

Interview with **Sonia Sanchez**

Date: March 7, 1989

Interviewer: Judy Richardson

Camera Rolls: 1051-1059

Sound Rolls: 121-124

Team: A

Interview gathered as part of *Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-mid 1980s*. Produced by Blackside, Inc. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

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Note: These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in *bold italics* was used in the final version of *Eyes on the Prize II*.

[camera roll #1051]

[sound roll #121]

[slate]

00:00:17:00

Interviewer:

Back then, what was your impression of the Southern civil rights movement and the impact it did or did not have, was not having on the, on the, on Black folks in the North?

00:00:29:00

Sonia Sanchez:

It was interesting observing the civil rights movement. I observed it from New York CORE. I was in an organization called New York CORE. I and some other people had made that trek down to Washington to listen to Martin talk about the dream. We came back very much involved with that dream, and also very much involved with being the people who were going to do some real work in this country. And I continued to be involved with that whole movement of New York CORE, but we always, at least I did, I'm not sure about everyone. I always viewed what was happening there as necessary for the South. I always viewed it not necessarily necessary for us in the North, because we could sit, we could go onto subway trains and sit any place. We could go on buses and sit any place. We could actually eat many places, if we had the money. I do know there was a subtle, very subtle segregation that

existed in New York City. Still, but, so, it was like, something you observed and were very proud of, and new people who were doin' some of that work also in the South and who, who came back and talked about it, but it was not necessarily talking about some of the things that we had, were talkin' about in the North, and I think that's probably how Malcolm talked about what we felt. It was not just, Give me a seat on the bus. Let me go to a pool. Let me wade in and pray in and, and sit in. But let me also go downtown and get some jobs, that most certainly we needed. Let me live on Riverside Drive, when we were living in the Harlems, and if you were walking over to Broadway in Riverside Drive, you got looks. You couldn't get apartments in New York City. So, there were other things. And when he began to talk about our oppression, we looked up, because we knew there was a freedom we had. But we knew also [laughs] that there was a non-freedom that we had. So, when he articulated that kind of oppression, and what we needed to do to feel good about ourselves and to make for some kind of movement. When he said it in a voice like we had never heard before. When he said it for even the brothers on our block, who didn't go to church, so couldn't involve themselves in the civil rights movement, OK? Who were hangin' out on corners. When he told people like me in a sense who had come out of Hunter College, was, had gone onto grad school, had really thought that she had most things that she really needed at some point. I mean, I was exceptional blood is what I'm sayin'. They called us the exceptional niggas in quotes. I really didn't, really didn't think that there was much that I needed at all. And really thought that was a movement there in the South, OK? Because we up North in New York City, and we in Chicago, and we in Philadelphia, we were like, OK. I mean, we were doing OK, although a part of us knew we were not doing OK. There was some part that knew something was wrong. Every time we experienced that peculiar, subtle prejudice segregation that New York was about.

00:03:50:00

Interviewer:

Tell me about your first impression of Malcolm.

00:03:54:00

Sonia Sanchez:

[laughs] See, what's interesting about talking about Malcolm is that quite often people always want to make you believe that he was some terrible, terrible man who never smiled and who was always scowling and, and demanding something that was obscene, almost. When I first saw Malcolm on the television, he scared me, also. Immediately, the family said, Turn off that television. That man is saying stuff you ain't supposed to hear. [laughs] And so, of course, we did. But always, you know, when the sun comes in the window, and you kind of jump up to get it, to close the blinds or pull down the shade, but before you do that, the sun comes in? Well, before each time we turned the television off, a little sun came in, and you'd be walking some place, and it would resonate in the ear what he said. And you would say, No, I can't listen to that because I'm in New York CORE. You know, I can't listen to that because they say he's a racist, and he must be a racist if he, they say he's a racist, so don't

listen. Well, one day, we, we were doing a huge demonstration in Harlem right in front of the old Hotel Theresa, which doesn't exist anymore in Harlem. Right diagonally across from Mr. Micheaux's bookstore there on 7th Avenue before he had to move to Lenox because of that building, the State Building that was going to be built there—

00:05:20:00

Interviewer:

Excuse me, if you could do that again without—

Sonia Sanchez:

My fingers?

Interviewer:

No, fingers are fine. But you were talking about—

Camera crew member #1:

[coughs]

Interviewer:

—Micheaux's moving and it'll—

Camera crew member #2:

Stay on that theme.

00:05:30:00

Interviewer:

—yeah, yeah, if you can stay right there.

00:05:32:00

Sonia Sanchez:

Gotcha.

Interviewer:

Mm-hmm.

Sonia Sanchez:

The first time that I really listened to Malcolm was when New York CORE was doing a large demonstration. And Malcolm has sent out a directive to all of the organizations, most especially the civil rights organizations, that, you cannot have a demonstration in Harlem, unless I, unless you invite me to speak. So, in our office at 125th Street, we moaned and groaned and said, Who is that man? Imagine that man saying such a thing. Who does he think he is? And of course, we had to say yes. So, we went to this big demonstration. Malcolm came with his bodyguards. I shall never forget that day. It was a day, where it was cloudy. There was no sun. And in New York City when it's cloudy and rainy, you know, you finally see the colors of the buildings. The yellows came out on the buildings, and the reds came out on the buildings. And when Malcolm got on, up on this man-made stage, the reds on his face came out. The red in his hair came out with that kind of blonde, red thing. *I was standing on the island there, looking at him. And my friend said, I'm going back to the office, we're going back. And I said, I'm gonna stay because I like the rain. There's this kind of quiet drizzle that was happening there. And I looked up and looked around, determined not to look at him. Determined not to listen. But he started to talk, and I found myself more and more listening to him. And I began to nod my head and say, Yeah, that's right. That makes sense.* That's logical. Mm-hmm. Whatever. And the audience was like, Yeah, Malcolm, yeah, man. Mm-hmm, Malcolm. Amen. Yes. Mm-hmm. Right on, yes, brother. Mm-hmm, whatever. There was this great call and response that goes on in the African American community. *When he came off the stage, I jumped off the island, walked up to him. And, of course, when I got to him, the bodyguards, you know, moved in front, and he just pushed them away. And I went in front of him and extended my hand and said, I like some of what you said. I didn't agree with what all that you said. But I liked some of what you said. And he looked at me, held my hand in a very gentle fashion, and says, One day you will, sister.* One day you will, sister. And he smiled. And I remember just standing there because I was ready to withdraw my hand in a very fast fashion. Like, you know, it was like, extending the hand like, here it is for being polite, but don't really, you know, that's it, but I left it there, and he smiled at me. And I remember walking back to the office, the CORE office there on 125th Street, smiling. Well, what happened then is that every time he was speaking in New York City, I was there. I came there to the temple. But what was strange is that everybody else was doing it. Baraka was doing it. The poets were doing, the musicians were doing, the teachers were doing it, the nurses were doing it. Everybody who was an intellectual was coming out to hear what this man had to say. People don't wanna remember that or talk about it. And that's how we became very much involved. And he saw us coming. Now, we would try to disguise the fact that we were coming. We didn't tell people we were coming. You come in and sit on the side and we, you wouldn't say anything. And you just kind of sit there, and you look around there, and you see all your friends, whatever. You nod your head and then keep looking at him. And I began to, through him, I began to go to the Schomburg more and read up on history because he began to give us Black history. He began to give us a sense of ourselves and—

00:09:17:00

Interviewer:

Excuse me, if you could say, if you could say Malcolm every once in a while.

00:09:19:00

Sonia Sanchez:

OK. Mm-hmm. Malcolm began to make us understand how we had been denied the history of African American people in this country. So, I began to go up to the Schomburg, and when he'd mention a name, I'd go search the name out at the Schomburg. When he mentioned a time, I would go and search out in the Schomburg what that period was. So, Malcolm sent us back all to the history books. He began to make us begin to move to a point of, like, what was he talkin' about? Why was that period important? Who was that person he was talking about? He sent us back to the libraries of America. But above all, it was when you watched him talk, he would fire you up, and you would simply respond, Mm-hmm. Yes, sir. Yes, that's right. Uh-huh. But then also, he turned a smile and his smile warmed us. The smile said, I know you're lost. The smile said, I know you don't wanna hear that. The smile said, But I will protect you with my, with my smile. I will love you above all. Above all, the smile was about love. We knew that man loved us. We knew Malcolm was saying simply, I, I can take the weight for everything that I'm saying. But I will raise up a, a generation, your generation, my generation that will begin to talk and preach truth in this country. I will listen to you. I will even fend off your scowls. I will, like, fend off when you get, when you get angry, because we got angry quite often because he called us names. We were the educated group. Don't forget, OK? We were the group that simply had come through and had been exceptional people. So, all of a sudden he was telling us that we were not so exceptional, that we were dumb, probably, that we didn't know our own history, that we didn't really know what it was to be a Black person in America. As a consequence, we got ignored quite often, but we kept coming back—

00:11:14:00

Interviewer:

Let me—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Interviewer:

—let me ask you, what was it about. What did you feel like when you listened to him? What was—rollout.

00:11:19:00

Camera crew member #1:

It's rollout.

00:11:21:00

Interviewer:

Yes, Yes, OK. Hold that point.

Sonia Sanchez:

Mm. Sure.

Interviewer:

OK. OK.

[cut]

[camera roll #1052]

[slate]

00:11:23:00

Interviewer:

OK, if you could think back on a rally where he was present, where he was the speaker, to get a sense of what electrifying, what an electrifying speaker he was.

