4-28-2016

Terrance McMillan

Wilmer Amina Carter Foundation

Bridges That Carried Us Over Project

Interview Summary

Interviewee:
Terrance McMillan

Interviewer:
Stefanie Crump

Interview Date:
April 28, 2016

Interview Location:
Rialto, CA

Length:
00:23:47

Interview Summary completed by:
M. Camacho Nuno, 2024

Description:
Stefanie Crump interviews Terrance McMillan for the Archiving Black History in the Inland Empire Project. McMillan explains that he used to be a parole agent for incarcerated youth and, at the time of the video, had retired and gone into the real estate business. He is an educated man, going to many schools in his youth and multiple colleges. While working as a parole agent he spent eight years in the SELF program. There, he and others helped young African American boys stay away from violence and gangs through support and positive mentors. McMillan, along with the help of his wife and his sister-in-law, created the Bakari Rites of Passage Program. After two years, the program stopped and McMillan expects to get around to restarting it again. The interviewee then speaks about the study the University of Michigan did from the years 1950 to 1983. It was a study that went over what influenced youth and he noticed that school started to become less and less of an influence while peers rose. McMillan sees the need to teach the youth education as well as trade. That way, the youth will have skills that will make it easier to land a job or career. The interview ends with McMillan advising future mentors. That being for the future mentors to be committed and learn about Black culture, see the positive contributions, and help others.

Subject Topic:
- Archiving Black History in the Inland Empire Project
- Parole Agent
- Incarceration
- Real estate
- Juvenile Detention
- Crime
- Gangs
- Community Change
- Supportive Programs
- School/College

- Trade/Training
- Advice

Spatial Coverage:

Name of Site (if relevant)	General Location/Address
Youth Training School	Chino, CA (Defunct Location)
McKinley Elementary School	7812 McKinley Ave, Los Angeles, CA 90001
Vanguard Junior High School	13305 San Pedro St, Los Angeles, CA 90061
Verbum Dei High School	11100 S Central Ave, Los Angeles, CA 90059
San Diego State University	5500 Campanile Dr, San Diego, CA 92182
California State Polytechnic University, Pomona	3801 W Temple Ave, Pomona, CA 91768
Azusa Pacific University	901 E Alosta Ave, Azusa, CA 91702
African American Musuem	600 State Dr, Los Angeles, CA 90037

Temporal Coverage:
1950 - 2016

Key Events:
- McMillan retired as a parole agent in 2015 and then worked as a real estate agent.
- The multiple schools and colleges that McMillan attended.
- The SELF program is a program that pushes African American boys and teenagers to do better in incarceration with positive role models.
- McMillan created the Bakari Rites of Passage Program and created a positive influence on African American boys.
- The multi-year study from the University of Michigan showed results of change regarding influence in youth.
- Education on trade and economic matters that is needs to be taught to the youth.
- Advice to future mentors and the need to help others for equality and success.

Key Organizations:
- The Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation
- Bakari Rites of Passage Program
- SELF Program
- Konomi House Drug Program
- The San Bernardino Probation Department

Interview Index:

Media Format	Time (hh:mm:ss)	Topic Discussed
Digital Video	00:01:20 - 00:02:29	Terrance McMillan explains his background as a parole agent and his current work.
Digital Video	00:03:38 - 00:06:38	McMillan explains the SELF program.
Digital Video	00:06:42 - 00:14:45	McMillan explains the Bakari Rites of Passage Program and its goals.
Digital Video	00:15:05 - 00:20:02	The University of Michigan study and McMillan's thoughts on it.
Digital Video	00:20:43 - 00:23:23	Advice to the next generation of mentors from McMillan.

Related Materials
Additional oral history interviews are available from the Bridges That Carried Us Over Project at CSUSB, https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/bridges/

Full interview transcript can be found below.

Start of Interview:
[00:00:00]

F1: (laughs) Go faster.

STEFANIE CRUMP: Thank you.

F1: That one [goes around?] to -- okay, thank you.

STEFANIE CRUMP: All right, today's date is April 28, 2016. My name is Stefanie Crump, and I am interviewing Terrance McMillan for the Archiving Black History in the Inland Empire Project. His name is spelled -- first name?

