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The Bridges that Carried Us Over Project

Interview Summary

Interviewee:

Hardy Brown, Jr.

Interviewer:

Leah Michelle Cash

Interview Date:

May 18, 2016

Location:

Rialto, California

Interview Summary completed by:

Kimberly Morales, 2020

Topic:

Hardy Brown, Jr. talks about the Black Voice Foundation and his family-owned Black Voice Newspaper. He also talks about his elected position on the San Bernardino County Board of Education. In both the Black Voice Foundation and in his elected position for the county, he explains the importance of being active in giving back to the community and being supportive of youth education.

Keywords:

- San Bernardino County (Calif.)
- Hardy Brown Jr.
- Black Voice Foundation
- Black Voice Newspaper
- Community Engagement
- Children's Education
- Supportive Parents
- Supportive Leaders

Comments:

None

Interview Index:

Video: <https://youtu.be/uvZcjQ7Ekgo>

Media Format	Time (hh:mm:ss)	Topic Discussed
Streaming video	00:00:57	Black Voice Foundation
Streaming video	00:01:08, 00:18:53	Black Voice Newspaper
Streaming video	00:02:24	San Bernardino County Board of Education
Streaming video	00:10:43	African American Student Success
Streaming video	00:15:43	San Gorgonio Council Girl Scouts
Streaming video	00:17:15	United Way Board
Streaming video	18:07	University California Riverside Library Archive Board

Related Materials:

Additional oral history interviews are currently underway in collaboration with the Wilmer Amina Carter Foundation from the Bridges that Carried Us Over Project.

Full interview transcript can be found below.

Interview Transcript

Interviewee:

Hardy Brown, Jr.

Interviewer:

Leah Michelle Cash

Interview Date:

May 18, 2016

Location:

Rialto, California

Length:

00:22:04

Media format:

Streaming video

List of Acronyms:

HBJ= Hardy Brown, Jr.

LMC= Leah Michelle Cash

Interview Transcript completed by:

Kimberly Morales, 2020

Start of Interview:

[00:00:00]

LMC: Has shut down on basically identifying, oh my god [*adjusts camera*]. Okay. Today's date is 5/18/2016, my name is Leah Michelle Cash and I am interviewing Hardy Brown Jr. for the archiving black history in the inland empire project. His name is spelled—

HBJ: —H a r d y B r o w n [*smiles*]—

LMC: —Jr.

HBJ: [*smiles and chuckles*]

LMC: We are interviewing here at Wilmer Amina Carter's in Rialto California. Thank you, Mr. Hardy, for taking out the time to conduct this interview with us.

HBJ: Thank you [*nods*].

LMC: So our first question is, very briefly can you just tell me a little bit about your role in the Black Voice Foundation?

HBJ: So as an executive director of the Black Voice Foundation, I run the overall operations here at our location in San Bernardino. We are the nonprofit to the Black Voice Newspaper, better known now as the I.E. Voice. And this newspaper was started 45 years ago by my parents. Now me and my sisters are into second generation of ownership and I lead the entire nonprofit arm where we do some history pieces where we work in the schools and in working in the school, we're doing assemblies teaching kids we're more alike than different.

And then we're also working with parents and parent engagement, creating leaders there [*hand gestures*] within school districts. And working with the teachers, teaching them how to teach engaging intriguing history and we do that utilizing the Underground Railroad Tour that we have been doing now for the last 20 years. We take them on an eight-day tour where they get to see up close and personal real-life history that they get to understand and bring back to the classroom.

LMC: That's fascinating.

HBJ: [*smiles*]

LMC: So now as a young person you have a whole entire community that is very proud of you—

HBJ: —thank you—

LMC: —in regard to your recent election so can you explain your elected title and a little bit about that role?

HBJ: Perfect. First of all [*hand gestures*], thank you so much for calling me a young person because my daughters would never say that [*smiles*]—

LMC: —[*laughs*]—

HBJ: —but my position, I was recently elected to San Bernardino County Board of Education and that covers area D. We are broken up in sections but we cover the entire county.

Now the entire country is 33 school districts [*hand gestures*], 412,000 students. My area covers the entire city of Highland, the entire city of San Bernardino, the

entire city of Rialto, a portion of Fontana and then I go up the 15 freeway and I cover Wrightwood, Feland, Oak Hills, —

LMC: —[*laughs*]—

HBJ: — [*smiles*] parts of Victorville and parts of Hesperia.

