

California State University, San Bernardino

CSUSB ScholarWorks

Bridges Digital Archive: Audio and Video
Recordings

Bridges That Carried Us Over Digital Archive

3-9-2021

John Coleman

Wilmer Amina Carter Foundation

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/bridges>

Recommended Citation

Wilmer Amina Carter Foundation, "John Coleman" (2021). *Bridges Digital Archive: Audio and Video Recordings*. 28.

<https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/bridges/28>

This Oral History is brought to you for free and open access by the Bridges That Carried Us Over Digital Archive at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Bridges Digital Archive: Audio and Video Recordings by an authorized administrator of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@csusb.edu.

Bridges that Carried Us Over Project

Interview Summary

Interviewee:

John Coleman

Interviewers:

Charletha Ringstaff

Jennifer Tilton

Interview Date:

March 9, 2021

Interview Location:

Remotely via Zoom

Interview Summary completed by:

Jennifer Tilton, 2021

Description:

John Coleman describes his childhood in downtown Boston, MA in the 1930s and 1940s, and how he returned to complete college and a Master's degree after serving in Korea. When he graduated, Patton State Hospital was recruiting so he moved from Boston to Redlands, CA with his family. He describes the warm welcome he received from his white colleagues in Redlands and the locations of Black residents and social life in the 1950s. He describes the difficulty he found trying to find housing because of housing segregation and details his experiences with real estate agents and observations of block busting. He explains how Robert Burton, a Black real estate agent in Redlands, helped him buy a home and describes the community on the northwest side of the city which by the late 1950s had become the center of Black community life in Redlands.

Subject Topic:

- Black Boston
- Korean War
- Patton State Hospital
- Housing segregation
- Real estate agents,
- Rialto (Calif.)
- San Bernardino (Calif.)
- Redlands (Calif.)

Spatial Coverage:

Name of Site (if relevant)	General Location/Address
Norton Air Force Base	1601 E 3rd St, San Bernardino, CA 92408
Patton State Hospital	3102 Highland Ave, Patton, CA 92369
First home in North Redlands across from Texonia Housing Project	1008 Texas, Redlands CA
Home in development that Robert Burton helped develop	329/331 Carlotta Court
Racial boundary in San Bernardino/Fontana	Baseline

Temporal Coverage:

- 1930s-1950s: Boston, MA
- 1950s-60s: Inland Empire (Calif.)

Key Events:

- Depression
- WWII
- Korean War

Interview Index:

Media Format	Time (hh:mm:ss)	Topic Discussed
Digital Video	0:00:04	Growing up in Boston 1930s, working as a newsboy, watching WWII vets come home, drafted to Korea, returned to complete college
Digital Video	0:10:46	Completing Master's in Social Work & difficulty finding work outside of the south for Black professionals

Digital Video	0:14:46	Finding Work at Patton
Digital Video	0:19:00	Warm welcome to CA and Redlands but difficulty finding housing because of racial discrimination
Digital Video	0:27:35	Living in two worlds, relationships with white colleagues in Redlands and where Black community was in San Bernardino
Digital Video	0:38:07	Describing community in North Redlands and N and S Redlands divide
Digital Video	0:46:29	Black community in San Bernardino at Valley Truck farms and westside around Highland. Baseline as a racial boundary & experiences looking for housing in Rialto
Digital Video	0:52:56	Robert Burton real estate agent in Redlands helping Black families buy homes, tight community formed in that neighborhood

Full interview transcript can be found below.

Interview Transcript

Start of Interview:

[00:00:00]

Charletha Ringstaff [00:00:04→ 00:00:31] Hello, I am Charletha Ringstaff, and this is my cohort Professor Jennifer Tilton.

We are interviewing John Coleman, for the Bridges That Carry Us Over Archive for Cal State San Bernardino.

So, Mr Coleman if you can tell us a little bit about some of your earliest childhood memories.

John Coleman [00:00:31→ 00:10:32] Right. I grew up in Boston. Uh, I'm assuming that you guys won't know Boston, certainly, as well as I would. It was in a community, which, uh, even as I recall, was primarily occupied by most people there were black. It is a..a..an area of Boston, which is now being part of the historic preservation. I could walk out my front door and look to the right.

