



Jerome Gray – Obama field organizer in Alabama for the 08' campaign and an activist with the Alabama Democratic Conference, an old Black political organization still in existence. Interviewed on air at WJLD studios, Birmingham.

Date of interview - August 2, 2008

Interviewer – Bob Friedman

Interview length - 45 minutes

Transcriber – Joe Wright

Transcription completed – September 1, 2017

Transcription Time – 5 hours 30 minutes

B: Welcome back to the studios of WJLD and listening audience as well. Mr. Jerome Gray Good morning again sir.

JG: Good morning of what our history has been about and also if you look at what I call our Christian history if I thought the Obama run for president and how he is put himself out there to want to serve America represent America I thought about the David story in the bible where God was tired Saul being king and basically said I'm going to pick another leader and of course he said to his prophet Samuel go over to Jesse's house and select one of his boys to be king and course Jesse had eight sons and in the tradition typically people thought of the oldest son or sons being the most experienced and the ones who would be likely to be chose but out of those eight sons David was the youngest and he was the one God selected and anointed to be king and when David came before the prophet Samuel and he was looked at you know again there was the stereotyping of how can he be he's too young and he was asked the question you know basically what have you done and he basically he said I've killed a bear and I've killed a lion in my day you know may not know about my experiences as a shepherd boy because I've been away from what I've done is not been where you maybe have noticed what I have done but I'm aware of what I have done and of course when David went down on the battlefield and his brother saw him his eldest brother saw him and said what are you doing down here and he basically he raised a question that Obama is raising to American. David said to the people on the battlefield and his brother he said is there not a cause he asked that question is there not a question and he basically said I am willing to step out here to represent because there is a cause I am needed I am God sent and therefore I'm going to take on the Goliath of our day. And basically to me as I think about what Obama is doing he's basically saying I'm willing and ready to take on the Goliath of the day because there's a cause and I'm tired, he says, I'm tired of corporate America and the lobbyist controlling things in Washington and it is all of that

he's not taking any money from corporations, political action committees nor he is taking money from lobbyists because he really wants to be free to change America as he says and take it in a different direction and to do that you almost have to get away from the money that tends to control politics and policy making in Washington and I just think that is earthshaking in terms of how politics tend to operate you know in whether it's in Washington or in Montgomery. And so when I thought about his agenda and why this guy is running and why he wants to serve and his theme is Obama for America and he wants to bring people together black white men women young old independents Republicans Democrats. That just resonated with me because our country is too polarized and it is too partisan even though I have worked in for a Democratic organization for years but I know in order to get things done you have to have people of good will irrespective of party and irrespective of race and to me that means something. I'm 69 years old and I want to see America live to its creed to the constitution where it says We the people in order to form a more perfect union and this is what this guy is trying to do. He's saying I want to have the opportunity to serve so I can help America become a more perfect union and he says the vision in terms of how he thinks that needs to happen how the world to see America not as a bully but as a nation that's strong but also that will use diplomacy to try to resolve disputes around the world and I just think that's what this nation needs at this point in time and so looking at his track record as a member of the Illinois legislature also when he was editor of the Harvard law review. His whole history has been characterized by a guy who is non-confrontational who is a conciliatory and who is a conciliator and a uniter and I just think that time is right as he said in this defining moment in our history that he is what this nation needs to become president at this point in time.

B: Well Jerome that was a heck of an introduction you answered question by basically saying these are the kinds of thing you support and that's why you jumped on board..

JG: Absolutely

B: I wonder if you could talk a little bit about this.. in 1984 there was a split in the Alabama Democratic Conference.. folks going Mondale... folks going for Jesse Jackson's first run. Do you remember that?

JG: Oh yeah very much so..

B: And can you talk a little bit..

JG: It was divisive..

B: From the inside. Yeah.