LMC: Wow, that's Dr. Henry's territory over there—

HBJ: —Yes [*smiles*] —

LMC: —Oak Hills [*laughs*]. —

HBJ: —Yes.

LMC: So what are your goals in this new position? —

HBJ: Well [*takes a deep breath*] —

LMC: —newly elected position.

HBJ: I think some of my goals are to continue to do the work that we are doing. I am active in the community working with kids and I want them to see they're being cared about their education as well.

And my story, I think I want to record this for the future so people understand that I'm not just this person who is polished [*hand gestures*] and became this elected official but coming out of San Bernardino High School, I was a student just like many of these students. And I barely graduated out of high school with a 2.1 GPA even though my father was on the school board—

LMC: —[*laughs*] —

HBJ: —and my mother was active in the community. Even though I had a PHD sister, I still barely graduated out of high school. And it wasn't because [*takes a pause*] I was dumb, it was because I was lazy. I just enjoyed dancing and school wasn't a priority to me.

And it took me until I went to Wilberforce University. And when I attended Wilberforce University in Ohio, which is the nation's first historical black university, I'll never forget this [*hand gestures*]. A professor walked up to me, grabs me by my collar [*grabs own collar*] and says, "Young man, you could be sharp, if you would just put some meat with those potatoes." And I was like, [*smiles*] what is he talking about.

LMC: [*laughs*]

HBJ: And it took me a couple of years, I started to watch the other men around our campus, young men, young leaders. When I saw it, the light finally came on and I realized that I had been given a gift. A gift to come back into our community, to make a difference, to be a business leader, to be an educational leader and duplicate those type of leadership opportunities for other students.

So when the position became available, for me to run for San Bernardino County Board of Education. I was first appointed for a year and then I had to run. I am technically the first African American [*smiles*] ever to serve on the San Bernardino County Board of Education which my father also ran for and did not win 20 years ago.

But from there, I ended up winning an election and I don't know the exact percentage, what I won by, I don't remember the exact number but I know I had about 17,000 votes between [*hand gestures*] this entire area. It is a nonpartisan position and I ran on the idea of having a regional conversational education. It was time now for us to be so segregated in our thoughts [*hand gestures*].

And I'm not talking about segregated from demographics, I'm talking about segregated just from our thought process about student success. I'm tired of us being that group who, you know, Los Angeles County and San Diego County—

LMC: —I agree—

HBJ: —and even Riverside County kind of shuns upon. I wanted to make sure that our entire inland empire region, that we come together and talk about the success of our students and let the men stand out and do what they do and support these amazing women who are leading our schools and then get involved with our kids so that we can do even better.

LMC: So, in what you just said, you have defined a little bit—

HBJ: —[*nods head*]—

LMC: —About how you want to make a difference—

HBJ: —Yeah—

LMC: —And how someone made a difference to you—

HBJ: —Mhm [*nods head*] —

LMC: —when you were at Wiberforce. Who has actually inspired you—

HBJ: —Oh there's—

LMC: —that you have just sat back, is it a whole [inaudible] of people—

HBJ: —Yeah, it is [*smiles*]—

LMC: —Or is it anyone that just really really stands out?

HBJ: Yeah, my father is still alive so I get a chance to sit down and talk to my dad about strategy, about life, about how he did what he did. He's the first African American ever to serve his president of San Bernardino City Unified School District and so I get a chance to talk to him. My mother is in the assembly as a current sitting assembly person for the 47th of district and she's an inspiration.

But I also have other people that I talk to. There are people back east, William Gray who headed the United Negro College Fund. He was one of my mentors and he was a person who sat down with me and talked to me about professionalism. Carl Dabrum who was here in this community, gave me one of my first internships. Mayor Robinson who is the mayor of Rialto, she gave me my first [a phone goes off in the background] internship of working at Caltrans. So, I learned from some of these people how to do what I do.

Of course, I was raised at St. Paul's Amity Church and being raised at St. Paul's Amity Church they taught us all about leadership skills and development and all those things [*hand gestures*] together, —

LMC: —clicked—

HBJ: —kind of clicked and became who I am today and of course those professors at Wilberforce made a big difference but these people have done some amazing things in their lives.

I do have to make sure I mention, there's a gentleman, he's not in our community but his name is Marshall Mitchell. And then there's another gentleman named Riverend Dr. [inaudible].

