

Charles J. Patterson (1925 – 1994)



Charles J. Patterson (1925 – 1994) began attending the Unitarian Congregation of Fort Wayne, Indiana in 1946. Subsequently, he was active in the Unitarian Society of Cleveland, and served in positions of leadership in both the First Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco and the First Unitarian Church of Oakland. He was also a board member of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee.

The autobiography below of Charles J. Patterson is a compilation of sources edited by Mark Morrison-Reed with the permission of Charles Patterson's widow, Dorothy Smith Patterson. The first person voice is maintained because it draws largely upon an interview with, and a sermon and letter written by Charles Patterson.

Fort Wayne, Indiana

Race was the formative thing in my life. When I was growing up every week you could open the black newspaper and there would be pictures of lynchings. In my home town, Fort Wayne, Indiana, racial segregation reigned – restaurants you couldn't go to and movie balconies you had to sit in. And the most terrible things anyone could call you alongside black nigger was *black African*. For me and my friends, deeply and emotionally outnumbered in a world of white goodness, *black* was a fighting word, used to compound the basic racial obscenities of nigger and African.

We lived on the outskirts of town, next to the Romanian and Hungarian immigrants who had come to work in the steel mill. My father's life was full of prejudice and discrimination. International Harvester was where my father, Archie Patterson, Sr., worked; he was trained as a mechanic and yet worked as a janitor. There was no union.

There was real illness. My second oldest brother died at age sixteen of tuberculosis; premature death was another thing that I was very much aware of.

I loved going to church. We went to Turner Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church. As a baby I was baptized there. For the first twenty years of my life it nourished my spirit. It brought me tears of joy to sing in the gospel chorus with my mother. My cousin played the piano, sang and conducted the choir. Sunday mornings we would all cram into the car – mother, occasionally father, always my maternal grandfather, three brothers and my sister. On Sunday we went and stayed. Sunday School at 9 a.m. Church at 11 a.m. We'd maybe get home for dinner about two in the afternoon, and then go back to church at 4:30 for the Young Peoples' Christian Endeavor League. The sermons brought tears to my eyes. I always loved, the marvelous story of the Good Samaritan. People praying and singing and shouting their religious joy. The minister would take us to the mountain top and gradually bringing us down, down to the promise of peace, of love, of life everlasting. The thing that stuck with me years later was the whole Christian notion of helping other people.

Outside of that one day a week in the African-American religious world, was a life of racial animosity, contempt and hate. My awareness of being black and being surrounded by racial prejudice and discrimination was probably sharpened because I went to an integrated school. But I think that it was integrated only because there weren't enough African-American children to have separate schools.

My grandfather, who fled from Alabama ahead of a lynch mob, had been a teacher. He set great store by education. That is probably why I took to school. Some teachers were encouraging but, in general, we were not welcome and we knew it.

I found myself in a very marginal position because of my interest in school. Other black kids were less interested and I was not part of any of the white student groups. But one of the great discoveries in my life was reading and libraries. The library truck used to come out to our disadvantaged neighborhood every Saturday. I would be there and get five or six books. I still remember the truck was a marvelous, shiny, apple green.

One day as I sat in the seventh grade geography class, the *only Negro* there (how those words haunted my school years). The teacher, grey, grandmotherly, and benign, had given much time and attention to the places and peoples of the earth. High among the things given particular emphasis was the classification on the Indians of Asia as racially Caucasian, thus assuring the white population of a safe majority in the world. In the words on the teacher, "They are really white."

Having confirmed and expounded the usual negative American judgments of Africa and blackness, and having sung the praises of the world's white heritage the teacher now called upon her pupils to demonstrate the richness of the American cultural "melting pot" by listing on the blackboard at the front of the class, those countries in which their families had originated. One by one, my fellow pupils marched to the front of the class, and often with a flourish of pride, added the name of any ancestral country not yet represented on the board. In that small time, as my turn drew closer and my confusion increased, for the first time I openly and fully confronted the question, "What is Africa to me?" In this naked situation, this "only" situation, the *nothing* of the young, young years would not suffice. My "aloneliness" meant that I was starkly visible to the others of my class, and these others, these generalized others, were in turn a mirror in which I clearly beheld the darkness of Africa written upon my brow and being. I arose in self-

consciousness, defiance and anger and wrote *Africa* on the board. It was a moment of self-knowledge and truth.

