

**June 10, 2004**

**Oral History Interview:**

**Harreld Adams  
Retired, Executive Director  
Los Angeles Homeless Service Authority**

**Stephanie Klopfleisch, Interviewer**

ADAMS: My name is Harreld Adams and I live in Los Angeles, California.

KLOPFLEISCH: Harreld, how did it happen that you entered the human services field as a career?

ADAMS: Well, it is a long, kind of winding path to what I ultimately ended-up getting into. The early part of my life I wanted to be a professional musician. I got an undergraduate degree in music. I made a decision after I graduated from college; however, to change my pursuit from music because my interest got very narrowed just concert accompanying singers. I did some professional work but I felt I could not make a living at that, partly because I got married and I had a child. So I decided to switch to academia. I had my undergraduate degree at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. I moved my family to California and got my Masters and Doctorate from UCLA in Political Science with a major in African Studies. While there I kind of decided that academia was a little too confining for me. I was fairly successful at it. I published as a graduate student, which is quite an achievement. However, I thought that I wanted to pursue something involving more in actual life rather than academia.

KLOPFLEISCH: What year was this now?

ADAMS: I went to UCLA from 1963 to 1967 and so after getting my degree I decided to pursue other avenues. I had two options at one point. This points out how accidental I can be. You really can't predict it. I was a finalist for the Neilson rating establishment of a regional center in Los Angeles. I was one of the two finalists for that. I, in fact, went back to New York for an interview. My competitor was a fellow who had been involved in radio marketing. So, in the final analysis they decided to pick a guy with a marketing background rather than someone with a research background. He got that job. What I ended up doing was being the first African American to enter the county CAO system by exam. That was in 1967. That started my career in public service. For a brief time I worked for Lockheed California's company as a public affairs representative, working in the community. Eventually I left that and went to run the non-profit corporation established in South Central Los Angeles called the Economic Resources Corporation, which was an economic development administration program establishing job-creation and economic development for South Central Los Angeles.

KLOPFLEISCH: Was that a private non-profit organization?

ADAMS: It was a private non-profit organization with a private Board. I was the director there for a couple years. I left there and became the Assistant City Manager for the City of Compton where I stayed several years.

KLOPFLEISCH: What year was that?

ADAMS: 1971, I believe. I was there when Compton started to change politically. When I first went there it was kind of an exciting job to have because Compton was one of those all-American cities with a great mix of economic and racial classes.

KLOPFLEISCH: Yes.

ADAMS: Then along came the Watts riots and there was a lot of White and middle-class Black flight. A lot of movement of lower-class Blacks and Latinos into Compton. And the politics changed. It kind of reflected that. It became an unpleasant place to work. So I left. And initially I went back to Washington D.C. as an Executive Assistant to Assistant Secretary of HUD during the Ford years. I stayed there for a while, but I missed Los Angeles and I missed my kids so I came back here and started working for the City of Los Angeles.

KLOPFLEISCH: Pardon me, Harreld. You worked in HUD and what specifically, which housing organization?

ADAMS: Equal Opportunity. I was the Executive Assistant to the Assistant Secretary of HUD. There are a number of special assistants, but one exec. And I was her's, Dr. Gloria Eatut. I worked for her as her exec. for a while until I decided I needed to come back to L.A.

KLOPFLEISCH: Great.

ADAMS: When I came back to Los Angeles I initially was hired into the mayor's office to run the Model Cities Program.

KLOPFLEISCH: Who was the mayor then?

ADAMS: Tom Bradley. I had had prior experience in Compton running the Model Cities Program. So my job initially was in the mayor's office and I had the enviable situation of having to close down the Model Cities Program because it was switching to the Community Development Block Grant Program. That was a rather trying time.

KLOPFLEISCH: Why was it trying?

ADAMS: Well, because politically the idea of trying to close down a program that involves participation and the network of community organizations that had been accustomed for a number of years of receiving monies in their community.