Sonia Sanchez:

Well, I think that the reason why he was so effective—

Interviewer:

I'm sorry. I should've said Malcolm. So you can mention his name.

00:11:44:00

Sonia Sanchez:

OK. The reason why Malcolm was so effective was because the moment that he came into an audience, he told them exactly what he intended to do, what he intended to do with them.

What he said to an audience was that almost like you, we are enslaved. And everyone looked at first and said, Who? We are enslaved? We're free! And he began to tell us and explain to us in a very historical fashion, just as to what our enslavement was about. The moment he did that, he always had some information for you, some new information. As a consequence, you see, he drew an audience towards him. Malcolm knew how to curse you out in a sense, and make you love him at the same time for doing it. He knew how to, in a very real sense, to open your eyes as to the kind of oppression that you were experiencing. On the one hand, he would say something in a very harsh fashion. And then on the other hand, he would kiss you and hug you and said, I understand why you feel the way that you feel because you have the following, you see. The joy of Malcolm was that he could have in an audience, college professors, school teachers, nurses, doctors, musicians, artists, poets, and sisters who are housewives, sisters who work for people in their houses, brothers who were out of prison, brothers who were on drugs and were coming off drugs, brothers who were workers, brothers who were just hanging on the streets, whatever. Or were waiting outside the temple to get inside. The point is that I've never seen anyone appeal to such a broad audience. And the reason why he could do that is because he understood the bottom line is that if you tell people the truth, then it will appeal to everyone. If you tell them all about their oppression, in a fashion that they never heard before, then they will all gravitate towards you. So, he could have an audience of people who were saditty. You know, like, I'm in here to listen to you perhaps, but I really don't want to hear too much, whatever. And a sister sitting next to, Yeah, you right, man! Go on, tell it like it is! And all of a sudden, you will find yourself now saying, Yes. Tell it like it is, but you said, Yeah, man, you're right! And you went back to roots, very fantastic roots, you see. And he cut through all the crap. In other words, he says, I know you've learned how to speak this English in a proper fashion, but you forgot that you said, Man, you right! [laughs] You know, at some point. So, yes, he cut through a lot of, of nonsense in this country. At the same time, he informed us, and he made the broad mass of people respond to it. The joy of Malcolm is that he would get on a television, and he will be sitting there with bright, bright people. This man with no PhD, this man with no MA, this man with no BA, and would listen, in a very calm fashion, to what people, how people analyzed the world, be they Black, or, or be they White or whatever. And then he would come right around and speak in a very articulate fashion. And you see, what he said out loud is what African American people had been saying out loud forever behind closed doors. And he said, I'm now going to say out loud for everyone to hear what African American people have been thinking for years. And he did it. The reason why, initially, we cut off the televisions, is that we were scared. But he did. He, he said, I will now, in a very calm fashion, wipe out fear for you. He expelled fear for African Americans. He says, I will speak out loud what we've been thinking, and he said, You'll see, people will hear it, and they will not do anything to us necessarily, OK? But I will now speak it for the masses of people. When he said it in a very strong fashion, in this very manly fashion. In this fashion that says, I am not afraid to say what you've been thinking all these years. That's why we loved him. He said it out loud, not behind closed doors. He took on America for us. He assumed the responsibility of father, brother, lover, man. He became again, Martin Delany's *Blake*, the first Black revolutionary character in, in literature. He came out, and he became the person that we wanted to see. The man that we needed to see in the North and in the South. He became the man that most African American women have wanted their men to be. Strong. Say, I'm gonna take you on, America. Here I is. Look at me. I want to say the things that you've

wanted people to say. That's why the men and women loved him. That's why we all loved him so very much because he made us feel holy. And he made us feel whole. He made us feel loved and, and he made us feel that we were worth something finally on this planet Earth. Finally, we had some worth.

00:16:53:00

Interviewer:

Cut.

[cut]

[slate]

00:16:58:00

Interviewer:

What was Black folks' reaction, particularly in Harlem, but generally Black folks'—

Sonia Sanchez:

Mm.

Interviewer:

—reaction to Malcolm's, Chickens coming home to roost, comment after Kennedy's assassination.

Sonia Sanchez:

Well, I think Black folk were, were in agreement.

Interviewer:

I'm sorry if you could just mention his name.

00:17:14:00

Sonia Sanchez:

OK, yeah. You know, when JFK was assassinated, you know, and I know that this country had what we call an, made an opportunity for people to expel that horror via the television. OK? So, they said simply, We will assassinate on television, but we will also allow you an opportunity to get rid of the horror and your pain via television. So, they televised

everything. Then Malcolm, of course, made a statement about, This is just an example of chickens coming home to roost. This country also will not only kill African Americans, this country will kill its own also, too. Especially people who think they can be presidents. When certainly, that is not what happens in this country. You don't run a country as President, you're just there for, to be, you know, artifacts. You're just there to be the heads of states, et cetera. Of course, he was then sat down. What happened then for us, many of us, as we were watching that from the Harlems of America, we thought it was a very unjust thing. We thought what he had said was hip, was like, Yeah, why couldn't he say that? We didn't have a sense of the nation at that particular time being threatened, feeling threatened by the government—

00:18:32:00

Interviewer:

I'm sorry. Only because if you could incorporate the, Chickens coming home to roost, comment in there somewhere.

Sonia Sanchez:

I thought I did. I said, Chickens coming home to roost at the beginning.

Interviewer:

Oh, OK.

Camera crew member #2:

At the beginning.

Interviewer:

I'm sorry.

00:18:42:00

Sonia Sanchez:

I did. Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Yeah, I did. We, since we were not in the Nation. OK? At that time, we didn't have a sense of, like, there was a hierarchy involved. We saw the Nation as Malcolm, you've got to understand that. Although that we knew that there were other people involved with the Nation, our sense of the Nation was always Malcolm. Our sense of the Nation, of coming around the Nation and involving ourselves with the Nation, Malcolm was indeed the person. So, when someone could say, We are sitting you down because of your statement, we thought the dialogue in, in, in the Harlems of America was simply, Why? He said what was true, and why shouldn't he say what was true? Because he had been a person

who could always say what he wanted to say. So, we began to have a dialogue among ourselves about, There's something wrong. There must be something more than what is happening here. It is not just the statement, perhaps there are other things involved at this particular point. So, we began to watch very carefully. Watch Malcolm, watch his movements, watch his non-movements, and then all of a sudden, when he announced that he was no longer a part of it, then we sort of said, Well, good, you know. I mean, we've all said, OK, because he was our connection. He was our lifeline. In retrospect, you see, you do understand some things that were happening there. Certainly, we realize now from reading—

00:20:08:00

Interviewer:

Sorry. I can't [unintelligible].

Sonia Sanchez:

You can't do that. OK, I'm sorry. OK.

Interviewer:

It's OK.

Sonia Sanchez:

So—

00:20:12:00

Interviewer:

But, also, if you could, if you could also talk about what it meant in terms of what he was trying to do with the African continent and connecting African Americans with it.

00:20:19:00

Sonia Sanchez:

Mm-hmm. Yeah. And so, of course, there was his disconnection from the, the, the Nation. There was our disconnection as artists and, and observers of the Nation. We became very much disconnected also from the Nation. And then we began to observe Malcolm's movements towards Africa, and we were very much involved with talking to people who were involved with that. There were people who make, had strong connections with Malcolm and had letters back and forth from him at that particular time, and would let us know what was going on at that particular point. What we saw and didn't see, however, I think was that we didn't really know what was going on. We heard the roar from Africa. Africa responded

in a very splendid fashion towards Malcolm, you know. When he traveled, the students most especially loved him. So, they loved him in the same fashion that we, that we loved him. So, we knew that he had a very successful movement there on, on the continent. When he came back, his movement to the Audubon, the movement to, to form his own organization. Many of us went up to the Audubon Ballroom to see him and to hear him talk at that particular time. The fire was still there. You saw some disconnections in terms of crowds. The crowds were not the same anymore, you see, because people didn't know really what to do. People had come into the Nation, you must remember, because of Malcolm. So, many people stayed in the Nation. Many left, also. Many came to listen to Malcolm, but he didn't have the, the support that he had had in the Nation. He didn't have the temple. He didn't have all the people who would go out and make sure people came out to hear him speak. So, you had other people who were involved more with a Pan-Africanist-Africanist kind of attitude coming towards him at that particular point. So, I think that it was probably a low period on many levels for Malcolm, and for many of us also, who observed in him, not—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Sonia Sanchez:

—in a disciplined fashion, but in the fashion when you thought about going on a Sunday to hear him talk. And, and, and when you came, you know, you know.

00:22:29:00

Camera crew member #2:

OK, that's a rollout.

00:22:30:00

Sonia Sanchez:

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Camera crew member #2:

Ten, five, two.

Sonia Sanchez:

Mm-hmm.

[cut]

[camera roll #1053]

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it, please.

00:22:41:00

Interviewer:

OK. Could you give me a sense of the Black reaction to Malcolm's trying to do a broader view in terms of human rights and going to the United Nations and how people, Black folks saw that?

00:22:53:00

Sonia Sanchez:

When Malcolm went to the UN and began to say, This is no longer just about Black folks in America, but it's about the whole movement of human rights, that this is now a human rights problem. It is a problem that the world has got to deal with. I think it made him much more dangerous. I think that many Blacks in the country were not exactly sure as to what he meant, to be frank. And I think again, because he was not in a base, a real strong base, the way he had been, that it made him less effective. It became, he became as a person, who was having ideas, but not really having a strong base, to bring those ideas into motion or to make them really become effective. You see, when you have a base, the way the Nation was at that particular time, then if this is what you want to send out to the world, it got out because you had people working. He had a limited group of people around him.

