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University of California
Berkeley, California

Margaret Gordon:
Oakland Army Base Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Lisa Rubens
in 2009

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Interview #1: 04-21-09

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01-00:00:26

Rubens: I'm here today with Margaret Gordon. It's the twenty-first of April, 2009, and we're sitting in the office of Margaret Gordon. What office is this?

01-00:00:37

Gordon: The West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project office.

01-00:00:40

Rubens: And we're going to get to how you got involved with that, but I would like to start just a bit with your background. You've been politically involved with this community; you've been—

01-00:00:51

Gordon: I've been politically involved with the community since 1992, but I've been involved in social justice *something* since I was sixteen, so it's about over forty years.

01-00:01:02

Rubens: Where were you born and raised?

01-00:01:04

Gordon: I was born in Richmond, California, and I was raised in San Francisco. I moved to Oakland, moved to Berkeley, and never left Oakland.

01-00:01:14

Rubens: Oakland, Berkeley, and then back to Oakland?

01-00:01:16

Gordon: Yes. I never lived outside of the Bay Area.

01-00:01:18

Rubens: Where did you go to high school?

01-00:01:19

Gordon: I went to Lincoln High School in San Francisco—Abraham Lincoln High School, San Francisco.

01-00:01:25

Rubens: What brought your parents to Richmond?

01-00:01:278

Gordon: The war. New war jobs. My mother lived with her two great-aunts, and they worked at Bethlehem Steel. They were riveters, help build ships.

01-00:01:42

Rubens: Where had they come from? Had they migrated?

01-00:01:44

Gordon: Yes, they migrated from Arkansas.

01-00:01:47

Rubens: All right. Did they know people here when they came, or did they—

01-00:01:49

Gordon: No. Not that I know. I don't think they knew anybody.

01-00:01:54

Rubens: So, sixteen years old—where are you at sixteen?

01-00:01:57

Gordon: Sixteen years old, my parents had a home in the Ingleside neighborhood, right outside the Daly City BART Station. And at that time, and I think it was 1961, the 280 freeway was about to be built, and then the BART development came. And first the 280 freeway bought part of the backyard of our home, and then the BART was going through this phase of buying up property. And my parents felt it was an injustice of how they were—they money they were going to give us; it wasn't like a market price at that time, in the sixties. And they filed a formal complaint. And while they did the formal complaint, they also organized the neighborhood, and my job was to go knock on all the doors and tell them my parents was having a meeting. And that's how I got involved.

01-00:03:05

Rubens: And you were born in 1945?

01-00:03:07

Gordon: Forty-six.

01-00:03:08

Rubens: So then, how was it that you moved to Oakland, in fact?

01-00:03:14

Gordon: I moved to Oakland, I got married—I got remarried—and I moved to Oakland. He wanted to come to Oakland; that's how I got to Oakland.

01-00:03:22

Rubens: And basically here you've been ever since.

01-00:03:25

Gordon: Mm-hmm, been here ever since.

01-00:03:30

Rubens: In my notes, I see you were involved with the citizens' coalition—that you co-chaired the Citizens' Advisory Group when the Cypress Freeway fell down.

01-00:03:38

Gordon: Yes.

01-00:03:41

Rubens:

And that's pretty close to this neighborhood as well as to the Port. So is there anything that you want to talk about what you learned when you were involved with that, in terms of the community?

01-00:03:59

Gordon:

Regarding the replacement of the Cypress Freeway. I was a co-chair around jobs and the contracts and was concerned with who was going to get jobs in the jobs programs. And one of the things I found out in being the co-chair, is that we had a large population of African-Americans and Latinos that lived in this neighborhood that did not have the skills that Caltrans required through their contractors to get the jobs, even though they had been promised, under the decree of the city and Caltrans and the state of California signing that X amount of jobs would be given to people in [zip codes] 94607, 94606, 94612, which is West Oakland, would get the jobs. But all the contractors for each phase of the construction, brought their own composite crew. So they had their own crew, and it was very hard to get them to hire in the community. At that time—when the freeway fell in 1989—there was a big surge of public works jobs, and so a lot of the African-American men who had been in public works jobs, construction jobs, prior to the freeway had got out because there was no jobs. It was almost like another recession here. So it was hard for them to pay the union dues, get the equipment, have transportation to and from the different sites. Even if they lived in the neighborhood, you couldn't guarantee no jobs, and at the end of the one billion dollar construction to rebuild the freeway, we could only say that sixty-five people out of 94607, 94608, and 94612 got jobs.