KLOPFLEISCH: Oh, and their under contract.

ADAMS: Right and there was a particular councilman at the time. A councilman by the name of Bob Farrell who strongly believed in community participation. All of his pleas were directed at me because I was in the person in charge with the responsibility of closing the program down. I remember one specific example in which during the budget season he made a motion to write me out of the city budget.

KLOPFLEISCH: (Laughs)

ADAMS: And he got a second and it passed. (Laughs)

KLOPFLEISCH: That must have been awful.

ADAMS: It was awful and I wondered why would all these people like Joel Wachs and John Ferraro would support it. An alleged friend of mine Dave Cunningham seconded the motion. So I went around and asked everybody and they had no particular reason for doing it. They just thought Bob needed this. They knew nothing about me. In fact, Ferraro confused me with someone else who had been a previous Director of Model Cities who had actually run against Bob Farrell. It was resolved because Councilman Gilbert Lindsay wasn't sold. He introduced a motion to reverse it so that was kind of a trying time.

KLOPFLEISCH: What year was that?

ADAMS: Gosh, when was that. That must have been sometime around 1974 or 1975.

KLOPFLEISCH: And the Model Cities Program at that time would incorporate what kinds of things?

ADAMS: It was a program that concentrated federal resources and other resources into specific neighborhoods. Like in the case of the city of Los Angeles there were two neighborhoods. There was the greater Watts neighborhood and the greater Northeast neighborhood. Two Model Cities areas. And there was an annual grant from HUD, which was used to help improve those two communities through social service programs, economic development programs, and housing programs. That's what the Model Cities Program was all about.

KLOPFLEISCH: That was phasing-out the Community Services Block Grants?

ADAMS: Well, it was the Community Development Block Grants.

KLOPFLEISCH: Excuse me, the Community Development Block Grants?

ADAMS: It combined all of housing and social services together and the grant we have even today. The 15% that's current law for social services and Community Development Block Grant Program came from the historical Model Cities Program, which was basically a social services program,

KLOPFLEISCH: Were the funding amounts roughly comparable when they began to phase in the Community Development Block Grants?

ADAMS: No, which is what usually happens when they combine programs. In this case they combined the Model Cities programs, the neighborhood facilities programs, sewer grant programs into one Block Grant program during the Nixon years. The amount of money for each of these programs combined became less, which is usually the way government works.

KLOPFLEISCH: Yes. Did you then go ahead and start implementing the Community Development Block Grants?

ADAMS: Actually what happened after we closed the program down, one of the positive results of the Model Cities Program, is that each municipality that had the program had what they call a public improvement. Not public improvement but public employment program. PEP.

KLOPFLEISCH: PEP.

ADAMS: So the Model Cities Program became the Community Development Agency of the City of Los Angeles. The same thing happened with the SITA grant, which became a city department. And as a result of that I became the first African American General Manager in the City of Los Angeles' history in 1976.

KLOPFLEISCH: That was a real honor.

ADAMS: Thank you.

KLOPFLEISCH: Who was your staff at that time, city employees or contract employees?

ADAMS: When we became a city department in 1976, all the employees who had come into the Model Cities Program through the community were folded into the city service system.

KLOPFLEISCH: Really? Without competition?

ADAMS: Without competition, through a charter amendment. That was a requirement that the federal government put on the city. All the people who are now... many of them have retired like me, but the early days of the Community Development Department and the job training program were all community residents, all young professionals who had gone to graduate school and had worked in the community before they came into city services.

KLOPFLEISCH: So that was a relatively smooth transition?

ADAMS: Yes. It was very smooth.

KLOPFLEISCH: When you started implementing the Community Development Block Grant what were the major thrusts that the city was interested in with that program?

