you know when you make a decision, and you

say, okay, you're going to stand by them, and you're only probably two years of teaching? You don't have no tenure?

WT/CK: That's some guts.

IR: You're putting your job on the line? You know what I did? I put my job on the line, because if I can't practice what I preach, then I shouldn't be there. I put my job on the line. And when I did that, those kids sat there a week. And after that, you know what happened in school? They came in with NAACP, CAUSE, SNCC, all those organizations. And not only, now it's not just the cheerleader, now you got to come with the history, you got to come with the guidance counselors, you got to come with more people of color to be teachers. So that's what happened. It started exploding like that. So no longer the issue was, right? So that happened, alright?

And I can tell you that when I came in the school system, and when I did that, and I walked down the corridor, I can come to a number of people that wouldn't talk to me. Doors were closed. I'd walk in the teacher's room, see because you've got to remember something, when I was the only person of color. And I was still to them, they remembered me from being an athlete, they remembered me from being in school and all that, and when I was sitting in the room, you know how many nigger jokes I heard? They forgot that I was sitting in there. These were teachers! So I'm saying to myself, if that's what you think, what do you think about those kids out there? Until one day they forgot. Two weeks of hearing that stuff, I just sat there and listened to them. They forgot. Everybody is laughing, "ha, ha, ha, ha". And I said, "Joke's over". And they look at me and they realize "Uh oh". Okay?

But, see, you've got to understand that was back there and they had certain images of people, and now, they had to be counted for, and I can tell you, that that whole system turned against me, including the community, my own people. You know why? I was living in South Providence. Don't you bring that South Providence stuff into East Providence with our kids. That's how some of those parents were thinking. It was their kids being discriminated, not me. I fight my way, and I was fighting for your kids. Now I'll tell you what, if you think that your kids are so great, you tell me what they're getting out of being in East Providence High School, other than being a good athlete, because I was one of them. What did they get?

Then, but the kids did the talking. Then the parents started doing the listening. And see, so, and I went through that, and I can tell you that when they went to change over, I can tell you my career. I was a teacher for six, seven years. Then I had a CAGS and the black kids and the white kids were starting to have problems. But I could talk to everybody. I was everybody's friend. Both the black kids and the white kids respected me, and they would listen to me. And they liked me, and I liked them. I respected them and they respected me.

So what ends up happening, they need someone to be able to control that, so what they did, they took me out of the Phys. Ed. class and called me Dean of Students, and I was to work with the kids. Now do you know what I was doing? I was doing the same thing that the Vice Principal was doing in the junior high school. They were called Vice Principals. Huh? All the, I was doing what the Vice Principal does here, probably with attendance, with discipline, with all those kind of things. That's what I did. They called me Dean of Students, with 2400 kids in our school and, and the two junior high school principals called Vice Principals, okay? Until I went to go tell the teacher something, and the Principal said, "You can't tell that teacher anything, you're a quasi administrator." Oh? What's that? I said, "Okay". So I went and I did my political battling and so finally they made me, they said, "Okay, we're going to change your title. We're going to change your title to Vice Principal, but you know what? You're going to have to wait a year before we do that, because we're going to take someone in the Guidance department, and we're going to send him to RIC [Rhode Island College]". By the way, I had thirty-six credits beyond my masters, okay? We're going to send somebody to RIC to take four courses to get administration. It took them a year, and that's when they changed my title. So they made me Vice Principal in charge of discipline, and made him Vice Principle in charge of curriculum and administration.

But they didn't know I was working on my doctorates. They found out when I had to take a sabbatical. So I went to University of Connecticut, so I had to take a sabbatical 'cause I was all through my course work, all right? I was one chapter away from my Ph.D. in writing when I came back to school. That's when they made a plan, what they were going to do was they were going to switch the Principal. He was retiring. I applied. What do you think happened? I didn't get the job. But the community really came out and was angry about that. They were real angry, because I was doing all the work. Matter of fact, the Principal was in the room and they didn't know who the Principal was, the kids. They thought I was the Principal. So they, that was a problem, okay?