These are two people that I work with Wilberforce University and they were mentors to me in a professional light and they really taught me a lot when I left the community and moved back east to Ohio. I worked directly with them as we would do exactly [*smiles*] what I say I am doing now is what we did with those students on that college campus.

LMC: Because you're a community baby—

HBJ: —Yeah [*smiles*] —

LMC: —and that took a lot of courage and some big steps to move out of that community—

HBJ: —Oh yeah—

LMC: —and a lot of those loving arms that were holding you up and go to a historical black college like you did in Ohio—

LMC: —What was the cultural shock once you moved there?

HBJ: Oh, there was no cultural shock for me, I mean the thing I love about a HBCU [Historically Black College University] is when you walk on a campus that's family. —

LMC: —[laughs] —

HBJ: —Soon as you see [inaudible], even if they're from [*hand gestures*] Detroit, Chicago, [inaudible], Cincinnati, it doesn't matter, that is family and you become brothers and sisters and you lead together.

And that's one of the things I learned to be able to bring back to the community, is how to take those skill sets that I learned at a HPCU, bring those back, pour those not only into my own children but into other children.

And then partner with some of the leaders in the community and just say hey guys we have to do this. We have to be involved, we have to be visible, and we have to be persistent in how we do things and we can't be stuck in one area [*hand gestures*]. If you see me, one of the things you're going to see is that I am regional. I will be in Moreno Valley, Riverside, [smiles] Corona, Adelanto, Victorville—

LMC: —You're very regional—

HBJ: — San Bernardino—

LMC: —That is absolutely the truth—

HBJ: — I am very [*nods head*] regional in my thoughts, that's what I wanted to run on and I think that not only my seat but our business and our family business fits that mode as well.

LMC: Mhm. So, 10 years from now in this elected, or 20 years from now—

HBJ: —Yeah [*nods head*] —

LMC: —15 or 20 in this elected position that you are in, what do you think your legacy will be and what do you want to encourage young people to do?

HBJ: Perfect [*nods head*]. I'll give you [*smiles*] the couple things that I have learned in the system so far that I am working on. I can't is one person change the entire system, this system is too daunting too large to change the entire system but what I have learned is I have picked what I can do, those small little things and worked towards those things. So, I have a couple of things that I have launched out on. One, of course, that conversation, that [*inaudible*] conversation—

LMC: —communal career—

HBJ: —regional. The first thing that I did is I had the superintendent, the county superintendent break apart our entire [*hand gestures*] dynamic, how we look at our students, breaking into the demographic breakdowns and then let's start targeting the ones who need our help the most.

The first group that we went after and we went after that this year in my first year elected as, actually second year elected in office was a task force for African Americans student success.

We reached out to all 33 school districts and we didn't go for [*hand gestures*] bad numbers, we wanted to go for, there are amazing students in our county, —

LMC: —Amazing—

HBJ: — amazing students in our cities and amazing students in our schools. Who are the teachers that are teaching them [*hand gestures*], who are the parents that are parenting them, who are the community members that are working with them and who are those amazing students?

If we can find those students and interview them, we can duplicate their services and what they do and so we can give that to other generations and that's the first thing that we did. We have a task force report on African American student success. We're not looking at the bad numbers [*smiles*], we're looking at the good numbers.

LMC: [*laughs*] Good numbers.

HBJ: We have a graduation rate of African Americans about 72% right now and we're definitely pushing that and this task force is going to be one of those things that help that because [*hand gestures*] we're going to show those other kids, "Hey, this is what you can do. You can be that student." And we're going to show them how to do that. So that's one thing that I want to do.

The second thing that I want to do is just something that I've always wanted to do. I take kind of an idea from our First Lady Michelle Obama and I take the concept and idea of healthiness for our kids. And I believe that one of the things that we can do, we don't do it here in the west coast but they do it back east, is double-dutch jump rope [*smiles*].

LMC: [*laughs*]

HBJ: And so I've actually been putting together an entire platform, the same way you have a county-wide [*hand gestures*] science fair. We're doing a county-wide double-dutch jump rope competition—

LMC: —Oh that's going to be fun.—

HBJ: —for students. And the idea is to get them moving again, get them out from playing their video games and just being on their cell phones but to interact and play and just have a good time. If we can do that, tying that into our nutrition, the goal is to reduce the obesity rates of our children here in San Bernardino County.