ADAMS: I think initially there was kind of a bureaucratic war going on between the various factions to try and dominate the grant in their favor. Of course, me coming from a social services background at that point primarily I was interested in trying to maintain the size of the old Model Cities program and the Community Development Department. There was a new thrust into affordable housing through the mayor's office. And a lady who subsequently became the State Controller, Kathleen Connelly, came on the staff and kind of led the movement for affordable housing. And we all got into one big city department called the Community Development Department at time. The first General Manager was a fellow by the name of Jerome Miller who came out of a labor background, a labor training background. I was one of the Assistant City Managers and his assistant, a fellow by the name of Steve Porter became the other Assistant City Manager.

KLOPFLEISCH: Okay.

ADAMS: So Gary Miller was the initial General Manager. Steve and I were the two Assistant General Managers and I handled the part dealing with housing and social services. Kathleen was head of housing beneath me and Parker Anderson worked for the social services programs as well as a number of people you don't know.

KLOPFLEISCH: Yes. Harreld, can you explain a little bit, the complexities of trying to develop programs under the city government structure?

ADAMS: In the case of the City of Los Angeles.

KLOPFLEISCH: Outsiders have always thought it was difficult.

ADAMS: I like to compare the relative ease of the County of Los Angeles with that of the City of Los Angeles. Because in the County of Los Angeles, as an overview because I don't want to get into great detail. The stream of power is more direct and clear-cut from the supervisors down to the operating departments. In the case of the City of Los Angeles; however, you have 15 council-people who really run the city, but you work for a mayor who is the executive but does not have as much power as the individual supervisors. And they work through a committee system. Those councilmen in the city are all full-time politicians with their own staff. In order to get anything done you have to go through the staff of individual council-people and through committees.

KLOPFLEISCH: Through the 15 offices?

ADAMS: Often. And then through the full council and then hopefully the mayor goes along with it. It's a much more Byzantine structure. You also have two bureaucracies that compete similar to the federal government. You know you have the GAO and the Office of Congressional Budget. In the city, you have the CAO (Chief Administrative Office) that works with the mayor. And you have the... I'm blocking on the name right now.

KLOPFLEISCH: The legislative--

ADAMS: The legislative analyst's office with the council. So it is a much more complicated process and involves the bureaucracies and executives of these various city departments that spend a great deal of time in a kind of non-administrative function.

KLOPFLEISCH: Yes.

ADAMS: Meeting with council people, etc.

KLOPFLEISCH: You must have had to develop a very sensitive political antenna to maneuver there?

ADAMS: Well, if you were successful, you had to be. Or you had to be extremely combative. I tended to be of the latter nature in which sometimes it worked to my disadvantage. I learned over the years to be a little more diplomatic. I often clashed with the offices. But in the long run it didn't work to my disadvantage. I mean, I was not unreasonable in my approach. But there are kind of two approaches to following that system. You either cave-in... no if you cave-in they lose respect for you. A lot of executives make that mistake in the city system which is always doing what the politician wants. You end-up with a "what have you done for me lately?" mentality.

KLOPFLEISCH: Yes.

ADAMS: Where you either have to learn how to maneuver your way in a diplomatic way or you have to bull ahead. And I tended to be a mixture of those two approaches.

KLOPFLEISCH: Did the city council people in the city change frequently and did you have to constantly keep re-educating people about your program?

ADAMS: In the early days you didn't because they didn't have term-limits. But when Richard Riordan became the Mayor he came in on a kind of populist approach to government. He chartered also the term limits, etc. Then you started getting change. Fortunately I missed most of that because I retired in the early days of the Riordan administration.

KLOPFLEISCH: When did you retire?

ADAMS: I retired from the city, I believe in 1996. Yes but when I retired... part of the reason I retired is because the Los Angeles Homeless Service Authority was going through somewhat of a crisis and there was some discussion about, at least from the city's perspective--I don't know about the county--of dropping out of it. And I had some friends in the Mayor's office who wanted me to kind of consider going over to see if I could, from the city's perspective, help salvage the agency. I wanted to retire because my wife had already retired. I was interested in this as something to do for the last chapter of my public service career.