So after that, after that, that whole scenario of things, then I knew that the position was going to be open with, for the Assistant Superintendent. Okay? So what ends up happening is I had applied for the principleship, because I knew down the line, politically I knew there was another position was going to open. They had one Assistant Principal, I mean Assistant Superintendent, and he was leaving, and they also was hiring a new Superintendent. So, I applied for the Assistant, I mean for the Assistant Superintendent's position, and I got it. But, I didn't get it because they wanted to give it to me, I got it because they wanted someone else to be the Superintendent, and they needed the votes. That's all political stuff.

And I became Assistant Superintendent, all right? I became Assistant Superintendent in 1979. The individual became Superintendent, okay, in 1979. He brought me up. I want to tell you, his, his career, he was an elementary teacher, he was an elementary Principal. He became director of curriculum for elementary. Okay? And became a Superintendent, with a master's degree. Okay? Now, when he retired, East Providence never went outside the system for any Superintendent, Okay? Now remember, I was going to be the first person of color to apply for the Superintendent seat. So I applied. Do you know what they said? "Oh, you know what the problem is? You've never been a Superintendent before." Of course, did the other guy? But me, but, here's my career. I was a student in the school system like him, I was a teacher, I was Dean of Students, I was Vice Principal, I was Acting Principal, and I was Assistant Superintendent with a Ph.D.; and I wasn't qualified to be Superintendent. Okay? Now, what did I do? Now we're talking about rights and civil rights and how my career, 'cause this all fits. Now I, I, so I go to court, because you know what they did? They went into Central Falls community, see you know what, see our community, you've got to remember, the Portuguese community was looking for someone of Portuguese, but they wouldn't tell you that. They didn't want anyone from Cape, from Cape Verde. They wanted a Portuguese. And that's what they did, because they had control. And so they brought in a Superintendent. And I went to court. Now, I've always, always said that,

WT/CK: Hold, on we're just going to flip it over real quick.. (flipping tape)

I've always said that, when you are being judged, and you go before the courts, unless you know me dearly, dearly, you know me, you know my inner makings, you cannot have a full understanding. You said to me, "What is a Cape Verdean?" Right? Because you don't know. Well, that's the way I feel about courts. All right? So when they have a court up there, selecting a jury, I want some people that look like me that sit up there. Because they understand me, and understand what I'm talking about. So when you have the large, one of the large discrimination cases in the state, and you look at the jury, and the jury is all white, they come from all over the place, then you don't know nothing about me. What do you think that jury said? They discriminated against you? Course not. That was their attitude. Do you know what their attitude was? Look, you because Assistant Superintendent? How could they discriminate against you? All right, that was their attitude. So guess what, I lost the case. I didn't win. And so now that Superintendent left, and he became my dear, dear friend, and he's my dear friend today. He left. What do you think they would do now, because I said I'm going to come back and I'm going to apply for that job again. What do you think they would do? Huh?

WT/CK: Ummmmm.

IR: Okay. What they did, because they knew the judge told them the last time, don't come back, because he understood what they were doing, okay. What they did, they brought in, just recently, a lady, a black lady, now what can I say? Nothing. What am I going to say? They discriminated against me? They did it in a smooth way. Cause they didn't want me, because I had a lot of control in the community. Because I had the support of the community, the teachers, the custo-, the whole staff, support of everything. But see, that's more control than they had, so what the school committee did, and it's three of them, not all of them, three of them, they brought in this lady. Now, she ruined our community, because then she left and our community was really upset. Now all the community come out supporting me. Everybody. Okay? Everybody. You see, because nobody looks at me any longer because of this, they look at me because they know me and they know how I am, they know I'm fair and I'm going to be honest, right up front with everything, and I'm not there just because of this, for anybody. So, the community all supported me. But you can't say no more they discriminated. They just had a black lady, right? So they brought someone else in over me. Now I've been there since 1979. Through osmosis I know how to be a Superintendent. There is nothing in that school system that I don't know. Nothing!

And just recently, they brought a person out of New York over me. I was, and you know how many times? I tried three times. You know how many times I was a finalist? It was only me on the inside and four or five people outside. And me, the only one inside. I never made it.

WT/CK: Why do you think they were so afraid?

IR: Yeah, because number one, now there are some members on the school committee that know I can step outside the door, if I quit tomorrow, I can beat anyone of them on the school committee in any kind of elected office. And they know that. See, and they know they're not going to make me do things, so they know that. So. And I'm on my, tail-end of my career, and I do my job, I'm good at it, and I still do a lot of things for people in general.