At this point in time, and see the Prudential Center, which was at that, well, which is about, maybe 10 minute walk from my front door. Um, on the other side of the tracks mind you.

However, it is a community now that almost no black people live in, because it is so close. It is a fantastic area, uh, and it is probably 10 times too expensive for us to live there right now. Uh, It's, I guess you can call it the south end of Boston or Back Bay. Either way, that will help identify the community. Uh,

I think the more important feature is a factor that I was born in 1930, which means I am now over 90 over 90, years old. And so the world I grew up in does not exist in significant ways right now. Um, I continued in Boston. Um, It was a time when, 1930. Most deliveries, for example in our community were in horse back. Horse drawn carriages and Boston is so cold that I wanted to get out. When I could.

And I eventually. Well, my first major job. Actually, I sold newspapers in Boston and I had to get a, A news boy paper boy, uh um, license. I still have my own license. It was only available from 12 years old and 16 years old and you're not supposed to sell papers, before 12, and after 16, you either had to turn in your license and then I did some other work. I ran an elevator for a, Um, Farrior that I could get to, um, I was at the time I was 12, I ran this elevator and and did some cleanup stuff, um for the uh, company. I started, I got a job. I attended English High School, one of the oldest high schools in the country. Um, and after I was 16 I couldn't make any money selling newspapers uh, and which means I was selling papers during World War Two. Working

on the street in and out of the bars, whatever was available. Set up a, a, a delivery route which regulated my, my quote "business".

And I can go into much detail. At any rate, uh, I. My job was in a downtown Boston, uh, shoe store, between the time I was 17 uh, and 22 at 22 I got drafted. And, uh, within two weeks of my draft date I was on a, on a boat, heading to Hawaii, where I did my basic training and shot soon as the basic training was over.

They brought us back to the states for a couple of weeks before I was on a boat, headed to Korea. I uh, work, I was in Korea with a well. Well, And during the last eight months of my, my time in Korea. I was on a mountain with the Korean, North Koreans, being on a another mountain ridge, where we were close enough to shoot at each other. Uh, I took a correspondence course with the Armed Forces Institute while I was in Korea.

When I got home, I had great difficulty getting into college, I had a...a fairly good high school, Uh, record. However, I had to, um, get through admissions people who were not really very cooperative. In regard to that. However, after about a month or so applying to various colleges, they had a lot of colleges in the Boston area. Uh,

I finally found an admissions officer who admitted me, uh, and told me about some of the interests I had that were compatible with folks who are interested in social work or psychology or things like that. Uh, socio-, so I ended up with a major in uh psychology minor in sociology and another in education was admitted to Simmons College School of Social Work there in Boston. Some of your folks would uh, recognize that Simmons College is one of the Prestige, uh, colleges for women on the, on the, uh east coast. I, however they had a. They permitted the, uh, 10th about 10% of the enrollment to be male in their graduate programs, uh, undergraduate No, but in the graduate programs where I got my masters in social work, they had a probe, they permitted. uh, They admitted about 10% male.

I was married by the time I graduated picked up my degree on Monday. On Friday, the 13th of June 1958 brought my family, wife and son to California, where I worked for the first um, 10 years, Let me make sure I get this right. 58 no first eight years at Penn State Hospital in San Bernardino PATTON State Hospital in San Bernardino, then I continued in for another three years. In our outpatient sur- program State of California, where I work, uh, covered pretty much, uh, corner of the, uh, Inland Empire of where my, my, my, my, uh workload where my clients. It was basically I was Inland, I'm sorry, in the Inland Empire, E- M -P- I -R -E, and where I live covers Riverside San Bernardino County, and other counties there in San Bernardino in in California.

We're from the fact that in an empire in San Bernardino where area I live in is about 5060 miles from downtown Los Angeles, which. Okay. [inaudible]

Jennifer Tilton [00:10:32 → 00:10:46] Mr Coleman, what, so why did you move to California, what what got you to move out to the Inland Empire? What drew you here and why, why did you end up in San Bernardino County?