JG: And it was painful because you know there was a split in the family many of these people were close friends of mine and Joe Reed and I hated to see that but to me this is even different because Jesse kind of got in at the last minute and commitments and probably had already been made by some of the leadership in ADC to support Mondale and plus the standard that ADC always looked at in looking at candidates it looked at acceptability electability and track record. Well in 84' no question Jesse Jackson was acceptable. He did not have a track record as an elected official but he had track record as an activist and advocate for our issues. The electability question was the thing that loomed large in ADC but one of the things I did then as state field director I polled our members our leaders from round the state because I said to Joe Reed at least we need to find out what people are thinking before we go to the convention and I polled our delegation our members around the state and the majority of them members who found Jesse Jackson acceptable did not think he was electable in 1984 and pretty much that's how it split out you know in the vote but at least people at the opportunity to discuss and debate and the decision before the recommendation was made to endorse Mondale but even though we took the position that we would support Mondale because of his acceptability and what we thought then was his electability and track record. Mondale only carried one state in 84', Minnesota and he carried Washington, DC the District of Columbia so Jesse couldn't have done much worse than Mondale did..

B: How'd..

JG: Even though Mondale had been the Vice President..

B: How about that..

JG: Since that time the Alabama Democratic Conference has supported other candidates for President..

B: Did they support..

JG: Al Gore..

B: Reverend Jackson..

JG: John Kerry, Michael Dukakis. They all lost.

B: Yeah did they support Reverend Jackson in 88'?

JG: We did support Reverend Jackson in 88'. But I was mentioning the fact that the others we had supported other white candidates since 84' who did not win but we did support Jesse Jackson in 88' as an organization and he ran well in the south but he did not win nationwide but the thing that got my attention was Barack Obama. The first quarter after he announced his candidacy. He raised more money in one quarter than Jesse Jackson raised during his whole run for President. And so that got my attention when I saw how competitive was right out of the block against the Clintons. Now also he had more contributors individuals to give him money than Hilary Clinton did and so I said hmm if this guy can come out of the block without a machine organization behind him and just get ordinary American to give him this kind of money that really was a wake up call to me that a whole lot of folk in American wanted change in the White House.

B: Well Mr. Gray. We're glad to have you. For folks who tuned in late we're talking with Mr. Jerome Gray, the field director for the Obama campaign in Alabama long time long time involved activist in this state with the Alabama Democratic Conference. We're learning a little bit about the history of the ADC and I note that from what I have pulled off of the internet. The ADC was founded in 1960 this says by a group of lawyers professors and labor leader to back the Kennedy/Johnson ticket and in 1970 chose Joe Reed, a 29 year old education activist as its chairman. Former governor George Wallace called the group the Black block. The Republican candidates still use images of Reed in ads to disparage their Democratic opponents. Even today the politics of race is very prevalent Reed said. Does that pretty much encapsulate the history.

JG: Yeah..

B: Or the early history

JG: It does to a great degree. But even though the organization is... the subtitle of the organization is the black local caucus of Alabama but I'll often remind people that the Alabama Democratic Conference has endorsed and supported far more white candidates than black candidates so we should not feel any sense of abandonment or guilt when we choose to support a black candidate over a white candidate because our history has been as an organization in this state is that we supported probably three or

four times more white candidates for public office in this state than we've supported black candidates and I think we need to say that more often in terms of the voting rights act has benefited far more whites who've won office through our black support than blacks because typically we don't see and don't encourage blacks to just run for positions where their not likely to win so certainly if it's an at large state wide situation or an at large county office where it's a majority white population or an at large majority black district typically you won't have black candidates running in those areas and so if you have white candidates qualifying and running those positions for those seats usually we are supporting white candidates in these majority white settings or where we are outnumbered in terms of population..

B: Ah Mr..

JG: But here you're talking about nationwide contest for president with a person who is a United States Senator Barack Obama who has served in the Illinois legislature so there is a track record of his performance and his credentials well educated so this is a situation where I think you know we I'm not saying obligated but certainly if you look at how American is changing how we need change why wouldn't we want to embrace a candidate like this. He has all of the qualifications and what I would say is none of the disqualifications.

B: Right after this we'll return.

**Black Women: A Portrait of Dignity Segment:**

***Shirley Franklin is the fifty eighth mayor of Atlanta, Ga, the first female to hold this position and the first black woman elected mayor of any southern city. This Philadelphian native became mayor in her first run for office garnering 50% of the vote to win the 2001 election and was easily reelected in 2005. Time Magazine calls her one of the five best big city mayors and US New & World Report featured Shirley Franklin as one of the best leader of 2005. Others name her one of the eight female politicians that could be elected president of the country. I'm Sheryl Lee Ralph and this has been Black Women: A Portrait of Dignity.***

B: And back we are yes indeed Shirley Franklin talked about it. Shirley Chisholm about 1967 or so attempted to wrest the Democratic party nomination got on the ballot in about 36 states and of course Dr. Lenora Fulani the first African American and the first women to get on the ballot for president in all 50 states in the general election did it in 1988 and did 40 states in 1992 now an independent activist and actually bringing up that subject let me first of all welcome back to the studio of WJLD and listening audience as well Mr. Jerome Gray good morning again sir.