00:24:04:00

Interviewer:

Do you think it made him more vulnerable?

00:24:05:00

Sonia Sanchez:

And I think it meant, of course, it made him much more vulnerable, because you see, for him to have said to people, I don't want to search you, when you realize that people are searched now. It made him actually, you know, literally vulnerable in a sense, you see, but the point is that he couldn't change. He had to do what he had to do, because, of, of course, the movement towards human rights was a very real movement. And African Americans have always been at the forefront of the human rights movement. So, he was on time. The point is that his organization hadn't grown to support him as he was moving. His ideas had grown in

a very real sense, but he didn't have the platform, the real platform. So, he was in Audubon Ballroom. You see what I'm saying? A place that was crumbling. A place that didn't have the kind of security that it should have had. And so, I think that when he came out on that stage, that, the morning that I heard. ***I was going to the Audubon that, that day. Had been out the night before reading, had gotten lazy and had said simply, Ah, I'll go next week. And so, proceeded to go into the kitchen, put some coffee on, turn on the radio. In my little apartment there, I had a little black and white kitchen table with these little black chairs. And I had this little black radio on that table, and I clicked the radio on. As I stood there, thinking about what had happened the night before, turned towards the stove to pick up my coffee. And the flash came through on, on this station and it said Malcolm had been assassinated.*** [gasps] [pause] [sighs] And I froze. I remember turning in that kitchen and screaming. I remember walking down through my living room to my bedroom to put my clothes on. And I remember cursing myself for not being there because I thought, maybe in some strange, obscure fashion, that if some of us had been there, perhaps it wouldn't have happened, but of course, it would have happened. But still, I remember coming back saying, No, no, this can't be. This has not happened to us at this particular point. And I remember the rage, the sheer rage, not helplessness, just rage and then sitting down. And just sitting still for the rest of the morning because the telephone began to ring with people asking me, had I heard? And I said, Of course, I'd heard. And I remember hanging up the telephone. The telephone ringing again, and they said, Did you hear? Is he really dead, Sonia? And I knew he was dead at that point, and I said, Yes, he's dead. And I remember what all that was about at that point. That, that sheer rage that this man was no longer on the earth. And then I began to later on that, that night, I began to write a poem that I had done for him that night, didn't finish it, but I began it. And I began, understood finally that I came to some terms with death, I think, that, that night. I said simply in my anger, Why? Why him? Why not some other person?, etcetera. Then I began to talk to myself. I began to understand insanity for the first time in my life, because I knew that many of us would speak out about it. And we had to be sane about it. We had to have some sense of it. I knew also at that particular point that we had to, that we were looking at a country that not only would kill, but also would begin to explain. Because already on the radio all day long, and the television, the explanations were coming as to who had done it, why it was done, etcetera. So, we had to be prepared for like, looking at it, analyzing it in a very real sense. I remember that night I didn't sleep. I remember some people came by, and we talked about it. I remember walking them downstairs from my apartment, and then comin' back up. I remember the faces of people. People like, were crying, would just stop, and we'd cry. And I remember hugging people, saying simply, Yes, this has happened, but he'll always live on as long as I breathe, and you breathe, and you truly believe that African American people need to be free, and all oppressed people need to be free. I remember saying that. But I remember also, not being that lucid in my own place, in my own time, with my own quiet, with my own pain. But I knew at some point that we would come through it because he had given us so much, much more probably than we had given him. And I knew also, because someone wanted to say that he was before his time. I said, I remember saying he was on time, we're always on time, you see? Whether people want to deal with what we say when we say it is not the point.

[rollout on sound roll]

[cut]

[sound roll #122]

00:30:27:00

Camera crew member #3:

One twenty-two.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:30:29:00

Interviewer:

If you could give me a sense of the sexism, but also, that you were not getting that off Malcolm?

00:30:34:00

Sonia Sanchez:

Well, what I remember, and what I know, what Malcolm gave us, those people who sought him out, those people who came to hear him speak, he gave me what I needed in order to move into another arena. Into an arena that began to talk against oppression. So, I did not receive the whole idea of, of a sexist message. I do know that there, you know, and I know that there, there was much sexism within the movement. But the point is that the message that, that he gave was a message that came out to men and women. And each one of us took that message, and went on to do the work that needed to be done. I never, in a very real sense, allowed myself to be relegated. Or if I, if people, if I saw people relegating me into an arena, I complained about it and would say something about it. And I think that most of the women who were involved with that movement, did it. I mean, they would do things like get coffee, and do stuff like that. But at some point, they rec-recognized the fact of what they were doing. So, Malcolm's message was a message that came out to men and women, and it did not say, Now, women, you be this way. Granted, he was, his message was like, quite often, like he'll say, I'm gonna say this to the men, Be the men that I want you to be. But, and also, he made women feel like they were queens of the universe, whatever. But it was a queen, not in a sense that's set on a throne and did nothing. It was a queen that worked. A queen that taught. A queen that led. A queen that was very much involved with the movement, you see. So, yeah, you say, Hey, I am pretty. Mmm, look at here. Look at this. Mmm. Look at these big lips. Aren't they full? When you, when you've been kissed by these

lips, you know you've been kissed by these lips. That's why they so full. [makes kiss noise] No one kisses like these lips kiss. I mean, it was that kind of beauty, you see? And if your nose was wide, yeah, your nose was wide, because simply that you could breathe well in the summertime when it was hot, you see. And the hair was what it was simply because, you know, it jumped back when we went swimmin', but you know, we, we could go swimming again. I mean, all those things, we began to integrate from his words. So, when he began to talk to us about our beauty, we understood that beauty, but it was not to relegate us in, in an arena that we got quiet and didn't say anything. I mean, my listening to Malcolm was like, here is, here are the words, now here is the message, now go forth, and spread the message. And that's what we did, listening to him.

[cut]

[camera roll #1054]

00:33:09:00

[slate]

00:33:12:00

Interviewer:

Yeah. If you could give me a sense of, of Malcolm and the icon story about Baraka.

00:33:16:00

Sonia Sanchez:

Right. You see, what Malcolm did, I think, is that he freed those people who needed to be freed, who were waiting for someone to say, Hey, come on, you can do this in this fashion. So, as a consequence, I never saw Malcolm as an icon of sorts, OK? So, I never saw anyone else. I saw them all as my brothers in the struggle. Now, of course, Malcolm maintained a rarified position for all of us, make no mistake about that, OK? But what I'm saying is that when, when I heard the message at the same time that many of these other people had heard the message. So, therefore, they were my brothers and sisters in the struggle. So, when I went to see people, I remember at a point in Baraka's life, heading Newark, heading for the University of Pitt, very much in need of some kinda help there at that particular point. [bell rings]—

[wild sound]

Sonia Sanchez:

—I saw it and couldn't, I saw it and couldn't, couldn't say anything.

Interviewer:

[laughs]

[cut]

[slate]

00:34:22:00

Interviewer:

What were you saying about not seeing Blacks in positions of power in the North?

00:34:25:00

Sonia Sanchez:

In the North, we never really saw African Americans in any position of power, except in a church. Even at the corner stores, the supermarkets, African Americans were not in a position of power. You had other people who would sell you food and sell you vegetables, whatever. When you went to church, quite often you would have a Black pastor, if you went to a Black-Black church, but if you went perhaps to a Catholic Church, you would not necessarily see, you know, African American priests up there preaching to you or talkin' to you or doin' the sacraments. So, I guess, Malcolm made us say simply, There is a man in the position of power. And he's exerting power. And he's spreading that power around. And he's saying, Here's some power for you. It's spell P-O-W-R. It is indeed Black Power. Because, you know, I is Black, excuse my English. And we understood that, all of us in some very instinctive fashion, because we extended our hands very fast and said, simply, I'm going to be seen, whatever. So, when we simply got naturals in the early '60s, and I walked across a, a street in Harlem, on 135th Street, I stopped traffic with this natural. Now, you must remember the natural was not big. It was like, not a huge natural as many of us got to be known for. But it was a natural, and people recognized it was different, and the taxicab driver would stop and as soon as I got across the street, he would lean out and go, Ooga booga booga, you know? And I would like, draw myself up real, real proudly, you know, and keep on going in a very real fashion. But my father said, Girl, what's your problem? You know? Why don't you get married and have some babies and move to Long Island or the Connecticut someplace? And we would say, You just don't understand, period. And what we, what we understood is that we had been released. The power energy had been released in the North via Malcolm. The energy that says, You could be whatever you wanted to be. You can do whatever you want to do. You want to write a play, girl write a play, write a play tonight, bring it out tomorrow and do that. And I did that and someone says, Are you a playwright? I said, Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. They said, Isn't it strange the connection between the poet and the playwright? And I would say, Mm-hmm, you know. [laughs] They said, Isn't it really interesting that you write poet, you write, you write plays and poetry? I said, Mm-hmm. And I said, When do you want that play? They said, Tomorrow. I said, No problem. Went home,

set up and wrote a play. Typed the play, brought it back the next day and said, Yes. Isn't it amazing the connection between the poet and the playwright? And walked out, burst out laughing going down the steps, because you could do whatever you wanted to do. He had released that kind of energy within us, and we still have it. I mean, I still have that energy that says simply, and everybody I know who came from that, that period has that energy also, too.

00:37:24:00

Interviewer:

Cut.

00:37:25:00

Camera crew member #2:

Cut? [phone rings]

Interviewer:

Cut.

[cut]

[slate]

00:37:28:00

Interviewer:

Give me the Baraka story.

