

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Ernest L. Golden (EG)

May 27, 1993

Honolulu, O`ahu

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Ernest Golden on May 27, 1993, and we're at his office in the airport industrial area in Honolulu, O`ahu. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, Ernest, let's get started again. Let me ask you about Hampton Brazell's Porter Services. Where did the other skycaps come from?

EG: Okay, he had five people before he employed this friend of mine and I. Some were merchant seamen who had gotten off the ship here in Honolulu. I think one or two people filled that category. I think one had come over as a civil service worker, same as I. I think also one of them had been in the [U.S.] Navy. Brazell came here about 1947 from San Francisco. Originally from Louisiana, he worked some time in San Francisco and then decided, for some reason, to come to Hawai`i to start a porter service over here. There was a Harry Williams, who had been, I think, a former war worker—a civil service worker. There was Prince Gary, whose background I'm not sure of. But there were two other people who were merchant seamen. And then there was this friend of mine, a man named Gilbert Cork. He and I were civil service workers. So that was the makeup.

WN: And they were all Black?

EG: All, yeah. Interestingly enough, I see a lot of different ethnic groups out there now. I think, it's good. But, in contrast, we were flunkies in those days. It was a flunky-type job. I think some of that still carries over now as far as the airport's concerned, and I'm pretty disenchanted with it. If something goes wrong, and it's almost a joke, but it's not really a joke—if something goes wrong as far as in a department, if the porters have anything to do with it then the porters are responsible. We play quite an important role as far as servicing the visitors. And yet when something comes up, we're the last ones to be considered, especially by the airports. Now the airlines take a more positive view toward our worth. But I have a strong feeling that the rest of them still look on it as a Black thing and still haven't gotten out of that mind-set. I'm a little bit *huhu* because of that.

WN: Now, Hampton Brazell was Black.

EG: Yes, Hampton Brazell was Black.

WN: Now, what about nationwide? Was portering in those days a Black . . .

EG: Nationwide, during those days, and I would dare say possibly up until the last—let's be generous and say twenty years, okay?—it was pretty much Black. Actually it started out with the railroad porters.

WN: I see.

EG: The railroad porters were Black. And then air travel. Then they brought it into this part of transportation, but it was Black. New York, had Black owners. San Francisco, Black owners. And some of the names I had heard of over the years that were pioneers in (this) particular field. Most of them, because of the arrangements between the carriers and the contractors, (failed). These [*Black-owned*] companies never survived. Most of them failed after years and years of operation. Brazell lost his because of taxes. A lot of the others lost theirs because of taxes. And some of them sort of evolved into this sort of business. And because it was an evolved process we often went into it undercapitalized. This is one of the main (reasons). We went into it undercapitalized. There was very little business know-how these people had. Brazell had little or no business training. He had initiative. Very intelligent man, but little or no education. I dare say he didn't have a high school education. I think I'm being generous when I say that. But I think like he and a lot of the others who started the business, they just sort of saw a need, fulfilled that need. Because it was not a business, as such, the source of income, even as it is today, was through gratuities or the tips. And I think a lot of them decided because of that I can earn a livelihood in something that I like doing and in an exciting type of work without being compensated in the usual manner—a salary and that sort of thing. I hesitate, but I want to think that I was one of the few that made a business of it. Just prior to my becoming one of the owners . . .

WN: This was in 1959?

EG: Nineteen fifty-nine. The decision to become an owner came about 1957. Up until that time I'd never considered being an owner of a company. But to do so I decided to get the necessary training. So this is when I enrolled in what was then Church College [*of Hawai`i*], (that) is now Brigham Young University[*-Hawai`i*]. It was a two-year school, and I went in for business administration. Studied corporate law. And in turn came back and started to incorporate. Up until then most of these companies would be single ownership. There's a term for it that I'm not using. You have partnerships, and then you have corporations. And then you have the . . .

WN: Sole proprietor.

EG: Sole proprietorship. That's the term I'm looking for. Most of them were sole proprietorships using the name of the person who was the proprietor. Brazell's Porter Service. Buck Jones' Porter Service. The contracts that existed between the carrier and the companies were through the individual. He was the key person, and this is who the contract was with.

WN: Now, did he pay salaries, too?

EG: Yes. We were getting, in the beginning, I think, seventy-five dollars a month, which was peanuts. But the airlines said, look, we will give you so much a month to provide this service. The airlines removed themselves from any liability, and it was up to this individual to hire his people. He was the contractor, but it was all slanted very much in favor of the carrier.

I may have been one of the first to start the corporate thing here—when I say “here” I mean continental United States. (In) 1976, a porter service [*organization*] (was) formed—called NASCAP [*National Association of Skycaps*]. And it was at that time that I got to meet, at a convention of this organization, owners from throughout the continental United States. So I'm speaking from firsthand knowledge. There was a similarity in the organizations themselves because we were all doing the same thing, but I think very few of them. This friend of mine in Seattle, Bob Matkin, had a very sophisticated service, but I don't think he incorporated either. Bob was a very successful operator. He had everything as far as these type of services are concerned, except for catering service and an airplane. He was doing fueling. He was doing the skycaps. All this evolved out of his porter service, and then he (developed) several other services.

WN: Is there a difference between porter and skycap?

EG: They're interchangeable. At first, they were [*called*] porters, then redcaps, then skycaps. I coined the phrase skycap here in Hawai`i. Brazell's Porter Service, when I first started working for him, everyone was calling us redcaps. I think we were wearing red caps. And I decided at that time (that) this was different. It was related to (aircraft). So why not call it skycap? So I'm certain unless someone comes up and challenges this. If they come up and challenge it I think we can debate it. (WN laughs.) I would debate that I coined the phrase skycap here in the State of Hawai`i.