WT/CK: So you're currently still the Assistant Superintendent of the schools in East Providence?

IR: Yup, that's it.

WT/CK: You never got so frustrated with being just the assistant, do you?

IR: No, you know why? Tell you what, I reached my goal. My goal was to be Superintendent. When everybody in the community feels that I should be Superintendent, and the staff, I've reached my goal. I don't care what one or two elected officials say. And I'll tell you what. Two of them didn't run this time, because they knew. You see, the last time, when they did it, there was a couple of them, and we knocked one off. Then this, the chairlady, she got knocked off for bringing in Daniels, so they knocked her off. This time, the other two was going to go, and they knew it, and so they didn't run this time, so we're going to get a whole new committee, but I don't really, see,

I'm satisfied with my career because I've made it. And what I've done in the community is, I mean, I just know everybody, and when I goes to the restaurants, when I go there, and when people come up to you and say "Hey, that's a shame what they did. And, we'll make sure that doesn't happen again." You know you made it. And it has nothing to do with color, it has something to do with you as a person and how people feel about you and how you feel about them. And that's, so I made it, and I feel very good about that.

WT/CK: Let's just go back to the Vietnam war. What were your personal views on the Vietnam War?

IR: To tell you the truth, I really didn't have any, because I didn't have to be involved. Because, I you know, I had children, and I didn't have to, I've never been in the service, and my only views were based around my brother, all the difficulties he was facing, but as the issue should they be there, should they not, I really wasn't caught up in all that. I just, I just never did, I never got caught up in that. Whether I thought the war was righteous or unjust, or whatever, I never had to worry about that. I would imagine if I had to go probably I would've, but I didn't.

WT/CK: How did the assassination of Martin Luther King, what kind of impact did that have on you?

IR: On me? As any, as, as any assassination of anybody, see, I'm not into, I was never into any so-called models (?), because I thought he did things stoically, he did some things (wrap around?), all these people that were out there during those times were doing things their certain way, and I don't personally, I don't resolve my whole life to say it was Martin Luther King who changed this whole country. I don't believe that one bit. That's my views. Maybe there's other people who believe different, I just don't believe that.

I believe there was too many guys that were out there during those times, that was saying things, doing things, struggling and I think personally, I think Martin Luther King had the, the type of personality that everybody could resolve themselves around by saying, you know, no violence, and none of these kinds of things, where some of these other guys were saying, you know, "burn baby burn", and you know, "you slap my face and I'll slap yours", and those kind of things. And so, I, I, you know, more people were able to deal with Martin Luther King's philosophy than some of those other guys, but I'll tell you, they had a tremendous impact on what happened in this country back there in the Sixties and it wasn't solely Martin Luther King. And I've always believed that, so I'm not like, you know,

I'm glad to see him get his dues and all that, but I think they're also forgetting a lot of other people who have contributed immensely to the, you know, to the movement.

And, you know, I understand the lady on the bus, you know, she didn't, she didn't want to sit down, but you know, there was a lot of people out there that did so many things. You know, and, I just kind of feel they don't get enough credit for what they've done, either.

WT/CK: How did you feel about the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy?

IR: It's like, you know, you, it's just, you're just taken back of anyone getting assassinated like that. I mean, whether it was Kennedy or his brother, or Martin Luther King, or any of those guys back there during that time that got assassinated, you say, you know, Why? I mean, if you don't like someone's view, you shoot them? No. See, I mean, that's to me, you know, I just, I was like everybody else, you know, astonished that something like that would happen. And could happen in this country. And that people would just sort of automatically shoot someone because of their views. So you know, whether it was Martin Luther King, or John F. Kennedy, or Bobby Kennedy, or any of those guys, you know, and the civil rights movement that was assassinated, you know, I look at that as a horrible, that's a horrible situation.

WT/CK: Concerning the women's rights movement, how did you feel about that? Did you think that it was a good thing? Did you think it was, do you think they took it to an extreme level, or?

IR: No, I have my views on civil rights for the women. First of all, I think women are treated, were treated poor, just like any, you know, person of color. But when I start looking at the movement, the women's movement, and we talk in terms of.

WT/CK: (checking tape recorder) no movement, (laughing). No, that's all right, it's just, if there's no movement for a while, these go off.

IR: Is this thing working?

WT/CK: Yeah, this is okay.