In high school I got good grades and was president of the Central High School Latin Club and French Club. So I wound up a lonely black kid in the high-achiever track. I grew up with this great awareness that there was something wrong and something needed to be done about it. But I was never able to articulate these feelings until years later when I came out of World War II, the great War for Democracy and Freedom.

World War II

Drafted when I got out of high school in 1943, I was encouraged to take a test for the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP). The ASTP was intended to find bright kids and send us to college. After that we would be trained as officers. Here again, everybody else was going in one direction and I was on a train by myself going to ASTP. When I got to Fort Benning, Georgia, I was one of four blacks in a training company of 250. But the first sergeant and the captain told me that if anybody gave us any trouble, we should let them know.

Interestingly, it was a setting into which I was able to fit very well. We had young fellows from places like South Dakota, many of whom had never seen a black. Others from the North had gone to integrated schools and mostly guys from the North outnumbered the guys from the South. The military learned that the way you integrate is that, if you have good discipline, soldiers take orders. Nobody gave us a hard time.

When things got bad in Europe they wiped out most ASTP programs, and I was sent to Fort Huachuca, Arizona, for training with the famous 92nd Division of African Americans. That division had fought in World War I. I became a rifle man in the Jim Crow infantry. I went overseas. My unit was the 86th Railhead Company and I a First Sergeant. We came ashore at Anzio and fought our way up the spine of Italy. I did a lot of shooting and killing. I saw my entire platoon wiped out and was sent home wounded with a Silver Star, a Bronze Star, and a Purple Heart all between the age of nineteen and twenty.

In 1945 after recovery from surgery in Italy I was stationed on a Mississippi army base. I was assigned to escort German prisoners by bus to a prison camp in Alabama. We were in Birmingham. The German prisoners were allowed to be fed in the white section of the bus station, but not the black soldiers who were guarding them. When they were finished we escorted them outside to board the bus to the prison camp. Thirsty, I drank from the water fountain and a white man pushed my head into the faucet. I'm standing there bleeding while whites gathered around threatening and humiliating me, and I barely escaped being lynched.

Home Again

Feeling an overwhelming sense that the wrongs of the world needed righting my first impulse, in terms of wanting to do good, was to be a minister. That's what I thought of as a fit role model, but I started getting disillusioned because the minister at our church. Previous ministers

gave uplifting sermons. This was before Martin Luther King, but a lot of black ministers preached “do better,” “let’s get together,” “improve your life.” There was a strong streak of that in our church but also a strong streak of Satan and the howling death, if you didn’t do right. So, as I was contemplating going into the ministry, we had a sin death-and-if-you-don’t-do-right-go-to-hell man and he literally pushed that inclination right out of me.

I was in a fog about what to do and didn’t have any mentors. It never occurred to me that I could be a teacher. All my teachers had been white.

I knew I wanted to go to college, so I went to the Indiana University Extension Center in downtown Fort Wayne. I enrolled there on the GI Bill. I had set as my goal being a journalist. I don’t know where I came up with that, other than I had a good experience working on the high school newspaper. I was also thinking I’d like to do something about discrimination against Negroes. I wanted to “save the race”. I didn’t have the faintest idea how one went about this but I embarked on the study of sociology because it looked to me like that was most relevant.

There was no one to counsel me on what to do, but somehow I knew that the YWCA was much more enlightened than the YMCA and I found out that the only race-relations committee in town was at the YWCA—which was one of the few non-Jim Crow places in town—for meetings and lunches and stuff. I went to one of their meetings, and this white man stood up and started saying we need to organize an Urban League here and an NAACP to do something about prejudice and Jim Crow. I could have fallen through the floor, because here is a person talking about the kind of things that I wanted to do!