01-00:06:07

Rubens:

So would you say that's where you really cut your teeth politically?

01-00:06:10

Gordon:

Yes. One of the things I cut my teeth on, was understanding about policy and how agencies really, really have impact on our community of West Oakland. That's how I really understood. And there was not any real leadership from the city government and local government about how these jobs are going to be -how these people are going to get these jobs. Either you can do service jobs or directed construction. It was very, very hard to get the people in.

01-00:06:55

Rubens:

So you're frustrated; you're seeing how policy works. What do you do then? I see you next in '96, when the announcements are just starting to go out about that the Oakland Army Base is going to shut, and they're interviewing people in West Oakland.

01-00:07:13

Gordon:

Well, I stayed involved with the core people. I was a member of CWOR [Coalition for West Oakland Revitalization], so we stayed involved with the core people, and there was a core of us staying involved in a lot of different processes still going on within the community. At that time, the school reform

was going on in the city of Oakland. You also had other transportation projects that were going on. You also had housing development that was still in play. And it was all these different things. And we also had a process of ensuring if you were an apprentice, you went to the apprentice program—if you went to the pre-apprentice program, how to get into the apprentice program for construction. So I participated in a lot of that with the staff of the public works department within the city of Oakland. And also, how to keep the funding for the pre-apprentice program, the Cypress Mandela program, here. So after the construction, after the replacement, I still participated in a lot of things around, advocating for people getting to the construction field.

01-00:08:25

Rubens: As well as community reform and development.

01-00:08:27

Gordon: Right, right.

01-00:08:30

Rubens: I want to move us to the Oakland Army Base. By the way, '89, when the Cypress Freeway falls, many people that we've interviewed who were on the Oakland Army Base remember seeing it and hearing it. Did you have any interaction in those years with the Oakland Army Base?

01-00:08:46

Gordon: No, none. Only, I remember coming and going to the bowling alley for different events, and I've been to the officers' club for events, but that's about it.

01-00:08:58

Rubens: It was not employing many people from the West Oakland Community. Either—

01-00:09:02

Gordon: Oh, yes, it was at that time.

01-00:09:04

Rubens: Still, that was your sense?

01-00:09:06

Gordon: There was a sense of some people still out there, or they were on the other side, at the Naval Supply Center. So there were people who were here, but it was still after '92, '94, '96, that's when the wind-down started happening.

01-00:09:26

Rubens: That's right. So then this is the final report from the West Oakland Community interviews that was appointed to OBRA, to the Oakland Base Reuse Authority.

01-00:09:40

Gordon:

Right, I was on the advisory. I was appointed on the advisory in 1994, when Natalie Bayton was the city council member. So by the time the freeway was over, the base conversion was about to get started also, the process.

01-00:09:56

Rubens:

And can you tell me a little bit about what you remember about those early—you were an advisor to—

01-00:10:01

Gordon:

We had an advisory group. We were advisory to the OBRA.

01-00:10:05

Rubens:

Do you mean WOCAG—the West Oakland Community...

01-00:10:09

Gordon:

Yes, this was the WOCAG. It was the WOCAG. My understanding was that my input in the beginning was around the homeless under the McKinley Act. The McKinley Act was supposed to support underemployed people and the homeless, being connected to the base conversion, around having new planned-out facilities for homeless and getting jobs, jobs in the base conversion. What happened was through the city and with the Port having the power of ignoring the state agencies that had to sign off on any of these conversions. The community, not having those capacities, got shut out. We did not know that the Port was an integral part of the base conversion until later on okay, and how to navigate and maneuver that process. That's like it was two or three different things going on at the same time that you had to be involved into understand what was going to be the giveback of community benefits to West Oakland. And at the end of the day, the Homeless Collaborative got X amount of dollars, a million dollars or something, and they told them to go away. They get no property.