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: Terrance McMillan, T-E-R-R-A-N-C-E.

STEFANIE CRUMP: And last?

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: McMillan, M-C-M-I-L-L-A-N.

STEFANIE CRUMP: Thank you.

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: You're welcome.

STEFANIE CRUMP: We are interviewing here at the home of Wilmer Amina [00:01:00] Carter in Rialto, California. Thank you, Terrance, for taking the time to conduct this interview with us.

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: You're welcome.

STEFANIE CRUMP: Okay. So we asked you here today to talk about the Bakari Rites of Passage Program you started in 1995 and also speak a little about your experience with SELF, a mentoring program founded by Jeff Hill. But before we talk about those programs, could you tell us a little bit about yourself?

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: Okay. I'm Terrance McMillan. I'm a retired parole agent from the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. I worked as a parole agent for a little less than 20 years, and I worked inside the institution -- the Youth Training School in Chino, an institution that incarcerated males from the ages of 17

and 25. And I worked on a formalized drug program called the [Konomi?] House Drug Program for eight years. I'm [00:02:00] currently retired. I retired from a parole agent in -- November 20, 2015, couple of months ago, and now I'm a full-time realtor -- real estate agent selling real estate here in the Inland Empire, High Desert; basically, all of Southern California. And I work for Century 21 beachside in Rancho Cucamonga.

STEFANIE CRUMP: Okay. Were you born around here?

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: I was born in Compton, California, and I moved to the Inland Empire in 1986.

STEFANIE CRUMP: Nineteen eighty-six, okay.

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: And I've lived here ever since.

STEFANIE CRUMP: So then all of the schools that you attended for the most part were out in LA?

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: Yes, I attended McKinley Elementary School, and then I attended Vanguard Junior High School seventh and eighth grade. And I attended high school at Verbum Dei [00:03:00] High School in Watts, and I started there in 1979 and graduated in 1983. And after graduating from Verbum Dei in 1983, I went on to San Diego State University. In 1984 -- I left San Diego State in 1984, and then I went to Cal Poly Pomona for two years, and ultimately, I finished at Azusa Pacific in 1988 with a degree in political science.

STEFANIE CRUMP: Nice. Okay, thank you. Okay, so first off, how did you become involved with the SELF program?

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: I seen an article in the paper that Jeff Hill had started a mentoring program for African American boys between the ages of eight and 17, I believe it was. And I wanted to be involved in my community on a [00:04:00] preventive level instead of dealing with the youth like in youth authority after they

had become incarcerated and trying to rehabilitate them. I felt there was a need to help in the community to prevent them from doing things to get them incarcerated. So when I read the article, I made contact with Jeff Hill and went through the training, and became a mentor in the SELF program that was designed to help African American boys basically stay away from gangs, drugs, and be around positive role models in the community to help them in their path to do right. And we had a lot of police officers, sheriff deputies, law enforcement officers in general mentoring the young boys.

STEFANIE CRUMP: Okay. Do you remember what year that was?

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: That was around 1992.

STEFANIE CRUMP: Oh, okay. All right, so Jeff Hill's program started around '92 or a little [00:05:00] earlier?

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: It may have started -- I think I became involved at -- around 1992. It may have started around a year earlier in 1991, and then I think unfortunately, Jeff passed in 1995, I believe it was. Around '94, '95, he was killed in a car accident on his way to work. Sad, sad day. Still remember it like yesterday.

STEFANIE CRUMP: Oh, okay. You've already touched on it, but I'm going to ask it again. I'm trying to figure out the best way to answer -- or ask this question, but just speaking as a sheriff's deputy, as well as a member of the community, could you tell us what the environment was like, what was going on in the community at the time that would warrant a program like SELF?

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: Oh, you're talking about, during that time, a lot of Black on Black crime, a lot of young African American boys joining gangs. You're talking about the time around the Rodney King incident where the climate in the African American [00:06:00] community was just -- it almost reached its peak in terms of crime and killings and drug dealing, and all of those different things were taking

place. And we knew at that time that we had to give our kids an opportunity to have a alternative to be able to do something different in lieu of going down the same highway that we'd seen -- that was causing such a destruction in our community. And we felt that it was a need, and it was an obligation, and it was our duty to step up as Black men in our community to help make a change.