After the meeting I went up to him and introduced myself. His name was Aron Gilmartin and he was a Unitarian minister who had arrived in Fort Wayne while I was away in the army. I had never heard of Unitarians and knew nothing about them. I knew a little about other religions growing up. Catholics were “cat-lickers” and that Jews didn’t have church on Sundays was all I knew. Injustice in my mind was black. I didn’t know about other people facing these problems.

Gilmartin, this white Unitarian minister, got busy organizing in Fort Wayne. I think the first thing we did was to try to organize the NAACP. He’d talk with black groups, and he had the kind of knowledge, about how you get things done and how you tackle the kind of problems that I was concerned about, that I had never been privy to before. He and my minister at Turner Chapel AME organized the first NAACP branch in Fort Wayne and Gilmartin became its first president.

Gil took me under his wing. We started meeting and I would be going to classes and then afterwards drop by. The church was in a big, old house. The church auditorium was downstairs. He and his family lived upstairs. So I found my first counselor, my first mentor. He was a young man. I was twenty-one years old and he was only about thirty-five years old. I really started spending a lot of time with him. In that process something else happened to me. I was falling away from my old beliefs in the Trinity and other things. I did a “terrible thing.” I read—one of the things that Indiana University did do for me—I read the *Age of Reason* for the first time. There is nothing like it. I’m going through this metamorphosis anyway, and questioning all of these things, and the minister of our church minister has fouled the nest because he’s a lousy minister always talking about sin and hell. Then all of a sudden I read the *Age of Reason*.

Gil was good because he never pushed the religion. We never even talked about it, but I was curious about what kind of religion turns out someone like this - who cares about people and who wants to save black people, help black people?

I loved the church and did not wish to lose all of that warmth, the joy of expression, or cut the bonds with mother and family but I was having trouble with its theology. I wondered: What is this religion that brings this minister so close to the anguish in my own heart? I decided to find out. Sunday morning at 9 am Sunday School at Turner Chapel, at 11 am church at the Unitarian Society, by 12:30 back to Turner Chapel AME for the rest of the church services. I only made the mistake *once* of pushing against the old religion. Going home from church the fury and hurt was a cauldron in which I came to know – and never forget – I had better learn to live with both. I made peace with both and learned to glory in ambiguity.

Gil came from New York. He had been very active in the Workers Defense League. He was a socialist, - a dedicated socialist. In fact, his wife was the daughter of a famous socialist thinker, Bruno Lasky. He came out of this New York Unitarian-Jewish-socialist political matrix. He took me to this other man that he thought I should meet, and in him I found another mentor. The person he took me to meet and whom he had known in New York was a writer, union organizer and former Communist. His name was Paul Jacobs. A radical journalist Paul would later write for the *Reporter*. He had been based at Bear Field, a United States Air Force base at Fort Wayne and had edited the base newspaper.

Gil started giving me things to read, and we talked. When I made my unhappiness with Indiana University and its Jim Crow dormitories known he started talking about Antioch College. I had never heard of it, but he and Jacobs decided that Antioch was the place for me. They helped me apply and I was accepted.

Antioch College

The summer, before I went to Antioch, Aron Gilmartin introduced me to the Encampment for Citizenship. He said, "It's a great place for you to go before you go off to Antioch." In a very real sense this was my first exposure to philanthropic giving because of what Gil did. He had met all these black leaders in Fort Wayne while getting the NAACP organized. I was impressed with how everybody really trusted him. No one, which I knew about, ever challenged him about being white. He was "very highly thought of"—that's the great expression my grandfather had, "very highly thought of"—by the black community. He took me around to some of these people who owned bars, restaurants, and other businesses and collected money for my scholarship to the Encampment for Citizenship. Of course, I knew these people, because I had been involved in the NAACP and I was "a hero." I did have some visibility. My picture had been in the newspapers with General Mark Clark pinning a Silver Star on me for "gallantry in action." So they came up with the money. I can still remember one guy, who ran a place called the Chocolate Bar. His name was Butch Smith. Everyone, in the black community, knew that he headed the numbers racket in town with the connivance of the police. It was easy for Butch to put up most of the money for my scholarship.