01-00:12:06

Rubens:

They were going to be up at Oak Knoll?

01-00:12:10

Gordon:

All those things were part of the negotiation, but at the end of the day, they was given a million dollars and told to go away. And so the property still sits empty until up to about three, four years ago, they started really looking at what could be done there. So you had the Wayans Brothers come in and wanted to do something, and you had the film crew—the film people wanted to do something out there—you had the auto-mall wanted to have a piece of the land, we have had Costco wanted to be out there, now they want more retail out there. And recently, with the city's request -its RFP for its section, this section of the property, that's when a lot of—the RFQ process is dealing with the RFP process, so that's when it started, the new surge about being engaged into it and what's going to happen to this Army base.

01-00:13:15

Rubens: So let me just take you back for one minute. How is it that you came to learn that the Port had such an interest in the...?

01-00:13:22

Gordon: After I had participated in so many of the meetings, it came to the time where BCDC gave them a new coastal area, and that new coastal area kind of pushed away the land that had been allocated for the Homeless Collective, okay? The Homeless Collective was going to have like a little city out there where people live, they got training, and they went to work. You know, like a transitional housing. And then some kind of way, the port was able to get that land.

01-00:14:08

Rubens: I see. I see. We have other people who have talked about the whole machinations when BCDC came in and said that they had a higher authority and that they had to go through a whole set of plans then.

01-00:14:19

Gordon: And then we found out that the land was really too toxic for people to be living on. It needed to be cleaned up. But you had these empty buildings for years that could have been used for housing. But then, we had Jerry Brown found the piece of land to have his military school out there. Okay? So it was very confusing about the highest and best use, when it came down to use it. The unemployed, the ex-offender, children, whatever else—there was always a pushback.

01-00:14:56

Rubens: I guess there was issues, also, of recycling, of—

01-00:14:58

Gordon: All that has been issues. And now, when the Port put out its RFQ for request to develop this part of the land, and they didn't find anybody, they had to put out another one.

01-00:15:21

Rubens: So they had gotten it down to four?

01-00:15:23

Gordon: Right, for on the Port side.

01-00:15:25

Rubens: And then one dropped out.

01-00:15:27

Gordon: By then, it was only two. And the Port is not putting its money into any kind of capital improvement projects as of right now.

01-00:15:39

Rubens: Well, let's back up and get to how you get to be a Port commissioner. But just prior to that, how active are you in WOCAG? Are you going to regular meetings? Are you helping them—?

01-00:15:50

Gordon: I go sometimes. I go sometimes. Not a—

01-00:15:52

Rubens: We're talking about '94 to '98?

01-00:15:54

Gordon: Yes, I went all the way to 2000; 2001, I dropped out. I was involved with McClymonds-Silverstein initiative. with the Hewlett Foundation for visioning for a new community. I was involved with Scotland Center Project. That's where I start working with West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project.

01-00:16:28

Rubens: Please tell me about that. How did that come about?

01-00:16:32

Gordon: One of the other environmental justice advocates, named Allen Edson, and I had did another project around asthma, and he had a friend named Arlene Wong, who worked at Pacific Institute. And they wrote a grant together to educate residents about how to use indicators. He and I had did this other project together, so he wanted to introduce me to Arlene and Mr. Costa. I can't think of his first name. It will come to me.

01-00:17:14

Rubens: We can fill that in.

01-00:17:14

Gordon: Okay. Mr. Costa. And he had worked with—not Urban Strategies—Oakland Partnership, and he was always involved in some form of environmental justice. So I helped them do the outreach and organizing and bringing residents to this process. And some of the students who was in the Master's program at the Institute for Urban and Regional Development were the facilitators.

01-00:17:55

Rubens: At Berkeley?