STEFANIE CRUMP: Mm-hmm, okay, thank you. Okay, so you worked with SELF for a couple years, but at some point, you left SELF, and you created your own program. So could you tell me more about the Bakari Rites of Passage Program?

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: Yes. The Bakari Rites of Passage Program -- and bakari means, "A noble promise," meaning that we wanted to give our [00:07:00] youth an opportunity to have a -- to make a promise and a commitment to do right and make a change in their community. And our program is based on the seven principles of Kwanzaa, which was created by Dr. Maulana Karenga. And those particular principles -- and I don't know them offhand right now, but those principles -- what we wanted our youth to do is to practice those principles and not only practice them, but learn about individuals in Africa. Say, for example, the principle of Umoja, which is unity. We showed how a great leader in Africa practiced unity, and then we showed how a great Black leader in America practiced unity. And that was the main crux of our teachings and our learning sessions is that we showed how those principles were practiced, not only here in Africa -- in America, but also in Africa. And so we went through each principle [00:08:00] and showed how those principles were practiced and how it related to our youth as they lived here in America, and so they had something to grasp at, something to focus on other than the negative things that they were seeing every day in their community.

STEFANIE CRUMP: Right. So how was this program structured?

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: We had myself -- I was the executive director, and then we had a board which was -- consisted of my wife and my -- it was [Shauna?] Wilson and her sister, Cheryl Wilson. And then we had mentors who volunteered their time, who stepped up to the plate, who wanted to be involved in their community, and they were our -- not only mentors. They were what -- we called them [malanas?], which was -- which means, "Master teachers," and so they were part of the core of individuals who taught our youth on a weekly basis.

STEFANIE CRUMP: Okay. And for how many weeks?

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: We -- our program was for 18 [00:09:00] weeks. We practiced the -- we used those principles. One week, we may focus on Umoja in Africa. The next week, we may focus on Umoja and how it's practiced in America. And then we went through those seven principles, and then we took the -- our young boys on field trips to learn about -- to the African American Museum where they actually had a opportunity to go out and see and learn some of the things that their ancestors had accomplished. And it was at the museum in Los Angeles.

STEFANIE CRUMP: Yeah, I remember that. Yeah, okay. So wow, how did you get the funding for that to take them places, to do all of -- was this just you and your wife and whoever you'd get to pay for it?

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: My wife and I, and we had some people who donated money. And we had a small fee just to join the program; I think it may have been 50 bucks. And one of the great things that we -- that happened to us which was -- [00:10:00] one of the probation officers and -- I can't recall his name right now -- from the county of San Bernardino actually had seen an article on our program. And he felt that there was a need with his agency in terms of maybe referring kids to our program, and so what happened -- matter of fact, his name is Dan Ochoa. I can remember his name now. The San Bernardino Probation Department actually

allowed us to use their classrooms. They paid for our field trips, they let us use their vans, they allowed us to use -- like I said, use their classrooms, and they referred kids to our program. And the good thing about it is that if a kid was on probation, depending on what they were on probation for, if they completed our 18-week program and graduated from it, they could show that to the judge. [00:11:00] And the judge, in many cases, would mitigate the sentence that they received from putting them on probation, so we had one kid in particular who actually had the crime -- I think it was burglary -- totally erased from his record because he had completed our program.

STEFANIE CRUMP: Wow. Oh, that's wonderful. So were all the kids that were participating in this program on probation or just -- it just happened --

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: We --

STEFANIE CRUMP: -- that that's how that worked?

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: It happened -- it was a mixture. It was basically kids who had joined the program based on knowing what we were doing in the community and kind of came to us. We didn't have to advertise or anything. People had word of mouth, and then once the article came out in December of -- what year was that? December of 1995, and the probation department -- Probation Officer Dan Ochoa had seen the article and got in contact with me, then at that [00:12:00] point, the San Bernardino County Probation Department started referring kids to us and putting them in our program.

STEFANIE CRUMP: Right. But aside from the kids that were on probation, I would imagine that you had a lot of mothers or a lot of parents that were reaching out to you initially and --

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: Yes, a lot of parents was reaching out to us. We ended up -- at some point, had about 70, 80 young boys in our program.