00:37:31:00

Sonia Sanchez:

Malcolm made you believe that the message was not a separate message. I mean, even when he was saying that, This is for the brothers, you know, you'd listen. You know? [laughs] He said, Yeah, I, I bet. You felt that it was also for you, too. So, it made us feel as equals. And I felt equal to the brothers in everything that we could all do, etcetera. So, I was heading to the University of Pitt. Was coming out of Indiana, came through to see Baraka and Amina and, and their family and that whole organization that they had formed there. I'd come to that organization to do a, a talk once. So, I was coming back through on my way to the University of Pitt. I walked. I came up. I came into the office, and I was stricken by the way the men would dress, and the way that they were like, rushing around. So, I said, Hey, man, I'm

expected. My name is Sonia Sanchez. How you doin', sister? Whatever, etcetera. And we, some people talked to me very respectful. When I got upstairs, I was led upstairs to the office where Baraka's office. And as I was walking in, I observed that men, many of the men were doin' this and bowing down and backing out, and I said, Hey, how you doin', Amiri? [laughs] How's everything going? And I remember he looked up at me, and I looked up at him. And my eyes said, 'Cause, ain't no way I'm gonna do that. And ain't no way, really, I know you expect me to do that, because I understood fully that we had come through some other times together. And that was not in our, that was not our agenda. That was not in our history. And in no way had we been taught that kind of history at all, too, which was interesting. So, I went over and hugged them-him. And I remember watching some of the people watching me, and we looked at each other, and I began to talk about, you know, some problems I was having at that time. And he began to talk about what they were gonna do and what he was gonna do, etcetera, and we, and, and I left and went on to stay over in Newark. I stayed in Newark, perhaps for about a day or so with my twins. But I thought about that whole, that, that arena that he had moved into, and I thought to myself, I remember writing in my journal because I keep journals. And I said simply, What does this mean? What does this mean when we have, in a very real sense, made people, put people on strange pedal-pedestals? Or we have, in a sense, made people believe that people have to bow down. I hadn't quite, quite gotten to what it was really all about. But I knew in some strange fashion that was not where we were supposed to go, at all. And didn't verbalize that with him at that particular time. Years later, we all managed to laugh at some of these things.

00:40:23:00

Interviewer:

OK. Yeah, we cut you there.

Sonia Sanchez:

Yeah. I got it. I know the moment I said it, the moment I realized—

Camera crew member #2:

Cut.

[cut]

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

00:40:32:00

Interviewer:

As a Black woman, what attracted you to the Nation?

00:40:35:00

Sonia Sanchez:

What brought me and a lot of women and men to the Nation was that finally, the continuation of what had gone on before. When we began to search out how had we come in to this sense of ourselves, this Blackness, this, this sense of like, what it meant to be an African American woman or man in, in America, we realized that a lot had come via Malcolm. He had been a vessel, but a lot of the information had come also through Elijah Muhammad in terms of his ideas. So, many of us, because of other things that had happened in the country at that time, began to go to the various temples again, and sit and listen. And it was because with the sense of support of this Blackness. Also, at that particular time, too, it was the strongest organization in America. And so, many of us who were working very hard, felt an obligation to go, as people were sayin', to the source of the information that we had become familiar with. So, many of us went in, I went into the Nation, I think, in '73. And, and stayed until '75. What I saw and experienced, as a person who was very much involved with ideas and, and writing books, that I ended up teachin' some classes, and my classes were controversial. But I taught women. I taught poetry. I taught also the whole idea of, you cannot have twenty-five children in three years and stay sane. It's impossible. I continued to lecture. I was called not a Muslim, but a Pan-Africanist at that time. And people wondered why I, why was I in the Nation? I had children, I had twin sons. And I, I took them into the Nation in a sense, I think, for probably protection. There was a very real atmosphere of strength in the Nation, almost the same kind of strength that, that had emanated from Malcolm. And so, I went into the Nation with my children, for, I suppose, surcease from a lot of the turmoil that we were all in, very much involved in and with. But also to begin to study more about the Nation than I had. I had not studied the doctrines of the Nation. I had not really looked at it. I had looked very much at Malcolm and all the other information I had gone into as far as Black history and, and, and Black literature in America. So, I began that interesting look at some of the mythologies that, that the Nation was involved in and with. And so, that's what I did. Mm-hmm.

00:43:18:00

Interviewer:

Can you give a sense of, when you said the Nation was Blackness, what did you mean by that?

00:43:23:00

Sonia Sanchez:

The Nation, actually, made America begin, Black America begin to use the word Black. You know, we use Negro and Afro American. The Nation said, You are a Black man and a Black woman. It was very obvious, at least for my study of it at that particular time, it was like, You're Black in the diaspora. Wherever you are, and you're looking like you look, you are Black in this diaspora. And it's something to be proud of. You know, and I know that when someone called you Black in America before then, you said, Not me. I'm not Black. I'm brown. I'm yellow. I'm—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Sonia Sanchez:

—you know, I'm whatever. But you did, You were not Black.

Camera crew member #1:

We rolled out, so—

Sonia Sanchez:

Oh.

Camera crew member #2:

Rollout.

Interviewer:

That's [unintelligible]

Sonia Sanchez:

OK, OK.

[cut]

[camera roll #1055]

00:44:08:00

[slate]

00:44:09:00

Interviewer:

You were talking about the Blackness that the nation represented. Could you talk a little bit more about that?

00:44:13:00

Sonia Sanchez:

You see, Malcolm had made the country receptive to Blackness. Had said simply, It's OK to be Black. It's beautiful. It's OK to have that history. It's OK to understand that part of what it really means to love yourself. So, what we, what were, where were those people gonna go? You see, there was no other place for them to go with that information, with that intelligence, with that kind of movement. And so, they moved in almost en masse into the Nation, you see. And the Nation says, Here I am. Here. Yes, I, I respect your Blackness. I say you are a Black woman, and you are beautiful, and you are queen of the universe, and you walk up and be correct, be moral. It was the greatest moral place for people who were trying to be correct, who were trying to be political, who were trying to be very much involved with their Blackness. People were trying to learn about themselves. That was the place to go. And of course, there were restrictions involved. There were problems with it, make no mistake about it, but that was that arena that had been left. The legacy that Malcolm had left was that legacy right there for many, for many people, masses of people. It was an arena also, where people said, I wanna get off drugs. See, what people forget, during that period, drugs were decimating the Black community. People want to forget that. They say, Now, crack is new. Crack is new, but the whole idea of people being on drugs was not new. And so, people were, I actually saw men come into the temple, who were out and women were out, and they were resurrected in one week, and would come back. It was like seein' people rising from the dead. Stand up straight, brother. Would stand up and say, I was, yesterday, here and was standing up straight and was walking. They had the best drug rehabilitation program on the planet Earth, right there. And the same with women. The same thing happened with women. When, when you told a woman, You're not a hoe. You're not a whore, you know, you're not somebody's whatever. I saw women who in a month had come in with, you name it, whatever. And three weeks later or two weeks later, they were coming in saying, I know I'm not on that level. So, here was this, this, this, this organization, talking about resurrecting and, and, and reordering your life and, and not just, I don't mean moral in terms of dress, I mean moral in terms of responsibility to your people. It was that kind of morality that they were talking about. You are responsible to your people. So, therefore, you must do the following, you see. You must act in a certain fashion, but you must also preach this message to bring people to the sense of themselves. You must indeed do as the boys and others said in the '30s, you know. Go and frequent Black businesses. You see, erect Black businesses. Work for Black folks. It was a whole push in terms of Blackness. It was a sea of Blackness there to see people saying to themselves, I like me. I saw people likin' themselves. I would walk down the street and people who were like, you know, were, were not doing right as such would say, Oh, don't worry now, Sister Sonia. I'm, I'm, I'm going to get it together. Yes, I know. [clears throat] But they would stand up better, you see, at some point. There was a moral energy in the country that made people, whether they wanted to be a Muslim or not,

think in a fashion that was healthy towards each other. All people, all women in Harlem could cross the street and no one mugged them. Women could walk down the street with diamonds, and no one, because even though the brothers were poor, or po', they knew they could get a meal, if they went in there. They knew that someone would give them food for thinking, which would make them say, I don't need to do that. Let me go out and get a job. Let me go out and sell the paper. Let me do something else. So, there was that moral fiber that was given to that Black community that was so necessary and so needed.

00:48:03:00

Interviewer:

And what was the image that Black men had within the Nation? What was your sense of that?

00:48:07:00

Sonia Sanchez:

The image of Black men in the Nation was one of, the FOI. The FOI, the Fruit of Islam was an organization that came over as being extremely strong, extremely powerful, extremely protective. And they, they brought back the whole aura of Garvey. That whole era where you came, you came into uniforms, you came in, and you didn't mess with 'em. There was some bad bloods, you know what I'm sayin'? I mean, you did not mess with the FOI. When they came out on the street people would say, Mmm, yes, sir. Mm-hmm. But even the brother who came into the Nation and just wore the suit every day. They had to wear a suit, into, into the temple, whatever. And you saw the brother selling a paper on the street. It was an image of, like, an upright brother, you know. I've come from being powerless to a position of bein-having power. I'm selling a newspaper. And they would, like, push a newspaper on you, and you bought that paper, you know. And they really believed in that. Brothers goin' around selling fish that came from, from Latin America, if you remember. Central America at that time, or brothers selling bean pies, brothers with businesses. It was like a sense of, of, of people trying to do, be correct with each other, that people weren't gonna hustle you out of anything, then you would, you could trust them. You could trust the sisters. You could trust the brothers and so, therefore, in that sea of Blackness, you were home, and you didn't have to, you could let down and say simply, These people will, are good. They can take care of me.

