Holly James: Well, on behalf of the Crossroads to Freedom Project, we'd just like to thank you for taking the time to share your story, but I'd like to start off with your name.

George Hunt: My name is George Hunt.

Holly James: And where were you born and raised?

George Hunt: I was born in Louisiana out from Lake Charles.

Holly James: Okay. Were you raised there as well?

George Hunt: I was – lived in Louisiana most of my early childhood with my – I lived with my grandparents and they were itinerate sharecroppers and we moved from plantation to farm to plantation to farm most of my early life.

Holly James: And what's your occupation?

George Hunt: I'm a visual artist.

Holly James: All right and you said you were raised by your grandparents. Can you just tell me a little bit about like their names and their occupations?

[00:01:00]

George Hunt: My grandparents were Adie and O. D. Alexander and they were farmers and they usually worked on shares. By that, they worked crops for half price of the crop.

Holly James: Okay and what was it like growing up? You grew up on the farm as well?

George Hunt: Mm-hm.

Holly James: What was the day-to-day like?

George Hunt: Days were the same. You'd get up and you – to go to – maybe I wasn't old enough to go to school, but I spent a great deal of my day with my great-grandmother and I spent a lot of time on a porch painting, not painting but drawing with coloring crayon and pencil.

[00:02:06] And I would usually be drawing animals and birds, things like that, trees. I spent most of my days repetitiously doing the same thing.

Holly James: And so did your grandparents inspire you or encourage you to make art when you were younger or was that something you found on your own?

George Hunt: Actually, it was something that my great-grandmother – my great-grandmother was also a midwife and she delivered me from my mother's womb and I was a sickly child and most of the people in my family were working and she was the only one that really didn't work in the fields.

She cooked at home and so she had to monitor my daily activity as well as give me various medicines and things, so she got the butcher's paper from the commissary and pencils and crayons to kinda keep me busy and that's how I started really doing art.

[00:03: 03]

Holly James: All right and did you have any brothers and sisters growing up?

George Hunt: Yeah, I had an older brother and a cousin, first cousin, who lived in the house with us and he was like a brother as well.

Holly James: What are their names?

George Hunt: My brother's name was Rodell, R-O-D-E-L-L, and my cousin's name was Grady.

Holly James: And what do they do?

George Hunt: My brother is deceased and my cousin is a musician.

Holly James: All right and so what activities did you – were you involved in, like religious or on the farm?

George Hunt: Usually throwing rocks at the animals and, you know, whipping the dog.

[00:04:00] And I threw rocks in the water, pond. There was a pond near one place where we lived and I spent a lot of time around the pond. Never learned how to swim, though.

Holly James: Do you have any memories of childhood that has influenced you later on in life?

George Hunt: My mother, she cooked at the plantation house and she would bring magazines home with her sometimes and I remember she

brought a magazine that had illustrations of Pablo Picasso's work and I was tremendously taken by what he was doing and I was sure that I could do it.

His work looked very childish to me at that time and so I started copying his work and I've been copying it 65 years and still haven't done a good job to this day.

00:05:05:00 BEGIN CLIP 2

Holly James: So where did you go to elementary school at?

George Hunt: I went to elementary school in Hot Springs, Arkansas.

Holly James: Okay and when did you move from Louisiana up into Arkansas?

George Hunt: Actually, I was about 7 years old when we – and like I said, we were itinerate sharecroppers. We went from Louisiana into Texas, Texas to Louisiana to Arkansas and from Arkansas, we moved around from – my grandfather took a job in a bathhouse in Hot Springs and Hot Springs was a resort and so we moved to Hot Springs and basically that's where I went to elementary school.

[00:05:59] I did go to some church schools growing up and one or two small elementary-type schools, a kindergarten as well, but most of my formal education was acquired in Arkansas.

Holly James: Okay and did you pursue art during your elementary and early years as well in that home?

George Hunt: Well, it was something that I was pretty good at. I mean teachers gave me the opportunity to decorate boards and things like that and I got a National Merit key in high school in art, but I really – about the eighth grade, I got involved in sports, football in particular.

[00:07:00] And so my art kinda took a back burner for a number of years while I pursued sports.

Holly James: How would you compare different experiences since you traveled so much as a child, just different environments from state to state?

George Hunt: Well, I didn't get a chance to make any real close friendships, not that I was looking for any because I had my brother and my cousin and they were constantly in my life, and so really you talked to the

animals and that kinda thing. I always wanted to get out of the country, though.

Holly James: And was your education – well, prior to college, was that segregated?

George Hunt: Yes.

[00:07:58]

Holly James: And how do you think that has affected you?

George Hunt: I had some great teachers and they never told me anything that I was in a segregated environment. I knew that. Everybody around me was black, but I always felt like that – somewhat superior, to tell you the truth, that I was – you know, I didn't – when I was a real small boy I had a cousin that was white and we spent a lot of time together in Louisiana.

But I didn't come into any contact with any other whites after I left Louisiana other than my mother also was a cook and she cooked for a couple of years or so for a Jewish family and cleaned up and we stayed out back at their house.

[00:09:00] So I interacted with that family and just like anybody else, you know. I argued with, you know, the father figure of the house just like I would when I go to see or be with my grandparents.

Holly James: So what was your first experience with integration?

George Hunt: First experience with integration? Actually, it was in high school. We used to – I had some guys that I knew that was interested in sports just like I was and they were white and we'd meet early in the mornings or at night at one of the local stadiums and we'd compete against each other and sometimes they would win.

Most times, I won or we won, meaning black, doing what we were doing and that was running, you know, and stereotype at that time that we could outrun just about anybody, but we didn't think too well, but I found out that that wasn't true, too.

00:10:21:00 BEGIN CLIP 3

Holly James: Now, I've read that you have some memories of when Little Rock integrated.

George Hunt: Mm-hm.

Holly James: Can you tell us a little bit about that?

George Hunt: When the school system in Arkansas integrated period, I always felt that I was already at the best school and it had nothing to do with, you know, integration from my perspective.

And some of these kids that went to – at that time the predominantly black school in Little Rock was Dunbar High School and I always felt like they were trying to get away from the whipping that we would put on them in football, you know, and so – in Central High.

[00:11:03] And Central High was a tremendous power in athletics and that's the way I recognized and respected them for their athletic abilities, not so much as what – academically or whatever. I wasn't too much into the academic arena.

Holly James: So do you remember what the political climate was around that time? Did that affect the area in which you were living?

George Hunt: No, not really. I was in an isolated community. Hot Springs was one of the first integrated places that was in America. It was a resort and people from everywhere came there.