The Encampment was a summer leadership program; and I'll always remember that my workshop group was asked by Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt to write our version of a declaration of human rights. That and many other Encampment experiences spoke to the heart and yearnings of someone like me, fresh from that horrendous war.

I had a great time at Antioch. There weren't many other black students, but some of them became well known later. Cory [Coretta] Scott King was there when I arrived. We dated one time, but that didn't go too far. She lived off campus and I was very much involved in on-campus life and activities. Other blacks at Antioch at that time included Eleanor Holmes Norton and Leon Higginbottom. The people I found I had the most affinity for were New York, Jewish, intellectuals; they were my spiritual people. Both at the Encampment and at Antioch I found myself in a situation where I, for the first time, was free in terms of friendship and social relationships — not from racial ignorance and prejudice. There was a great deal of ferment at Antioch: students were boycotting barbers who wouldn't cut blacks' hair and generally were active in annoying the neighboring communities, Dayton and other small cities about Jim Crow practices. I loved all that.

These were people who really cared—gave a damn about things. I remember when we set up the Interracial Scholarship Fund. We were into progressive politics and wanted more minorities on campus. I got into radical politics and liked running around with these radical people. As far as I was concerned their basic ideas and the basic attitudes were the kind that I preferred to all the other crap that I had lived with. These were the first people that I was close to outside my family. But I think maybe it was my basically very strong conservative family life which held me back from going too far left politically. These were people who were readily identified as being opposed to and fighting against discrimination and racial hate, that's why I found myself very much at ease with them; yet ,intellectually, I was never very much of a radical. The rest of their politics, I never could buy: socialism, the revolt of the masses, the progress of the Soviet Union, and so forth.

Antioch sends its students out to work part of the year. That was a problem because blacks weren't always welcome in the available co-op jobs. I did wind up working in a settlement house, a setting where I had never been before. It was run by Episcopalian-Bostonian connections in a Polish Catholic neighborhood of Chicago. That was quite an experience.

Another job came about because Paul Jacobs had gone back to work in New York for the American Jewish Committee. He said, "Well, come to New York and we'll find you a job." Antioch let you do that on occasion—find your own job. Paul had me immersed in something very unique; he arranged for me to work for a group which was opposing discrimination in the military.

Everybody thought that I was a prime candidate for the staff. After all, I had a Silver Star and Purple Heart. What they didn't consider was that I was totally inexperienced in organization. Two groups were putting this effort together. One was the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) with that marvelous old man, A. J. Muste; a pacifist group. The other was the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) which was a heavily integrated operation. Bayard Rustin was very much involved as was A. Philip Randolph. CORE and FOR had persuaded A. Philip Randolph to head up a group called the Committee Against Jim Crow in Military Service and Training. They had very little money and they needed somebody who would act as an executive and administrator. For the Fellowship of Reconciliation and for the Congress of Racial Equality fundraising was a constant, a hard constant. What I didn't know was that I was expected to raise money. I didn't know anything about doing

that; it was my first experience with looking for philanthropic funds in order to get something done.

CORE was quite different then from the way it evolved later. Jim Farmer was around and a very energetic man in those days. The CORE of those days was dominated by Bayard Rustin and nonviolence. This was the time of the Journey of Reconciliation. Segregation had been declared an undue burden on interstate commerce. They were the ones who took the first freedom rides in 1947, long before the sit-ins occurred. FOR was opposed to military training, period. Their notion was that if you get the non-discrimination in the law then the universal military training legislation then being considered will fail. Years later I thought how unlikely it was to have been part of a front organization for pacifists.