But the corporate thing that was formed here for the first time, I'm sure that I was responsible for that. The one that I did form, the first one, was not acceptable to the person who had the authority to give us the contract. So, in turn, in a very subtle way, he directed that I form a corporation with the former owner. Now, (here is) what happened: Brazell had lost his business because of taxes [*in 1955*]. And then the [*airline*] carriers had taken this contract from him and decided to give it to an ex-policeman named Bill Smith. Bill Smith had been an airport policeman. On his retirement (from the police department) they gave it to Bill Smith. And Bill Smith let me run all of the operations for him. Smith kept it for about two or three years.

WN: From '55, huh? Fifty-five to '58.

EG: Was it? Yeah, somewhere around there.

WN: Ownership went from Brazell to Smith.

EG: To Smith. And Smith called it Smith's Porter Service, I think.

WN: And were all of you retained?

EG: Yes. But when I was working for Brazell, I had the responsibility, but not the title that goes with supervising. With Bill Smith I had the responsibility plus he gave me the title. At that time, I became supervisor under Smith. Smith lost it because he signed (a) union contract that the airlines would not support him in. So at that time they took the contract from Smith because when he signed the union contract, committing himself to pay out more than the airlines were willing to give him. You see, the airlines had (a) fixed amount that they were paying the porter companies. So Smith committed himself (to) the union—he was naive to do so—for more than he was receiving. So the airlines said, “Look, we won't pay this amount so you don't have a

contract.” So that left (Smith) without a contract.

WN: This would be a union for the skycaps . . .

EG: The skycaps, yes.

WN: I see. What union was this?

EG: Ah, Warren, I think I want to say the brotherhood of the railway. It was the brotherhood of something.

WN: We'll look it up.

EG: Okay. But it was related to the aircraft, to the travel industry, somehow or another, but I've forgotten the title. [*Brotherhood of Railway, Airline and Steamship Clerks, Freight Handlers, Express and Station Employees.*]

WN: This is a national union, not a local?

EG: Yeah. I think it came under the umbrella of AFL-CIO [*American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations*].

WN: Was it [*International Brotherhood of*] Teamsters?

EG: No, it wasn't Teamsters. I got to know the head man [*i.e., president of the skycap union*]. His last name was (Reiley). Very nice guy. He and I got to be very close friends. But Bill Smith lost it because of that. And at that time no company existed, so (we) were out of work.

WN: You too?

EG: All of us. When I came to work that afternoon, the guys said, “Hey, listen. We don't have a job so I think you'd better go in and talk with the airline representative, who acted as a liaison between the airlines and the porter company. And so I walked in to see this man, and he explained what had happened. He said, “Well, look. As of now you people don't have a job.” This man's name was Frank Taylor, and he was station manager for Northwest Airlines. We had a very good relationship with him. And he said, “Well, listen. What you can do is you can apply for it.” Because of conflict of interest, he could only suggest certain things. So he said, “I suggest that you do one of two things, and that is you apply for it yourself or that you form a corporation and apply for it.” So with that I went and formed a corporation with Brazell, who had given me a job, and also another person who was my right hand. You know, you always need somebody to watch your back, and this man was very good at it. I'd known him for a number of years, and his name was James Smith. So I formed a corporation with the three of us. Took it back to Taylor, and he rejected it. He said it wasn't strong enough, that the porter company was a growth industry. In other words, it's going to become a big industry. His foresight bore fruit.

So he said, “I recommend”—again recommendation—“that you form a corporation consisting of Bill Smith,” grandfathered him in, “Paul Leong,” L-E-O-N-G, Paul Leong, “because you need. . . . He's an accountant.” Leong had been Bill Smith's accountant. And Leong was good at his business. “So I suggest him because you're going to need an accountant in this thing to

keep you out of trouble. And you. But whatever corporation is formed, the stipulation is that you are the operations manager.” So I went to Leong at this time, and he agreed to that sort of arrangement. He set up the corporation with him as president, I as vice-president/treasurer and later appointed general manager. Smith as secretary.

WN: This is back in '59, right, when you . . .

EG: Yeah. It was '59.

WN: Yeah, okay.

EG: So that was the beginning of Honolulu Airport Porter Service, Inc.

WN: General manager, right? That's what you were.

EG: Right.

WN: I see.

EG: So that was the beginning of, to my way of thinking, a very successful company. Leong with his background—businessman and accountant—made it into a business. Up until that time it had just been sort of going along. But it became a business. And he [*Leong*] was able to negotiate with the carriers. He and I worked very well together. We had some differences at one time, but when these differences were ironed out, he and I became a very good team. That team existed until 1974 when I decided to resign—to retire and leave the state.

WN: So when Honolulu Airport Porter Services was started back in '59, the gist of it was really the ability to get contracts with the airlines. Is that basically the gist of how this business works? The ability to get contracts with airlines and then . . .

EG: At that time there was no competition.

WN: Oh, okay, that was the only one there.

EG: Yes. The only thing we had to do was put together the right package to provide the services for the airlines. And at this time, I think, the airlines that existed may have been, oh, about five or six. I know there was Northwest. Pan American was the big one at that time. United was there. There was a Philippine airlines carrier and a British carrier. I think there was a Canadian carrier.

WN: What about Japanese?

EG: No. No Japanese airline.

WN: This is still at the old airport?

EG: This is the old airport. And Aloha Airlines was just getting started at that time. So those were the carriers there. And once you put together the right combination that was acceptable to the carriers—to the airlines—they said, “Okay, fine. You are qualified to do the job.” There was no question about the people who were doing the work because all of us were retained by each

change. Brazell started it, and then Smith kept us. And then when this corporation was formed. So you had the same people doing the work. So the airlines had confidence in the people who were doing the work. It was just the administrative part that had to be directed and coordinated. This is where Paul came in with his business know-how. He made it have credibility, something that the airlines could respect because it was handled in a businesslike manner. And this continued without competition. At that time no one was interested in it. Remember, I said that it was a flunky thing in the first place. We were making money and everybody was looking at us as being flunkies, and we were laughing all the way to the bank (laughs), you know.