JG: Good morning.

B: Glad to have you with us. You know I wanted to ask you a question and then I'd like us to go to phone lines.

JG: Sure.

B: I went to the rally that was just held at UAB and it was posited as a town hall meeting and I was very much hoping that it would be that but it turned out mainly to be a rally. It wasn't an interchange and I'm not really faulting the organizers for that. That's just a preference of mine. I would have like to have seen that. But the question I would have asked and I brought a question with me. And I hope you can address this and perhaps address it reflecting your closeness to the candidate as close as you've been able to get over the last year or so. A lot of independent votes out there and I'm thankful for the fact that over the last ten years people like myself who believe that partisan politics has been more of a corrupting influence than anything else on our democracy. Some 40% of the electorate in polls that Gallup has run and CNN has run identify themselves as independent votes which is logical in many because you're looking for the issues and looking for the substance of the candidate as opposed to the party that's he's running in or her running in. And one of the concerns that independents have that although a lot of independent votes hear Obama and his message of hope and his message of possibilities which is what in my opinion distinguishes him from Mrs. Clinton. And you can feel his desire and his ordinariness which I think people really relate to..

JG: Yeah.

B: I was privileged to work on Harold Washington's campaign in Chicago in both in 1983 and 1987 and I see some of that 1983 just extraordinariness that Harold was in Obama. He wants to get us somewhere and partisanship is like the bouncer at the door and I

would love to have him speak and perhaps you can I'm not saying you would speak in his voice but to speak to independent voters not as some amorphous pendulum that likes to swing but as real people who have made a decision that they can participate in the parties as it were. As I said earlier there are 18 states where independent votes can't even vote in the primaries.

JG: Or they've closed out.

B: They've closed out and yet we pay for them because they're tax payer supported activities even though they're the activities of private organizations. Can you even if you can't be for Obama that is the question I was going to ask can you tell us why you think so many people are choosing to become independent can you tell us what we can expect in terms of your leadership around these issues of..

JG: Sure.

B: ..opening the democracy.

JG: One of the reasons why Obama resonates with me even though I have worked in a partisan Democratic setting but there are times when the Democratic candidate may not be the best choice for a community or for a district and even though we swear upon these loyalty oaths but I think sometimes that can be damaging to our agenda when we just sort of give blind allegiance to a party without looking at the individuals are running and what they bring to the table and what they want to do. And I guess the older I get you know I know I reflect upon that more and more because sometimes when those of us who are let's say insiders in politics we tend to think that everybody is an insider but most people are not..

B: Far from it

JG: Most people are not tied to any party structure or organization at all and so when you think about the fact that most Americans are independent of party structure they do look to it while watching television and internet and so forth the candidate that or candidates who resonate to them the most in terms of issues and agendas. So I think what parties have to do to become smart enough to say look we cannot allow ourselves to be put into this straitjacket or Americans are not going to be in this straightjacket of just blind loyalty any party anymore and of course you think about our history as a country of the whole party system has changed at one time you had you know Whigs

that was very strong in this country and the Republic party came into being in mid-1850s so you have had an evolution of parties and also the disappearance of some parties that used to very strong in this country but somehow the parties as we know them now even though they are weaker in many respects than they once were think that most Americans prefer being a part these party structures and I think most Americans do not.

B: Yeah.

JG: And the thing I see with Barack Obama. Many of these people who are supporting Barack Obama are not supporting him because he had a big D. Democrat by his name. They are supporting him because they like what he's saying and what he stand for and what he's saying about how he wants to bring all these different groups together red states blue states independents Democrats Republics so we can get things done and that's what makes sense to politically because what good is it to have a Democratic president in the White House but because you have a hostile climate of Republics who won't support you because they are partisan and they've been told don't support a Democratic agenda even it's a good agenda so you have to a leader as Barack Obama says who is inspiring to the nation where this guy this person can persuade the people of the nation that this is good public policy so therefore put pressure upon your elected representatives regardless of what party they may represent so that we can get things done and so I really like that vision that he has that ok I'm not just going to rely on my party to get things done I'm going to rely on the American people to help me get things done..