[00:12:03] And it just didn't fare too well for – I'd see men gambling and be white men and black men around the tables. Over into the nights, you would see blacks and whites together and it just – that's something that didn't happen, they say, outside of Hot Springs.

But like I said, I lived in an isolated area and most of these people, the older people, were retirees that had come from, you know, the Midwest or East or someplace, you know.

Instead of going to Florida they came to Hot Springs and so there wasn't a lot of biases even though, you know, I attended a segregated school, but I knew these guys, you know, and I had respect for them and they had respect for me.

[00:12:57]

Holly James: So did you end up going to college after high school?

George Hunt: Yeah, I went a day or two.

Holly James: What motivated you to go to college? Did anyone in your family or anyone you were close to go to college or encourage you to?

George Hunt: Yeah, my coach, football coach, athletes and stuff like that. I looked at initially that it would be four years that I didn't have to seek employment other than play football and when I graduated high school, I had 26 scholarships, athletic scholarships, and one art scholarship and it was to a black institution.

And I also had one to the University of Arkansas, Pine Bluff which was predominantly black at that time and the others for the most part was eastern schools someplace and I chose to go to the University of Illinois initially, Champaign.

[00:14:00] And I stayed there maybe three or four months and got into an altercation with another athlete and got terminated there. They put my stuff on the street, gave me an apple and funny book and sent me home. That's what we used to say, you know, and I walked the streets of Chicago for a period of time.

Then I called my mother and she said – you know, I didn't want to tell her that I'd gotten put out of school, but she said the coach from UAPB had been calling and he'd heard that I'd got put outta school and he wanted to talk to me.

So I wanted bus fare home really and I called him and he talked me into coming to the University of Arkansas, Pine Bluff.

[00:14:58]

And when I got there I had maybe $0.50 in my pocket and started a crap game with that, and they gave me books. I sold the books, and after my sophomore sojourn, I kinda said, "Hey, what am I here for, you know?" And a light came on and I started trying to do better.

00:15:30:00 BEGIN CLIP 4

Holly James: So what would you say your differences in experiences between going to school up in the North and going to school in the South?

George Hunt: University of Illinois was a huge place and I felt like that I was an animal to an extent, that they wanted me to come out of my cage on Fridays and Saturdays and perform and go back in the cage and be what you were there for, a trained athlete.

[00:16:04] And so a degree of professionalism at that day and time. You've got monies and that was – you ate good and then what more could I want, you know, so nobody ever talked to me about being academically, you know, proficient or whatever.

I was there to play football and usually the schedule that I had was made out for me, but when I went to UAPB, there was more emphasis placed on me as a person.

It was a smaller school and so the people got an opportunity to know me and I had an opportunity to know them, but I brought the same kind of attitude that I took with me the day that I left U of I.

[00:17:05] Just said, "Hey, I'm here to make it." But not in the classroom. I was gonna make it in the classroom, too, you know, because I don't know what the situation evolved like – I do, too, because I was a teacher for 36 years in Memphis City Schools.

But I know at that time that if you had the answers, I had the answers because somebody was gonna get them to me, you know, for whatever class or whatever it is.

You didn't have any honor system at that time, so – but you had some people that worked in the various offices that were gonna bring them to the athletic department, you know, if you wanted to go that way and I did go that way initially and not to stay eligible.

[00:18:00]

Holly James: So what did you study in college?

George Hunt: Initially, I wanted to be a coach and when it got time to declare a major, I went to the athletic field house, talked to people who ran the – what do you call it – well, athletics is what it amounted to and they told me basically the kinds of courses that I needed which were science courses for the most part.

And I remember exactly the chairman of the department said that you had kinesiology. I said, "Kinesi-who?" "Kinesiology. That's one of the courses that you gotta take."

[00:19:00] I said, "Man, wow, biology and all of these other "ologies" and stuff. No, no way." And I said, "Coach, did you know all of that stuff, you know?" talking about my coach in high school and that kind of thing and then I started out of the field house and there was a guy walking along beside me.

He was about 265 pounds at that time, big ole boy and he said, "Why don't you become an art major?" He'd seen me, you know, doing these murals and things and in my room on the walls and stuff like that.

And I said, "No, I don't think there's no future for me in art." He said, "But you're good at that, you know." And I said – well, like my initial purpose was to stay in there four years, you know, before I thought about a job of any kind.

[00:20:00] BEGIN CLIP 5

So I went to the chairman of the art department and he remembered me from high school. He had been a judge in one of these scholastic arts things, you know, and gave me an opportunity to put together a portfolio.

And I did it in about a week and brought him stuff and he looked at it and he said, well, he thought that I had potential and he gave me the opportunity to become an art major and I kinda backed in.

It wasn't what I really wanted at that time, and the same thing when I got out of college. I had a job offer at one of the schools. I can't think of the name of the school in Little Rock, but I said, "No, I'm going to Kansas City and work for Hallmark."

[00:21:03] I wanted to do illustrations for them and I got to Kansas City and the reason I went to Kansas City, my mother had married a man that worked on the railroad and they moved to Kansas City and I went to Hallmark and more or less they told me, "Don't you call me; we'll call you."

And they never did and I wound up going a year on the police department in Kansas City as a patrolman and after that, I took a job here in Memphis and went to city school system as a teacher at George Washington Carver High School in South Memphis and I spent 36 years there teaching art and coaching track and football.

[00:21:59]

Holly James: Just go back for a minute. You said you spent some time in Chicago after you had left school. What was that experience like?

George Hunt: Well, for me, it wasn't too good, but I had an aversion to work. I wasn't gonna do any manual labor of any kind and I had the opportunity to maybe wait tables when I was in high school.

Like I said, I came from a city that was a resort and one of the jobs or opportunities afforded to especially black youth was a waiter and I didn't want to do that and I don't know if you'll recognize what I said, but I said when I got to school, I was gambling and some of my role models had been gamblers.

[00:23:01] And I was gonna do that bit and so when I got to Chicago and got on the street, I did some things that I didn't want to mention, but I used to rob prostitutes and it got to the point where I just couldn't do that and that's when I called my mother and I hadn't communicated with here in better than two and a half months.

And said, "I don't want to do this anymore. I want to go to school or something, you know." And that's why I wound up going to school, not really in pursuit of an education, not at all, but to get off the street and get in the position where I could take advantage of some people gambling and I did that for, you know, two years and people just helped me, turned me around.

[00:24:05] And back when I got put outta school it wasn't – you know, I could have easily avoided that, but I wanted to pit my physicality against that other individual and that's what got me put outta school, fighting.