John Coleman [00:10:46→ The simple answer is whether However, no, that's not true. The real answer is that I graduated in 1958. If you think, well, you guys are so young, you would not think about, same. I ran through WWII pretty fast. Because I was, you know, we're watching started in 1940, which was 4041 period I went through pretty fast. Basically, the, what we refer to as the Great Depression, years. Okay, which is a major historic feature. And so I saw I was selling papers. at 14- 12, to 14, 12 to 16 years old. While the headlines wrote, Japan and Korea and China, and all the things which we know only in terms of history.

[12:05]

Um, Um So, Uh, the Depression was another significant period And I live more in those years of my life. Then I do when I guess it's all maybe equal impact impact on me as I might, in terms of what happened when I got my master's degree and went to work in California and all that stuff. Uh, At any rate, uh...the 50s were very interesting in terms of what was going on in this country, because that was when people began some of the sit-ins . When the southerners began some of the sit-ins in the south.

When what we refer to as Jim Crow and all this other stuff was a very significant factor of life in not only the South Uh, So that....I'm trying to figure out how to condense some of this in regard to... At any rate, uh, when I did three, there were three schools of social work in Boston. Simmons College, Boston University and Boston College and while I was in school they opened, uh, a, uh.... I forget the name of the other college right now, who opened. Uh, only graduate program graduate program where they only dealt with, people already had their, their, their bachelor's and master's degrees and so on.

So there was a lot of people coming out of school, who are looking for a very limited very limited number of jobs, and the focus in terms of the realities were that jobs were much more potential, uh for people who are white, uh and very scarce for people who are not white, uh um, the only job opportunities I had when I came out with my Masters was maybe to go somewhere in the south, to get a job. In 1958 that was not a choice that I was interested in making, particularly in that I had a five month old baby and wife, uh, all of us being black at the in terms of what was real.

[14:46]

I, as late as may of 1958, I didn't know where I was going to get a job or whether I was going to be able to get a job. And finally I saw an ad that California was recruiting and they had.. in their sewing all going all over the country, with their brochures "California Calling". And I, they had their crews going out looking for people. I took the, the, the written exam. And they would come back that afternoon and do the orales for those who passed the written. I passed the written and sat for the oral.

And I was crazy enough, that I insisted that... Well, I during during the oral exam. I asked about the possibility of being able to get housing, or some. If I took a job in California. Without knowing anybody that having no resources, I basically said, uh I asked the recruiting team, whether they would be able to provide housing for me and my, my family...

There were some discussions of that. However, the people from the state personnel board. Were the, the, the, really the administrative control of what was going on, uh, confronted me with saying, if I were to sign on a sign on the spot, that they would try to make sure I had some housing. Uh, But that, I had to commit to take the job before they would even talk about that and I walked out of the interview, and was not even sure I passed the oral exam, got home that evening, and I was going crazy even crazier, because I had given up so far as I knew the only possibility of my getting employment, the only options that I had seen before that was going south, which was not acceptable to me Uh And staying in Boston, where there was no jobs available, and where we have snow and rain and bitter cold weather.

At any rate, while we were eating supper, the telephone rang and with a typical California response. They said that they would uh, What was it, uh I...I should person to person call for John Coleman, California calling.

But, you know, here I am, without a job without hope for a job and these people are coming up with some work that would not be bad pass the exam that they wanted me like I wanted them because I've done my research right and some idea about what was available statewide system, best in the country, and all this stuff. And they're talking about, California College, calling and will pay for the telephone call my wife took the call and looked at me and said, You know, I don't know. I took the call, and it was a chief of social work at Patton State hospital and saying basically if you come, we'll look for, we will try and find somebody who can take you in for enough time so that uh we can make a transition.

[19:00]

Magic, magic, pure magic. As I say, pick up, pick up to agree on, On June, 5, June 9th. Monday 9th, ninth, got off the plane at LAX Friday afternoon June, Friday the 13th of June 1958.

Somebody, one of my classmates said, Simmons. So and I was still crazy. I still didn't know about going to into a new place. And he said, Well, I'll ask my mother she'll pick you up...She didn't know me I didn't know them. At any rate, Mrs Moore, who lived in Long Beach, uh, um, What is still considered the hip hop capital of the world And I forget the name of the Compton.

I forget the name of the Compton. Mrs Moore from Compton was at the airport, picked us up and took us from home And basically offered housing and so on for short term basis. My wife and child waited in with Mrs Moore during the week. Uhhh umm As I say arrived on Friday. On Saturday we drove out to San Bernardino.