B: Well one of things..

JG: His vision is a global one for the country..

B: Yeah.

JG: And I think that's good.

B: I think he does represent those possibilities which would be a fresh break from what we've normally been served up and I hope that you know in the course of the conversation that we have Mr. Gray over the next hour or so perhaps some of these concerns of humble little ol' me might be delivered to the brothers..

JG: Yes.

B: ...that he actually has a conversation with networks of independent voters all across the country. I think he has enormous potential to bring those folks in in fact..

JG: People do that.. let me tell you one of the things in reading in reading one of his biographies. One of the things he said when he became editor of the Harvard Law Review. At the time we know when the black law student association was very strong and the black students felt that now that we have a black editor of the Harvard Law Review we gonna get all these choice positions since one of our brothers is heading up this thing but Barack Obama's position was no you won't some of you will have fair representation but you'll have conservatives on here we're gonna have whites on here and so that's the kinda of things he's demonstrated this kind of balance and inclusiveness and not once I'm here I'm going to exclude others because you all didn't help get to where I am and I just thought that was unique and it was an interesting observation by one of his biographers David Mendell who said that that's one of the things he did when he became editor of the Harvard Law Review.

B: Well I hope he gets a chance to read the Neo-Independent. I don't if you ever seen it but I'll make sure it gets into your hands Mr. Gray.

JG: No I haven't.

B: We have about 90 seconds to go. And my guest this morning pleased to have him on board. A man who worked for many many years in the Alabama Democratic Conference now has split with that organization around the endorsement question and the ADC as you know if endorsing Hillary Clinton and Mr. Jerome Gray has volunteered to become the political director for the Obama campaign in Alabama. We've been really enjoying our conversation. Good morning again sir.

JG: Good morning. Question about the judicial elections. There were a couple of law suits that where we thought to try to change the way that judges in Alabama are elected but we failed the last one was called SCLC vs Siegelman and that was a lawsuit that sought change how judges are elected in the state whereby they would be elected from judicial districts that would reflect more the black population percentages of the state very much like we do for legislative districts but the federal courts struck that lawsuit down. We didn't prevail. We appealed that case was appealed all the way to the United States Supreme Court. So we lost on that issue. The conservative courts have been

very resistant to creating judicial circuits that reflect black population percentages in state in districts. Even in the case out of Florida was called Nipper vs Florida, where the Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta in effect ruled even those the plaintiff proved that at large elections are ways judges are elected in the state of Florida discriminate against blacks being elected as judges but they said that they didn't know of a remedy a good remedy to fix it such as single member district so even though they ruled the liability the question was proved the plaintiff but they said that the remedy would be too disruptive to the judicial order so there was no release that was provided and so that was the thing that stuck us in Alabama once that Nipper Case came down and the Alabama case was modeled after the Florida case. It was a no win for us here in Alabama but we have tried to get the courts to come up with or to rule with us that we need to have a fairer system for electing judges in the state of Alabama because we are woefully underrepresented just in terms of percentages blacks make up almost fair representation on most governing bodies in Alabama. In the legislature we make up about 25-26%. On county school board county commissions, we have anywhere between 20-25% of the representation on city councils the same thing but when you look at judges black judges in the state we're in the single digits. We're less than 5% of the makeup of black judges in the state of Alabama and out of 40 district attorneys in the state we only have one. So that's the one area where we are woefully underrepresented.

B: Now if you ask the ordinary citizen you think that there should be partisan election of judges or non-partisan election of judges I think a lot of people would say non-partisan right off the top of their head as I would. I'm surprised that we still have partisan election of judges. Has that issue been about?

JG: Yes it has there's been bills introduced in the legislature but they have been defeated.

B: Sure. By the partisans.