01-00:17:55

Gordon: At Berkeley. And so I had a relationship with some of them prior, a couple of them, prior, as we were in the ramp-up for the Seventh Street and McClymonds Initiative. So we put both of them together initially. But the indicators, we identified a lot of impacts in West Oakland, from housing stock to voter registration to jobs, infrastructure, truck routes, the TRI—Toxic Release Inventory—what was in the ground, what was in the air—air quality—moving from 250 items down to seventeen. And it was an eighteen to two-year process. And at the same time, with Pacific Institute, and by the time we had gotten down to the seventeen items and also identified the impacts of the Port being in this neighborhood, that's how—and so we have used that as a platform to do campaigns. The seventeen items became the platform to do campaigns from then on. So every year from then on, we have

used two or three indicators as a platform for a campaign. Like the air quality—look at the air quality. Air emissions. The emissions for diesel. How to address these issues with the public health, the state agencies, and the Port. You've got a working group, because the Port had got sued in '89, and we were all engaged into—many of us, the core of us, was engaged in how to get solutions.

01-00:19:53

Rubens:

They were sued for...?

01-00:19:55

Gordon:

They were sued for trying to do the EIR as one big project instead of breaking it up, and they were found default in the project, and they got sued for two million dollars. But once again, not having the capacity for sustainability and resources, and how to use that money, the community let the Port have the signing privileges of how to use the money—not the community have signing privileges on how to use the money; the Port had that authority, all right? And in the decree, it was supposed to report out what they did over the years that showed that they did a certain level of emission reduction. The Port has really never done it. It's still a mystery. It's still a mystery.

01-00:20:59

Rubens:

So was this Environmental Indicators, was this a way of really both getting around the Port but also pushing them to do what they were supposed to?

01-00:21:07

Gordon:

Yeah, yeah. The indicators was a new organization that came together under Pacific Institute, and from Pacific Institute, we became our own 501(c)(3).

01-00:21:29

Rubens:

Oh, when was that?

01-00:21:30

Gordon:

We became our own 501(c)(3) in 2004 or '05. We went through this process—So from 2003—'02, '03—we went through the process of developing this 501(c)(3), and then in 2005, we became official. I was also the staff of Pacific Institute. I worked under the Pacific Institute for almost two years—two or three years.

01-00:22:13

Rubens:

Prior to that, setting this up?

01-00:22:15

Gordon:

Yes, yes. In fact, Pacific Institute became our fiduciary partner and a research partner. EIP became the community organizer. They'd do the research, but we'd use the research to develop a campaign and as a message to influence the process. From that, we got an EPA grant called the Community Air Renewed Evaluation Grant for three years to develop a collaborative. We're part of US EPA region nine. And the EPA wanted to do the collaborative model process with us. We did a collaborative model called the West Oakland Toxin

Reduction Collaborative. And the collaborative model was bringing the regulators to the table, to the community—and the businesses in the area were being impacted by the Port in one area. So the community had to go this person, this agency over here, that agency, this agency, that agency.

01-00:23:37

Rubens: That's how they wear you down and fragment you..

01-00:23:39

Gordon: Yes. So we had formed enough relationships to get them all in one room. So we have done significant things for each one. And EPA is still our partner.

01-00:23:52

Rubens: And when were you appointed to the Port as a commissioner?

01-00:23:54

Gordon: Two thousand six.

01-00:23:58

Rubens: It's a big year for you, 2006. Let me ask you first, why would the Port appoint you? Aren't you a—

01-00:24:04

Gordon: I was not appointed by the Port. I was appointed by the mayor. I was selected by the mayor and the city council approved of my appointment.

01-00:24:16

Rubens: Is that the general process?

01-00:24:18

Gordon: Yes, right. Yes, that's a general. You are selected by the mayor.

01-00:24:26

Rubens: And was this Jerry—

01-00:24:29

Gordon: No, it was Ron Dellums. Now, my first time when I was nominated, there weren't the votes there, so they pulled my name.

01-00:24:39

Rubens: When was that?

01-00:24:40

Gordon: That was in like May. In May, they pulled my name. So from June, July, all the way in August, the staff at the mayor's office put a full-court-press of a campaign for the city council members who didn't know me to know me, found out all the work I had done. And because I'm an activist—you know, I don't have a lot of letters behind my name, I don't have my little lawyer, I don't work for a big corporation, I don't have a big business, and a lot of them thought I would be interfering with the Port's business by me being there.