So those are some of the things I want to work on right now and then we're going to target girls on that same report next and the Latino students after that. And we're going to look at all student sub-groups and see how we can find out who's doing well and how can we duplicate that.

LMC: And that's the project you want to—

HBJ: —Yes [*smiles*] —

LMC: —start.

HBJ: And we've already embarked on those so when we look at this back 10 years later, —

LMC: —10 years later—

HBJ: —my goal is to accomplish things. I'm very thoughtful of my measurement [*hand gestures*]. I believe I don't say I want to do something that I can't measure—

LMC: —can't measure. —

HBJ: —So the types of things that I do, you'll see [*hand gestures*] as a [*inaudible*] piece, it should be a document that will say African American student success task force. And it should say, you should be able to see a report in 10 years saying here is the double-dutch competition. These are the things I am pushing for as we go through.

And then I am of course looking at how we develop our [inaudible] plans, I am looking at how we develop our budgets. Definitely working on suspension rates and graduation rates, trying to inspire students in that particular area as well.

One of the things we do, a little bit from my seat from the county but also from my seat from the foundation, we develop this program and it's called men mob. And the men mob, we go from school to school. We now have been in eight different school districts throughout San Bernardino—

LMC: —Yes you have. —

HBJ: —and Riverside County and we go and we'll play, we surprise the kids. We go to the school, high schools or middle schools and we look at the schools that have some of the [*hand gestures*] numbers that really have that need—

LMC: —need [inaudible] as an empowerment—

HBJ: —and we go and inspire the kids so we line up like a football tunnel or like a basketball tunnel and we play [*hand gestures*] either the Chicago Bulls theme song. Michael Jordan for those of you who won't know this in 10 years—

LMC: —[*laughs*] —

HBJ: —or Steph Curry, LeBron James, [inaudible] but we play that music and then we'll play the Rocky theme music and we play really hype music and we high-five these kids to let them know that the men of the community are here and we believe in them and that we support them and that we know they can be successful.

So we've been doing that now for the last year and our goal is to be able to measure that. Now some measurements that we've seen and are still working on the real measurement from it but every school we've gone to that day and the day after, zero suspensions on the campus. So that's all subgroups, [*hand gestures*] zero suspensions on the entire campus.

LMC: That's amazing.

HBJ: So, if we can take that and duplicate that, then we'll make a difference for our kids.

LMC: Yeah and you are making a difference—

HBJ: —Thank you. —

LMC: —but I would be [inaudible] with all of your achievements and everything that you've done in the community, not to bring up the girl scouts [*laughs*] —

HBJ: — [*smiles and laughs*] Oh I know, right—

LMC: —because that scene from the Oscars when Chris Rock had all of them come out, all of the girl scouts come out regarding selling those cookies, all I could think of was Hardy Brown.—

HBJ: —Oh yeah [*smiles*] —

LMC: —You must have jumped off the couch.

HBJ: I love it.

LMC: So what is your take on how many years you have empowered and helped with the girl scouts of America?

HBJ: I have been on the board of directors for a San Geronio Council Girl Scouts for the last eight years and a lot of people ask me well why do you do that? Well they don't understand my background story. I am an only son with three sisters [*smiles*]. I grew up in a house full of women. I have now been married, this year will be 20 years—

LMC: —20 years—

HBJ: —and in that 20 years, I have two daughters, [*shakes head*] no sons. So, all I've grown up with are women my entire life [*smiles*].

LMC: [*laughs*]

HBJ: So empowering girls is something I do personally in my life of my daughters and also through scouting. Scouting is about the leadership and development of these young women regardless of race, class or background.

And as a girl scout leader, I've worked with them on increasing the diversity. I've worked with them on increasing their fundraising and their corporate support. And I'm usually a community face that will go out to the color run, have them pour stuff all over me [*smiles*], act a fool but also let the girls know that the men in the community will not give up on them. That we will be there, not just for a paycheck to help them but we're going to be there to support them, to let them know that they can do it and by doing that [*hand gestures*] over and over year again and year again then we can show that those numbers are going to be successful.

And our girl scout council here is probably ranked either number one or number two in the entire country and so I'm really proud to be on the girl scouts board.

LMC: Yeah, you've been a very valuable asset on that board but speaking of boards, —

HBJ: —yeah—

LMC: —there's another board. United Way Board.

HBJ: Yes.

LMC: Tell us a little bit about United Way Board.