JG. The partisans yes. I'll give you a mailing address. Mailing address is P.O. Box 4217 Montgomery and the zip is 36103. I came out of an era of segregated schools. I finished school called Conecuh Training School in Evergreen, AL. The name was changed to Thurgood Marshall High School before integration. My high school was slated for closure just as many former black high schools have been downsized or closed or abandoned but what I learned early and Joe Reed as well is that you have to organized and mobilize people for fighting against what I call bad change. And some of the change changes that are being proposed are being proposed by folk some folk who look like us. Joe Reed has an expression that I like. He says just because its white doesn't make it right and just because its black doesn't purify it. And sometimes because its black in terms of leadership we are afraid to sometimes speak out or attack it or say to be critical in terms of our evaluation and that harms our community when we don't do that but when our school was slated for closure our NAACP and our local democratic conference mobilized like crazy. We went before the school boards and we let that school board know that if you close that school you all are going to be out the door in terms of elected officials. We are elect our superintendent and all our board members but sometimes what I see if that it appears that we sometimes in our community fail to realize that if we use the power of the vote we can allow that to speak and send a message loud and clear to people when they are not responsive to what we want them to do if its good agenda and I went home one weekend and I saw this valley chained fence around my high school. I said what's getting ready to go on here and my mother who's a retired teacher said, "Jerome, I hear they're talking about closing the school and gonna turn it into a bus shop." And I basically said the hell they will. And so I began to call had our organization to meet and we had a meeting with the superintendent and the school board and we basically said, "Take that fence down. That school is gonna stay open. If you need extra money to upgrade whatever you need to do let's do.. let's work toward that." And that's eventually what we did. And now that school is still operational. It's a middle school. Still has the name Thurgood Marshall but the community has to realize where our group strength comes from. Again it's a thing that Barack Obama is saying, we the people. We got to forget.. stop thinking that only a few people or special interest people can speak for us. If we realized that there's power in group strength in out voice and let these elected officials that if you mess with our agenda what we prefer we're going to remember you on election day. But we've got to know that. We can't sell them wolf tickets. We've got to have the kind of group strength voting strength that when we say to them if you don't listen to us and pay attention to us you're gonna be

out the door. Once we start doing that then they will be more attentive to our agenda in our communities. And I think sometimes we don't do enough in terms of that group sense peace. Also we got to do a better job of educating our electorate about how important it is to go to these school board meetings whether they are educated or parents. They need to let their voice be heard because these folks handle some of the largest budgets in the county. They are policy makers. They determine who gets hired. For example many times people are concerned about policy issues at schools in terms of whether its zero tolerance policies or whatever it may be but we certainly need to weigh in on these school board and administrators in a big way but we got to do that constantly and consistently and do it from a position of group strength and let out voices be heard collectively throughout the year..

B: But that hasn't..

JG: ..on issues

B: That hasn't happened in quite a while to be frank with you in terms of organization getting built. There've been people who have spoken and they may have the facts but actually the rigorous mundane grunge work of building the organization as was forced on many people decades ago. We need a resurgence of that.

JG: You've got to be attentive to that.

B: Yes.

JG: You know what that's the thing that is so impressive about Barack Obama's campaign. It is truly a grass roots campaign. I have never seen any thing like this in my thirty years of politics. That guy energizing who just walk off the street who come into our Montgomery headquarters and say it's happening all over the state and all over the nation for that matter. But I just see how ordinary people who have never been involved in politics in an organized way just walk off the street how can we volunteer, how can we help, what can we do, blacks, whites, young, old. We have a 17 year old white kid who goes to Alabama Christian Academy here in Montgomery. A guy named Zac Shields. He comes into this office a couple days a week and volunteers. He's not even old enough to vote yet. He'll be 18 before November. But that guy is passionate about Barack Obama. That's the kind of thing to me is just beautiful when I see people who have just been sitting in front of their tvs or non committal in the past who are coming and volunteering retirees young people college student high school students you know blue

collar workers. You know and that's what we need in our communities but you gotta have people that people trust. And who can get people to respond. Even in giving money. Barack Obama has sent out all these I call them boxes of self addressed stamped envelopes to tell you how this campaign is going why he's able to raise the 32 million dollars in one month. We have people who come into our headquarters everyday who just put cash money in envelopes for us to send to Chicago 2 dollars 3 dollars 7 dollars 10 dollars 20 dollars everyday. Two weeks ago when the Alabama State Alabama A&M had a basketball game here in Montgomery and we were there to primarily to do vote registration but some the Alabama State students had taken some of those envelopes for people to consider it. On there way into the ball game people would say give me one of those envelopes and would stuff cash money into an envelope going into a ball game.