00:49:49:00

Interviewer:

And what was your sense in terms of respect that brothers in the Nation had to sisters? Both in and outside the Nation.

00:49:55:00

Sonia Sanchez:

Right. Well, brothers did. I mean, you, you, you felt that respect that brothers had for sisters because they were taught that. They were taught. And I'm, I'm not talkin' about problems with that at all, OK? Because certainly, there were problems with that. But certainly, on a, on a, on a level of sisters were, were queens. Sisters were be to, were, were to be respected. Sisters were, were to be taken care of. All those kinds of things were interesting kinds of things that some women had never experienced. I mean, some women told me they had never experienced anyone saying to them, I, I'd like to protect you. I'd like to take care of you. I'd like very much to, in a sense, make sure that you are protected. So, when sisters came into a neighborhood, whatever, and the brothers were standing outside. They felt safe. You hit 116th Street or two blocks before 116th Street, you felt protected. You knew no one was going to mug you, and you knew the brothers would not mug anybody within that area, within that arena. Because they knew if they did that, they were in deep trouble. They wouldn't even think about doing it, you see. So, there was that, that wall of protection that was there all the way from 125th Street, all the way down to 110th Street. You know, from Lenox Avenue to Seventh Avenue, you didn't commit stuff in that area, you know what I'm saying?

00:51:06:00

Interviewer:

That's because the mosque was there?

00:51:06:00

Sonia Sanchez:

Because the temple was there, the mosque was there. Yes, you better believe it, you see, and if something did happen, they would, you know, you felt that they would go out and say, What, you know, what's happening? What is this really all about? You see. And I think that you have, we have to understand that when the temple was attacked once by the police, that the neighborhood came out and surrounded the mosque and said, No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. What are you doing here? And the police said, We're looking for someone who supposedly stole something. They said, No, no, no, no, no, you know, it won't be here. I mean, you had people coming out. You had poets and, and, and, and writers and social workers and all kinds of people coming out doing that.

00:51:50:00

Interviewer:

Cut.

Camera crew member #2:

Yeah, OK.

[cut]

[slate]

00:51:56:00

Interviewer:

OK. If you can give me a sense of protection and, and kind of lack of crime within the area around the mosque.

00:52:01:00

Sonia Sanchez:

What, what the mosque was, I think, for many people, it was a, a beacon, a, a haven. And as a consequence, you know, or you knew that you were safe within the confines of, like, once you hit Lenox Avenue, coming down towards 116th Street, that you were gonna be OK because actually, there were brothers up and down that avenue sellin' the papers. And it meant simply that if they saw anything happen, or people wouldn't do anything around them, first of all. So, once you got to 116th Street, you were, like, free. You were home. You were OK. You were safe. And people knew that. And so, therefore, and if anything happened around the confines of that mosque, I mean, you knew the person had to be crazy to do it because someone would find them out and go and say, What's your problem, brother or sister? So, there was a sense of, of, of being safe within that arena, which was very important. I think that it was that aura and, and that mystique, and that sense of seeing brothers and sisters around. I mean, we saw sisters walking in a certain fashion and dressed in a certain fashion, and even though it seemed different from the rest of the populus, people respected that. You, you have to go back and look at the respect that ordinary people had for the sisters. I mean, there was a sense of, like, respect for these are good sisters and people would say, the church would say, How you doing today, sister? Everything OK? Because you said, I'm fine, sister. And there you were, there was that, a common ground of respect and, and, and love for each other and someone will stop you and say, You know, I don't know if I really believes in this stuff that you people's talking about, but you know, my daughter's in this, you know, and she done changed. My daughter used to run, and do this, and drink, and smoke that pot and, and just run with all kinds of mens, but she don't do dat no mo'. And so, even though I don't quite understand what it's all about, I like my daughter now. My daughter is nice now, and she's respectful. So, keep on doing what you're doing, girl, you know, because I know there's some good in that. That's what I'm talkin' about. You can't fight that. And that was a very real kind of movement there. And we have to remember that and understand that. So, young boys would not hit or knock down older women for anything at all because they knew that they weren't supposed to be that way. That's why I understand truly the feelings that some people

have now about sayin', talkin' about that in these new rap songs. Okay, I know. [laughs] I don't know why I said it.

00:54:47:00

Interviewer:

I know you know, that's why—

Sonia Sanchez:

That's why I stopped.

Interviewer:

[unintelligible]

Sonia Sanchez:

I know, but—

[cut]

[camera roll #1056]

[slate]

00:54:53:00

Interviewer:

This is a question about Muhammad Ali back then. What was your sense of him?

00:54:59:00

Sonia Sanchez:

Mm-hmm. I don't like fights and fighters, but I love Muhammad Ali. And I love Muhammad Ali because he was not just a fighter. He was a cultural resource for everyone in the time, in that time. Black students, White students, green students, brown students, blue students, he cut across. I mean, every race, every religion because he said, No, I will not go, and then try to continue to fight at the same time. And students loved him. Because they said simply. He articulated what they were thinking, that indeed it was a unjust war. So, you had to love him. And so, I would, when he fought, I would like, make myself, force myself to come and watch him fight. But I knew that I was not just seeing him in an arena because you see, these things are not just about fights. They're always about the, the struggle for people's

minds. So, when people played baseball or fight a fight, they're struggling for the minds of people saying, Come over to my side, you see, and not that other side. So, I recognized as I was always pullin' for him to win, because then it meant he won some other people over to his side, you see? So—

00:56:13:00

Interviewer:

What did you think when he joined the Nation?

Sonia Sanchez:

Mos-most of the people I know—

Interviewer:

I'm sorry. If you could just say when he joined.

00:56:20:00

Sonia Sanchez:

When Muhammad Ali joined the Nation, it was a continuation of what we knew was happening already. Everyone had seen Malcolm down in his camp. Everyone had seen, knew that he was teaching him, instructing him at that particular time. So, when he changed his name, we said very simply, That's his name. When people, in fact, when people called him Cassius Clay, we would say, That's not his name. Call the brother by his name. His name is Muhammad Ali. Go on. Do it. Get it. Walk on. And we were very pleased and very happy. So, it was not a bone of contention. Unless people wanted it to be. People who said, I can't pronounce that name, or, I don't want to pronounce that name. Or what it meant, perhaps at some point that maybe they thought that he had gotten to be too big, but the man knew what he was doing, could do it, did it and brought everybody along with him when he did it, because he had that sense of himself. That sense that when he said, I'm the greatest, you say, Yes, you are. There's no doubt about that, Muhammad Ali. You are indeed the greatest. The greatest that ever done walked on this earth, whatever. And you believed that, but you also, again, this man was a gentle man. I mean, he'd get out of the ring, and then would grab your hand and be very gentle with you and said, Did you like that, sister? Did you like what I just did? Did I tell him really off? [laughs] And he laughed that laugh, that very infectious laugh, and you would say, Yes, you did. And that was good.

00:57:42:00

Interviewer:

Cut.

00:57:42:00

Camera crew member #2:

Cut.

[cut]

[sound roll #123]

[slate]

00:57:47:00

Interviewer:

OK. That sense of pride that you have.

00:57:49:00

Sonia Sanchez:

Mm-hmm. *Can you really imagine whole generations living and dying and never once having loved themselves? That's what we tried to change. When we moved into the Black arts, Black culture, the Black consciousness movement. I said, Never again will I allow anyone to live and walk on the planet Earth and not like what they are, what they be.* Not like the full lips and the flat noses and, and the hair that was curly or not curly or so-called nappy. But just like the skin, the brownness and the yellowness and the Blackness and the blue Blackness and the brown berry-ness of it all. And that's one of the things we attempted to do. We, initially, many of us wrote in Black English, and many of the people Black, White, green, purple, blue said, This is not proper English, so it's not proper poetry. But I remember my grandmother speaking in Black English, and I remember what held me and drew me to her was that sound and that beauty of it. So, I implanted it in my psyche. At, at, at an appropriate time, I pulled it out and used it and said, Here it be, this is what this is really all about. And I loved it. And I loved those words. And I knew those words loved me. But I knew also those people who had used those words said, Finally, oh, girl, you done used us? Is we home yet? And we all looked up and said, Yes, you home. We all home now because we understand home, finally.

00:59:25:00

Interviewer:

What other influences were there on your poetry at this time?

Sonia Sanchez:

Of course, brother Malcolm, of course, what was going on—

Interviewer:

I'm sorry.