Uh, uh One of my co workers that patent state hospital, Helen, uh ummm Helen Robinson, who lived in Redlands, California said that she would meet the bus and take us to her home delivered, uh umm On Monday, I would completed my papers at Penn State Hospital stayed at Helen Robinson's house for a week. Uh She loaned me her uh um car credit card- I mean, talk about crazy folks, people, I never saw before and never heard anything about Mrs Moore, offered me, you know, picked us up at at at LAX, which was not nearly as big and fancy as it is now, you- um... at any rate I'll cut this short.

Helen Robinson, drove to Patten on Monday, uh to go to work. I-um completed my papers and was still hanging around, Helen Robinson around 10 o'clock came back down to the Social Work office and said, What are you doing, why are you still here And I said, Well, I have to wait to get ready to go home tonight to get there. And so on and she said nah here's my keys here's my credit card if I need, um if you run out of gas uh. If there's anything wrong with Credit Card they already know. And they'll fix it and so on. And all you need to do is get my father over to Loma Linda hospital. If he has an appointment. I had her car for a week.

She also gave me some more resources like a person who was a realtor in Redlands, he took it took me all around town showed me housing, all over the all over the place, um But telling me that, "You know, sorry, Mr Coleman, but I can show you but I can't. I mean, we can drive and look but we can't, I can't get to any place to live because if I were to do that, I'd be out of business before the weekend. I'd be forced out. But on Thursday, he found a brand new building, under being completed on the other side of town."

I mentioned in Boston, be on the other side of the tracks. If you haven't been to Boston, the first uh place you've stopped visit... Okay, your train station was, as I say about a five minute walk from where we lived uh umm uh main train station where all the three lines of trains came into the area which is I say about five miles, five minutes from where from home with my little legs at that time, could could take me.uh,

At any rate, I signed the papers Mrs. Robinson provided the housing for the week. And we moved into our first brand new uhh apartment building. It was a duplex uh where we didn't even have electricity hooked up uh When we moved in with first night there, uh The my. The American Express. Uh Ya American Express delivered, our uh stuff that we sent from Boston.

Uh and the Sewer lines had been completed that the afternoon before we moved in. But the electricity wasn't so first night, and in California, in terms of San Bernardino area, Redlands was by candlelight and so everything was great. I started working there on Monday June the um 15th.

And as I say, Redlands, is a small town uh north side and then there's the south side, you probably have, if you don't have that information from a lot of folks already. That was reality and so we had one brand new duplex on the north side of town. Uh north,

west corner of the town and which was where it was primarily Black and Hispanic and other folks who had less money, lived. Even though the University of Redlands is also on the north side of Redlands.

So I didn't have a car buy a car for over a year was in a carpool. And Helen Robinson is white, doctors who I was in the carpool with were white, my first exposure to Redlands was living in the black, Hispanic community uh with- with But, my life was with folks who were pretty much unknown or, you know, we're not involved in, in the general environment of Redlands, uh where I was and we're resources were available to me, and we're too many of the other folks that was living around. So, my experience in Redlands is a black Redlands and white Redlands at the same time uh a black San Bernardino and an inland empire community and uh uh white experience in San Bernardino inland Empire. Um So, that you asked about you ask the magic question,

Charletha Ringstaff: [00:27:35 → 00:27:43] Mr Coleman, I have a question for you following this you mentioned a little bit before -

John Coleman: (background: wait, wait, wait a minute) I'll try to not be so long winded,

Charletha Ringstaff: [00:27:49→ 00:28:02] you are totally fine you are doing great. Uh, You mentioned before that there was a black and white experience in San Bernardino, did you see racism when you're growing up in the Inland Empire and can you tell us a little bit about that?

John Coleman: [00:28:02→ 00:28:21] Uh, Uh what experience in being?

Charletha Ringstaff: What the experience of being a witness in a racism or description of the community around you?

John Coleman: In San Bernardino?

Charletha Ringstaff: yes yes sir.