B: A lot of trust there

JG: That's right but that is the kind of energy and interest and trustworthiness that this campaign engendered.

B: You know Jerome there's no questions I've seen this over the years of my life of being an organizer here and there that the people are always ahead of the leadership..

JG: They really are.

B: ...Just give us the chance and we'll move mountains.

JG: When I made the decision to support Barack Obama. I had a discussion with Joe Reed about my decision. It was not a move to be disloyal to the organization or to be disruptive in anyway or to disrespect Joe Reed's leadership. My decision is what I call a call to conscience and I think we gotta. We got to.. there are times when every man is confronted with a call to conscience. And my call to conscience led me to want to support and embrace Barack Obama and his agenda for America and I think there's a larger call here that it is greater than any being loyal to any organization or to any individual and so that was sort of the frame of reference that I came to this decision. Now regarding the comment Joe Reed saying he wanted that he supported Mrs. Clinton because he wants us to see wants us to have black federal judges. Well he's passionate about that. The last black federal judges that we got in Alabama were under Jimmy Carter when he was President. Clinton was in the White House for eight years and we were not successful in getting any black federal judges appointed and a part of

that was due to the fact that we had Republics Senators who resisted our and also we had Republicans controlling the Senate Judiciary Committee and so it made it extremely difficult for us to get black judges appointed during Bill Clinton's administration. Now I feel that if Barack Obama is President we will have just a good of chance or even better of getting black federal judges appointed in Alabama as we would with Hilary Clinton. So the argument is and I don't think Joe Reed is saying that he's supporting Hilary Clinton just because she would be the only Presidential candidate who was out there who could who would appoint black federal judges. I think it was because he knows the Clintons. We supported the Clintons before that that was sort of the frame of reference he probably was using and because he uses the expression many times, "You don't leave your old friends for new friends."

B: Does he think that Obama is electable?

JG: I don't think he did at first. I would venture to say that you know looking at what has happened to now I think he probably would have a different outlook on things. But I think he really wrestled with that whole issue before he made the decision of recommendation to the ABC leadership that they support Hilary Clinton. But I think he really did think that he was not electable at first [35:21] asked me before would Hilary Clinton appoint recommend some blacks be appointed federal judges. I feel confident she would but by the same token I feel that Barack Obama would do the same thing. Well the one thing I like about where I give Barack Obama the edge. I give him a edge in a several departments. I give them the edge in that his vision for why he wants to lead and to change America is to me it's kind of a global American vision rather than what I would call a party position where I just want to win for my party. He wants to win for America not just for Democrats so I like that vision that he has for America in terms of why he wants to lead to change things. I like the fact too that he's bringing all these new people into the fold as participants in the Democracy. See one of the things that troubled me our base of involved people in this country is too small in terms the people who advocate who express their points of view in the political arena and the fact that he is successful has been successful in galvanizing all these new people particularly young people who tend have not been engaged before. To me it's just revolutionary, monumental and so that motivation inspires me more than anything I can think of because when I first started working for ADC one of the things I would see as I would go out in the field to meetings all over the state how few young people would be attending these meetings and I would do a little exercise. I said, "Let me see everybody here by show of hands who's under 35." Rarely would see a hand go up and I would say to folk who were my age and younger. I said, "You know we say that we love this organization,

politics to something that we think everybody should be involved but why don't encourage our children and grandchildren to come to meeting like this. A young person.. at 18 he gets sent to Iraq or Afghanistan but yet we act as if politics is something that old folks do." And that just didn't make any sense that we were not bringing young people into participation in our political arena and so I hired a young man who was 22 years old out of Alabama State as my assistant, Daryl (last name unintelligible) worked for me for the ADC for 10 years and he changed the complexion of ADC in terms of bringing young people into the organization. So a lot of the young leaders you on the political front today like Senator Bobby Singleton, Quinton Ross, Shelia Smoot, you could just go all over the state. Daryl (Springfield ?)is responsible for a lot of those folks getting involved because they saw a young leader who was an activist and an organizer working you know in an organization like the Alabama Democratic Conference. But that's what we need to have and then now he's now a UNICEF Director for the Alabama Education Association. And this weekend going back to an early caller he is in South Carolina giving a presentation to a group support workers bus drivers and custodial workers folk like this around the southeast saying to them how important it is for just ordinary people to become organized from the ground up to basically lobby press for their interests before school boards because many time people who think they are powerless they are not. They do have power but they have to learn and be taught how to organize and mobilize to utilize their group sense to get people to be more attentive to their issues and their interests and their gender. And I think that sometimes we miss out on the education piece. King and those folk didn't just march from Montgomery Selma to Montgomery just to be marching. They marched so that lawmakers in Washington would listen to this wholes issue vote denial and discrimination in terms of the right to vote. They were trying to get the policies changed in Washington, D.C. so that we would have access to the ballot box. They weren't just marching to be marching and so I think that's what we got people to focus on. It's important to organize and mobilize but you got to have an agenda of things you want changed for the better to improve your communities.