00:59:33:00

Sonia Sanchez:

The influences of my poetry at that, at that time was, of course, brother Malcolm. His sense of heartness, his sense of humor, and his sense of playing the dozens. People forget that, you see. We integrated all of that in our poetry, so we had hard-hitting poetry, but af-after we hit people, we would like, in a sense, give them a chance to breathe and say, OK, you have a little breath. You have a little leeway here. Also, what was going on in the South. The movement in the South played a great importance in, in my poetry in that I wrote about the children being killed in Birmingham. I wrote about people moving in the South trying to move towards what it meant not only to be Black, but also the grass power at that particular time. Also, I read a lot of people. What was going on in Cuba influenced me. What was going on in terms of a Guillaume and Neruda. We extended ourselves. We had to teach Third World literature because we would teach it in Black studies, so I couldn't relegate myself just to a Phillis Wheatley or Du Bois. I had to then move out and read what the chairman was saying, what Neruda had said, what Guillaume was said, Guillaume was saying, what other people were saying in terms of leadership. So, we went to Africa, and we, all of a sudden, looked up and began to read the African poets. I met Ngugi came to this country, and I met him and he listened to me read. He says, When I go back home, I got to write like you people are writing now about yourselves, a sense of identity. So, all of those influenced what was going on in the world in the Black diaspora, you see. Influenced all of us, and we began to come together. We met, we shook hands, we hugged, and we said simply, This is what we've got to do worldwide. This is a movement that must go worldwide, it must. People must hear what we're saying about ourselves and about the world. And so, there was a sense of not only Black identity, Black consciousness, but always the sense of Black politics also being weaved in, because when people said Black Power, we said, Yeah, here it is. In poetry. Look at this. Ho-ho-ho. When people said, We need land. We say, Here it is, let me tell you about land, OK? When people said, said simply that we need Black schools, Let me tell you about Black schools. Here's a poem about a child loving herself, and she'll love herself more, if we take over these bloody schools, or if we have our own schools, period. So, there was always the coming together. We were, like, weaving together. Moving in when someone said something, we picked it up in the literature. When someone said simply, We need to go South, I did a trilogy of poe-plays that talked about the Bronx is next, and moving South, the trek South, returning home, whatever. And someone said something else, we said, Oh, we got the poem for you. We got the music for you. We wrote songs for people to sing and record. You see, there was that move-moving, coming, coming together, you see. When I saw Coltrane playing his last concert, I went home and wrote a poem about, about Coltrane, and

then began to use my voice at the same time. So, when I did a Coltrane poem and got to the poem, the part where we didn't understand what Coltrane was doing at the time, I would [vocalizes] with my voice. And I brought up Coltrane at the same time. When I said, Are you sleeping, brother John? Are you sleeping, brother John? I responded with my voice. When I said those words also, too. It is that kind of motion and movement that we did. And I saw the paintings for the first time. When I saw a Charles White painting for the first time, stumbled over his painting. When I saw, saw a Bearden for the first time stumble over his, I responded in terms of my writings also, too. About, we were like, in every arena looking at each other. When I heard people speak all the way from a Stokely to a Baraka to a Muhammad Ahmed, you know, you name the people, you know. Akbar, you name the people. We responded to each other. When Queen Mother Moore stood on the stage and said, Reparations, I said, What the hell, what, what's reparations? And she came down off the stage, said, Honey, let me tell you about reparations is, it's what we all should have, you see. And then I went and wrote about that also, too. This is what I'm talking about. It's that kind of moving in and out of each other, that kind of coming together, no separation of the art, the culture and the politics. And so, we said simply, I wrote an essay that said, Culture is the consciousness of a people. If you don't own and maintain the culture, you will not keep, keep a conscious people, they will become unconscious. They will give you all kinds of peculiar people and call it your culture and it's not your culture at all.

01:04:03:00

Interviewer:

Can you give me a sense of what you were fighting against in terms of the image of Black folks at that time?

01:04:09:00

Sonia Sanchez:

The image of Black folk in the late '50s, early '60s was one—in the movies still of, like, the big fat mammy syndrome, you know? I mean, it's not by chance that people say the most important movie is *Gone with the Wind*, you know. Come on, because you had like, Miss Lucy Mae, honey child. You mean that no good man done left you, honey child? Honey. Honey, honey, honey, honey. Of course, I'll come. I'll stay with you and work for you. I'll do all I can for you. She said, But I can't pay you any money, darling. Honey, I don't need no money. I don't need no money at all. I'll work for nothing because you is my family. And then of course, she has six little crumb crushers at home. We saw that, you know, and we said, No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. That's not what African American women be. That's not what they are. Not at all, period. And we began to literally reconstruct the image, whatever. Of course, we still had those funny movies come in, Tarzan movies, you know, that we grew up on. African people were always scared people, whatever. And we said, I, I came through Harlem, I couldn't have been scared. [laughs] You know what I'm saying? If I was scared, I was dead, you know. So, therefore, we began to say simply, That's why people were always brash, you know, very much sure of themselves. People want to say, we didn't

see always, like, a human quality. Well, the, the human quality doesn't make them bad. You know what I'm saying? I mean, like, that was like the human quality. We saw bad, you don't mess with us, you see, and what that did—[phone rings] oh, the telephone—

Interviewer:

[unintelligible]

[cut]

01:05:47:00

[slate]

01:05:50:00

Interviewer:

What was the new Black image that came out with the Black consciousness movement?

01:05:54:00

Sonia Sanchez:

Well, the new Black image was one of people who were taking control of their lives. One that denied that Africans in the diaspora were, were weak, child, you know, childish, childlike, incapable of doing anything. It denied that whole image of Black woman as whore. I mean, we as Black women, put that down to rest, to sleep. The whole image of the pickaninny, kind of thing. And we did that by braiding our hair and saying, Look at here, look at these braids, you see, because we've been braiding our hair for a very long time. Don't forget. These are the kinds of things we—and, and, and, and African American men who were taking control of their lives, were not scared and shaky. The images that we gave in our poetry were, were men and women who were very certain of what they were doing. Strong men and women, complex, you know. Weaknesses, yes, OK, but not weaknesses that would destroy them. You see, and I think that initially, at the very beginning, a, a lot of the writing was, was on purpose one-sided, and that maybe even one-dimensional on some levels to show simply, an audience, this is a possibility. This is really how people are. But if you really read, if you do a close reading of the literature of that period, there was always the other that was there, too, at the time. Quite often people pushed one, one side of the literature we were doing, but you always had the poems about being lonely, the poems about being a woman, the poems about being a mother, a single mother, the poems about being oppressed alone, but there was a double and a triple oppression that we all had at the very beginning. As we wrote, you see, most certainly, as the women, African American women were writing the pieces. And always, most of the times the difference is that we were not victims, and we must understand that. We say, Yeah, I'm lonely. But the point is that and, and I'm by myself, and I might even show some fear every now and then. But most of us had gone through the whole

process of expelling fear. You know, if you listen to brother Malcolm long enough, you expel fear. You know, if you really got up and did something. If you became active, fear was expelled from the body. It's when you, it's when you are inactive that fear accumulates, like fat in the body, OK? And that's what I'm saying. So, the moment you, we kept, we were lean, we were lean, you know. We stayed lean, because we moved around a lot. We were lean with action and lean with courage, you see, and we leaned against the con-country with that courage, you see. But the activism made that happen.

01:08:44:00

Interviewer:

And why was it important that Blacks defined their self-image? And who had been defining it before?

01:08:51:00

Sonia Sanchez:

One of the things we learned from Malcolm and others, that we had not been in control of defining ourselves. There was no such thing as self-determination. We were very much concerned about doing that for ourselves. Who are we? The whole question of identity came up. Are we Negroes with a capital N, because America didn't capitalize Negro until the 19, late 1920s. OK? In the newspapers and books. Are we Afro American? And what that means also. Or are, are we Black? And so, all of a sudden people kept saying, Ugh, I'm not Black. Please, you know. And, and we said, No, no, we're not talking about the color. We were talking about, are we these Black people who populate the earth? So, it became important that we defined ourselves as Black men and Black women walking on this planet Earth, doing what we need to do. It became important that we write our own books, that we write our history books, and our poetry books, and we write in the language that we wanted to write. It became important that we educated our children. That we start, that we began to talk about Black religion, you know, Black Christian theology, Black history, Black English, Black poetry, Black sociology. People began to look at little Black girls and say, Yeah, OK, maybe they do have some problems in these urban cities. But there's a strength about them that is fascinating, whatever. And how then, then do we change that? We began to teach Black literature. For the first time, people in our classroom in San Francisco, we had, like, people sitting on the floor, to read a Wright, to read a Du Bois, to read a Garvey, to read Zora Neale Hurston, to read all these people. And they cried, people literally cried in the classroom, saying, How can I say that I was educated? When I didn't know these people existed. People cried. And so, when you gave a syllabus out with thirteen, fourteen books, people said, Hey, I'll read it, because they wanted to read, because they knew that they had been deprived of that information about themselves. That is the kind of joy. So, at the same time, so, you begin to have in the churches, at the shrines, the Black Madonnas, Black Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ, you know. A Black Jesus Christ up there, and people said, Sacrilege, sacrilege, and we said, No, no, no, no. Think of the place, think of the time and say it's not sacrilegious to say a Black Jesus Christ, you see. People began to put up Black Marys and,

and Black, you know, all of these things, and people said, Hold it. Now that might not be the case. We said, Think of Isis, and you'll know something then. Think if you go into certain countries, if you go, you'll see that the people that they worship are these Black women. And so, people said, Hold it. If they worship Black women, how have we become to be people who are not, women who are not worshipped and who are damned? You see. And so, that whole movement began to come in terms of women beginning to look at themselves in a different fashion.

01:11:50:00

Interviewer:

Cut.