KLOPFLEISCH: Yes.

ADAMS: So I retired and went to the Los Angeles Homeless Service Authority as its second Executive Director.

KLOPFLEISCH: Harreld, could you back-up just a little and tell us from your perspective, because you were still in housing, what factors led the county and city to create the Los Angeles Homeless Service Authority to begin with? How did it come into being?

ADAMS: I'm not sure because at the point that that occurred I was not directly involved in it. But I know that there had been historically a series of lawsuits going on between the city and the county about this burgeoning problem of homelessness in the county and whose responsibility it was. The city claims that it's the county's responsibility because they had the welfare role to play. The county countered with the fact that most of the homeless people are in the City of Los Angeles since it's the largest city in the county. Those kinds of arguments went back and forth and there was a lawsuit, I believe. And part of the settlement was to create this joint power of authority called the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority.

KLOPFLEISCH: And who were the parties in the joint powers?

ADAMS: It was the County Board of Supervisors, the Mayor and the City Council of the City of Los Angeles. As a result, the governing board of these joint powers of authority called the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority consisted of five representatives appointed by the County Board of Supervisors and five representatives appointed by the mayor and confirmed by the city council.

KLOPFLEISCH: I was somewhat familiar with the formation of LAHSA and--

ADAMS: More than I am.

KLOPFLEISCH: I'm sure that you wouldn't want to say this, but at the time you came in you were a very welcome change. The agency was indeed in a state of crisis and many people were concerned about what was going to happen with what had been a very arduously created entity and everybody had a lot of hope for it. Can you tell us what it was like when you started there and what steps you took to bring the order to it that you did bring?

ADAMS: Well, you know when I got there, there were, I'm going to be quite candid, the staff was not very competent. There were very few systems. The first Director was an advocate, a very sincere man who believed strongly and was very knowledgeable about the homeless issue. I wasn't particularly because I had never been involved in homelessness at the street level. I was always involved from the bureaucratic level. So he had a clear vision, a mission of what it should be. I gather he just liked certain administrative abilities of people with his staff. Things like that, so it was somewhat in a shambles I would say. So my first emphasis was to hire appropriate staff, which involved having to let a lot of people go, something that is always difficult. I never liked firing people but it was something I had to do in that situation. And I had the support of everybody doing it. So the first thing was just to set-up systems. That was primary emphasis in the very beginning, just to get staff and stabilize the organization and try to develop some credibility for the agency. I had an easy job of doing that in the city because everybody knows me in the city. And I knew all the politicians at the time and I was supported by the mayor's office. The county was a little different because I hadn't been involved in the county. I knew a couple county supervisors like Zev Yaroslowsky because he had previously been a city councilman.

KLOPFLEISCH: And you knew Gloria Molina I'm sure.

ADAMS: Not too well actually. Actually the one I knew better Yvonne B. Burke because I had met her in my early days when I was in Compton. I also had some contacts to her office from members of the LAHSA board. So the combination of establishing a working staff, functioning staff, and trying to turn around the issue of credibility for the agency, that was my first involvement.

KLOPFLEISCH: I think all people would say that you were quite successful in that. When you retired from that agency it was when?

ADAMS: Either 1999 or the early part of 2000. I really cannot remember at this point.

KLOPFLEISCH: I think it was 2000.

ADAMS: I guess it's a function of age; you know you forget these kinds of things if there not really important.

KLOPFLEISCH: Yes, well everybody felt that you had done a successful turnaround with the agency. What was your perspective as you left on where it was headed with the issues of homelessness here?

ADAMS: When I left I was somewhat pessimistic despite the protestations of all the policies about the importance of the issue. By the time I retired there was very little follow-up to these words. They spoke of homelessness but they weren't willing to put their money with their mouth was, to be quite candid.

KLOPFLEISCH: The county and the city?