B: Well it's clear that your candidate that Obama generates all that kind of enthusiasm in all kinds of people from the Iowa, New Hampshire primaries on down. And it's also clear you when you talk about young somebody said to me you know when somebody was born in 1990. When I think about somebody born in 1990 Jerome I think of a baby ok but of course there gonna be voting this year and the definitive moment for most of those people was not the Civil Rights Movement, the Women's Movement, the Labor Movement, the Anti-war Movement of the Vietnam War. It wasn't the second World War an anti-fascist or you know movement. It was 9/11.

JG: That's right.

B: It was... we're talking about human beings being shaped by a totally different culture in some way than we were...

JG: Yeah.

B: And it's critical that they not be left behind because they have tremendous energy and capacity to develop new things and I think Obama.. As long as Obama.. I say this over and over again. I hope he said this because so many young African Americans and young people in general identify themselves as independents. They don't identify with any party.

JG: They really don't.

B: They don't. And he needs to say that. The other thing that I hope. I don't know it's probably too late to say this. Kucinich, Gravel, even Ron Paul at different times were you know it was either the major media or in some cases the party structure, decided they were not going to be in the debates anymore. I don't know if you know this, you probably do when they determine in poll whether somebody should be in a debate what they look at in essence the answers to the questions would you vote for him as opposed to would you like to hear him the debate...

JG: Yes.

B: Which is a totally different question and I was sorry to hear and I don't know if you know Obama had any feelings about the fact that there was this decision to ice Kucinich and Gravel out of the debates and I know Kucinich in Iowa released his delegate as I understand to support Obama.

JG: Yes. Well you know you make a good point there because it's almost like saying even though you may be outnumbered or you may be a minority that your voice or your point of view should never be heard or respected just because you are outnumbered and that makes absolutely no sense to me and the thing I say to people when they say things like my vote doesn't vote. I say oh yes it does. You may not have Bill Gates money but on election day when you go in that voting booth. I said the voting booth is the great equalizer in America because on election day Bill Gates just has one I have

one no matter how rich or poor you are or what gender you are what your religion is. On election day that's the great equalizer and I think we need to trumpet that more when people say my vote doesn't.. oh yes it does because that's when you have just as much power as anybody else in America. One of the thing I think we don't do enough of on the what I call accountability side. I like sports but in politics we don't measure people the same way we do in sports. In sports if you got a losing team or losing coach that coach if he has a losing season too many times, he's gone or if that player no matter how blue chip he may have been if he stops performing or underperforms, he's gone they cut him but in politics, we act as if we don't know how to cut folks or remove folks when they under perform, and I can't understand why we don't bring the same level of performance standards and accountability to politics, people who represent politically, as we do in professional sports.

B: Yeah. Its very interesting concept. It seem that people.. I mean we're not talking about people who... people when they know they're not being serving and yet what they do is they say the system doesn't work, I'm staying home rather than replacing that person even with someone they don't know because the message the public has to send to people who want to be candidates is we will get rid of you.

JG: Yes

B: You know if you're not there for us then we'll replace you.

JG: That's right they are elected they're not popes they're not there for life they serve a designated term.

B: This has been a wonderful experience for me to meet you in this context.

JG: It's an opportunity.

B: Let's say we're going to do it again ok.

JG: I look forward to it.

B: Or continue the conversation as we say in the trade.

JG: Yes sir.

B: You have a marvelous day and we'll be back in touch.

JG: Thank you.

B: Thank you.