Holly James: So do you think that still influences and inspires you today?

George Hunt: No, I'm somewhat competitive, but that left me years ago. Yeah.

Lauren Turner: You mentioned you came to Memphis. Can you talk a little bit about the experience like when you got here?

00:24:50:00 BEGIN CLIP 6

George Hunt: When I came to Memphis – my first visit to Memphis was as an athlete.

And we played against Melrose, which was a formidable opponent for anybody at that period of time and over the years, and we kinda whipped them like they were little boys and so when I got to Arkansas I developed a friendship with one of the guys that I had played against who was an athlete at Arkansas and he encouraged me to come here.

But I still had to go on to Kansas City and working for Hallmark, you know, and I got sidetracked, you know, but that next year I came here and I started to work and my intention was maybe to stay here a couple of years and then I would probably wind up in maybe Chicago because a lot of people that I knew were from that area.

[00:26:02] But I didn't like the cold weather and staying in Memphis had kinda grew on me and wound up I've been here 40-something years, you know.

Lauren Turner: Can you talk to us a little bit about your teaching career?

George Hunt: I told you initially I was a police officer. I saw a man shot to death and that didn't figure too well with me and I said, "Well, I need to change my occupation." And I put in an application right away.

Again, my friend, he and I had communicated and he said, well, he was sure that I could get a job in Memphis and I wrote and got a – and, by the way, I was – had gotten married, too, and my wife was from Helena, Arkansas which is about 75 miles south of here.

[00:27:04] And so we came to – I was given a job, came here. The first year, I went down Pennsylvania to the school. The principal said – well, they had a student body of well over a thousand children at that time and he said he wanted me to coach and I was finished with athletics, you know.

And – but I didn't know what kinda power he had, you know, or control or whatever, but I said, "Yes, sir. I'll coach." And I said, well, I'll just do it maybe this year and I wound up doing that 30-odd years, too, so my life has been an enigma of sorts in that there were things that I didn't – I kinda back-doored into them and it was like art.

[00:28:05] I never intended to become a professional artist. I was an art teacher and I felt like that I was doing a pretty good job. About maybe 25 years ago, I started thinking about what I was going to do when I retired and I didn't play golf, tennis or none of those athletic kinds of things and so I said, "Well, I'll pursue the art."

And in the '80s, mid-80s, there was a real awareness for African-American art and I started doing it and started to go on a circuit, more or less, that – where African-Americans were selling art.

[00:29:00] And so, consequently, I got into this thing and it became like a second job, and so I said, "Well, hey, this is what I'm gonna do the rest of my life."

And I got hooked up with a gallery here on Beale Street about eight years after that and I was going to various places around the country and do these weekend shows and things like that and then I'd have to get back to school to meet my students on Monday.

And it got to be rather hectic and so I took a kinda early retirement and been doing the art thing ever since. I didn't realize initially, again, that I could sell art.

[00:30:00] BEGIN CLIP 7

I just most of the times – like Christmastimes, I would go to Stax Record Company and I would do decorations and things down there for Stax and I'd make enough money to supplement my income for Christmas, you know, and also I did decorations for various communities.

And there are several areas in Memphis that were predominantly black at the time, and so I would go and contract with these people to make – didn't happen in you all's lifetime where you put up all these things in their yards, you know, for Christmas decorations, door decorations.

And I did a lot of these things and it supplemented my income and I started doing maybe portraits and it just led on into what I do now.

[00:31:00]

Lauren Turner: Just going back a little, how did you help your students through art as an art teacher?

George Hunt: You know, there are certain things that you do as a teacher to any student. You got to create an interest in the subject and I did that by getting athletes at first. You gotta get in the class. You can't participate in the athletic arena unless you're in my class with me 'cause I'm gonna deal with you there and I'm gonna deal with you here, too.

[00:31:54] And my background was such that I understood athletes and the way which you have to play in order to be successful in an

academic environment and the girls, a lot of them would sign up for my class because the boys were in the class, but when they get there and I'd explain everything to them, that it's not as easy as you getting up and drawing little stick figures and stuff like that.

There's a lotta history involved and there's a lot of other things that you've got to understand before you can become even an appreciator of art, and that's one of the things that I try to do is a lot of these people did not have the skills to become proficient as artists.

[00:32:56] But everybody has the ability to become an appreciator of art and know what to look for and how to evaluate art and out of the years that you – you take those that you know got the basic skills and everything that you need and, again, it's probably what you're looking for, too.

You might want to be a fashion designer or something like that and so, well, you've got to have a background in history, art history, and I was very heavy into the history of the art and skills as craftsmanship and that kinda thing.

I tried to expose my students to all the various kinds of – types of art and give them with oils and watercolor, acrylic or pastels or whatever, cutting and sculpture, even, you know, how to work – working with your hands and with pottery and all of that.

[00:34:05] And you've got to have all of that background if you're going to compete with other people as artists, you know. You just – then you find your area of expertise and you start to work in that, you know.

If you're a painter, you've got to put in the number of hours painting. If you into pottery, you got to do a lot of pottery and even though my weakest area was photography, but I understood what you had to do and then I tried to steer those that I felt that were good in photography into working in that area, but know as a teacher you got to be here on time. You got to do what's required.

[00:35:00] BEGIN CLIP 8

You got the opportunity to make mistakes, but you can't get repetitious. Nothing worth anything is easy and I felt like as a teacher I got away with too many things, you know.

I was pushed in the wrong direction a lot of times and so in dealing with young people this is one of the things I want to make sure that I didn't make the mistakes and everybody got an opportunity.

Lauren Turner: How do you feel the issues that were going on in Memphis at the time affected your teaching and your students?

George Hunt: That's a question I've never been asked before, but Carver High School was, 35 years ago, a black institution.

[00:36:06] Two white children were graduated in the history of the school from Carver High School, so it's a black school and at the time that Dr. King was assassinated, those individuals that were the so-called leaders in the black movement, young people, 95 percent of them came outta Carver High School.

Why is that? That there were a lot of young teachers at the school at that time who encouraged their students to take some of the stands that they took. I didn't do this.

[00:37:00] You got to do what you got to do. I discourage you from chaos, disturbing, you know, the system or whatever. I always felt like, you know, you needed to work through the judicial system even though I'd slap you upside of your head when I was a young person if you offended me in some kinda way.

But that's where you have to grow and I figured that I was in a growth stage at that time, but – and I spoke to a number of these people, you know.