STEFANIE CRUMP: Wow. Oh, my God. So did you have active parent participation, some people wanting to be mentors?

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: Yes, we had some parents who would stop forward, males in particular, and we trained them and gave them the appropriate training to become mentors. So they'd end up not only being a parent with a child in the program. They decided they wanted to be a mentor and involve themself in that capacity.

STEFANIE CRUMP: All right. So how did this -- how long did this program last?

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: It was -- we -- the program [00:13:00] lasted approximately maybe two years, and we had a great impact in the community during that time.

STEFANIE CRUMP: Right. So after two years, may I ask what -- because you had all of this great response from the community. You had people who were willing to step up, offer classrooms, all of that, so after two years...

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: Yeah. A lot of times when you're dealing with community-based programs, people stand up, but the question is can they stay up? (laughter) And sometimes after a while, it becomes difficult staying up, as Dr. Maulana Karenga would always say. And me being the executive director, I found myself not only being one who was overseeing the program, but I also found myself being the individual who was going by, picking up the boys, and bringing them to the sessions. And that [00:14:00] became very difficult. And then my son was growing in age and becoming involved in sports and things like that, so I kind of had to make a decision. Do I neglect my son -- who came around, but he was so young. But at that time, he started playing t-ball, and I started coaching with him. And I always had it in the back of my mind that I was going to just put it off for a

short period of time and eventually get the program going again, but it just never seemed to happen. But we still have thoughts -- my wife and I actually was talking about it not too long ago -- of probably coming back and starting the program again because it's so needed in our community --

STEFANIE CRUMP: It is so necessary.

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: -- nowadays, more so than any other time.

STEFANIE CRUMP: Yeah, thank you. Wow, so you mentioned that at the time, your son was a little too young to participate. What was the age range for the students that were participating in your program?

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: Our program -- the ages was 13 to [00:15:00] 18.

STEFANIE CRUMP: Wow. Okay, so that age where they need that guidance, they need that...

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: Right, because you're looking -- when you talk about that age group -- let's say 13, 14, 15 years old -- the University of Michigan did a study in 1950 to see which institution had the most influence on our youth. And in 1950, home was number one, church was number two, school was number three, television was number four, and peers was number five. That was in 1950. The University of Michigan turned it around in 1980 -- did that same study to see which institution had the most influence over our youth. And in 1980, home was number one, peers was number two, television was number three, church was number four, and I can't remember what was number five at that [00:16:00] time in 1980.

STEFANIE CRUMP: Barely school.

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: Barely school. Nineteen eighty-three, they did that same study.

STEFANIE CRUMP: Three years later.

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: Three years later. Peers was number one; television, number two; home was number three, school was number four, church was number five. So looking at the dynamics of that study and knowing that the peers had the most influence over our youth at that time --

STEFANIE CRUMP: At that time.

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: And most peer influence, in most cases, is not usually positive influence, so we felt as a community, as men -- Black men in the community, in order to curtail that problem and to give the youth alternatives to being negatively influenced by their peers -- then we looked at the African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child." And so we decided at that point we were going to be that village, and [00:17:00] we were going to help raise the children and give them positive alternatives in lieu of the negative influence that they were having at that time.

STEFANIE CRUMP: Wow, thank you. That's wonderful.

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: You're welcome.

STEFANIE CRUMP: I want to go back to that 1983 because my feeling is -- when you were talking about that is that it hasn't changed. That ranking is exactly the same. It's the peers --

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: Clearly, it's worse.

STEFANIE CRUMP: -- followed by television, followed -- whatever. Yeah, so okay. So you are planning -- thinking about maybe kicking this up again and doing it?

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: Yes, and if we do it, it's not only going to have a historical -- it's not going to just be from a historical standpoint in terms of teaching our youth about their history and about their culture. But we also have to implement a economic component of it also because as much as they know about their history,

as much as they know about their culture, they still need to be able to have some skills to become employable. And not only becoming an employable [00:18:00] employee, but we want to teach them about ownership.

STEFANIE CRUMP: Right, how to be --

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: Owning and controlling --

STEFANIE CRUMP: -- their own contributors, yes.