WN: When you talk about a package, okay, what kind of. . . . What do you mean by a package in terms of services for an airline?

EG: Well, at that time our responsibilities were simple. To assist passengers in checking in. Make sure their carry-on bags were placed at the seat, that sort of thing. This was departing passengers, and to meet the arriving passengers and assist them. So primarily that's all we did. It's quite a bit more involved now, however, we still have possibly three key services to provide. Priority number one would be assisting the handicapped with their wheelchair needs and then their travel needs. The second would be any baggage services that may be needed as far as the carousels are concerned. And then third is assisting the passengers with their check-in and their arrival needs. And this has become third now because of other means of self service, especially smart carts. So anything else sort of dovetails into these three major services that we provide.

WN: So does self-service technology, so to speak, hurt your business?

EG: Yes it did. They stopped any growth for a period of time. Those carts came in after I came back from the Mainland [*in 1976*]. Prior to my retirement, we had the state. We had this island. We had Kaua`i. We had the Big Island and Maui. At that time we had something like 110 employees. Without the carts this expansion would've continued with the growth of airlines coming into the airport. I dare say that (it) would've doubled. But after I came back in '76, and the carts must've started sometime after I came back, and this stopped any growth for a while.

The economy now is retarding the growth somewhat. But there are other changes that have taken place now, so I can see where the growth will start again or has started, because (of) some of the services that we are now providing. And the computer is playing a role in that also because we can now check your baggage. You present your ticket and we can tag your bags with a piece of equipment that will write out your claim checks to your final destination. And this does require quite a bit more skill than what it was when I first started with the porter services. So this has caused growth. And (the) smart carts, you can get so many before they start crowding out the areas that they are supposed to provide equipment for. In other words, if our passenger traffic increases, you cannot have enough carts out there to provide one for each (passenger) because there's no space for them. So a limit (will be reached) where the smart cart has to sort of stop. So this allows for more growth, allows for expansion. I've looked at it on some other stations on the Mainland, and the smart carts play a much lesser role there than they do here for some reason. I haven't been able to analyze it to really see and I think I should. I see a lot of stations where you hardly see any use at all of the smart carts, not as much as it is here. So I have hope that eventually we will reach that point where the smart carts are not taking away [*business*].

The [*Hawai`i State*] Department of Transportation gave us no consideration whatsoever when they decided to bring smart carts in. We tried to provide a quality-type service here. There are always exceptions (to) everything. But the (porter) companies, by and large, wanted to provide a quality service for this industry, wanted to see the travel industry, the business industry here grow in the state of Hawai`i. You would think that when they decided to bring in that sort of service—if you want to call it that—that was going to put a lot of people out of work, (they) would have been a little more considerate in how it was to be done. To have consulted with those of us who (are) in the field. To see what impact it was going to have on the (skycaps). But none of this was done. There was no consideration. And it could have been a blend of the two. It could have complemented each other if some consideration had been given. But they brought the things in. They put them right on the curb, right where the (skycaps) were earning their livelihood with no thought as to what impact it was going to have on (the skycaps) and their families. I think it's a gross oversight on the part of those people who make decisions. And they may criticize me for it, but I would discuss it with them because they were derelict in (not) taking under consideration these people who have families.

WN: What about the airlines? Did they support these smart carts because, you know . . .

EG: The airlines supported it because the airlines pay to have skycaps available to assist their passengers. It's minimum wage. In other words, the airlines say, "Look, I pay x amount of dollars for you to stand on the curb and be available to assist those passengers who are traveling on my carrier that might want it. And regardless of whether they accept that service or not, the fee is still the same." And that's a good argument. And I say this now with tongue-in-cheek with a certain amount of reservation, because of the state of the economy, I think that the carriers are doing about as well as they could. When things were better, when the economy was good, I think that the minimum wage may have been a little low. And I'm saying (this) because of the interest that those of us who work with the people, the interest we have in the welfare of the (traveling public), in the image that we have as far as the airlines are concerned. How we represent them, how we service their passengers. And I think that because we are interested in them we possibly do a better job than some of the people who work directly for the carrier.

We are very close to the carrier, yet we're like a stepchild, as opposed to the [*airline*] employees. Now this existed for a long time but then all of a sudden, even those people who are employed by the airlines were sort of cast aside. Qantas [*Airways*], for example, got rid of their passenger service. But we, the porters, were always considered a stepchild. You're within the family but yet you were not. I've always felt like the stepchild. I tried to provide a quality-type service. I took an interest in the passengers boarding an aircraft. If he was irate when he arrived at the airport, I took pride and saw that that passenger, when he walked to the ticket agent, his whole attitude had changed because I did everything within my means to make his departure pleasant. And I know that others have done the same thing. So to take this much interest and to still be denied [*discount*] air travel, for one thing, and. . . . This may be the reason why they have these contracts. But I often felt like a stepchild. And I think some of my people feel the same way although we are now becoming closer. We have a very close relationship now with the carriers that I provide a service for. And I have found the people that I deal with now have a greater appreciation for the services that we render. And they are not stingy with saying this. I provide (service to) two carriers now, and they both give verbally the appreciation that I think we deserve. And it's a good feeling.

WN: How has competition affected--I mean, you said from '59 to '74 you were the only game in town.

EG: Yes.

WN: And after you came back from Athens in '76, was that the point where competition started coming in?

EG: It started just before I came back. During the time that I was gone, I think just before I came back, United [Airlines] decided to pull out of what was called the porter pool. At the time that I was here, whatever new carrier came in they went into this pool arrangement where they jointly shared the cost of the skycap services. I'm using interchangeably skycap and porter so just realize it means one and the same thing.

WN: Mm hmm.