Matter of fact, I had a job with the City of Memphis that I was an overseer for the summer youth programs of Memphis and we had a neighborhood organizing project down on Florida Street and I had to get physical with a number of young people down there.

[00:37:59] Because when you take money, you got to work for it. You can't lay up and sleep all day and get some money. I went through that process and I know, you know, I'm not gonna give it to you.

You've got to work for it and if you're not working for it, you're not gonna take it from me and if you don't put in the time or do what you're supposed to do, we got problems, and it's the same way, you know, as a student.

If you didn't do what I had prescribed for you to do in the class, you got problems. It's not personal. It's just this is what's laid out, what you've got to do.

I'm gonna give you every opportunity to achieve, but if you don't, you don't have anybody to blame but yourself and I don't know too many kids that looked at me in a negative light during the time and said that I was unfair.

[00:39:05] I don't know of anybody said that I was unfair as a teacher, so I'm there to do the best that I could for you and your parents send you here to learn and I'm obligated to them to make sure that I give them the best that I've got and you as well.

And sometimes, you know, well, folks say, "Well, did you scare folk?" Yeah, I scared some people. Some folks scared me. I wouldn't have been there to scare nobody else.

Lauren Turner: How did you feel teaching some of the students that were getting involved in the movement and things like that?

George Hunt: I figure everybody gets involved in some kinda movement at some point in time.

[00:39:59] BEGIN CLIP 9

It's however – how you choose to get involved, though, and you've gotta think and act responsibly for yourself and for those who love and appreciate you before you can go out and start, you know, creating violence or something like that.

You're gonna hurt somebody and most of all if you're a student, who are you gonna hurt first? Your parents, so I think you need to communicate with those people and get an understanding about what position you should take on any issue.

You get their advice and then if you want to go for what you know, then that's up to you, but I don't think that I should try to influence you as a teacher to go out and take a stand for certain things. I think that's something that you need to decide with your immediate family, the responsibilities that you want to take.

[00:41:03] As far as me, up the street here, wherever your Orpheum Theater is, blacks were relegated to go in the – around the side on Riverside – on Beale Street and go up three flights of stairs and sit

up there. I chose not to go. I wouldn't go to the movie. They had another one down on Main Street that you had to go up the side.

I didn't go. A lot of movies came by that was supposed to be good movies, I understand. I haven't seen them to this day, but that was just me. I wasn't going up there, you know. As far as, like you said, I said earlier on, integration – I always felt like that I was in the best spot for me at that time.

[00:42:05] And I felt – I didn't feel uncomfortable being around white people. I had competed with these guys. I knew them, you know, when I'd see them. We didn't go to the same school together and sit in the same academic classroom, but I did go to – when I started the University of Illinois, blacks and whites were there.

The University of Memphis, it was black and white. Did I experience segregation at these places? Chances are I might have, but I gave as much as I got, you know, and my arena was a physical arena at that time. You hit me; I'm definitely gonna hit you, but I was in the arena that you did these kinds of things.

[00:43:00] And when I left the football field, I wasn't out perpetuating violence or nothing like that, but if it's in a contest and we've got ground rules and like that, it's you bring yours and I bring mine and that's the way it is. That's the way it is in life period, the way I see it now.

You've got to bring yours and other people got to bring theirs and you compete and if you lose, you're gonna say, "Well, they were biased against me"? No, you gotta go back and get your act together a little bit better and go back whether it's in filmmaking or whatever.

You're wasting time talking about, you know, they stepped on me or hurt my feelings or didn't let me do this. If you can't go in the front door and they want you to go in the back door, maybe you can get in the side door sometime or you can go in the back door and push the side door open.

[00:44:04] Then your friends would come in and maybe after while you get too powerful and everybody start thinking like you think or either they accept whatever you've got to say, because I think that people communicating together is really the essence of, you know, getting along.

You've got to know each other and you stay over here and I stay over here and we don't ever have a middle ground, we'll never know about each other and the world is growing smaller and smaller and so, consequently, we – right now, we're involved in violence around the world, you know.

And it's because heretofore we didn't communicate with each other and we didn't see what they were doing and they didn't see what we were doing and whatever you're doing is negative to what I feel and so, consequently, we just can't get along.

00:45:05 BEGIN CLIP 10

Lauren Turner: Can you describe your personal involvement in some of the organizations that were concerning the Civil Rights Movement at the time?

George Hunt: I've never been a joiner. I don't belong to any fraternity. I'm not active in any church. I never have been. I grew up in the Baptist church.

But I've always been a person that more or less followed my own mind, made up my own – made my own decisions about what it was that I wanted to do and what I didn't want to do, and I went down in Mississippi and helped to organize the Poor People's Campaign that Dr. King had initiated.

[00:46:00] And really, I wasn't too enthusiastic about Dr. King initially. He was just another preacher out here wanting to, you know, get something going where it's gonna be financially beneficial to him.

But after – it took Dr. King's death for me to recognize that he was a man, nothing more than a man, just a man, a good man, but had human weaknesses and frailties just like any other man, but stood for some things and so he was trying to get – trying to organize poor people, black, white Chicanos and all of them, to go to D.C. to voice their dissent against the United States government.

[00:47:01] And I felt like that everybody needs a voice even though your voice sometimes is like you're in the wilderness screaming at the wind, you know.

And so that's one of the reasons I went and tried to finish what he had done about getting people to vote, integrate, do whatever and to this day, you know, I still see people taking advantage of other people.

Just like the drug scourge in America. The rich, I think, is responsible for the demise to a certain extent of the poor and disenfranchised in this country because it's all about money. You can't eradicate drugs and drugs are taking over, especially in the inner city.

[00:48:04] You talk about violence and crime and need for more police officers. You need the eradication of drugs, in my estimation, because drugs control the mind and distort the views of those that are involved in the usage of these drugs, some of them hallucinogenics or whatever, and they distort your whole – and I see black family disintegrating.

I don't know if we're getting away from art or this is what you want to hear, but this is the disintegration of mankind and it's starting on the blacks with the use of drugs, but our political leaders have expressed all kinds of terminology for solving the problems of mankind.

[00:49:03] But some of them, like what I just talked about as drugs, nobody ever addresses the drug problem or either they speak about it and throw it in the closet, but if you don't have a family unity, you're kinda blowing in the wind and you're subject to go in any direction.

If you don't have a family that can give you direction, you have no control of your own. You've never been shown any love. You've never had anybody address the issues of right and wrong and so what do you do? You go out and kill your mother.

If you've been institutionalized in the penitentiary all your life practically where you have no love for your fellow man, you're scared, so what do you expect?