ADAMS: The county and the city and they were still struggling and fighting over who should do what and what how much money should go for this and... all the usual issues between bureaucracies. There was a change that occurred sometime in the last couple years. First of all, Jan Perry the councilperson for the downtown area of the city where a large part of the homelessness is located became an advocate for it. And she pushed it. She put money where her mouth was. She got the new Mayor James Hahn involved. Now, from the county's side I am not sure but I think it was a combination of Zev Yarolsovsky and Yvonne Burke that also got on the bandwagon so to speak.

KLOPFLEISCH: Yes.

ADAMS: But I'm not sure about it because I wasn't there at that point. Just from what I read in the paper and what I heard from talking to people about it. So, all of sudden, LAHSA as an agency started growing. When I was there it was a very small budget and I was quite proud of the fact that I was able to run it on such a small administrative staff and it was something that made Riordan very happy of course. But now the agency has a lot of staff. It has more than doubled. There is a lot more money from the county and a lot more from the city and—

KLOPFLEISCH: I think it benefited from the stability and the credibility you brought to the agency. I know from the county's perspective they weren't frightened anymore that the money would just—

ADAMS: I think also the selection of the new Director Mitchell Netburn also helped. He had a long history of involvement in homelessness as he had been the Deputy Director of the homeless agency in New York City, a much larger agency than LAHSA. I think he is just a man for the times. His personality is quite different than mine. He is not an aggressive or abrasive person like I can be. Mitchell is the type of guy who is kind of mellow. But he is a very smart and a very competent man. I think a combination of a change in personality, a change in times, a developing interest in homelessness that occurred in recent years by money being put into the issue. I feel much more positive about it right now. Recently I had a conversation with many members of the staff and the money is not growing commensurate with the problem. They still have financial problems. I noticed, for example this year the super NOFA, which is the Notice of Funding Availability that they do annually. They only have two million dollars for new projects. So, (laughs) because all the other money is eaten up by renewing projects. And next year they may even have any money for new projects and they may be facing cutting in the existing programming. Unless new money comes in from some source.

KLOPFLEISCH: It's going to be interesting to see what the government and the federal budget do to housing.

ADAMS: Right.

KLOPFLEISCH: Because they are shifting a lot of social services money around. Well in addition to the homeless problem, Harreld, how do you feel the city and county have done in making progress on the whole issue of affordable public housing?

ADAMS: Again, it just my experiences primarily in the city, I can't speak to much about the county. But I think the future is fairly optimistic and positive with respect to the city. The city has a whole new list of council people because of term limitations; most of them tend to be more liberal. One of the main issues is affordable housing. The new mayor, James Hahn, is also into affordable housing. There has been a recent upgrading of the status of the Affordable Housing Commission. All of which leads to much more interest being placed on affordable housing. So the picture looks very good from the city's perspective. There's money being set aside as a priority for support of affordable housing. I mean this is the political reality; for a city that has a growing population of people who can't afford the historic high-rents of the City of Los Angeles. Plus there is just not enough housing to, particularly housing for larger families. I mean historically Los Angeles has been a city of apartments with one or two bedrooms. There is a growing population of needs for three to four bedrooms. There is an effort to try to match the population mix in the housing aid for the City of Los Angeles to help from the government. I think it's very positive.

KLOPFLEISCH: Well, in your career you have done many different things. But all your jobs had a common theme of working within communities to try to develop something for the people that were there. What would you say was the most exciting and gratifying program or time that you ever worked in?

ADAMS: I think the most was my early days in the Community Development Department, because it was a new department set-up after the demise of the Model Cities Program and the Community Development Department had the social services money, the affordable housing money, home rehab. monies, it had labor department monies, it had aging monies. All in one department, but it was a new department and I played an instrumental role in a number of things happening. I played an instrumental role in establishing the Private Family Rehab. Program. I also established the first criteria and guidelines for the Social Services Program, which is carried out even today in the Community Development Program. That's the time where I think was at my creative best because I was involved in establishing systems that are still in existence in the housing department of the city of Los Angeles and the Community Development Department of the City of Los Angeles.