[cut]

[camera roll #1057]

[slate]

01:11:56:00

Sonia Sanchez:

I began this poem after Malcolm was assassinated. And I never finished it. I used to come to it, look at it, hold it, put it down. But the great joy of poetry is that it will wait for you. Novels don't wait for you. Characters change, but poetry will wait. I, I think it's the, it's the greatest art because it will wait for you in a drawer, in a notebook. And when you open that notebook and say, I'm ready to finish it, the poem will say, Welcome, come on, get to it. Do it. And I did it. [reads] "Malcolm." "Do not speak to me of martyrdom, of men who died to be remembered on some parish day. I don't believe in dying though I, too, shall die. And violets like castanets will echo me. Yet this man, this dreamer, thick-lipped with words will never speak again, and in each winter, when the cold air cracks with frost, I'll breathe his breath and mourn my gun-filled nights. He was the sun that tagged the Western sky and melted tiger-scholars while they searched for stripes. He said, Forget you, White man. We have been curled too long. Nothing is sacred, not your white face, nor any land that separates until some voices squat with spasms. Do not speak to me of living. Life is obscene with crowds of White on Black. Death is my pulse. What might have been is not for him or me. But what could have been floods the womb until I drown." [sighs] That poem for him was, was done almost. I finished it in one night, in one sitting, as I walked through it, and thought about how to, at some point, say to people, Don't talk to me about martyrdom. I know it, I feel it, I taste it. I've lived through it. I don't believe in dying, but we're all gonna do it, you know? And then go to the man, talk about this man, this dreamer. This man, thick-lipped with words who will not speak again. But in a sense when he spoke, we listened, and we heard, and knew, and felt, and lived, and loved. And we were.

01:14:19:00

Interviewer:

Cut.

[cut]

01:14:24:00

[slate]

01:14:25:00

Interviewer:

Why was the Congress of African People's Convention in '70 important as the first step in building that National Black Movement?

01:14:34:00

Sonia Sanchez:

The Congress of African People was in 1970 in a place called Atlanta, Georgia. And it came about, I think, because Stokely Carmichael or Kwame Ture and Owusu Sadaukai decided, or began the discussion about bringing this into the international arena, bringing the sense of being Black into an international arena, an African arena also, at that particular time. And so, Stokely, Kwame had been discussing this from '68 until 1970. As a consequence, there was a gathering there, and we all came. You had at that gathering, don't forget now, everyone from Farrakhan to Diggs, Whitney Young was there. You're talking about two years before his death, also in a dashiki—

01:15:39:00

Interviewer:

I'm sorry. We're gonna have to cut this out—

Sonia Sanchez:

Hmm.

Camera crew member #2:

That's fine.

Interviewer:

—only because they're not gonna know Diggs offhand.

[cut]

01:15:37:00

[slate]

01:15:40:00

Interviewer:

So, you have, could you tell me about the, the Congress of African People's Convention in 1970, and the sense of it being a first step to this National Black Movement?

01:15:48:00

Sonia Sanchez:

Mm-hmm. The Congress of African People happened in 1970 in a place called Atlanta, Georgia, and to have been there, to have felt that excitement, to have seen on a stage a Minister Louis Farrakhan, a Whitney Young of the Urban League, a Congressman Diggs. To have seen people come together, holding hands, saying simply, We are going to advance the cause of Blackness and take it to a level that, that this country had never seen before. It was that excitement, that kind of mood that permeated the room there in Atlanta, Georgia. And we knew, many of us, that it had been, in a sense, the brainchild of a number of people who had begun to push for an internationalizing of the movement. It was not just nationalizing the movement, but internationalizing move, the movement, saying simply, We are moving to, we're taking it to an African arena now. We are bringing people along who perhaps don't want to come along, because the mass of people, the mass of Black people in this country, are saying simply, Get on board this train, just as Tubman said. If you don't get aboard in 1970, you might get left. [laughs] So, a whole lot of people got on board that train in Atlanta, Georgia, because they knew that that train was running and was on high speed at that point.

01:17:19:00

Interviewer:

What are your strongest images of the convention?

01:17:22:00

Sonia Sanchez:

[laughs] Watching people. I'm an observer of people, you know. I don't—if I, if I were not a writer, you know, I think I would just enjoy watching people. My children always tell me that I'm a snoop, that I watch people all the time. And it's true, I do. I watch people. And I went into workshops and saw the workshops function, saw people function with people. People came to that convention ready to learn, ready to be moved, ready to hear about how we were going to cooperate and do things, ready to talk about the idea of Af-African liberation on a global sa-scale. Ready to see people make alliances. That was the important kind of things. I watched the faces of people as they gave talks and speeches. I watched the people respond, the, the, the crowd, the crowd, the crowds. People stood up almost at every line that people said, you know. When I got on the stage and walked on the stage, everyone who walked on the stage, people were given standing ovations. You, you walked on the stage. I had my head wrapped in a gele. I had, I, a long African dress on and you looked out, and you saw all of that in there, and you saw people not dressed in that fashion, but people got up and, and women were especially happy because there weren't that many women involved there, at that CAP meeting. So, you knew you were there for the women and you said, Well, I, I'm here. How you doing, sisters? First thing you said is, How you doing, sisters? And the sisters cheered, stood up and cheered because you were, you were about them. You were there because of them. You were not there because you were an exception. I never liked, took that, that role. I was there representing the sisters and the brothers, but also saying, Sisters, I'm here. Now you're here. And we're gonna look at this and talk about it, and, and see what our interests are also, too. That was a, that was a really great time and a great movement also, too, because you saw people willing, at some point, to put aside differences and began to come together, also.

01:19:32:00

Interviewer:

Why do you think that happened at that point?

01:19:34:00

Sonia Sanchez:

Planning. Contrary to what people want to believe, a lot of this stuff was always impromptu. People planned it. People saw. People had ideas about—see, my idea has always been that we're were gonna be, call ourselves an African people, eventually. But I know that we have to go through stages. We have to go through Negro and Black and African American, and now finally African. So, one of the things we understood fully is that if you're talking about piggybacking off our brother Malcolm, you had to understand what his trip to Africa meant. It opened up avenues to all of us. What it also meant, too, at some particular point, is that it meant that people were asking for, for, for help. What we were doing in this country, people were doing, began to do in, in the Caribbean, began to do in Africa on the continent, you see. So, what was happening here, we had to be in, in a sense, in the vanguard. So, we were in the vanguard, but what we did here, it, it, it became, it happened in the Caribbean. It happened in Jamaica, it happened in Barbados, you see. It happened on the continent. So, therefore, those

lines were open, finally. So, we truly understood what we had to do at that particular point. It was a realization of being at the forefront, pushing people to their roots in a, in a very real, in very real terms, not in superficial terms.

01:20:55:00

Interviewer:

Do, can you give me a sense of Baraka's poem? The Nation Time [sic] poem? Do you remember?

01:20:59:00

Sonia Sanchez:

Oh, yeah. I, I think I'd heard that poem before he did it there. I could be wrong. But, you know, Barbara Ann Teer and a lot of people who was, she was the, the, the head of the Black National Theatre. People came down and recited what it was to be in, involved with Nation Time. What was interesting about that is that people said Nation Time, and people began to sing it and chant Nation Time. And so, when Barbara Ann Teer, and her, and her theatre group began to say, "It's Nation Time", and Baraka began to say, "It's Nation Time." And when we began as poets to say, "It's Nation Time." Get it together, brother, get it together, sister, this nation needs you, requires you, this nation requires your energy, your intelligence, your, your, your, your, your abilities, whatever. The people began to chant in the house. "It's Nation Time." Nation, nation time. And we knew what nation we were talking about. This country told us that there was a White nation and a Black nation. So, we knew we were talking about a Black nation, at that time. And that was important for people to understand that. So, people chanted, it was a call and response that was going on there. And we responded to the call for Nation Time, and Nation Time meant very strict response to what was going on in the country. Get your life together. Get your politics together. Get your eyeballs straight, you know what I'm saying? [laughs] Get the body straight, the hair straight, the face straight and get your job straight. Whom are you working for, and, and what are you working for? And what is this world all about? Are you indeed a human being? Or are you think, do you think you're a human being? If you think you're human being, you probably aren't gonna act like one. Become the human being that people want, really want us to become. As a consequence, you, you found people walking out, out of each cultural night. See, the cultural night reinforced the workshops. What happened in the workshops, you see, the cultural night said, said it again. In voice, in singing, in poetry, in dance, in whatever. In music, you see. When people talked during the day, they sang it at night. When people argued during the day, at night it came together, you see, and people, people's names were mentioned. So, we mentioned all the names. We didn't invite anybody when we sang "It's Nation Time." For you too, Whitney. For you, too, Diggs. You know, for you, too, Baraka. For you, too, Farrakhan. You see, everybody was included, you see, in, in, in that, you see, and as a consequence, you see, people are left there humming "It's Nation Time," It's Nation Time. And it got all the way into their insides, all the way down to their toe jam. [laughs]

01:23:42:00

Interviewer:

Cut. [laughs]

[cut]

01:23:47:00

[slate]

01:23:50:00

Interviewer:

While you were at the Congress of African People's Convention, what did you would come out of it?

01:23:57:00

Sonia Sanchez:

You know, I—that's a difficult—to say that I came to the Congress of African People with specific, with a specific agenda and specific hopes beyond bringing people together and beyond moving them to an idea of what it was to connect with, as African people all over the planet Earth.

01:24:21:00

Interviewer:

Cut. OK.

[cut]

01:24:23:00

[slate]

01:24:25:00

Interviewer:

As, as a woman, what were your expectations going into the Congress of African People?