00:50:02 BEGIN CLIP 11

And that's what I've said of young people. You've got to – hey, you've got to bring some unity, some togetherness, no matter what your color is because with DNA, you came from the same spot that most of the rest of us came from initially. You go back so many years and stuff and you'll be surprised where you came from.

I remember as a young boy, say, "Well, you know, what's your lineage?" Well, you know, I'm a slave. I've been the victim, you

know, of my slave master and he's – the slave master was father to my great-grandfather and my great-grandfather, you know, he also had a little Cochise in him, you know, Geronimo or whatever, Indian.

[00:51:00] And say, "Well, what about Africa?" "Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, you know, my great-grandmother, you know, she was from Africa." Says she was from a little place, Bacar or somewhere she says, you know. I mean black folk.

But with DNA – and that's a science, isn't it – say, "Well, no, you came from Southeast Asia in the 11th century" or whatever "and you migrated over to Africa and you – how'd you get across the Alps?" you know.

Well, you know, you were a Eskimo at one time, too, you know, or whatever. I'm being a little facetious, but that's it. You're dark-skinned and you're fair-skinned, fair skin, dark skin. What's the difference?

[00:52:00] There's no difference, really, when you talk about the whole history of things and I don't want to get in it from a biblical perspective or the scientific exploration kinda thing, but we're family, all of us.

You mighta came from North Memphis. I came from South Memphis, you know, but we got here today and we're family. It's no difference. We got to communicate. We got to get along. We got to have an understanding.

It's not local. It's not national. It's international and before long, you know, it's gonna be universal. You know, we got to communicate and we got to get along.

Somebody keeps saying there's somebody out there looking at us every day, right? So if they're looking at us, one day somebody with some sense is gonna see some of these people and make some contact that's gonna bring us all together at some point.

[00:53:01] And you're gonna say, "Well, that little fellow sure looks funny." And he might say the same thing about one of us, but he'll be from millions of miles away and will be a hop, skip and a jump, probably in your lifetime, you know, but communication is the key, I think, in everything.

And that's what I do every night is I try to communicate. A lot of what I do is in the past. It's conjurations of things that I have been – I have seen or been interested in. It has to do with history.

You know, integration is a lot – a lot of people say, "Well, George, what do you mean integration?" Okay, if you come up with up with a broad nose and thick lips, you say those were characteristics of an African, an African-American.

[00:54:04] Yeah, but if I put a green color on him, what does that make? If I put some red here, what does that make? If I put some brown on a sharp nose, thin lips, what does that make? Does that make him a black person or what? No, he got human-looking characteristics, but is it a human being? Just what is it? It's my interpretation.

Well, he got basically – she got basic characteristics that identify this person as maybe a African-American, but if you look closely it's not so. I have a lot of distortion and disfigurement in the imagery that I create. Why? Because this is what I want.

[00:55:00]BEGIN CLIP12

Well, it's not realistic. Why not? You know, a hand up there that – what's representative of a hand, sometimes I'll put six fingers on somebody and you say, "Six fingers? I never seen nobody with six fingers." I have.

If you want to find some image of – in my imagination, I've seen it and it's just, like I said, a conjuration of your imagination, you know, what you do with your mind, however you want it to be. I can do whatever I want to do as an artist.

Lauren Turner: As an artist, how did you perceive the movement that was going on in Memphis?

George Hunt: Which one?

Lauren Turner: The Civil Rights Movement, the women's rights movement, and what was going on in Memphis? How did you perceive it as an artist?

[00:56:00]

George Hunt: It gave me an opportunity to create imagery that I thought that was reflective of that period of time in a positive fashion in the black arena. One of the things that I found disturbing at that time was

how little exposure of the positive kind that blacks was available – that was available to them at that time.

If you look back through – say, take for an example *The Commercial Appeal*. There are books at the library that got front page of maybe a hundred years of Memphis history.

[00:57:00] I dare that on the front page of any issue that you will see anything of a positive nature of a black person until the late 1960s and it wasn't too much then. Now, on Page 22 of a *Commercial Appeal* maybe in 1940, colored, Negro man shot to death by police for stealing outta Jones Grocery Store on the back page.

[00:57:58] Are you following what I'm saying? And how I got involved and the reason that I got involved is because we were a nonentity. "We" meaning blacks at that time. Don't you call me black. Don't you call me colored. Don't you call me Negro.

All of these things have evolved over a period of time even to the present day. We're getting repetitious and going back around and a word that was used 100, 200 years ago, nigger, is very prevalent today, so we're going backwards instead of we're going forward.

We're coming around and as an artist, I feel that it's relevant for you, meaning me, to interpret various things that I have seen in my lifetime and what alterations have taken place.

[00:59:07] And sometimes you do something solemn and people look at it, even in the musical forum that I love, the blues. The blues was not always white. It was not acceptable by whites. I remember my grandmother saying, "Don't play that music loud."

And why was she saying that? Because she didn't appreciate it and she didn't want the neighbors – I'm living in a all-black neighborhood, but she didn't want the neighbors to know that we were over there playing that blues music.

[00:59:59] BEGIN CLIP 13

She didn't appreciate it. It's part of her heritage, but she didn't appreciate it and we could go into and make a subject outta that and then there were white folks which today we've come a full circle. The majority of appreciation for the blues is respected by whites and why is this?

Now, a black man say – well, meaning the white man – "He stole my music." And the black man didn't want it in the first place. He discarded it. He didn't want to it even associated with him, so you can't take that which is thrown away unless you are a dumpster-diver.

[01:01:00] And we got a lot of folks in the world that are dumpster-divers that take things that don't nobody else want and make millions out of them.

There's nothing wrong with that, but what I'm trying to say is how we have evolved from one thing to another as people and how we continue to evolve and we get to a point where we don't know history period, and so we get confused.

Somebody can tell you, say, "Well, it's a ape – ape." And if you don't know or hasn't been anything, you know, studying, she came from an ape. Well, I don't know. I don't have too much regard for an ape, so maybe I know it's not a human being.

[01:02:00] So I'm not gonna treat it like I would treat a human being because she evolved from a ape. You haven't done studying or anything – study about it, but you've got your information falsely.

Somebody gave it to you, and I don't want to consume your time. You might want to ask me some other questions, but I get on these kinds of things, you know, and it's all about why I do what I do and I'm just an individual that create images.

Oftentimes, they're illusions, but – and conjurations, as I said, and imaginations and that kind of thing, but they all tie back into who you are and sometimes you don't really know who you are and these things just pop out on you.