KLOPFLEISCH: That was very exciting.

ADAMS: I was kind of the lead person in all of those things at the time.

KLOPFLEISCH: Do you feel that your PhD helped you in those jobs?

ADAMS: Yes, because it was political science and I was, of course, within government being somewhat aware of the workings of government and all that. I think it played an important part. Yes.

KLOPFLEISCH: Great.

ADAMS: I think it would have been better than being a doctorate in some unrelated skill like medicine or something yes.

KLOPFLEISCH: What was the most difficult or frustrating or negative time during your career in terms of the programming and the social events that were going on?

ADAMS: I still think probably the most stress for me was that period of time that I alluded to earlier; I think I talked about it earlier about closing down the Model Cities Program.

KLOPFLEISCH: Yes.

ADAMS: That was an extremely unpopular task.

KLOPFLEISCH: Yes.

ADAMS: And it had all kinds of political ramifications. But I learned a very valuable lesson from that experience that in the type of job, you're very familiar with this yourself given the work you have done. That is when you are working with the community; you are always in conflict with the politicians.

KLOPFLEISCH: Yes.

ADAMS: Okay. So it's very stressful work. And you have to learn to distinguish between the politicians attacking you in public, in the public arena of the council on an issue or attacking you personally. And in most cases you just have to have a strong ego because they are not attacking you because they don't like you. They are attacking you because you are espousing policies that interfere with what they want to do. It's not a personal thing. You have to learn that or it will get you crazy. During that period I learned that and I was able to distinguish between personal dislike and programmatic disagreement. I learned a lot from that period of time. That's probably the biggest. I think also I felt a little let-down and disappointment in the latter part of the years in Compton because I was so excited about Compton as model city and a place where things could work well. Because of all the things I described earlier: the mixture of races and classes, beautiful tree-lined streets and one of the top junior colleges in the country. It just all fizzled away - it was horrible.

KLOPFLEISCH: It seems to have had constant and chronic problems in the last 15 or 20 years.

ADAMS: Yes, part of it had to do with the population shift. But a lot of it had to do unfortunately with the downgrading of the quality of the public and political leadership too.

KLOPFLEISCH: Yes, there has certainly been their share of conflicts and well-- everything you can imagine has gone wrong there. Harreld, if you were to go back into full-time work now in the human services field, where would you want to be?

ADAMS: Oh, that's an interesting question, I haven't even thought about that (laughs) since I don't plan on doing that. I'm enjoying my life as it is now. What would I want to do? Ah, I probably would want to go back into affordable housing because I think that's an area where, in the case of the City of Los Angeles, its not done very well. It has the political interest and it has the money, but the bureaucracy that's running it has dissipated. My wife used to be the Director of Housing for the City of Los Angeles and she helped to establish the whole system for their major grants programs. You know, their funding of large apartment buildings. But most of her staff, because of constraints of money, we are on contract. And all the people that worked with her now are scattered all over the private institutions of the city. The people in the various banks who were involved in affordable housing from a private perspective are no longer there. I would like to get back involved in affordable housing for the City of Los Angeles, if I decided to do something like that, because I think there is a great need for experience and there are real problems right now from my perspective in the City of Los Angeles at the staff level.

KLOPFLEISCH: It's certainly a challenge for the people who live in Los Angeles. We have such enormously high housing costs.

ADAMS: Right.

KLOPFLEISCH: And our wage base is falling, which is difficult. Harreld, well you've certainly had a long and varied and really very successful career. Now that you have retired, what are you doing in your personal life?