In a very real sense Antioch delivered me from the sense of hopelessness I felt, based as it was on my early Fort Wayne experiences. Antioch was a community that believed in the ethic of change and progress. The teaching and attitudes were about how to improve the world, and I still follow those directives. But I was also beginning to understand how hard it was going to be to “save” anybody.

Cleveland

My first full-time job after graduating from Antioch was as the Industrial Relations Secretary with the Cleveland Urban League; by then I was in my late twenties. In Cleveland I also attend the Unitarian Society of Euclid and I went to Case Western Reserve where I completed a MA in Sociology and Industrial Relations. The Urban League was primarily fighting job discrimination. We had this pilot program to create jobs for qualified black people in nontraditional settings. Every day I went with a portfolio of resumes, hammering on the doors of business and industry to try to persuade them to hire some of our people. Years later, that experience was relevant when I was involved in the Private Industry Council jobs program.

For six years, that's what I did go to the General Motors plant and other big defense contractors. Initially, I was concentrating on just trying to persuade people to do right. But then I started reading up on defense contract requirements and decided that was a much better weapon than Urban League-type persuasion. I think my biggest success there was persuading the federal authorities to come in and take a look at some of these defense contractors. In some of them blacks were in lower level jobs and in others they weren't even hiring blacks. I still get mad about one—the GM Cadillac tank plant. It existed strictly on army contracts. Only jobs blacks had there were janitors and very few of those.

After I discovered the contract compliance requirements and I wrote up my reports, we sent them to Washington. Next thing I knew, a delegation from the defense department came out. I don't think they were that enthusiastic about it, but the very fact that we had managed to get a Washington delegation out to look at what the contractors were doing made a difference. I confess that I was impressed by these people. They went through these plants, and things changed. The colonel, whoever he was, seemed to be all business. That immediately led to a breakthrough, and three major corporations began hiring Negroes for something other than janitor.

This is when I first plunged into big, organized, professional philanthropy. We were going to the dinners and the fund-raising hoopla. When they were talking about what the community chest, of which the Cleveland Urban League was a recipient, I made some presentations to some groups about the work of the Urban League. At one of these dinners in one of these campaigns, I looked around and saw all these CEOs, who were doing all this philanthropic work. I said to myself, "Shoot. These are the same people I've been trying to persuade to hire some blacks." This was an interesting lesson. I went back to the office and I went down the list. Since I had met some of them, I start sending out letters to these senior people—as opposed to always get filed off on the personnel director. I picked about six to write. "Delighted to have met you at the community chest luncheon," or whatever it was, expressing great appreciation for their support and asking for an opportunity to come by and talk about the work of the Urban League insofar as we might be useful in helping.

One man wrote a letter to my executive director, a black man. He came to me, "Pat, Pat, what are you doing? What are you doing?" He was upset about trying to take our Urban League business and connect it with their involvement in the community chest. I said, "Arnold, evidently they must have some principles. They subscribe to all this good stuff. I figured these would be just the people to help us make some breakthroughs." In one case we did—the telephone company. Literally the fellow said, "I never thought about it." He had just never thought about it. He looked around and started to think. He called me in a couple of times. Then I really looked good to my executive because here was the CEO of the telephone company calling me in and we were talking about how we could further integrate and create more job opportunities.

Another thing that got me into trouble was the unions. They were also big community chest contributors, and some of the same unions were barriers to letting blacks get into some of the skilled trades. So I used the same idea—I started writing them letters. "I would like to come and see you and so forth and so on." It is interesting. I made two hits with the business community. But the unions? No. They didn't even want to talk to me. But there they were, sitting up there, the carpenters and the masons and the electricians, at the tables. So this is another part of my introduction to this process of giving and why people give, the many, many dimensions to making contributions. What people get out of it and what they don't want you to mess with.

The Bay Area

I had become interested in the whole area of intergroup relations and there were more jobs as more civil-rights agencies and fair-employment-practices commissions came into being. In 1957 the National Association of Intergroup Relations Officials got a grant from the Fund for the Republic to establish some internships. I applied and received one, which was a fellowship with the San Francisco Council for Civic Unity. As soon as I knew I was coming to California, I got in touch with Paul Jacobs and went to visit him in Los Angeles.