[01:02:57] But the question that you, how did the Civil Rights Era affect me, I'm still looking for civil rights, not only for myself, but for everybody. You know, I looked at – I think it was about two years ago right out here on the street, there was thousands of people out here on the street and I was wondering, "What the hell?"

And I use "hell," that's an emphasis word. I used to use them in my classroom when I wanted to make a point. I said, "What the hell are all these people doing out here?" You know who was out there? Can you imagine who was out there?

Streets just crowded with people all up and down here, all up and down to the Civil Rights Museum, people just all out in the street. You'd think it was the 40th anniversary of Dr. King's assassination or something.

[01:04:02] Chicanos, Mexicans, Latin folk protesting their treatment in America. Them damn blacks is getting all the jobs. Them Hispanics is taking our jobs, taking our money and we can't stand that.

America was made on the basis of integration, the coming of races, different kinds. Every ethnic group in America had to fight to get here in some kinda way or other with the exception of blacks. They were brought here against their will for the most part.

[01:05:00] But everybody else, they got a free ticket. They'd been fighting to come here for centuries, but then when they get here, they start to look at – you know, we got a large Asian population in Memphis now and sometimes I try to create imagery that reflects on the Asians in Memphis.

01:05:28:00 BEGIN CLIP 14

Used to be wasn't no Asians in Memphis. We talked about Japanese. Used to call them dirty names – the Japs, slant-eyes, all kinds of negative terminology – but today, Japanese, we recognize as probably the most literate people in the world, they said.

[01:05:57] Vietnamese. We talked ugly about those folks. We had a war in Vietnam that we fought for a number of years. Now we got a large segment of Vietnamese in this country. Ain't nobody scared to go eat in a Vietnamese restaurant now.

Used to be that you got to kill 'em all. That's how our thought patterns change. The only thing that's been constant in America in my estimation for the last 200 or 300 years is prejudice and nobody must never want to get up and fight it.

When one group get involved in here, they're all about themselves. This country is their country and we don't really take too kindly to the other person who said that America's is their country as well.

[01:07:03] And in art, my art, I try to use colors that are representative of all the colors of the spectrum of a rainbow, and if it comes out in some kind of way that makes us related, I'm happy. If not, then I –

I mean I've done too much and to be quite frank with you, I don't think I've done too much as being an artist, you know.

Some folks say – well, I've heard people call and say, "Well, George, you're a genius." And I said, "Damn if that's so." I have not done anything to give birth to new ideas.

[01:08:00] I've taken what's already there and worked with it to the best of my capability, but I feel that I'm very limited as an artist, as a person, and I appreciate you all coming here and listening to me today, but I don't – I hope you haven't wasted too much time.

Lauren Turner: I was wondering. You talked about the lack of positive images during the '60s for blacks in America, about *The Commercial Appeal* and things like that. How did you try to translate that into your art during that time?

George Hunt: Did I say the lack of positive images?

Lauren Turner: Mm-hm.

George Hunt: Well, if I did, I made a mistake. I meant that there were no blacks that were seen in a positive way.

[01:09:01] And I made a statement that alluded to you might catch us on Page 16, 17 in *The Commercial Appeal* committing a crime where they didn't say that Dr. So-and-so did something to save a life, but John took a life and elevated Dr. So-and-so to the front page.

And the Johns of the world or the City of Memphis, you demoted those kinds of people. Some people are not worthy of praise no matter who or what they are.

[01:09:57] BEGIN CLIP 15

And then there are others that need the respect and the honor that people can bestow upon them and in the '60s, I think there was an awareness that African-Americans were achieving and that the majority could see that, that they were achievers.

They were not all out burning and looting. That's really what I – a statement that I had intended.

Lauren Turner: Do you feel like – as an artist at the time, did you feel any pressures from the black community as a black artist during the time?

George Hunt: As to what I should paint? No. There were the Black Panther Party that was very prevalent in the ’60s.

[01:11:01] Are you familiar with the Black Panther Party, Huey Newton? And stand up for your rights; stand up. I wasn’t big on Huey Newton. Like I told you, I felt like you didn’t have to kill nobody to get your rights.

They advocated violence and some imagery that I did to associate and assimilate with the black movement, there are some characteristics that I took on personally that were characteristics of a black people at that time and No. 1 was like I grew what was called an afro at that time.

[01:12:00] I had a beard and those were symbols that I aligned myself maybe with the Black Power Movement, but nobody never said, “Hey, what do you really think?” Just because I’m wearing a afro, you said I’m gonna burn down a building? I’ll be damned if that’s so. It wasn’t gonna happen.

But if it was significant for other blacks to say that I was aligned with them for certain things, I was, and I am still today, but I’m not gonna encroach on nobody else’s rights for my own rights.

I’m gonna talk to you about it and I’m gonna deal with you about it, but I’m not gonna take your rights away just because I feel that I don’t have certain rights.

[01:13:04] Because you do have rights. You have the right to think a certain way. Even it’s contradictory to what I think or believe, you have that right and I’m not going to take that away from you.

You can say what you want to say, so I got the right to say what I want to say, I believe, and I don’t think that you got the right to infringe on others’ rights just because you have not got what you think is your rights.

Lauren Turner: Did you ever feel like you were censored by the art industry as a black artist?

George Hunt: In Memphis, Tennessee, one of the things that I always felt, and I even feel that way today, that there is a degree of invisibility.

[01:14:03] I don't care if you're supposed to be gifted or not. The community as a whole have a hard time seeing an artist in Memphis in a positive way, speaking from a majority perspective.

Memphis is not known to be one of the art centers of the country or the world, so it simply means that we in the last – meaning the City of Memphis have come a long way in recognizing certain entities and art is one of those, but it still has – it's not New York or Paris by no means, you know.

[01:15:00] BEGIN CLIP 16

Lauren Turner: I understand – I read somewhere that a lot of your paintings reflect real life and American life. I read it somewhere. What about this time period inspired you to do – or has this time period inspired you to do some of your painting?

George Hunt: I say an artist is an extension of his or her environment no matter what the time period it is. I happen to be here presently at 2008 and I'm working on imagery that might be reflective of 1940 or it might be reflective of 2009. It's all in the configuration of your mind, how you interpret it.

[01:16:00] 'Cause I am. I'm here today and I got to do what I got to do today. How you react to it is a whole together different program or story.

Lauren Turner: Earlier –

George Hunt: I think I'm---. Excuse the express – excuse me for interrupting.

Lauren Turner: Oh, no, go ahead if you –

George Hunt: I'm finished.