John Coleman: [00:28:21→ 00:34:02] Uh, ummm starting off again. Um Patton State Hospital is, is the middle institution, uh, mental institution for that whole area uh east of um Los Angeles. LA had a different couple of institutions. Um so most of my caseload at Patton State Hospital, white. White folks get all the same mental issues, problems that black folks do- in the. So, coming to your question uh, When I was at work I was pretty much involved with white community, but also in communication with the population of employees who were black uh, it is a fraction of the population that we're working there were black, a small fraction. Uh

But I was also living a dual life. All right, let me describe that dual life. It will black psychologists, like psychiatrists, working like uh other personnel and my contact with them were, umm less frequent than my contacts with. You mentioned I'm, you know, I'm driving back and forth about a contact with with other white professionals. I, without

wheels when I was in San Bernardino. I was, you know, my contact with, with black folks in San Bernardino was during the day uh and with white folks it was during the day and, in, in the community because, as I say, the folks I was in the carpool with white, psychiatrists, medical personnel.

So I got to meet some of the black people who work in there in San Bernardino when I had wheels, which took some time built in over time. It took more time for me to get in contact or building with, with with a black community in San Bernardino and not with a white community in San Bernardino to the same extent. But in the white community in San Bernardino, like San Bernardino and in Redlands Redlands is a community where the population now is about 70,000, San Bernardino's was a couple hundred thousand and In a black community and San Bernardino would be over in what is called the uh-- I'm forgetting the word for it. But the area would be, south of baseline concentrated along Highland Avenue, Uh, Highland Avenue, it would have been no the southern know would be the northern Limit in terms of making in terms of can't, you know, census tracts and and population areas and concentrations and what have you. So the black community would have been along Highland Avenue East... No West of Waterman, and north of Highland and east of, no, Eastern limit is more is more diffuse, but we will say, uh um—

When you're my age, there are there times when memory, doesn't work. Mount, Mount Vernon Mount Vernon know you familiar with route 66 or have heard about first route 66 route 66 came right down to and through the area. And when the freeways were built. The Interesting thing that just happened is that my mind was focusing in one way, and I didn't click until your question came in, Charletha. But you guys, you guys know this area.

Charletha Ringstaff: [00:34:05] Yes!

John Coleman: [00:34:17] → The black community there would be. And so route 66 came down through fifth, Fifth Street was a the name for route 66, and the highways from LA would come in and, and, and cut through San Bernardino, right through, where the black community was. And they took out uh along Mount Vernon, which was, which is you, you know, still has a, a vibrant, well maybe not vibrant but a living, Mexican community. Not hotels but restaurants and so on. Whereas, a lot of the business was, you know, downtown San Bernardino was all the business for this whole area. Redlands is seen as the kind of upper income area.

For most black, even when Norton Air Force Base was there, the upper rank of people that lived in Redlands Mexican, uh and and in other Hispanic work concentrated around, uh uh, the railroad, because there were jobs for a lot of people, low income people where the railroads was a major employer for for lower income folk. So, you have pockets that you can identify where the jobs were. Redlands and jobs were for the Hispanic population, we're packing houses were all on the, the Northeast, north east end of the city. And where are the people who, the middle and so called working white were along Texas street between Texas and Cal-- what is it. As you move to the west,

the streets, the names the streets change in Redlands, you have Texas street on on the, the north end of town and west end of town, which becomes Center, as you head. Or Cajon. Uh-- As I say I'm forgetting, some of the stuff... (colton)

Jennifer Tilton: [00:37:11→ 00:37:13] Can we take you back. Sorry

John Coleman: [00:37:16→00: 38:07] Colton Ave and there are several, several blocks between Colton Ave and Redlands Boulevard, which were low income, white and black and Hispanic communities. The community I lived in in Redlands, I'm still living. I was starting to use the census tract kind of thing. I'm living on Frances street but when I first moved here I was living on the corner of Colton, Texas Street and Union, which you can still see the, the, the, the duplex that I lived in which was brand spanking new when my first week in California.

Jennifer Tilton: [00:38:07 → 00:38:34] Can you describe that community a little bit more to us when you moved into that neighborhood that first neighborhood that Texas and that first duplex what was the neighborhood like there in North Redlands, and who did you meet that kind of got you a sense of that community around you.

John Coleman: [00:38:24→ Well, Lugonia street is a major East, North south route I guess it is in town. I'm thinking remembering then that Lugonia is right now a major cross, cross town route to get to the freeway Lugonia was not a major Street. But they put the, the housing track on the corner of Texas and Lugonia where the Housing Authority place more of the so called middle income whites were where is the Tex-housing track corner...