Again, mentors looked out for me. I think they decided it was time for me to leave the Urban League and work in a different intergroup setting. The people that I came to know there, I have worked with in different organizations over the next thirty-five years. Interestingly, this was my first major contact with the unique quality of Jewish philanthropy. Many of the people

active in the Council for Civic Unity were part of the Jewish community which plays such a unique and positive part in philanthropy in the Bay Area.

The council had a broader base than the Urban League and was also interested in housing legislation. I was impressed to see that their board included some very heavy hitters, white people who were at the senior levels of corporation. These successful white people were very active in taking on committee assignments and raising funds. They had been instrumental in getting a city Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC). These were people who had the capacity to open doors and get things done.

Following my one-year internship, I went to work for Paul Jacobs again. He, Gilmartin and I had all arrived in the Bay area in 1957. Paul had come up from Los Angeles and Gil had come down from Seattle. Gil had taken a job as a pastor at the Unitarian church in Walnut Creek, while Paul who had come to California to work for the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions which was in Santa Barbara, but he lived in Berkeley. I got the feeling they were glad to have a black person like me on their staff. I was surrounded by these high-powered academics and Paul, again, was mentoring me. The job was part-time, so he said, "You can study for a Ph.D." So in 1958 I enrolled at the University of California Berkeley.

There were two other black students in the graduate sociology program, but at that time you could walk across the campus and if you saw another black student, it was a surprise. It was a unique opportunity. I was well-paid for my research job and had ample time to do doctoral studies.

I still wanted to devote my career to dealing with the problems that were being faced by black people. I discovered, however, that there was nobody in the department for who race relations was a specialty. I did find an adviser who knew a lot about it even though he had moved more into mass behavior. I was impressed by some courses I took on the development of the intelligentsia and on the concept of marginality, so I began focusing on these. I realized that I fit the definition of marginality myself: marginal meaning living with one foot in one culture and another foot in another culture. Most of my life activity was in an integrated setting because that's where the opportunities were opening up.

Africa

A faculty member suggested that I follow up this idea by doing my doctoral research on Africans who had been educated in Europe, and he got me a fellowship with the Institute of Current World Affairs. Once again, I was the first black in a heretofore all-white situation.

First, I spent some time in England where there were lots of Africans finishing their education. I went to meetings about what was happening in West Africa and wrote about them for the Institute of Current World Affairs. The purpose of the fellowship was to develop in-depth knowledge on economic, political and social developments in Africa with a particular emphasis on the nature and quality of the new political leaders and the economic viability of the new African nations. The newsletter I wrote introduced many in the U.S. to the issues in the emerging independent countries in Africa.

Many African leaders came to London for meetings in the great ferment going on about Ghana and other countries becoming independent. I met many of them, including the prime minister of Nigeria, where I planned to do my research at the University of Ibadan. I became aware that shared color was a limited bridge in terms of understanding each other. Among educated Africans there was much awareness of Negro Americans and their accomplishments, but in this country, Negroes (I use the term Negroes because I'm talking about that period) tended to look down upon the Africans. Looking to Africa came later.

When I got to Nigeria, I had some terrific experiences. There were still a lot of British lecturers at Ibadan and a lot of American scholars, but I also dealt with a growing number of Nigerians who had studied in the U.S. I also met Dorothy Smith there; she was involved in nutrition and growth studies at the medical school. And in January 1962 we got married and in so doing I gained Mark as my son.

I came to the conclusion that my interest in the academic world was not as sharp as it should have been and we came back to the United States and started checking out job possibilities. A friend in Washington D.C. was director of African programs for the Peace Corps and he talked to me about coming to work for them. That seemed exciting to me and a position in which I could be effective and use the knowledge and insights I had gathered in Africa.