Two of the city council members found out I had been appointed for two years on the state level for a working group, the Goods Movement Action Plan-

01-00:25:48

Rubens: Now, that's a separate appointment? That's not as a result—

01-00:25:49

Gordon: That was a separate appointment from the transportation business, Air Resources Board or CAR, and Cal/EPA, coming up with a process to look at goods movement. And I was the only person from West Oakland who participated for two years, and drafting the report and taking the report and going to legislation to identify the IBON money.

01-00:26:25

Rubens: I don't know what the—

01-00:26:26

Gordon: The IBON money is the money that the citizens voted for in 2005 or '07 to update the infrastructure around ports.

01-00:26:41

Rubens: So you're also appointed to that in 2006?

01-00:26:45

Gordon: I was appointed to that in 2004 or '05.

01-00:26:48

Rubens: I have a little note here, and I just lost it. And do you think that helped you or hurt you with the appointment to the Port?

01-00:26:57

Gordon: No, it helped me out, that the city council members knew I had this appointment, and I was the only one in the city of Oakland as a resident who was engaging these politicians, these different agencies and departments of transportation, housing, and air quality.

01-00:27:21

Rubens: Did that require going to Sacramento? Is that where those meetings take place?

01-00:27:24

Gordon: Every month for almost two years, I was either in Sacramento or L.A. for these meetings.

01-00:27:34

Rubens: And what's your assessment of the outcome of that? Were you—?

01-00:27:36

Gordon: The assessment was that I learned more about transportation—how the transportation process works and how it impacts communities like West Oakland, up and down the state and across the country.

01-00:27:50

Rubens:

Because then in 2006—I don't know whether this is one of your indicator conferences or if it's just the culmination of all that you do—there's a Port-related conference sponsored by the Intermodal Maritime Association?

01-00:28:03

Gordon:

Yeah, that was one of the things I presented at because I had been engaged on a state level, so.

01-00:28:11

Rubens:

Right, right. And you get two publications out of that. I was hoping maybe I could see this. "Neighborhood Knowledge for Change" and "Reducing Diesel Pollution in West Oakland."

01-00:28:19

Gordon:

Yes, yes. It's called "Clearing the Air: Reducing Diesel Pollution..." Yeah. And in between that, we had did lots of surveys around this neighborhood, around to acquire the information, so community-based research. We also did a truck count as part of dealing with our theory of what was the impacts of the goods movement here in West Oakland. I also formed a relationship with Public Health.

01-00:28:53

Rubens:

Relationship with—?

01-00:28:53

Gordon:

Public Health. Alameda County Public Health, getting information from them about asthma and respiratory disease, taking that information and utilizing it to the place where in 2006, we got a new ordinance in West Oakland around the truck route.

01-00:29:16

Rubens:

And what did that literally mean?

01-00:29:17

Gordon:

That means that trucks had stopped coming across neighborhoods, stayed on one pathway to go in and out of the Port.

01-00:29:27

Rubens:

A big issue for the neighborhood.

01-00:29:27

Gordon:

Yes, it was a big issue.

01-00:29:29

Rubens:

A lot of noise, a lot of pollution, a lot of danger.

01-00:29:33

Gordon:

So then by doing our own research, we were able to identify noise, the pollution level—because we did indoor air quality studies—aesthetics, the

indoor air quality, and truck traffic as part of community impacts on people living so close to a facility like the Port.

01-00:30:07

Rubens: So this is no longer related directly to the Oakland Army Base, because the whole plans there are laying dormant; this has to do with—

01-00:30:16

Gordon: Yes, as the Port and how it got connected to the Port—when the Port got the land and they planned on doing logistics centers there, warehousing there, that is a bigger impact to the community. Because right now, we have no idea, will rail be the focal point of moving containers, or will there be more trucks? We really do not know. And what we do know, as of December 2008, all trucks in the state of California will be in a whole new era of transportation, starting January 1, 2010. Trucks from 1994 to '98—no, from '89 to '94 will no longer be acceptable at ports in California. Those trucks that are '94 up to 2003 have to be retrofitted or replaced to the EPA standards of 2007.

01-00:31:40

Rubens: That's quite an achievement. I mean, that really was...