EG: They jointly shared the cost on a pro rata basis. And the expectation was that each would, because of cost, willingly go into this arrangement although each one had the right to pull out of this system by giving a thirty-day notice. And it was just before I came back, I think, that United decided to exercise this right. United being (then) and still is one of the biggest carriers there. So in early '76 they did pull out. This started the downfall or the penetration of what had been an exclusive. Then in the early eighties the economy took a downturn, and the transportation system—air transportation—started suffering because of it. And they started being very, very selective. They started to cut costs, and in order to cut costs they started seeking any means whatsoever, sources where they could cut costs. And porter services was one of them. The company, Honolulu Airport Porter Service, did not, upon request from the carriers, reduce its cost. It caused some of the carriers to seek lower contractual costs from others. By this time, trucking companies and tour companies realized how lucrative this business had become. So the outcome of that was that these people started forming porter (companies).

Also, some of the security companies started looking at this as a source of diversification, and a lot of them went into the porter service business. A lot of them had been approached by some of the carriers who were seeking less expensive contracts. I do know that one of the security guard companies did this in order to fortify their security business. "We'll take on the porter services almost for nothing." So this then had opened up the door for many, many other outfits to come in. Also, there's always someone who is within a company who decides, "Hey, look. I'll start my own." And one of our employees did this with the interisland carriers. So that sort of just made *pukas* in the whole system.

WN: What about the [Hawai`i State] Department of Transportation? Was there any kind of regulation in terms of airport contracts?

EG: For a long time, the department of transportation left it up to the carriers because we were contracting with the carriers. The department of transportation for many years did not take an active role in regulating it. I guess as growth came about they decided there was a need to do so. And they have now, so they did start taking a more direct hand in it, regulating the companies. Because there was the impression that anyone could come out with a cart and just go out to the airport and start carrying bags. And this (did) happen. So this may have been (why) the department of transportation stepped in and said, "We can't just have every Tom, Dick, and Harry taking a cart and coming in," because there was no control. And the impression of a lot of people was that, "Look, this isn't a regulated business. Anybody can go out with a cart and carry some bags and get some tips." So the department of transportation did

step in and start regulating it and I would say, overall, they've done a good job. I think it could've been done much faster if they had just talked with those of us who knew what was going on. But they decided against that. So they eventually evolved in something that's workable.

WN: Let me turn the tape over.

WN: Okay, backing up just a little bit into the old days with sole proprietorships and Hampton Brazell and so forth. Would you say that back then the business thrived mainly on the charisma or the drive of one single individual?

EG: Yes. Yes, it did.

WN: In other words, you contributed to this change in getting it more into business-type incorporation.

EG: Yes. It was the charisma and the personality of the individual. To some degree it still is even with the corporation. You still have that one individual. I am now that person with the two carriers that I am providing the services for. However, I am trying to be farsighted enough so that if something happens to me that the whole thing doesn't come crashing down around twenty-six other people. So I've got to move some other people to the forefront. I (have) three people now that I'm training, grooming and moving into the forefront so that just in—heck, I'm not going to be here forever—so that it will carry on.

WN: To what extent is portering or skycapping still a Black occupation?

EG: In Hawai`i, no. It's no longer so. I would say nationwide it's no longer a Black thing. This is a very. . . . I don't know, how do I say this? There is still sort of a undercurrent thinking that it is a Black thing. And there was some discussion about this very recently with some of the United [*Airlines*] skycaps. United has just dissolved the skycap services, and they did this the 1st of March. But I was discussing it with some of their skycaps and the underlying feeling (is) that it's still a Black thing, but yet it's no longer being done exclusively by Blacks. I'm using a lot of "I's" in this, but I was the first to hire a non-Black at Honolulu International Airport. I hired for the first time a Filipino kid, young man, whose stepfather was Black. And he had all of the (characteristics), except the physical ones, of the Afro-American because he talked the part, he walked the part, okay? So he was among my people. And I had to tactfully do it because I didn't want the resistance to him but yet I wanted to do it. So I had to pick this young man to be the first one to open it up. And he was so Black in his overall outlook and everything that he was among them, and they didn't know for a long time that we had been integrated. I've forgotten what year. I was also the first one to hire a girl as a skycap. I don't know, if I went back to the records, it may have been the first girl hired in (a) skycap company. I'd have to go and look—I don't have anything to support this now. Other companies throughout the nation may have had it mixed, but I was close to the first as far as integrating the porter services. Right now it's very much integrated. Some companies even now have token Blacks (WN laughs). Believe it or not.

WN: Back in the Brazell days, was Brazell common in terms of a Black owner-proprietor? In other words, in the early days, were there White proprietors? Owners?

EG: In this business?

WN: Yeah.

EG: None that I know of. Most of the information I got in those days came from and through Brazell. And he knew the bigger companies. And I can safely say back in those days, no.

WN: What about Bill Smith? Bill Smith was *Haole* . . .

EG: Bill Smith was part-Hawaiian.

WN: Right.

EG: Part-Hawaiian. I don't know. Maybe Hawaiian-*Haole*. Bill Smith was possibly one of the first—among the first—non-Blacks to get into the business. I don't say he was the first, but he was somewhere near that.

WN: Okay. Well, let's change course a little bit. You said you resigned from Honolulu Airport Porter Service in '74.

EG: Yes.

WN: What did you do?

EG: I went to the Mainland. I went to Athens. And went into business there. Not the business that I had left (here) to go into. For years, I guess, I had an idea. I bought some property back in Athens and I wanted to open up an outdoor recreation place that was near town, and this is what I left here to do. (But) I didn't go through with that idea. I had studied it from every angle, from a financial angle, which was a (last) thing that I did. I'd taken several trips back there, and, sometime around '73, about a year or so before I decided to go back, I had looked at it from a financial—this venture that I was talking about—I looked at it from a financial point of view, if you want to use (the) term. How much it would cost to put it together and come back and felt that I had enough money to put the venture over. I had the land. But the oil embargo went into effect in '73.

WN: Correct.