Lauren Turner: Okay. Earlier you said it took Dr. King's death for you to realize that he was a man that stood for something. Could you talk a little bit about your involvement – a little bit more about your involvement in the Poor People's Campaign in your –?

George Hunt: After Dr. King's death, I said to myself, "I have not took an active role in doing anything to help this man."

[01:17:00] I made no financial contributions. I gave no energy. I observed. I went to the meetings. I listened. I listened and I looked. I wanted to make sure that of some of the things that were being said or done, the truth was being spoken as I saw it.

And when I said that Dr. King was a man, I simply meant that he was a man that was no more or no less than any other man, but he was speaking out on what he thought was right or wrong with America at that time.

[01:18:00] And throughout my adult life, I've always had a job and I felt like and still feel like that everybody ought to have a job, be able to work and support the family and not be hungry, homeless or that kinda thing.

No matter what has transpired in that person's life, I think that he or she has the right to be respected as a human being, treated as such, and when I saw all of these people down in Marks, Mississippi and how they were living – and I didn't go down there initially at first. It was on the television that I saw the conditions that were reflected.

[01:19:00] But I got involved and I went around to various churches here in the City of Memphis and I spoke. I went down through Mississippi and I organized people. I worked with a guy named James Bevel that was one of Dr. King's personnel.

And we got buses and got people and companies to put money toward getting these people to D.C. and we went there and, for whatever good, rallied and came back home, and did things change? No, but some people – not at that particular point in time.

[01:20:00]

But some people saw what was happening and they reached out and helped and in some way brought about change where we don't have too many sugar britches in Mississippi or places like Marks, Mississippi, citadels of hate and things like that, not only in Mississippi, but Memphis and Arkansas or other Southern cities.

I remember whenever Georgia and Alabama was considered hellholes for black folks. There was a big migration of blacks from the East coming back South and a high percentage of those individuals were coming to Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi.

[01:20:58] Blacks were returning and why are they returning? Because the change has come about and their acceptance, people just like Freeman, Morgan Freeman, a Mississippian.

They'll have to live – can live practically anywhere in the country or the world, for that matter, that he wants to, but chose to come back to Mississippi 'cause a change has come about in the attitudes and personalities of people, older people, some who had the strongest feelings against people getting together, have passed on.

Integration brought about people like yourself, young people who can see each other, and know that, hey, there are differences, but we accept those differences and we communicate and get along.

And if there's any role that I played that helped to bring about that change then that was positive and I helped Dr. King and he definitely helped me and you, even if it cost him his life.

Lauren Turner: All right. We need to switch tapes.

01:22:32:13 BEGIN CLIP 17

Lauren: Just a little bit about what you remember was going on with the strike that was going on in Memphis while Dr. King was here.

George Hunt: Well, the strike was initiated because the sanitation workers felt that they were not being – not only adequately compensated financially, but they were not being treated as human beings.

[01:23:01] They were working for less than minimum wages and they had no facility at their worksite headquarters where they could bathe or they could just sit down and maybe eat their lunches. No lunches was provided or anything, no services.

You'd get off from work and you worked hard, long hours and you gotta get on a bus, for the majority of them, and ride X distance home smelling like garbage and they wanted a fair shake from the city.

[01:23:55] And Mayor Loeb – every city council at that time didn't want to give these people two pay cent raise nor did they want to provide, you know, adequate facilities where they could take care of their basic needs on the job.

Can you imagine you riding around and you don't even have anyplace to, you know, physically relieve yourself, you know, during the day no matter what the weather? You know, you were not given, you know, even a rain jacket, you know, but you're out there in the weather.

You got to provide whatever it is that you're gonna wear, you know, rain, sun, sleet or snow, whatever, and they wanted a raise and the mayor at that time, Henry Loeb, was adamant about not giving these people just a small raise, two or three pennies, when they were making less than $1.00 an hour at that time, too, some of them.

[01:25:01] Ninety-five percent, some – $0.95, not percent but $0.95 an hour, some of these people were making and so they were members of the union, a lot of them, and their leadership began to impress upon the mayor and the city leaders that these men needed more money; wouldn't give it to them.

And so they decided to strike and the struggle of sanitation workers was what brought Dr. King to town. Actually, he was in the process of organizing the Poor People's Campaign. They was to take all of these people to D.C. to protest the living conditions in America, not just the South.

[01:26:02] But he stopped doing what he was doing and came here to Memphis, Tennessee to voice his concern about the strike with the city at large hoping that they would get national recognition by his coming here and he did get it.

They initiated a march from Clayburn Temple, which is in walking distance from where we're sitting right now, down Beale Street to city hall, up Main Street to city hall. That was the route to be taken for that particular march.

[01:26:50] Along the way, some of the people that I told you that came out of Carver High School helped to initiate the controversy that took place that day on Beale Street where you say a riot broke out and windows and things were broken. People were hurt. One person was killed.

Many people were brutalized that day and Dr. King had to be hurried away. He'd never been in a march where there was supposed to be violence and he came back a week or so later and they were gonna do another march.

Meanwhile, they had meetings, Mason Temple, and on a rainy, rainy night, Dr. King gave – I was at that meeting at Mason Temple.

[01:28:03] He gave his so-called "mountaintop speech," and the building was filled with a majority of black folks but there were white folk there

and there's always been white folk who are anti whatever it was that the city was fighting to control over.

There were many white folk who were in accord with the fact that these folks needed living wages and accommodations and even though they might have been in the minority, physically they were there, and Dr. King spoke that night and, well, the rest is history what took place on – what is it – April 4, 1968.

[01:29:08]

I was also on the expressway when word came across the airwaves that Dr. King had been shot at the Lorraine Motel. I live less than ten minutes from here. I took my family home and I came down to the Lorraine Motel. When I got to the Lorraine, there was hardly nobody there. I inquired someone where they had taken Dr. King's body and – or taken him.

I didn't know he was dead at that time.

01:30:04:00 BEGIN CLIP 18

And they said St. Francis Hospital, which is on the north side. You go down Second Street and you run into – it was St. Francis at that time. It's no longer St. Francis. I was accompanied by one other person that – excuse me a moment. Can you still hear me?

And he went with me and we went to St. Francis Hospital and when we got there, a policeman said that we couldn't go in. Well, we kept walking and both of us had on a suit.

[01:31:03] So you understand the power of a suit, and the police officer, he let us pass through because we were – we took it that we were dressed in a manner that he had to let us pass.

Well, we went up into St. Joseph – not – St. Francis Hospital and we went to the area in which Dr. King and his staff were at. Dr. King's body was on a gurney up against the wall and his staff were communicating to each other. Some of them were kinda hysterical and they were crying and we came into the room. Nobody actually said anything to either of us.