No, I'm sorry, Texas and Brockton, Texas and Brockton is where the black public housing was the goal, and lugo- forgetting the name of the main street that is you run across, whereas you get on a, on the, the South side of town, it becomes, Come on Coleman. Yeah, I'm blocking on the street names at this point, but it's the main drag through the South side of town is is. Cahoun-. No, it's not good. Yeah, I'm blanking on the name for it. So, Yeah, it gets crazy.

However, I mentioned Helen Robinson, Helen Robinson was white. She lived at 534 ? Street, which is again the main, so I had my, my first address in Redlands was clearly on the, on the South side of town. My, that's where my, my wife stayed for that first week that we were here, wife and son stayed And I don't know how, you know, Helen Robinson, a wonderful bunch of wonderful folk that they came to know and became close to during my first years in Redlands, so that and but when my, you know, my wife named Florence Coleman we we ended up getting divorced after about 15 years of living in California. No, 15 years marriage. 13 of That was in California.

When we moved into 1008 Texas into that duplex. My wife took a look across the street and said, "That's a housing project." I never saw a housing project that looked so good. Never saw a housing project that looks so good. And she said [with emphasis], "That's a housing project."

So it was very clear that I was enjoying being in my brand new place they're kind of 1006 Texas, that I was enjoying that and, and she said, "No, that's a housing project," and it was not something that she in the concept of living across the street in the housing project was not as exciting to her. We moved from 1006 Texas to 829 831, I forget which one now. Carlotta Court, which in the history of Redlands, was I believe you mentioned. Bob Burton, Mr. Burton. I believe he had a heavy hand in development of the project or not the project, but the the housing development there for the Lugonia track. And, and then, we moved from there to the, to the, the, the, the housing area where I live right where I'm living right now, which is really on the was the. Both of those are, in fact, on everything on this on the north side of of Texas street was almost, ya know, that's where a lot of the black and Hispanic folk in in Redlands live. And it is the more recent development which is 50, the track I'm in right now I call it now was built in 1955. It has been added onto doubling the size of it, more than doubling the size of it, built, where the edition was in 2007. In fact, I didn't even recognize it, didn't even know that it had been built there because my in and out was typically was on the Texas street side, and other traffic and so on was pretty much grounded.

In fact uh um the Lugonia is still very on the south of Texas street. Most of the Hispanic community in Redlands, the older established expand Hispanic community in Redlands, is, is east of Texas street... Texas Street was a really heavy duty communication. Orange Street is the Main Street that goes. And what's the other end of Orange St as it goes out. I'll remember when I'm not trying to do other stuff.

So that most of my friends there on the in San Bernardino were concentrated over among Baseline between Baseline and Highland and west of west of Waterman. Ummm. There's the area. Ummm It's as you head south on Waterman. There wasn't here that was known as the

Jennifer Tilton: [00:46:22→ 00:46:26] Valley Truck farms. Yeah? Valley truck farms.

John Coleman: [00:46:29 → 00:52:53] Thank you, from Valley truck farms .

A lot of the black people who moved further, further north when San Bernardino built up, they moved from from the south Waterman area over to the, the, the area along Highland Avenue. There was an active entertainment area. I guess that's a good way of putting it along Highland avenue just east of -- Well, east of Mount Vernon, but extended further over. That's where the, the, the bars nightclubs the social recreational area was. But very clearly the message because I have had people state very clearly that black folks in, in, in, in Fontana would be at risk if they were further of uh uh uh south of um of um of fifth street Baseline-

Baseline was at the time the um very fixed barrier in terms of housing opportunities there in San Bernardino. So that the, the world of black folks in San Bernardino and Inland empire, most the entertainment was in San Bernardino or in Fontana.

I remember when we first started, got a car and started running around looking for a house um uh that you drive through Colton, it would be one thing. But if you drove to Rialto you can find folks opening the doors and the kind of you know, It's like there was a warning early warning system so that as you drove through people would know that you're, that there's somebody driving through looking for housing.