01-00:31:45

Gordon: So now, that's the new thing.

01-00:31:48

Rubens: Can we stop for just one minute?

01-00:31:48

Gordon: Okay.

[break in recording]

01-00:31:50

Rubens: That's really quite an achievement. I mean, do you think of that as—

01-00:31:55

Gordon: A big achievement? Yes. But it's still a fight.

01-00:31:58

Rubens: Yes, it's all a fight, isn't it? You know, one thing you and I mentioned on the phone when we were setting up this meeting was the community fund, that there had been a community fund that had been established when the final closure of the—on paper, it had been established.

01-00:32:15

Gordon: Yes, the Port was supposed to give so much money to this community fund and this city, and it's been a whitewash.

01-00:32:22

Rubens: Their claim, I guess, is that they're waiting for the developer to come through, that when the developer comes through, that will all—

01-00:32:27

Gordon: Whoever develop comes through. Nobody still seems to be obligated.

01-00:32:35

Rubens: Do you want to talk a little bit more about what Environmental Indicators does? I want to put that next to, also, then, what you might have as a vision for what will happen to that Oakland Army Base.

01-00:32:47

Gordon: Well, West Oakland, like we do, we take those seventeen indicators we developed, and we use each one to develop a campaign. So we have right now several different campaigns. We will do the air quality issue, we have a land use issue, and a public health issue, and that's about our three circles. It's three circles that interconnect. You can't separate one without the other. And with those, what are the magnet sources of the trucking industry to the community? Okay, for instance, right now, besides the Army base development, you still have businesses that are disproportionately impacting the community. So because of West Oakland being what it is—it's a mixed-used community—you still have factories or a company that gives off emissions right in the heart of a neighborhood. That attracts trucks every day. So, for instance, we have like five to seven recycle centers right here in West Oakland, and every day, they come through the neighborhood, bring their trucks in, and bring their trucks out. So one of our visions right now is for the Army base is to have the recycling centers put on the Army base—all—

01-00:34:18

Rubens: Get them off Maritime Boulevard?

01-00:34:20

Gordon: No, not necessarily. No, right here in the heart of the community. Anything between West Grand, between San Pablo all the way over here to Wood Street—if we showed that you have no business being that close to people, you need to be removed. We don't want your business to go away, but you don't need to be that close to people.

01-00:34:47

Rubens: Where people live. Yes.

01-00:34:52

Gordon: So the paper companies, bottle companies, aluminum companies that recycle, and they'll bring in containers every day to take that stuff to the Port. Those businesses should not be that close to where people are. So one of our things is about five or six different organizations have come together to talk about how do we get on the Army base, and then possibly free up that land for other kind of developments.

01-00:35:23

Rubens: I had gone to a planning commission meeting a year ago, when the four proposals were identified. I think they had had, I don't know, maybe a total of ten or twenty or something like that, and each one of them had some aspect of

recycling. But now you're saying those are all just in limbo? Two of them have dropped out, and that—

01-00:35:44

Gordon: Right now, one of the things of the WOCAG is on the forefront is the recycling centers go out of the neighborhood.

01-00:35:57

Rubens: And who do they have to influence to do that? Both the Port—

01-00:36:01

Gordon: Well, it is going to have to be part of the master plan. Since being a commissioner for now about eighteen months, I've never been to a port where you had a shopping mall right next to a maritime facility. So when we talk about putting a retail out at the Army base, that's incompatible. You want to put a hotel, luxury hotel, or a trade center, or something like that? That's maybe a possibility. But people want to come in and shop? You have to do a whole restructuring of a roadway infrastructure to accommodate that, and I don't think the Port's plan has taken that in consideration. I think if you put a few office buildings out there and maybe a hotel, but you still will have to deal with the trucks' noise, vibrations, smells, Okay?

01-00:37:17

Rubens: So are you saying better to have it a mixed-use industrial—not have it mixed-use retail housing>

01-00:37:23

Gordon: Yes, mixed-use industrial.

01-00:37:26

Rubens: Light manufacturing, keep the film crews there...