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: Yes, owning and controlling their own business. And it may have to be -- everybody can't go to USC, but -- and get a degree in business or finance or whatever it may be, or become an attorney. But we may need to learn them -- teach them how to go back and learn a trade, become a plumber, be some -- become a craftman [*sic*] or a carpenter or something like that because those jobs and those skills are something that's always in demand.

STEFANIE CRUMP: Yes, most definitely, and it pays --

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: It pays.

STEFANIE CRUMP: -- real money. It's real money. (laughs)

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: Real money, exactly, so that's one thing we would have to add to it if -- there would have to be an economic component to it also.

STEFANIE CRUMP: So then you would be thinking about working with schools, local schools, something that would --

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: Yes, exactly.

STEFANIE CRUMP: All right. I can see you're still kind of hashing it out, still working [00:19:00] through it, right?

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: Yes.

STEFANIE CRUMP: (laughs) But that's good. I'm looking forward to that and --

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: And it won't be just confined here to California. You look at cities like Detroit, Michigan where you can purchase a home for 10 to 15,000 dollars, and those homes, a lot of time, need work.

STEFANIE CRUMP: They do.

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: So we can maybe -- you just never know. You can start a component -- start a program out in a city like Detroit or in Ohio or somewhere where you can get your homes cheap and teach the youth how to become an electrician or a plumber, someone who can paint and put up drywall, and start rebuilding some of these homes that need a lot of work and turn around and sell them for a profit. Yeah, those are the things we have to start looking at.

STEFANIE CRUMP: And they help rebuild community in the process.

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: Yes, to give them something to do positive, and then they'll respect it more because they know that [00:20:00] they had a hand in making it better.

STEFANIE CRUMP: Yes, most definitely. Wow, okay. So going back to your organization and the SELF organization, do you see any other organizations or programs like that now in existence?

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: No.

STEFANIE CRUMP: None at all?

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: No.

STEFANIE CRUMP: So there isn't any --

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: They had one in Pomona years ago called SIMBA and -- I only think SIMBA, and that meant Safety in My Brother's Arms. And I don't even think that program -- no, matter of fact, I know for a fact it doesn't exist anymore, and programs like the Bakari program, the SELF program, and SIMBA program are so needed in our community nowadays.

STEFANIE CRUMP: Right. So final question: as a mentor, what advice would you give the next generation of mentors, perhaps someone who participated in one of your programs?

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: I would tell them to [00:21:00] be committed. They first need to learn about their history and their culture, and learn about the greatness of their culture and the contributions that African Americans and Black people in general made to the advancement of this society. And look at the positive things that we've done and don't focus on the negative. I would tell them to not only be more concerned about themselves because we're living in a society where it's about me, myself, and I. We have to be committed to not only ourselves, but we need to learn about and be able to help others, to be of service to others. And who are more in need now (laughs) than any other time than African American boys? You look in cities [00:22:00] like Chicago; you look in cities like Baltimore, Maryland; you look at cities like Detroit, Michigan where these young Black boys have no hope and no future. And so they almost are on survival mode, go out to commit crimes, and sell drugs, and so on and so forth. So I would teach and tell the mentors now that we have to be of service. We can't be concerned -- we can't be so concerned about ourselves. We have to help pass the torch to others and help them like our ancestors did. Fannie Lou Hamer, who self-sacrificed -- lived a life of self-sacrifice; Malcolm X, Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King -- these people was about service, and they were willing to sacrifice their lives in order that others were able to live a life of enjoyment and [00:23:00] freedom and justice and equality. And so that's what I would tell them now. It's to not only be concerned about themselves, but -- Bo Jackson said, "Once a person reaches the pinnacle of success, it's nothing left for them to do other than to help someone else," and that's how I look at things.

And that's what I would tell the future mentors if we were to start another program like that.

STEFANIE CRUMP: Wow, thank you.

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: You're welcome.

STEFANIE CRUMP: Well, all right, Terrance McMillan, thank you so much for this interview.

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: You're welcome.

STEFANIE CRUMP: You were awesome, and I hope that someone sees this, hears this -- hears those words, and picks up the mantle because that's awesome. (laughs) Thank you.

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: I appreciate you having me.

STEFANIE CRUMP: All right, thank you.

TERRANCE MCMILLAN: Thanks a lot.

End of Interview:
[00:23:47]