01:24:31:00

Sonia Sanchez:

I'm not sure what my expectations were, as we moved into Atlanta for the Congress of African People, because most of the women had not planned that conference. And so, we weren't too sure what was expected of any of us as women, other than perhaps to be participants or performers or, or to lead a workshop. But as we moved in, and looked, and observed, and worked, and listened to conversations, and listened to, listened to arguments, we understood that certainly, out of that would come some other things, and they did come. Good things. African Liberation Day came. Of course, the movement to Gary also. All of that made for the movement to Gary, going into Gary to try to fuse together the politics of the time with the politicians of the time. I didn't make that meeting, I didn't make it because, at some point, I had begun to say simply, and this had nothing to do with control or power, it had to do with finally, the realization that we were, we were getting a, one point of view. It was a point of view always usually of men, and of perhaps a woman also who reflected the views of the men, you see. And that was not, I didn't want to be divisive. And so, I thought it was much more important, at some point, to observe it, to listen to people when they came back, to read the writings of what happened, and just say simply, at some point, that, too, is not gonna make it. And I think it didn't make it necessarily, because it did not have the input of, of women who quite often can mediate, could take it in different directions, can sometimes insist that that not be the case, and also could say simply, It's not about egos here, people. It's about the survival and the movement of African people to a different level. Let us not involve ourselves with this at all.

01:26:25:00

Interviewer:

What was the reaction of the brothers? I mean—

Camera crew member #2:

OK. We will probably rollout.

Interviewer:

—oh, rollout?

Camera crew member #2:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

I need to recreate for people—

[cut]

[camera roll #1059]

[sound roll #124]

01:26:32:00

[slate]

01:26:40:00

Interviewer:

Could you talk again about the, the noninvolvement of Black women in the leadership in terms of planning for the Congress of African People Convention?

01:26:47:00

Sonia Sanchez:

Well, one of the things that one understood as, as one appeared in Atlanta, Georgia. [pause] One understood that there was no real leadership of Black women in the planning, in even the execution. Maybe in the execution. Maybe in the doing of running around making sure that things were kept on time, or passing out pencils, or making sure that, that we had directions in terms of places to eat, etcetera. But you came there not really knowing what that agenda was all about. You came there, not really knowing what the expectations were. So, therefore, you came out of great love for our people. You came out of great love for the people who were going to be participants there. And you came because you knew you were involved with history. You were indeed a part of history. So, you came wondering exactly what would come out of all of that. What came out of all of that was, of course, African liberation days. What came out of that, of course was Gary, later on where we saw the fusion of poets, and writers, and cultural workers, and politicians and, and the fusion of people who were involved with politics, with people who were just ordinary students and workers, etcetera. But what we also knew at that particular point, that there again was an example of things being planned without the participation of African American women. And I decided at the last minute that I would not participate in that. I decided that I would not go. That I would wait for the conclusions of that meeting.

01:28:46:00

Interviewer:

Oh, OK. If you could pick it up and just mention—where, where—keep rolling. The sense of not being not pa-not participating in Gary.

01:28:59:00

Sonia Sanchez:

So, as a consequence of observing what was going on I, I decided that I would not go to Gary, Indiana, that I would not be a participant, or what I call a, an, an observer only, a non-participant asked, asked to be a participant on a limited level in the Gary experiment, where people came to involve themselves with politics and, and, and culture, with politics and staying alive in America. So, I didn't go. And, and, and I got the results of, of that, of that, of that event from other people who did participate. I got the, the problems that came out of that and really thought at some point, that maybe if women had been very much involved with the planning of some of that, that some of the emphasis might have been somewhat different, maybe.

01:29:51:00

Interviewer:

What were you fighting against in terms of the attitude of, of Black men at that point who were in the struggle? I mean, they're nationalists, they're militants. What else are they?

01:29:59:00

Sonia Sanchez:

I think, what we recognized, finally, as women in the movement in, in spite of what organization we were in, that African American men had been socialized by America, and they were socialized to be patriarchs, and they were socialized to be people who control things. Also, we—don't forget, we had come out of the, of the time of Monahan. Monahan, when he came up with his report that said, The problem with America is Black women, you know what I'm, what I'm saying? They have the power, which was sheer nonsense. So, we also were coming out of the some of the literature that damned Black women. We came out of a literature that said the reasons why Black men couldn't advance is that Black women were holding them back. So, we kept, we were coming out of a lot of madness, you see. And at the same time, we were trying to refocus some of that and say simply that Black women were not responsible for this oppression that we were involved in and with, and that was very difficult. So, you see, we—I lost my thought. [laughs]

01:31:04:00

Interviewer:

Tell you what.

Camera crew member #1:

[unintelligible]

Interviewer:

Can you give an incident of that? An example that happened in the Congress of African People's Convention?

Sonia Sanchez:

No, that would be hard.

Camera crew member #1:

Do you want to cut?

Interviewer:

OK. Can we, yeah, let me cut.

Camera crew member #2:

We got about [unintelligible]

Interviewer:

OK.

[cut]

[Team C]

01:31:12:00

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

Interviewer #2:

OK, 1966, through '68 when you were in the, the Bay Area, what were, what was the Black Panther Party offering the Black community that might have been different from what other, other sort of cultural nationalist groups, to use that word, or other organizations were offering? What, what, what place did they fill in the Black community?

01:31:36:00

Sonia Sanchez:

The Black Panther Party actually was a very important movement in the Black community. The people—what they, what the party did initially was that they escorted people home. When they got off those buses late at night, to their homes. They were like, an escort service, initially. For the women who were coming in very late and for anyone because the cops over there where they live would, like, were menacing people. There were being menaced by policemen there. As a consequence, they offered a service. And so, they were very much a part of the community. And the community was very thankful that they could do this kind of thing for them. And then we saw a different kind of motion of movement of, of Huey and Bobby Seale and Huey Newton, as they moved into the classes with a woman by the name of Sarah Fabio, who was teaching over in Merrick, [sic] Merritt, Merritt College. And I first met Huey when I went to his class to read for Sarah Fabio there and began to talk to them about some of the things they intended to do. Their newspaper was a very important paper, just as *Muhammad Speaks* was a, an, an important paper, newspaper at the time. It gave you all the news that you needed to, to have. The Black Panther paper was modeled after the, after the *Muhammad Speaks* paper, with the same kind of demands, you know, We want the following on the back, et cetera. It had news that the other newspapers did not print. And it had something that was different from the *Muhammad Speaks* paper, it had poetry. It had a cultural side. It had the cartoons. It had the artwork by the cultural workers there, and it was fantastic. A very good paper. A very important paper. Em, Emory, the artist did the cover for my first book *Homecoming*. And he's a very fun artist. This is the kind of thing that the, the Panther Party did, and what it offered young men, you know, was a sense, the kind of thing, the Panther Party was probably the manifestation of Malcolm on many levels again. It gave that sense that we were men, and not boys. In a arena with, with fathers, OK? We are not boys. Don't call us boy, call us young men walking down the street. It was not new to me in terms of look, however, because I grew up in, in Harlem, where all the very hip people wore black leather jackets, you know. I wanted to have a black leather jacket because all the so-called bad kids in our school had the black leather jackets, and the black berets. And of course, I didn't have that. And the black skirt. So, that was not new at all. That was a familiar kind of scene. And I thought they were very hip because I, I had always wanted to wear those kinds of things. So, I would say, simply, that the image they gave the men a very powerful image. And then of course, the whole image that went around the world of them going into the assembly with the guns, whatever. They were not loaded, by the way, OK? But it was just something that said simply, Don't mess with me. And I remember, like, talking to some old folks at the time, they said, Well, girl, that ain't nothing new. We always owned guns. We just kept them in our top drawer, you see. But the whole point of the newspaper articles was simply that this is a new phenomenon that we never thought Black men had guns. But if you go South, or even went out West, Black folks always had gun someplace in the house, and you were told, Don't touch those guns that were in the second drawer on the right underneath some shorts someplace. [laughs]

01:35:12:00

Interviewer #2:

OK. Cut.

[cut]

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

01:35:19:00

Interviewer #2:

OK, could you speak about the interaction between the Panthers and the more cultural Africanists at that time?

01:35:26:00

Sonia Sanchez:

There was a lotta interaction between the cultural workers and the Black Panther Party. If the part, if the party gave a demonstration in the park in, in the Bay Area, or, or in Oakland, the cultural workers were called upon to read their poetry, to talk to the audiences. There was no division between the Black Panther Party, and the people at Black Studies, or Baraka or myself. We were all in the same area and on at Billins. The division came somewhat later on, but what we, when we did programs at San Francisco State, the Black Panther Party was— Huey came to speak. Bobby came to speak, OK? The sisters had their own little ditties that they would do, and they would come up and do their little ditties and, and, and do their will talk into their little marching thing, etcetera, so, there was always great interaction there. There—because we had the Black Arts Repertory Theatre in, in New York, as a consequence of that, we had in San Francisco, the Black House.

01:36:28:00

Interviewer #2:

OK, cut.

[cut]

01:36:30:00

[slate]

01:36:33:00

Interviewer #2:

Could you tell about the Black House and its influence on the Panthers and how the Panthers may have influenced it in, in, in San Francisco?

01:36:39:00

Sonia Sanchez:

Black House was really the, the Western extension of what we had done in a place called New York City at the Black Arts Repertory Theater, and there at the Black House, you saw Baraka's plays, and Billins' plays, and we read our poetry, and you, you saw Emory's works. Emory Douglas' paintings and drawings and whatever. And you saw people cooperating with each other. You saw students and Panthers and artists coming together there. And I think what you saw also, too, is that the Panther paper allowed us to print our poems, our poetry and our, our, our messages and our articles in its newspaper, and also the Panther Party allowed us an arena for reading our poetry at the various events that happened. There was a fantastic coming together. There was a great collage of people from Panthers to so-called cultural nationalist to students, to people from the Black Studies, and they supported each other, and the audience was one that—

[roll out on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Sonia Sanchez:

—that lived for that kind of interaction.

01:37:44:00

Interviewer #2:

OK. Stop. Great, thanks.

[cut]

[end of interview]

01:37:48:00

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