And then I can't remember, probably in the middle 60s, when people were started getting housing, through there Rialto, Fontana, and it was, it was, you know, folks considered somewhat risky. But that was when the, the, the white flight began as black folks started getting housing, the message would go out that, uh you know, that uh "Black people are coming here." And so it which worked very great as an economic engine, because the real estate folk would come through in fact, you send some folks to drive through, and then follow up with notices, putting notices on people's doors, encouraging to sell out. And then as they would indicate that they were selling out the real estate folk would come in and and raise the prices of the housing over what it had been when whites were living there. So it was very common and, you know, across the country. But it was so visible in Southern California because it was a instead of being a concentration where people had public transportation on the north, the north east, people were on the streets in San Bernardino Riverside, and so on. So there are pockets going further out, you probably know, when you go out to Banning and Beaumont there are black, small black communities there. But that was later as the people were moving out of San Bernardino different diffusing to other parts of the community.

But people in the LA area typically think of anything of uhhh east of Rancho Cucamonga is wasteland, or they used to. But uh, now it's infiltration just about everywhere. In Riverside, you can see the, the traffic lines in almost any community, you can, uh that there are ways in which you if you're looking to be in a Hispanic community there, there's signs, help you to figure okay here's where we go. San Bernardino, even in Redlands, you know they're not billboard signs, but there's still signs and say okay this is this is more likely that you can get housing here instead of less likely. Fontana was known as area for the Ku Klux Klan that the that they were there was a lot of issues of uh danger uh for black folks and, in, in the Fontana, it was more open than it was in the other areas and around here. But as I say, I run my mouth I talked a little know--

Jennifer Tilton: [00:52:45 → 00:52:53] No, you tell wonderful stories.

John Coleman: [00:52:52→ 00:52:56] You, You Push the button and stuff grows out.

Jennifer Tilton: [00:52:56 → 00:53:31] You tell wonderful stories. We appreciate it. I actually wanted you to talk a little bit more you mentioned Robert Burton, and you mentioned your own kind of search for housing as part of this story but I wondered if you could tell us how you first met Robert Burton, and what some of your memories about him are

John Coleman: [00:53:31 → 00:1:08:08] I think of Bob Burton as the hero of the area, and I really haven't validated that with, with others in the community. My initial contact with the, the real estate community in the area was white, uh ummm Van Weiren brothers were the ones who built the, the, the place where uh you know the the duplexes right there on corner Texas and and Union Street. Van Weirens, There's a Dutch Reform Church uh, Right there, right near the University of Redlands on Center Street. Is it center? Well, right and so it's a community, the churches there, people living right there near the church, uh and, and,uh, and--

But when Van Weiren was Dutch. It will couple of other the Dutch called. The man who drove me all around Redlands and basically as he told me I can sell you the city but I can't show you a house, was Dutch. Apparently the Van Weirens were not favorites of some other folks in the white community. And everybody was talking about how bad the Dutch were in South Africa. But here in Redlands, the Dutch were not primarily motivated in terms of their white uh, um,uh, umm identity. They operated make make things available, more generally than others did. Okay, got on my ok.

Bob Burton, Mr. Burton. I was living over on Carlotta court. And I had some, some contact with him earlier but I really, because I was looking for, for housing, but not really, I wasn't pushing for that. As I say, my wife was was less comfortable than I was. Don't run run around boasting that but that, I think that's reality. Uh, So, we did not stay long with the housing project across the street. However, black folks in Redlands didn't have a whole lot of choices too far away from for for that in terms of real estate. So we move from being across from the housing authority on Texas three, and then moved into across from the Housing Authority, out on Brockton street because the project here on Carlotta court joining the project on the other side. And so we were renting. Burton came by one Sunday, and said you kids really should be, you know, we know he, you know, he basically said, let me show you some other other options that you have um. And in that would have been 19- - the late. Okay ummm 1960s. Okay. Norton Air Force Base was close to being being closed.

My belief, unsubstantiated by trying to do any real research and so on. My belief is that some of the extensions of the community for more middle class kind of folk were being because the military brought folk in, who were not getting getting housing, you know, on the South side of town and in the military probably ended up saying well we got to do something to help folks, so that there was, Carlotta was built, and a good percentage of the folks who live in Carlotta court were military. I was down at the lower corner where.... Carlotta Court is a U shape. So that house that I had on Carlotta court was where you came in on what would be the, from Texas street. I would be on the corner, the U shape, which would have been the northwest corner of Carlotta court. He came by and said, Look, uh you kids need to take a look at other possibilities. I was not particularly motivated, my wife was probably a little more motivated. So we took the drive. He said I'll drive you over. Okay. Remember I didn't have a car.