ADAMS: Well, since retirement, my wife and I have continued some professional work. We have a consulting firm. A limited liability company, we do some consulting. We have a couple of small contracts helping agencies get funding. We also got involved in a couple of large affordable housing projects as a co-developer, which finally all reached fruition with the exception of one. But most of my time is spent now in the pursuit of things that have always been my interests, the arts. I'm the League President of the Center for the Arts in Eagle Rock, which is a growing organization with a very dynamic director and we are growing by leaps and bounds. So I am really excited about that. I spend a lot of time now in musical events. I sing and conduct right now, the Men's Glee at the downtown L.A. Athletics Club. I sing in a choral out of a Occidental College, which is quite good. So music, which has always been my passion, and the thing I still think I know the most about. Although I haven't pursued it in any type of professional sense since I was in my early twenties. I have always maintained an interest in it. So I do that. And in addition to that, my wife and I do a lot of traveling. We spend part of the year in the south of France. My wife is French. We are into our second place in France. We bought an old 300-year-old stone farmhouse, which we are renovating and modernizing, which keeps us quite busy. And then we travel to other places. We spend the summer in France and then sometime during the early winter we usually go someplace else. Like last year we went to Vietnam and Burma and this year we are going to go to India again. So I spend my time with music and traveling. So basically what my life involves now.

KLOPFLEISCH: That's a rich kind of life. Harreld, you mentioned that you had children?

ADAMS: Yes I have two children. And my wife, who is my second wife, also has two children. And together we have five grandchildren.

KLOPFLEISCH: Does that keep you a little busy too?

ADAMS: Sorry I forgot to mention that.

KLOPFLEISCH: What are their names?

ADAMS: My son who is a forest Ranger and lives up in Kern River in the Sequoia National Forest area out near Kernville has two children, a daughter age eleven named Haley, and a son Sammy who is seven. My wife oldest daughter Maureen has a son named Dimitri who is eleven and her youngest daughter Pascalina has two children. Lela who is five years old and a little boy Hayden who is two and one-half. So I have access to only three of them, because my son is up in the middle part of the state and I don't see him that much since he hates L.A. He just won't come here. Except he comes at Christmas time. So we see him at Christmas time and then once or twice a year we go up to see him. But I have complete and total access to the other three grandchildren, who we spend a lot of time with.

KLOPFLEISCH: That sounds wonderful. Well Harreld if you were to address a group of aspiring young college graduates, would you recommend that they consider a career in human services in Los Angeles or California now?

ADAMS: Yes. I think that it's certainly a worth while endeavor to be involved in government. I wouldn't limit it to necessarily the social services work. I think that government service is very important and often maligned in our country as wasteful and unnecessary. But people don't realize somebody has to pave those streets. Somebody keeps those parks open. Somebody keeps those libraries open. People don't realize how important government is to there life. So I think it's a very commendable and worth while endeavor and I would strongly support people deciding to do public service as a career.

KLOPFLEISCH: Sounds like you felt positively about your own career then. Harreld, as we close this interview is there anything else you would like to add or any other thoughts or anecdotes you would like to add to your oral history.

ADAMS: Let me see. What can I think of that might be of value. In terms of things that probably have affected my life more than anything else. I think you have to know a little about my background. I'm the first person in my family, in the history of my whole family who ever went to college. I was born in rural Georgia back in 1937. So for the first ten years of my life I grew up as a rural Black person in a racist South. So I know what that's all about. I learned an awful lot about that. I moved North with my family, first of all to Cleveland, Ohio. And in Cleveland I had an experience with probably the greatest impact, one of the two greatest impacts of my future life. My family was very poor and we lived on the east side of Cleveland, which like most eastside's is the poor side. And I remember we stayed in one little room up over a bar owned by a distant cousin who was a number's banker--

KLOPFLEISCH: (Laughs)

ADAMS: For the City of Cleveland, Ohio. His name was John.

KLOPFLEISCH: A numbers banker though?

ADAMS: Well, a numbers banker is the numbers racket.

KLOPFLEISCH: Oh it's like gambling.

ADAMS: Yeah, it's an illegal activity.

KLOPFLEISCH: Gambling (laughs) okay.

ADAMS: Cousin John was the Black numbers banker.