EG: And all of my planning, when I got back there in '74, the money that I had allocated was only about half the amount necessary to do the job. Because of the oil embargo, everything became inflated. And what I had thought I could do with the money that I had, cost me twice as much. So I had to (rethink) the overall (idea) and then saw something else that I got involved in that I possibly shouldn't have, with hindsight. But I opened a supper club. I bought a supper club and stayed with this for about a year and four months.

Now let me go back and explain to you what happened. While I was working on this project, and I was having this place bulldozed and the, you know, when you put in the roads and the electrical work and that sort of thing? (There were) thirty-four acres and I was going to have roadways put in. In other words, the foundation [*i.e.*, *infrastructure*] work was in progress. And I decided to go to work because all the money was going out and nothing was coming in. So I went to the airport and talked with the commissioner. A man named J. B. Giles who was head of the airport. I've forgotten his title. But to make a long story short, he gave me a job

driving a limousine from Athens to Atlanta. And I would do this every day. When I came back from Atlanta, once in a while, I'd stop off at Ramada Inn after the day's work and have a relaxing drink at the lounge there. And one evening I'm sitting at the lounge and struck up a conversation with a *Haole* guy who's sitting there and we started a conversation and eventually we, I guess, went from one lounge to another. He had been out of town. We'd both been there when things were—racially speaking—were very bad and, I guess, this was part of our conversation. But we had gone to several different places. But I made the statement, I guess, later in the evening, “Hey, listen. We've gone to all of these places, and they've all been White-owned. Why don't we go to one that's Black-owned?” So we did, a place that I knew, we went there. And they would permit me but would deny him entry. And this upset me something terrible. This was just prejudice. Regardless of where it comes from, it was still prejudice.

And I guess from that moment on I decided I would open up a place where anybody could come. So I set out to do that, to open a lounge. I had owned a lounge here, and I decided to open up a small lounge in downtown Athens that would seat about sixty people, a piano bar, that sort of thing, for what I called mature people. It didn't make any difference what color you were. As long as you're mature, you'd be welcome. There was a friend of mine, a *Haole* guy, in Athens. He's dead (now). His name (was) Dean Beachum. And Dean used to meet me each time I'd come into Athens, and we'd have lunch together. And I was explaining to him this idea that I had. And he introduced me to another person who owned a hotel downtown, a hotel that I used to work in as a bellhop. A (man) named Sandy Butler. Sandy Butler owned the Georgian Hotel. So Dean introduced me to Sandy, and we talked this concept over, and they seemed to think, hey, this is a wild idea. The very idea of a place that would provide this sort of atmosphere for both Black and White, I think, was something that we all wanted to see. So with that, I looked at a place at Sandy's hotel, and I saw what I wanted. And we shook hands on it. No contract was signed. This was the first part of the week. This was a small place. I was looking for a small place. Cozy and intimate.

About the end of the week, though, my daughter who was with me—my daughter and my youngest son—(when) I got back to the apartment, told that me someone named Sandy had called me up and wanted to talk with me. So we met. He said, “Listen. Get in the car. I want to show you something.” So we were driving out of town, and I was thinking negative thoughts that, “Hey, look. You've had second thoughts about me going into your building. And I know what you're doing now. You're going to take me somewhere out here.” And I wasn't interested. But he drove about four miles out of town. And he had the keys to what had once been a schoolhouse. It was a red-brick building. It was a schoolhouse that had been converted into a private club. Beautiful, a beautiful thing—very well done. And he said his idea was that he and I would run this thing together with the idea that I had. A very workable concept. A very workable (idea) because the two of us, with his connections (with) the White community and my know-how and feeling toward people, in general, it would've worked. The place would've accommodated—we could seat 200 in the ballroom. There was a cocktail lounge that would seat 60. There was a restaurant that would provide seating for about 40. There was a game room. There was a small apartment in the building. It was four acres of ground with a duplex on it. And there was two acres of blacktop parking. Four miles from downtown. [*Being*] from Hawai`i it was impressive. I mean the real estate itself was impressive.

WN: This was offered to you for sale?

EG: Sandy said “Listen, we can get this. They're asking \$175,000 for it.” Remember, when I was

trying to put together this recreation (project) I had looked at a clubhouse, and the clubhouse that I had looked at was going to cost me around—it was A-framed—around \$60,000 when I first looked at it, (now the cost) had doubled. The clubhouse itself. The clubhouse itself was going to cost as much as this whole thing we were looking at. So I was very much interested. But I went to my attorney there. And he explained to me that Sandy had a record and that he could not, because of Georgia law, go into a corporation with me of this nature. And I better take a second look at him as a partner. So Sandy and I had a conference and he admitted to something that would prevent him from going into it with me. So he backed out. We had to sever our relationship.

But then I'm looking at the real estate by now. And I'm saying that, for this I'll make an offer. The real estate alone. I've got to be able to make it, right? So I made them an offer of \$100,000, thinking they wouldn't accept it. They accepted the offer. Now I am the owner of a club. And I proceeded to get going. Advertised heavily. Went to bartending school so I could have some knowledge. Hired eight waitresses—four Black, four White. One idea was to capitalize on the clientele of a ratio that I felt—that the ratio of Black to White in Athens was about five to one, I think. And I wanted this ratio within the club.

WN: Five to one, Blacks to White?

EG: Whites to Blacks.

WN: Whites to Blacks.

EG: So this is what I set out. I set out to try to get five Whites for every Black in the club. This would have been a good ratio. To do that I wanted any White who walked in there to feel comfortable. So in turn, the bartenders, I had a male and female. They were both White. The waitresses—this was for the evening operations—I had four Whites and four Black girls, all very attractive. I called the place the Hawaiian *Hale*. And I dressed the girls in sarongs. I had visible a security guard. All he did was walk around just so people could see him. This was to prevent—in that part of the country it was standard thing to fight. They'd just fight, and I didn't want this sort of thing there. So the security guard was visible to prevent that. I hired a hostess to seat people and to greet them when they walked in the door. I hired a Spanish (musical) group to play in the afternoons—trio. They played sort of a Spanish-type music. I hired a house band to play in the evenings from about nine o'clock. One of my stipulations was that the music would be so that you could converse without being blasted out. This was one of the causes of my downfall. The music was soft enough, subdued enough, but it was all soul. And after a while the White men were not dancing because the Blacks would get on the floor and just sort of overshadow them. And so pretty soon the ratio that I had wanted had reversed itself. Instead of five Whites to every Black, I was getting five Blacks to every White.