When I began working for the Peace Corp in 1964, it was at its height. I wanted to spend time actually running the program in one African country, but the program was expanding rapidly that I wound up as the acting associate director. That put me in charge of all overseas programs in 50 countries in Latin America, Asia, Africa and the Middle East, 15,000 volunteers and a support staff of 2000. Alongside this was the annual budget preparation and presentation to the U.S. Congress; liaison with the White House, the Department of State and United Nations. But the bottom line was figuring out what was the best use of volunteers was and what kind of programs we were going to do. They were demanding projects, mostly in agriculture and education, sometimes organizing clinics and digging wells. Volunteers had to work hard and do their very best. My responsibility was to give them as much help as possible so they could do a good job.

Our daughter, Tracy, was born in 1965 and in 1966 I was hired to oversee the Oakland Economic Development Administration (EDA) program that invested in public works, business development, and technical assistance. In addition, I was to coordinate with all the other federal agencies that were giving aid to Oakland under the economic-opportunity legislation. This was not long after the Watts riots in Los Angeles, and a lot of people thought that Oakland would be the next city to erupt. My EDA boss wanted to demonstrate to Washington that we could help the city and keep that from happening. Basically, the goal was to create jobs.

World Airways

The biggest pot of money in this multi-million dollar effort was for projects at the Port of Oakland meant to develop a new terminal and an aircraft-maintenance facility. We were the first to require that whoever leased the new facilities commit themselves to develop a plan to bring in the unemployed or underemployed. World Airways was the biggest beneficiary because they leased the maintenance hangar.

Ed Daly was head of World Airways. He did not start off thinking about working with the people targeted by the legislation, but he responded very quickly and strongly. He hired a man who was teaching aircraft-maintenance courses at a junior college to set up a training project. The beauty of it was that the project included funds to train people to work in these new jobs being created in the new airport facilities being built with project funding. That was the beginning of more than twenty years that I'd be involved in manpower-training programs, from the War on Poverty through the Compensatory Education and Training Administration (CETA), and then the Private Industry Council and the National Alliance for Business jobs program.

I had gotten to know Ed Daly while setting up this employment program. One day he said, "Why don't you come to work for me?" I said it would be a conflict of interest because EDA was still involved in building the hangar. But then there were some changes at EDA; Daly and I talked some more, and he decided he wanted me to develop a social responsibility program for the company. I became head of public affairs for World Airways, which meant I dealt with the outside community. I was responsible for affirmative action, company giving and appearing before government bodies. We helped several Third-World countries develop their own airlines and I was involved because of my experience in Africa.

It became clear to me that at World Airways there was downright discrimination since it was hiring people who looked and acted like the people already employed. But Daly was strongly committed to affirmative action, so I was able to change those employment practices. While I was there, World Airways became one of the most integrated companies for its size. I was responsible for bringing in at least 300 minority people, including several vice presidents.

As senior vice president I got to be very visible around the community and people would talk to me when they wanted support from World Airways. I would check out personal charities that Daly was considering, and I was also the company's representative at meetings and events and went on the boards of directors of various organizations. I saw that in the Oakland-San Francisco metropolitan region, there was no other board member who was black like me. Gradually I wound up on the board of the San Francisco Fine Arts Museums; the board of overseers of University of California, San Francisco; KQED; the San Francisco Foundation; and similar organizations, often because somebody was looking for someone to integrate that board somewhat.

I got the feeling that some of them heaved a sigh of relief when the *right* person appeared, someone like me who came out of the corporate matrix. I never felt out of place because I

had a certain amount of self-confidence which told me I could handle things on anybody's board.

When I came to World, I think Ed Daly probably relaxed because he didn't have to do so many community things himself. I could do it. The New Oakland Committee is a good example. It developed out of a series of confrontations with the Black Caucus, which went after the business community saying, "You've got to do more." Three or four of the top white businessmen in town agreed to put out some money to get it going, and just about every prominent black leader has been a member. It's one of the few urban coalitions that's still going.