KLOPFLEISCH: Okay.

ADAMS: He was pretty high up in the system. His wife took a liking to me and because we were having trouble financially I ended up spending a number of my formative years living what they called the “gold coast of Cleveland,” which is where all the doctors and the professional Blacks lived. Along the lake and along this boulevard. I mean I had my own room, I had a maid, I was in fashion shows, and I hobnobbed with all the “hoi polloi.” I spent an evening with Paul Roberson because the next door neighbor was renowned medical family in Cleveland. My playmates were Lena Horn’s son teddy. And I had a next door neighbor who was the adopted son of Dr. Lambright Jr.; his name was Donald, who was the son of Dr. Lambright’s new wife. And Stephan Fedgit. I had breakfast with Duke Ellington and I knew Joe Louis, Ray Robinson. All these great people.

KLOPFLEISCH: What a culture change from coming from a poor background in the South.

ADAMS: Precisely. And I went to an integrated junior high school in Cleveland. Now, I took piano lessons when I was in Georgia because my father always wanted me to be a musician. I started when I was four years old. When I moved to East Blvd. I had the piano teacher, the wife of the Concert Master of the Cleveland Symphony Orchestra. So I lived there a number of years. But eventually I had to move back with my family in another part of town. But it had a great impact upon me in terms of the positive effect it had upon me as a person. Also it tended, and this could be viewed as a positive or negatively, it tended to direct my life in kind of, as a marginal existence, to the fact that I was never neither Black nor White because I had both. Although I have a strong identity as a Black person, I don’t live my life in a Black world. I don’t live my life in a White world either. I just kind of live my life with people.

KLOPFLEISCH: In a multi-cultural—

ADAMS: A multi-cultural environment. And so I think that was very, very important to my development for who I am now. A second experience I had I think that also added to that is when I was at Wayne State University I was the assistant pianist of the Glee Club and I sang bass and we went on a tour of Europe. I was on the first tour group that went to Europe. So when I was 20-years-old I had the chance to experience being a Black person in Europe and it was really eye-opening for me in terms of broadening my perspective on things.

KLOPFLEISCH: At that time Europe was much more welcoming to Blacks wasn’t it than our country?

ADAMS: I loved--have you ever read "Nobody Knows My Name" by James Baldwin? He talks about how people-- European's reacted. I would be walking down the street and people would come up to me and invite me to dinner. I remember once sitting with my back to the dance floor and we were chugging beer, a bunch of college guys, and every time this couple would dance by, the woman would rub my head.

KLOPFLEISCH: (Laughs) Oh my. A curiosity, a friendly curiosity.

ADAMS: But it wasn't offensive. It didn't strike me as being offensive. So I finally said "This is good, yeah?" So I had all these experiences outside of the U.S. as a Black person and it all added to me as a person. It gave me a universal view of things. I have a lot of life experiences, which I think have been positive in terms of my development as a person.

KLOPFLEISCH: That's probably why you're able to move so comfortably into a very difficult political arena and accomplish as much as you did.

ADAMS: Another thing that I think adds to the competence is that my father always has been a musician himself. He always had a quartet. My father always leads with his guitar in a quartet. And from the about the age of 12 on, I used to play piano for them. We had a radio show in Detroit, Michigan. When I was 15-years-old I was playing on a Sunday program with my father's group. I used to sing with Della Reese a lot.

KLOPFLEISCH: The Della Reese?

ADAMS: Before she was a big star. One experience I remember, I think this was in Cleveland. We used to always do Sunday morning shows out of funeral homes. And there is a big African American funeral home in Detroit. I remember sitting at the piano. I was about 15, and there was an open-casket next to me with a body in it. My father pushed me at an early age to get out and perform and so I'm seldom at a loss, in a situation where if I am thrust into something, I usually have the self-confidence to fumble my ways through it.

KLOPFLEISCH: Those were wonderful stories about your growing-up. Thank you.