And it's a funny thing about that community and a lot of communities throughout the country. We as Blacks want to go out Friday and Saturday. White people will go out in the afternoon for that happy hour. They'll go out about four o'clock and some of them will stay on until the evening. Blacks come out around six—no, about ten o'clock at night. And there was a law that said that on a Sunday you closed at midnight—all drinks had to be off the table at midnight. And most of us went out—most Blacks came out at ten o'clock. My place would be empty. I'd open at four o'clock, and I'd have a full house at ten o'clock. But up until ten o'clock I'd have very few. Now I've got two hours in order to make my money. Pretty much, I think, was one o'clock [*in the morning*] on a Friday. So this was part of the downfall. The club did some

wonderful things. A beautiful atmosphere. I had a following that would have been enough for me to be successful had I gone downtown in that small intimate club, but this was much too big for the following that I had. I succeeded in bringing together the two groups with no friction, and they socialized together, something that I think they both wanted to do but no one had ever set that sort of facility, made it available for them to do so. Later on, it became pretty much commonplace in Athens for the two races to mix. They do so quite well now.

I have to share this with you. Some wonderful things happened out of that club, though. I had to change the direction since I was unable to capture the audience or the clientele that I had wanted. And it almost became the (country) club for Blacks in the community. One that they could take pride in, and they did. I would allow social clubs to meet there. We formed a civic club that started in June of '74, I think, with about six of us. By October of '74, we had seventy-five-plus members. And it only started out with an idea that I had to give membership to my best customers. And this was to allow them to come in and run a tab and cash checks and that sort of thing. So I gave them a card. But it evolved into a social club—a civic club. And the makeup was educators, businessmen, policemen, politicians, all the business people of Athens—all the businessmen of Athens and some women—came together in this club.

We had a cultural thing going, a Black cultural thing going one Sunday in that ballroom. We must've had 300 people. It was packed for a cultural show we were putting on. You weren't supposed to be open at all on a Sunday. I was living in the duplex on the property. And when I came to the club, a lot of people were there—the police (came) and said, “Look. Mr. Golden, you're open on a Sunday.”

And I said, “Yes, but we're not serving any booze.” I made sure that no liquor was being served. We had grandmothers and small children and babes-in-arms. The Black in Athens had never had this. There was Athens Country Club—Whites only, okay? No Blacks were allowed in there. In here, this place, was one that Black Athenians could take pride in. And the grandmothers and all these children and young people, all meeting on a Sunday afternoon. And in a very wholesome atmosphere.

And so the policemen said, “Well, look. You've got to close. You know you can't stay open.”

He was looking and I took him inside the lounge, and I said, “The lounge is closed.” And I showed him the only thing we were serving was refreshments and it was soda and stuff like that. And these weren't being sold.

So he said, “I don't see (anything) wrong. You just can't be open.”

I said, “Well, you have to go in and tell them to close up.”

And he said, “You have to tell them.” (Laughs) So he called downtown. But what was happening was that I had several city councilmen (laughs) (and) policemen in there, and all of a sudden they came together and said “Listen, we aren't going to close this thing up.” So they kept it open. The police didn't know what the heck to do.

WN: What was the law? It was no liquor served on Sunday?

EG: No, no. For some reason you could not open up a club on a Sunday. You weren't supposed to open your doors on a Sunday.

WN: A restaurant could.

EG: A restaurant could. But you couldn't. We were borderline, right?

WN: Yeah.

EG: We were borderline. And, I supposed, it caused some frustration. Anyway, to keep from dragging us out, the commissioners met, possibly the next day or the next Monday. And by this time the (councilmen) had started their telephone network, calling up the county commissioners getting some allies (for) support and everything like that. We met at the hearing. By this time the place was blanketed, though, with Blacks. The place was full. And I remember one of the county commissioners said, "Mr. Golden, we didn't expect you to bring out the big guns," because the place was full. They'd never been that full before. The outcome was that two or three of them said that what I was doing was what was needed, that Blacks in the community did not have a country club where they could socialize on a Sunday afternoon and the Whites did. And that instead of criticizing, chastising me for it, I should be encouraged. However, it was against the law, and I was not to do it again. And (that) was the outcome. That was one of the exciting highlights of that thing.

The other one, which was much more of a positive nature, the police department was integrated. But there was some police brutality going on, and it was directed at both Black and White. And somehow or another, through this civic group, there was an investigation of police brutality. And it was found that it did exist. There was one lady—she was White. (Her) son attended University of Georgia. She was out of Atlanta, and she appealed to our group to check into brutality her son had been exposed to. There were others who came forward and said, "Look, there's brutality here and these are some cases." We took it to city hall, and again, there was a mass turnout. This was a meeting before the city council. I'm sure that the mayor was there. The outcome of that, there was an investigation of the police department. There was something like four, I'm sure, four policemen and maybe more. I think one or two were discharged because of this. One or two were given some other sort of penalty. But there was action taken that was all because of the Hawaiian *Hale* social club. These things make me feel that the whole thing was worthwhile. But I could only last so long because my money had run out. So I had to close and leave.

WN: So within about a year and a half.

EG: Yeah, about a year and four months I was there. But a lot of good things happened. A lot of good things. Made a lot of wonderful friends and accomplished one of the goals that I had wanted to. But I had to leave.

WN: So at that time [1976] you came back to Hawai`i?

EG: Yes.

WN: How did you feel about coming back?