So the Base was closing. A lot of the people who, who came out here to work for the military had either, if they wanted to have a job they had to follow the military, because

the jobs were not available locally. Job opportunities were very limited. So that uh um So, Burton took us over and I, because I hadn't been over there, I was unaware that there were a number of vacancies there, over there along Frances street uh lu- Lugonia. We came up, you're going uh street- up north from there North West from there. It's a small, compact area and there were about five or six houses that were empty. People had to follow their jobs, and they was paying paying their, their mortgages, and whatever housing costs into places where they could work, and where they used to be able to live. But they the jobs were now move back and military really loves being in South, uh for whatever I don't try to make judgments on other people's values and behaviors. That's not necessarily true, but I pretend that try to be fair.

So he was showing us all these houses, and we drove back home, like we had had an afternoon of entertainment. And we're sitting again at the table eating the telephone rang, and somebody who was living there on Frances street called and said, "Coleman. You were just over here looking at houses, we want to sell you our house." He was in a house that was still occupied, but he was he was a teacher from Riverside. Number of the folks who lived move down to the tract where I'm where I'm living the housing area where I'm living were teachers from Riverside, and there was better housing in Redlands available in that track, then was available in Riverside. And then, Riverside opened up over a area, which was better, more expensive and had more amenities and so on, and so he wanted to join his friends in Riverside and so he was offering his house, his family's offering his house in Redlands. And he said, "Well, I'll pick you up and bring it over and take it and show you our house." And, but they were, they were again about five or six other houses available, and I wasn't interested was not interested in any of them because I was still getting settled I've done some interesting things in terms of where I was living in terms of modifying the place and what have you. But my wife again it's a little bit more motivated than I was than I was and so we ended up buying the house from the Allens there in Redlands, and it just blew me away that I could pay, I can pay the mortgage and everything all my other costs there for housing here in Redlands, in that facility in that particular house, that, uh you know, people would you have rents were about as high as my mortgage cost was so, we bought a house there, 1334 Frances street in Redlands, and I went to work on trying to modify and do what I could to make that compatible for me and my value system.

So, Bob Burton. If I had any good sense or had any money, I was struggling to stick California. Well, okay. You didn't say much about Patton State Hospital, or any of that. But most folks who wanted that California was recruiting all around the country. They wanted to go to the main, you know they wanted to go to Los Angeles and San Diego or Santa Barbara or all the coastline places and Patton State Hospital was in a hard to employ area. So they were paying 5% more to work at Patton than at the other other state hospitals across the state. So, that helped motivate me, but it still was \$105 a month-- Rest of the state was \$95 a month for for my for my beginning pay level prices were not very high.

So that, I mentioned that it's kinda as an aside, but um the issues always came down to where you lived and where you could work. And in some cases where you could live

instead of where, you know, housing was not available. Or if you move there, it was risky to do that. So, but, Bob Burton, he basically was from my point of view, a major figure in terms of providing housing resources for folks. All those houses on Bellevue, on Francis Street, it took a while for those houses to sell because people didn't have to pay to move.

And they all, I mean it all built up and it became a nice little community and what I mean community where people interact. And over on Carlotta court. One of my neighbors, periodically, he would arrange a, a fishing trip, and a bunch of us would pack up and go and spend a day fishing with with your neighbors so we had sense of community in the in these places on Carlotta court, on Bellevue, my next door neighbor, he organized a a Boy Scout troop. So that you, when you're in one of these places, there was efforts to build a sense of community in these places that were not necessarily available, almost anywhere else in the community, because you would not be in a community where there was a significant number of people who shared with you, where you had shared interest. So that's part of I don't know if I answered your question?

Jennifer Tilton: [1:08:09 → 1:08:38] you did and we want to hear so many more stories but actually, we're gonna have to end for today, because your friend, Henry Hooks is supposed to get interviewed in 10 minutes.

End of Interview:

[01:08:39]