IR: And when I look at it, I look at it, see I look at it this way. Women's movement is tremendous. Okay? But when I look at it, I say "Hmm, okay." Their husbands denied me the right to get to the high level. They keep me out. Right? So now what we do, you look at the movement of women. And they'll tell you all these women are starting to move up in rank and all that, and I agree, they do.

But look who they are. They're all white women. So, you know, if you, if, if we're gonna have a society that is going to be fair and equal to everybody, you know, I agree, I agree that, and I say this to women all the time. I say, "I agree", you know, sometimes males get a better opportunity, but if you're a person of color, that's not true. If in fact the women have their rights, I agree with you, but along the line, they should identify what they're talking about. You know, and what happens is, you look at your CEO's and all those high powered positions, and they're women, who excel. When I look at them, they're still all white women. When are you going to start to move some people of color into these certain areas? Maybe there are some. But I never see it.

You know, so is civil rights for women great? Yes. Is civil rights for women, should it be better? Yes. I agree. But, there's that little 'but' that I have in there. And they have to look at it themselves, too. The women or that whole scenario of civil rights for women, and I, and I question, you know, because I don't move up like that. They're going to still keep me at a certain level.

WT/CK : What do you feel were the most important changes of the 1960s?

IR: I think, important change is when people start having a conscience and start to look at what in fact they were doing and, and when people can realize that they were wrong in what they were doing, their attitude was wrong, and how they thought of people, or treated people. I, you know, I think that opened the door. And it also opened the door for more people of color to get involved in business and get better education. All right? And when that happened, two things happened to me. My thinking, now no one else, I can only speak for myself. I think what happened is they opened the door wide, to say, okay people of color, these are the opportunities, around Kennedy's time, Johnson's time, these are your opportunities with all these different programs, poverty programs, etc., etc., so all the people, they start putting on ties, white shirt on, suit, briefcases. No education. But they go through the door because they had basic education, street education. That doesn't get you there.

So we're out there saying "Hey, look, why don't you go back to school?" But when that door kept closing, they're in somewhat of a problem. See? Those people that jumped through the door to get that education, were the people that survived it. But, so, it did two things. It gave some people false hope of being the head of the company, president, without going through the trials and tribulations to get to be president. They wanted to go from the street to the presidency. Because you wear a shirt, white shirt and tie, and a suit and a briefcase. That's what happens? So that's what happened to me, that's what I think happened in the Sixties, and the more the door stopped closing, the opportunities are getting less and less. And that's when, now, you have the problem of affirmative action. Right? And when you look at affirmative action, people are saying why should I suffer for what other people did in the past. And why should quotas be a number that gives you an opportunity before I get an opportunity.

But see, unless you've been there, you don't feel it. And someone older like me would say, but every time when I used to knock on the door, and I never got that opportunity, someone less than me got the opportunity because their skin color was different, so now the tables have turned, now it's not right anymore. And so to me, in my thinking, if everything was equal and fair, then I would say to you, you're absolutely right. You're absolutely right. It shouldn't be dealt on quota, anything. Cause if I can trust that businessman to have me come in there, sit and talk to him, and I know in that executive room off the side when he goes in there and talks to his people that he hasn't made up his mind because of this, then I don't have any problem. You know? But the problem I have is everything in this country is not utopian and, and people will always discriminate, no matter how you do it, unless they really know who you are and have a real strong commitment and feeling to you. But I don't trust the system that well, to say, give everybody, let, open up the, the pot. Throw all the names in the pot and let's just pick them out, and whoever comes up, comes up. I don't believe that's going to happen. They'll be still selective.

WT/CK: I was just going to say, you mentioned before, you've traveled all over the world. Did you ever stop in Washington and visit the Vietnam memorial?

IR: Nope, but I, let me just kind of back up. I traveled Cape Verde seven, eight times. I didn't travel all over the world. Okay? My brother traveled quite a bit around. But I did go to Cape Verde several, many, many times.

But did I go to Washington? Yup. I was in the White House. When Jimmy Carter was President. And how did I get there? I happened to be, like I told you before, Chairman of the Rhode Island Minority Caucus, and one day, some people came into the office at night, when I was in there doing some work, and they were looking for people to support a gentleman by the name of Jimmy Carter, who was running for President. And I just happened to look at a LIFE magazine, I was reading, and I was reading about this guy's mother who was so outstanding and the things that she did for people in general, all people. And I thought that was just great.