Bill Knowland got heavily involved in the New Oakland Committee after he left the U.S. Senate. He used to say, "We dared. We got a dialogue going and we got black and white people talking to each other." The critical change in Oakland had to do with the growing number of blacks, who became the dominant political group in the city, and the solid presence of middle class blacks with education and training and jobs. A lot of them were in politics, although some of the younger ones continued to fight the power structure even when it was taken over by moderate blacks like Lionel Wilson.

But it is also important that there was a commitment to the city by its business leaders. The city center development with the big hotel and convention center had its roots back in the early days of the New Oakland Committee. That has been the only place where white corporate leaders and black professionals and community activists have talked on a continuing basis.

I developed this idea that you have to do things differently. One of my favorite words is *reconfigure*. Reconfigure contains the notion that you don't tear something up, you reorder it. I feel that it is very important to reconfigure the kinds of people you have on all these boards. For one thing, if you have a different kind of life experience than they're used to, you can develop the notion, "Why don't we do it this way instead of that?"

In the eighties, when I went on the San Francisco Foundation board and, later, the East Bay Community Foundation board, I was able to get into dialogue with other board members. I'd say, "You haven't got that quite right" when, on occasion, they were not too understanding of what some minority groups proposed to do with the grant funds they were requesting. I found that my fellow trustees wanted to do good but didn't fully understand what the problem was that people seeking support were trying to address. It's a good thing for public bodies to have someone there who has some personal experience about what's facing people in education, what's facing people who are homeless, what's facing people in the way of racial discrimination.

When Ed Daly died so did the spirit that made the company so responsive to the community and other people's cares. I decided it was time to leave. I mentioned that to my friend Lionel

Wilson, who at the time was Oakland's mayor. He said that the general manager had left the convention centers and they needed somebody to get things squared away, and that I should talk to the board chairman about it.

Oakland Convention Centers

In 1985 I became general manager of the Oakland Convention Centers, enjoyed it and stayed until 1993. The convention centers have had a role in the continuing development of the city center, which now includes two new federal office buildings. We also sit in on the Oakland Metropolitan Forum, which is a University of California effort to help in resolving whatever problems the city faces.

In a very real sense, Oakland has arrived, because people are leading good lives here. There is an awful lot of good housing and an awful lot of things to do. People talk about the slow pace of development. And I say, "If you had been around here in 1968, you would realize that the city has strongly turned around."

Some people say that if you didn't get this or that project, you blew it. That notion is all wrong. Nobody blew the development of Oakland. All the things that go into making this a better city take time, money, and effort. There has been a lot of movement and an awful lot of people working on things in the neighborhoods as well as downtown.

One of the ideas I've developed over the years is that increments are okay. This life will go on and on and on and certain things will still be totally unresolved. But there will also have been some continuing improvement and updating in the lives of more and more people.

The important thing, as Martin Luther King, Jr. said, is to help somebody! That's been very much part of my life because I received a hell of a lot of help. People offered me a way to break through to new horizons I didn't know existed when I was floundering around after World War II. That's why I believe very strongly in efforts addressed to young people. They can't consider other ways to live unless they are aware that there are other possibilities.

The primary sources for this biography are: *Working for Civic Unity in Government, Business, and Philanthropy: Charles J. Patterson*, With an Introduction by Robert C. Harris and Interviews Conducted by Gabrielle Morris (1991), a redacted version of these interviews appears in the Black Pioneers at the University Series: 1920-1960, *Charles Patterson - New Horizons: Peace Corps and Corporate Leadership*, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. Other sources include: "What is Africa to me?" Letter from Charles J. Patterson to Richard H. Nolte, Institute of Current World Affairs, October 15, 1961, London, England; untitled, undated sermon delivered by Charles J. Patterson to the First Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco; "A Celebration of the Life of Charles J. Patterson: January 8, 1925 – May 5, 1994," no date, First Unitarian Church of Oakland, Oakland, CA; Resumes, Charles J. Patterson, pre and post-1985,

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