EG: Glad that I had something to come back to. (Chuckles) My wife, I'm sure, felt---I felt good that I had something to come back to. There was a fear that---because we. . . . During the latter weeks and months after, when things had gone sour there, we didn't know where we were

going to go and what we were going to do. And employment in Athens wasn't something that could sustain my family and I in the style that we had been accustomed. So this was a fear on my part. I called up Paul Leong and requested employment, and he was generous enough to offer me a job. But he offered me a little bit more. All I wanted was a job because I knew once I got back here I could start (over). This was the main thing, come back and get a (new) start. I knew I could do it in the skycap field because I knew it well. So I asked him for a job. He gave me a supervisory position.

WN: That is in '76?

EG: Seventy-six. So that's when I started back with Honolulu Airport Porter Service.

WN: Seems like you look at those two years in Athens with some measure of fondness, then. Is that something that you would have wanted to continue?

EG: What I was doing there?

WN: Mm hmm.

EG: If I had been able to survive I would have wanted to stay there. Athens is a fine place. My daughter and I have talked about it. I read somewhere where the successful person is one with tenacity. Maybe it takes one more step. Turn the screw just a half turn (more), may be the (key to) success. We had survival potential. We could have gone into the catering field. And this would have sustained us because it would have given us enough diversity so that I would have been able to ride the slump. We had the kitchen facilities. We had everything to work with. And we could've given them something different because my wife was quite good at this sort of thing. She and I together did catering for private parties there within the lounge itself. But we could've extended this out to the community, and we didn't. I didn't see it at that time. Why, I don't know. There were one or two other things I could've done to sustain myself. I needed to sort of tighten the belt and then ride the economic slump that existed in those days. Hindsight.

But it was an interesting time for me. It was going back to my origin, to where I came from, and doing something. And I sort of made a mark, I guess. I cannot see going through life and someone not saying, "Here are some tracks left by Golden." It's my ego, I guess. I wanted to see a building down here with my name somewhere on it. That's another part of ego trip, huh? But, yes, Athens, that year and four months. I think the (last) four months or so was rather difficult. But the first year was satisfying. It was something that satisfied a need. And the club itself was appreciated by the Athenians, but I didn't get the support from some of the areas that I thought I would have. And I've always maintained that---you strive for excellency. You strive for the best. And it was one of the best in town. It wasn't one of the best Black clubs in town. It was one of the best clubs in town. And this is what I like. I don't like being the best Black this or the best Black that unless there's no other out there. But if there's anything else out there and it's better, then that's what I strive for. And this was on par with the best. And it's a great consolation to me.

WN: So the club was closed. You didn't pass it on to somebody else or . . .

EG: No. The fellow who had the house band that I hired was financially. . . . I needed money, and he was in a position to let me have some money, so I turned the club over to him. And he still has it. I think he's leased it out. (He is) not running (it) the way we did it. So he's successful

and I was a failure, in a sense.

WN: Okay, well, in '76 you came back to Hawai`i. You started again with Honolulu Airport Porter Service. You were in a supervisory position. Then in '81 you started Versatile Services, [Inc.].

EG: Yes, I incorporated Versatile Services in October of 1980. Again, I'd had another idea, another dream, if you want to call it that. I was the first to operate a storage facility (in 1951 or 1952) in the state at the old airport. What happened? Pan American had a need for their passengers to have a storage facility. They, in turn, erected a building, erected a room over there right near the claim area at John Rodgers Airport. So they had the space. No one to run it. No one wanted it. I went to them, and they turned it over to me. So I ran the first baggage storage facility that I know of in the state. And I ran it successfully until they decided to move to the new (terminal) [*i.e., Honolulu International Airport, built in 1962*] over here. You would think that the [*Hawai`i State*] Department of Transportation would have said, "Hey Golden, you're the first one. Why don't you consider doing it over here?" They never mentioned anything at all to me. They started their own storage room, and they put somebody else in charge of it.

WN: You're talking about when they opened the new airport [*in 1962*]?

EG: When they opened the new airport.

WN: So this is way back, huh?

EG: Yes, everybody else that (had something at the old) terminal came over here with something. But, I guess, by this time they felt that the storage facility was too big for me to operate. I don't know, but they didn't ask me if I wanted it. They didn't give me an opportunity to bid on it. And they decided to go into the business themselves. The [*Hawai`i State*] Department of Transportation (will) probably chase me out of the state, but I'm going to say this: they should not be in the business in the first place. This is private enterprise. They are landlords. And right now they've got the biggest baggage-storage thing anywhere in the state. But this idea of mine was to open up a storage facility. The idea came from the evolving (of) one type of business to another. Now, those of us who have owned porter services—when we decided to—and I'm using (the) general "we"—when we decided to (retire from porter services), for some reason or another, we have gone into other fields that we knew little or nothing about. For example, a policemen, once he leaves the police department, would go into the private detective agency. He will go into a security guard system. We go into (laughs) the bar business. We buy liquor stores, and we open up cocktail lounges. I know the reason for it is because skycaps spend a lot of time in bars they have ready cash and they're looking at the bartender and saying, "Hey look. This guy is making a lot of money." They (do not) realize that the skycap is his best customer. So they feel, "Hey look, this is a lucrative business." No knowledge whatsoever of the bar business, and it's a very difficult business.

So I wanted one that was a smooth transition into a field that I knew something about—that skycaps knew something about. So over a period of time I started on this idea around '78 or before that—of looking at what would it be. And at the time that I was looking at the storage facility at the airport, number one, I have firsthand knowledge that the airport did not want it. They had never offered it to me. They had offered it to somebody else but they never came around to Golden and say, "Listen. Would you be interested in taking over this thing?" But they wanted to get out of the business because they were losing money at it. Or it was costing more to operate than it was bringing in. The person they offered it to did not take it.