And it just happened that these guys walked in that week or the week after, and they start talking about this guy running for, and asked me would I, would be willing to support a guy by the name of Jimmy Carter, who was running for President. And I said, I didn't know Jimmy Carter from Adam, so I said "I'll tell you one thing, from what I read about his mother, if that man's like that, I'm going to support him." They said, "would you?" And I did. Little did I know, right? And they were gonna, were gonna appoint me to a, because I also brought Jimmy Carter's son into Rhode Island and in East Providence, and Mondale's son into Rhode Island and East Providence. I used to sit on the, I used to be on the local Democratic committee and I was on the State Democratic Executive Committee, so I was very much in touch with a lot of the politicians. And so what ends up happening is when Jimmy Carter became President, his people offered me a position in the State Department of Education, but I couldn't do it, because I was working on my doctorate, so I didn't want to just drop that and do that, and then, I got invited to, you know the conference room where you see on TV? I was in there and I got invited to be there when he was briefing the press. And I was there, and so I've been in the White House. It was interesting.

WT/CK: That's cool. How do you feel about young people like us still striving to answer questions about American involvement in the Vietnam war, and find out more about civil rights movements and the whole decade of the Sixties?

IR: I'll tell you, I was talking about this just recently. I think it's very, very important that you do. I think it's very important that young people know exactly what happened, why it happened. It's very important to know how the country has changed immensely because of those years. All right? And because you've never been involved in it, you have a tendency to only read about it. It's just like me, when they, when I was a youngster sitting in a classroom and listening about George Washington, and Abraham Lincoln, and all that, so I just read about it. You know? That's what you guys are doing, and sometimes when you, when people talk, I say, "Wow, that's right, too". You know? No, they don't know. They don't understand the struggle, the struggles that people made to make this country like it is now. And I'm not saying just people of color, I'm talking about all people. You know, because you can't make changes unless everybody is involved in that change, and everybody is working together to make those changes happen.

And that's what this country is all about now. Everyone's working together and the more you go back and start to review and understand what those changes, what that battle, what that struggle was all about, the better you would understand people, and be able to ask those pertinent questions that you asked of me today. Because what in fact happens is that I don't even talk about what I just talked to you all about, over this past hour or so, I don't talk about it. It just happened to me. And I just do it. And when I'm out there in the community, I just do things for all people. Because it's right. And it's, it hasn't anything to do with color, to me, now.

You see, when people come to me right away, and they say, "You know, I don't even see color". Right there you lost me. Because you can't, you see, I'm not stupid. You know, and so what happened, I do see color. But color doesn't make the person. And until we learn that, you know, and that's how I operate in the School Department. I come down hard on any person of color as I would any white person, or vice versa. It doesn't make any difference. What is right is right, and that's the way you treat people. The exact same way you want to be treated. And I have no problem with that. So, and your, and your question is, how do I feel? I think it's great. I think it's great because I came here today, and you didn't know one thing about Cape Verde. You know just a little more than what you knew before. And that makes me feel good.

WT/CK: Finally, what advice would you give us?

IR: To keep doing what you're doing. Keep, continue to be interested in others, find out more about people in general, no matter what race, what ethnic background, it's best to know people, because when you get confined into your own little area, and you don't know what's going on over here, when you confront people, you don't know how to deal with them. And it's best that you understand and know what people are about.

And so, my, I would say to you just keep right on doing it and talk to people. And if you're, if you're ever in a situation where you don't know, ask questions. I mean, I ask questions every day, I don't care how many Ph.D.'s I have, I still learn every day. I learn from you, I learn from you, and I learn from anybody. And the thing about me, is I can still say "Ain't, This, That's and Don'ts" Okay? But yet I can still sit at another level and speak the way one should be speaking in regards to any presentations. I spoke with Presidents, I spoke with heads of country, I speak to college professors, I speak with bag people, I speak with people laying in the street, I speak with youngsters, I speak with teachers. And I can still speak with the kids in the community. Now there are some things I can't deal with, cause I haven't been there in a long time with them, but I can get by.

WT/CK: That's it, I guess, thank you very much.

IR: I want to thank you; thank you for inviting me, now I have to get back to work.