[01:31:59] I walked over to the gurney and lifted up the gurney and I saw the penetration that had taken place in Dr. King's face and neck. I

covered him back up and shortly thereafter, Ernest Withers came. Ernest Withers was a local photographer and Ernest didn't take a picture. He said he didn't want to take a picture of that.

And we stood there and communicated with some of the people. I know Andrew Young was there, James Lawrence, James Bevel, whom I worked with later on when I said that I helped with the Poor People's Campaign outta Marks and there were several others.

[01:33:02] I don't remember their names now, but we stayed there for a while and there was also a black fellow with *Life* magazine that I met and he and I rode around the city 'til late in the night and we were stopped a number of times by the police, but he had credentials and they would always let us go, the police.

But that was part of the motivating thing for me to get involved in doing what I told you that I had done, and that's basically about all that I can remember about that particular incident.

[01:33:57] In the next two or three days they had a march in Memphis where Mrs. King came and her family, Dr. King's family, and they had her right in front of city hall and some of America's dignitaries were there that day.

I remember Ozzie Davis and his wife. What's her name? I can't think of her name now, but he was there as well as Harry Belafonte and some other – Jesse Jackson was not in that room the day that – I don't know where he was.

But Jesse wasn't there at the hospital when Dr. King's body was delivered there, but these are some of the things that I remember and some of the things that motivated me to do what I did and that's about it.

01:34:56:00 BEGIN CLIP 19

Male: Just a note. That was St. Joseph's Hospital.

George Hunt: Was it St. Joe's? Yeah.

Male: Yes, St. Joe's, not St. Francis.

George Hunt: Yeah. Uh-huh. Right.

Lauren Turner: I think I saw somewhere that you painted a picture with the title "I'm a Man."

George Hunt: Mm-hm.

Lauren Turner: What inspired you to do that?

George Hunt: Well, I think as an artist you're an observer and I told you I live less than ten minutes from downtown. The center of Memphis was downtown in 1968, where the center of Memphis might be in East Memphis now, but the center of Memphis was downtown.

All businesses were operated downtown primarily on Main Street, this street here, only further north. From Beale – from two blocks up 'til all the way to Madison and Monroe, that was the heart of downtown and Main Street.

[01:36:02] No trolley was running down through there then. The trolley came in – what is it – the late – early '80s, I think the trolley came.

Male: Yeah, '90s, '91.

George Hunt: Was it '91? Oh, I'm thinking '81, but businesses was there, so I had to come downtown a lot and so I see these guys on the streets. You know, they were protesting. They were walking quietly and in a unified manner and they had these banners stating "I'm a Man."

And they just walked with the banners in their hands, you know. It was a quiet, you know, protest. Nobody was out there cursing or being belligerent or anything like that. They were just walking, you know, in unison with these banners and I'm a man.

[01:36:58] And I felt that that personified what this strike was about, that these people wanted to be recognized as human beings, to be recognized as men and that's why I created that imagery.

Holly James: I would like – I'd just also like to ask; I'm a little fuzzy on when this happened. Do you remember when Bobby Kennedy came to Mississippi and did that relate to anything that you were doing with the Poor People's Campaign?

George Hunt: No.

Holly James: Okay.

George Hunt: I – Bobby Kennedy was killed in the summer of '68. I remember it and Martin Luther King was assassinated in the spring of '68.

[01:37:55] The unification of the two, it had already – to me, it was the personification of evil in America at that time. Even though these individuals were not related, it was just – to me, it identified almost kind of akin to what today is like, people failing to communicate and understand each other and taking on the position of violence to solve – as being the solution of all problems, like what's going on in the world today.

Everybody wants to be in some way violent and solve the problem and violence is not the answer.

Holly James: So how would you say Memphis has changed since you've been here 'til today?

[01:39:00]

George Hunt: Geographically, it's moved further east. I think people like yourself, young people, are communicating more with each other. When I – I told you when I came to Memphis, I was working at a predominantly black institution that had over 1,000 children that went to school every day.

It was only 'til the '70s, mid-70s, that integration came in the school system teacher-wise, and with the teachers coming, there was a change because they took back information to their various communities about certain things that had been said, biases about the school system.

[01:40:09] BEGIN CLIP 20

And particularly schools like Carver High School, that it was, you know, drug infested. Criminal activity was there and all the time fights, but this was not the case at all and after a while people began to recognize that, you know, it wasn't like – and the people are not like what you might perceive them to be or what you've been told and that's what I say this about Memphis now.

We're going through a change, a metamorphosis even now in Memphis and we've gone through these changes. In my history of 40-something years being in history, it's not the first time.

[01:41:03] But usually what it brings _____ wise, you know, and it's coming back more and it's coming back better and that's the way it is with

the world. I feel like the world is coming back better and Memphis is definitely better than it was in terms of race relations.

There are some problems that are occurring in Memphis now that we talked about earlier on and I think that drugs is the leading problem that needs to be eradicated and also our educational system needs more help than was given maybe 40 years ago.

[01:42:01] But the school system 40 years ago, in my estimation, was superior to the school system that we have now. I think we have more people now and with more people, you have more problems. We didn't have a large Asian population 40 years ago in Memphis.

We didn't have a large Hispanic population. We didn't have a drug problem like we have today 40 years ago, and so with the new problems and the inability of our leadership to communicate and deal with all aspects of the new Memphis, we have problems.

[01:43:05] But once we get enough people with experiences in place to deal with all of these new venues, I think we'll see a turnaround for Memphis and it's gonna come from people like you all, young people.

And one of the things that I've seen happen in Memphis, the people who could turn around, a lot of them have left to go seek their fortunes elsewhere and that's you all.

Each one of you all came from some other place to come to Memphis and in all probability, you're not going to stay unless an opportunity presents itself that really reach out and grab you and says, "Stay."

[01:44:07] You're gonna leave and you're gonna leave us with more dregs and we need you to stay and I'd like for you not only to carry the word about what you need. We need good people in Memphis. We don't need more jails. We don't need more handouts either, but we need you to stay because you are the leadership.

Holly James: So if you could give one piece of advice that you've learned throughout your life to people our age, what would it be?

[01:45:05]

George Hunt: Be who you are and don't be no figment of yours or somebody else's imagination. You know who you are and you know who you want to be. Be that.

Holly James: Well, thank you very much. We greatly appreciate you giving your time and sharing your story.

George Hunt: Thank you. I think it's been a pleasure to be with you all today.

[End of Audio]