01-00:37:30

Gordon: Yes, having the infrastructure. Because that's old land, and it has been used, it's been filled in, it's going to take twenty to thirty years to see the full-scale build-out of that land.

01-00:37:49

Rubens: Another—another twenty-five. I mean, it's been close to sixteen years already since it's begun.

01-00:37:55

Gordon: So it'd be another twenty to twenty-five years, because you got to go in there and do the remediation first, then you got to put in a new interior infrastructure before you start doing the actual structures.

01-00:38:11

Rubens: What do you think the Port's designs are on that property? Do you think they would—

- 01-00:38:15
Gordon: They want to see logistics centers. Yeah, they want to see logistics centers there.
- 01-00:38:22
Rubens: In your mind, is there the fear that they're just going to take it over?
- 01-00:38:28
Gordon: Well, the Port's logic is that they want to be funded upfront. They want to be funded upfront.
- 01-00:38:44
Rubens: So it's in their interest to get these other developers in there.
- 01-00:38:48
Gordon: They're not planning on spending one dime, one penny, on doing anything that would build out the Army base.
- 01-00:39:00
Rubens: And do you feel we've allowed enough time here for you to talk about what you'd like to see go on, on the Oakland Army Base?
- 01-00:39:07
Gordon: Well, I do see the logistics center further the freight movement needs. I see the railroad being more impacted because it's underutilized, and moving containers out, moving containers more north and then to the Central Valley. The interior, going into Utah and to Wyoming, places like this, try to get to Chicago. That's inefficient. There is not any efficiency in moving double-stacked containers. So I could see that. So that's my vision right now.
- 01-00:39:44
Rubens: And then we identified the other, that it makes jobs.
- 01-00:39:47
Gordon: Yes, and giving people jobs. Give people jobs—good-paying jobs.
- 01-00:39:52
Rubens: Now, what do you think you've learned, or what is in place to compensate for or prevent from happening what happened with the Cypress rebuild? I mean, are there people in the community who can be trained?
- 01-00:40:07
Gordon: I think the Port has learned a lesson from Caltrans, from the Cypress Freeway. When they did the build out of Vision 2008, they got what you call MAPLA and the MAPLA is a labor agreement. And you know when, under our past president, Bush, he suspended the labor agreements. So now they're back, all right. But since the MAPLA was already in place before he came in, they couldn't destroy that. So it's been lifted.
- 01-00:41:09
Rubens: How often do you meet as a commission?

01-00:41:16

Gordon: I have four meetings. I have the executive committee, I have the city/Port liason that I chair, and I chair the Maritime Committee, and then I have the standing board meeting.

01-00:41:34

Rubens: So you have a meeting every week.

01-00:41:36

Gordon: Just about. That doesn't even include any of the other invitations or receptions and not include—

01-00:41:46

Rubens: This organization?

01-00:41:48

Gordon: No, this work here, plus interviews, doing tours, and conferences, and other policy work that I work with. I do policy work around the air quality—I'm on two of their committees, working groups. Then I'm on a working group which is called Ditch Your Dirty Diesel. That's more a regional collaboration of CBOs and EJ groups. Then I have different students, students from all over the world, asking me to critique something, give me interviews. I'm also on the National Environmental Justice Advisory Committee—for Goods Movement.

01-00:42:42

Rubens: Is that part of EPA?

01-00:42:43

Gordon: Yes, EPA. And then I have a social justice group. We come together from different parts of the city or different agencies to talk about what policy is being pushed forward by state, federal government, and how we sign off on stuff.

01-00:43:04

Rubens: Do you have any free time? [laughter]

01-00:43:10

Gordon: Friday night to Saturday morning. I've got Friday night to Sunday.

01-00:43:14

Rubens: Yes, yeah, unless you're traveling you do your—

01-00:43:15

Gordon: Unless I'm traveling.

01-00:43:18

Rubens: What keeps you going? What...?

01-00:43:22

Gordon:

Well, one thing that keeps me going is that I had good role models. I had three women, my fraternal grandmother and the two great-aunts who raised my mother because her mother died in childbirth. So these women ran something. They were the first feminists that I ever know. They always had a job, had a business. They ran a church. They had some position in the church. Everybody, what they said, that would go. The husbands conceded to them.. It was always well taken care of. Everything was always well taken care of. So I had good role models.