HBJ: Yeah so, I was on the United Way Board era United way and I help them with funding and I help them also with their young leadership council. And that was bringing in young leaders, at the time I think I was still in my 30s, yeah cause I'm 44 now. Said that for the camera [*points at the camera*] so you guys can see it in 22 years [*smiles*].

LMC: [*laughs*]

HBJ: But I served on the young leaders council and we did a lot of work in the community to show that people can make a difference. And I think there's some videos out there of me on YouTube, you know doing some of the things that I do, talking to the community, raising funds for the United Way and so I'm really proud of the other work that I do in the community.

There is one other board that you probably don't know that I'm on, actually I'm on two other boards that you probably don't know about. One is the Riverside, University California Riverside Library Archive Board.

LMC: Okay.

HBJ: I'm on that board looking at the African American research and studying all of the research the same way we're doing with this project but from the university level at UCR. And then I'm also on the MBA board, advisory board for Howard University in D.C. [*smiles*].

LMC: Oh okay. Wow that's huge,—

HBJ: —And I'm in charge of all of the recruiting for the [*inaudible*] —

LMC: —that's another historical black college.

HBJ: Yes, that is our flagship [*smiles*].

LMC: But the archiving for UCR, is that the one where the ebony magazines or the magazines win or when you've had—

HBJ: —Yeah, I've had several archive events there and artifact events there [*nods head*], yeah.

HBJ: But yes, so they've asked me to be on that board and we're trying to do some really interesting things there as well.

LMC: And Black Voice News' archive—

HBJ: —Yes, [*nods head*], that's where we started our paper, yeah.

LMC: Well Mr. Hardy Brown Jr., you're quite an accomplished young man—

HBJ: —Thank you [*smiles*] —

LMC: —and we are so very thankful that you gave us just a little spotlight into you.

HBJ: [*makes face expression, hand gestures peace signs and smiles*]

LMC: [*laughs*]

HBJ: You guys [*inaudible*], I'm actually really funny. I'm not this serious [*smiles*].

LMC: [*laughs*] So we thank you for your time because we know you're a very busy man for giving us the information regarding you and—

HBJ: —Thank you. —

LMC: —being an outstanding young person, —

HBJ: —Thank you. —

LMC: —African American in the inland empire.

HBJ: Thank you. Can I give one last thing?

LMC: Yes you can.

HBJ: Alright so one last thing and I'm doing this for people that have hope down the road so they can understand that they're not alone. A lot of times we [*hand gestures*] do kind of look at some of the negatives but I want to give this group in

10 years, I think one of my flagship things [*hand gestures*] that is never spoken about and that is I'm a darn good father.

LMC: Mhm, fatherhood.

HBJ: Yeah [*nods head*], my daughter who I've been by her side every single day since she was a little girl and this is my oldest that I'm talking about. My youngest, by the time this [*points at camera*] is played again, she should be graduated high school as well.

My daughter's graduating high school next week and she's graduating from middle college high school in San Bernardino. She has a 4.47 GPA. She's not only graduating on Wednesday from high school with straight honors, she's graduating on Friday from the community college, San Bernardino Valley College with her associate's degree. She did high school and community college at the same time.

LMC: Wow.

HBJ: We were there every single day, me and my wife to make sure [*hand gestures*] that she was successful. We gave her the tools she needed to be successful. She was accepted to 24 universities including Spellman, Ohio State and several other universities. And she accepted a full ride presidential academic, has never played a sport, an academic scholarship to San Diego State University to study economics, entrepreneurship and African American studies. Her is becoming a university president, possibly get into politics maybe by the time we show this again, we'll have her as a congress woman or something [*smiles*].

LMC: [*laughs*]

HBJ: But we talk to her all the time about giving back to the community so she knows that the seed that is planted today in her education, the scholarships that she's received from several of our community groups here, her goal is to come back to our community and do exactly what her family has been doing for the last few years.

That is her responsibility, that is her right and that's what she's supposed to do. And as a parent and any one of our leaders, we should be talking to our kids about loving our community to do more, to come back. It's not enough to take all your chips, all your money and go play up in the hills. You got to come back [*hand gestures*] in the community, you have to work, you have to give and you have to be an example for that next generation [*claps hands and smiles*].

LMC: Yes, wow.

HBJ: That's it [*smiles*].

LMC: Thank you very much.

HBJ: Alright, thank you [*laughs and smiles*].

End of Interview:

[00:22:04]