01-00:44:18

Rubens:

And the good genes, good energy, as well.

01-00:44:21

Gordon:

Right. And my father, he was there to take care of me. I got a pretty good education. I shouldn't say a "pretty"—I got a good education. I got was able to go back to college, even with some kids. So it's just the—

01-00:44:37

Rubens:

Margaret, you have children as well?

01-00:44:39

Gordon:

Yes.

01-00:44:40

Rubens:

How many children do you have?

01-00:44:41

Gordon:

Three adult children. I have a forty-five-year-old son, forty-three-year-old, and a thirty-one-year-old son, and I have eleven grandchildren.

01-00:44:50

Rubens:

Oh, bless your heart. Are many of them in Oakland?

01-00:44:54

Gordon:

All of them. One in Alameda, one in Concord and one here in Oakland.

01-00:44:58

Rubens:

Congratulations. But it sounds like there's been this incredible snowballing since 2000, really—maybe 2004—with the success of Environmental Indicators and your appointment to the state committee, and now having all of these conferences.

01-00:45:22

Gordon:

[to someone else: Okay, I'll be there in a minute]

01-00:45:26

Rubens:

I think we're finishing up, yeah. Yeah.

01-00:45:29

Gordon: And then from being a volunteer to staff and then to co-director of this commission.

01-00:45:41

Rubens: You were called co-director of the Environmental—?

01-00:45:42

Gordon: Yea, I'm the co-director right now.

01-00:45:44

Rubens: Of Environmental Indicators?

01-00:45:45

Gordon: Right.

01-00:45:46

Rubens: Who's the other co-director?

01-00:45:46

Gordon: Other was Brian Beveridge. He's the one who sits on the WOCAG. He's been participating more than I have.

01-00:45:56

Rubens: We probably should have interviewed him.

01-00:46:01

Gordon: I'll give you his telephone number when this is over.

01-00:46:03

Rubens: Okay. When I read that first community report to OBRA, you are identified as being tied to the West Oakland Commerce Association.

01-00:46:18

Gordon: That was. CWOR.

01-00:46:19

Rubens: Oh, then maybe they listed it incorrectly.

Okay, fine. I meant to ask you that. Is there anything else that you think that you should say or want to say in terms of just your observation about Oakland politics, I mean, and development. We're right here close to the old train station-

01-00:47:08

Gordon: There's a lot of inequity in the development—a lot of inequity in development. It's not well planned out. You have this great area here—because, you know, being in West Oakland, you're at the center—kind of like in the center—of the state, and for the Bay Area. This is like the center. And I feel as though the plans that had been put forth out, West Oakland has not been really looked at the deep analysis of the issues. It's always been very surface, you know, based on these patchworks of development. Okay? You

have this housing development on Mandela, with all these factories around it. And you built all these lofts with these older homes around it, and it should have been some kind of a real transitional investment based on how to keep the community sustained. I've traveled a lot of different places where they have joint authorities of planning, okay? Boston—I was in Boston when I first saw this, where they have joint authorities of planning out neighborhoods. You have your school district, you have your community, you have business, you have your health department, police department, all sitting together—the universities, business, all sitting there, planning out how to sustain neighborhoods, or sustain this city.

01-00:49:03

Rubens: Effectively a master plan.

01-00:49:05

Gordon: Yes. That's—

01-00:49:05

Rubens: Master planning—engage in master planning.

01-00:49:08

Gordon: Yeah, and not this patchwork of development that happens here. And that's the biggest problem I see. We have this patchwork. And even San Francisco now has a much refined process in looking at development.

01-00:49:27

Rubens: But you're hopeful. How long will Environmental Indicators being funded? Is it another—?

01-00:49:32

Gordon: Oh, we'll be here for a while.

01-00:49:35

Rubens: Good.

01-00:49:35

Gordon: I'm going to be here for a while. I'm going to be here. I got second generation staff already. That's why we have the leadership academies.

01-00:49:46

Rubens: We'll stop for now. And I want to thank you so much for this time.

[End of interview]