Let me say this a different way. What boosted my interest in going this direction was that there was a bombing in two states—one in New York and one in Los Angeles. And this caused the storage facility at the airport to tighten up on security. And it was taking a long time for a person to check a bag in (or) to take a bag out. And I felt it could be simplified. That was part of the thinking. I wanted to include in that, baggage repair and everything pertaining to the needs of a passenger as far as baggage was concerned. Baggage repair, baggage sale—sale of all travel items like boxes and stuff like that. And we, in Hawai`i, use a lot of boxes. So this was the idea I had been working on, trying to make it as diversified as possible so it would have income enough to carry it. Pick up and delivery from the airport.

So I opened up in 1981, Airport Baggage Center, up here on Nimitz Highway, Nimitz Business Center. I had lockers, and I had bulk storage. I would pick up (and deliver) to and from the airport. The colors were green and white, and I say that because I have a point to make. Japan Airlines was one of the carriers that endorsed the concept outright. We provided a service for Japan Airlines, their passengers, when they were flying to and from the Mainland. We had an agreement with them to meet their passengers at the gate, claim their bags, and store them and return them to the passenger when they departed. Passengers traveling on Japan Airlines from Japan readily accepted the idea. It was a new concept here in this country. In Japan, they had a functioning organization going. I don't know how long. They had the same colors. My colors were green and white. We almost had the same---I had ABC, Airport Baggage Center. I think they had the same letters. Japanese coming here had no reservations about turning their bags over to us. It was something they had been accustomed to. I think the one in Japan must've been on a much bigger scale than mine because, I think, they may have been leasing bags and all that sort of thing. Japanese from Japan had no problem with it.

Others. . . . When we would meet them at the airport had reservations because they couldn't see where the bags were being put. They couldn't see the bags going off, and I was off the airport. My prices were much better. I was very competitive with the airport. All you had to do was come in. You didn't have to stand in line and fill out a lot of papers and show your identification. All you had to do was give me the information as to when you were returning, and we would take (your bags), give you a claim check and you were on your way. We tried to narrow it down to about three minutes.

EG: I could get a permit for a van to pick up and deliver bags to the airport. I could have my people, and I had the skycaps from all around the airport, from Aloha Airlines all the way to United Airlines. Hawaiian [*Airlines*] and all the rest of them. The skycaps would call for the services because we were giving them a percentage of the storage rate. I paid them for them recommending the service. But the state would not allow me, first of all, a clutch at the airport. They had bins. If I could have had a bin at the airport (the passenger) could have seen his bags going in there. [*Hawai`i State*] Department of Transportation would not allow me to put my brochures in the information stands out there, and it's not because of the quality because I had quality brochures. They said they couldn't endorse that.

During the time when they [airport] were overflowing, they could not handle the volume, then they would call me. Some of their people called me. When they were down and empty they would knock my services. So I was competing with the state. I started [*Airport Baggage Center in*] February 1981, and it was slowly growing. I needed maybe more time and more capital in order to keep it going. But then the airlines started to break off from Honolulu Airport Porter Service. And I, in turn, teamed up with a former employee of mine who was now manager of

Honolulu Airport Porter Service—to take some of the contracts that the other company wasn't taking. Honolulu Airport Porter Service wasn't getting some of them so Anderson and I decided to go out—it was my suggestion—and start getting some of these contracts.

WN: You weren't connected with Honolulu Airport Porter Service?

EG: Yes, I was. I was a supervisor. As soon I started doing this, I gave my resignation [*in 1981*].

WN: Mm hmm. I see.

EG: I gave the resignation and it was accepted. We weren't taking contracts from Honolulu Airport Porter Service. These were contracts that Honolulu Airport Porter Service wasn't getting. Some that they didn't have and were not aggressively going after. So by June 1, I had gotten a significant amount of the contracts. One thing about that Airport Baggage Center, it did serve that idea I had, and that was as far as the (evolution) from a skycap to another type of business. I could put in a skycap in that building, in that [*baggage storage*] facility there, and within maybe (an) hour or two, he knew everything about it because it was something that he had done ever since he had been a skycap. It was a natural thing for a skycap to operate. It is still a natural for skycaps, and I'm thinking seriously about going back into it. I'm thinking very seriously about starting it again. I'm doing a lot of research. I don't want to make the mistakes I made before, but I'm looking at location, I'm looking at some. . . . This is another story.

So, but June 1, I then start back into this line of work that I'm in now. And the baggage storage room, for more than one reason, maybe I wasn't in a position to carry it long enough. Maybe again I didn't turn that screw just one more niche. Just one more turn of the screw. The mere fact that I didn't makes me think why would I go back into it now because I'm trying to capitalize on some of the mistakes. I haven't done it yet, but it's the driving thing behind me. So about 1985, I phased it out and just concentrated on the porter services.

WN: Under the name Versatile Services?

EG: Yeah, Versatile Services, [*Inc.*].

WN: Now, Airport Baggage Center was part of Versatile Services?

EG: Dba [*doing business as*].

WN: I see. Dba.

EG: It was good.

WN: So from '81 to '85, you were a baggage storage company as well as a skycap company [*Airport Baggage Center and Versatile Skycap Services, dba Versatile Services, Inc.*]?

EG: Yes.

WN: And then from '85 on, you phased out the baggage and became solely skycap?

EG: Yeah. When I first incorporated, though, we incorporated not for porter services at all. We

incorporated for a janitorial service because the man and I who'd gone into this and incorporated together, he had been in the janitorial services at one time, wanted to get into it again. So we teamed up and formed this corporation as a baggage storage room and a janitorial service. When the porter services contract came along, the first thing to go was the janitorial service. We just dropped that. And then we had, at that time, just the baggage, Airport Baggage Center, and the skycap service up until about 1985. And the baggage center, combined with the porter services, would have been able to survive but there was something that had happened, and I have to bring this in, too. It wasn't because the baggage center would not have been successful. It was because when I went into the porter services June 1. . . . Remember I told you that most of us got into the business undercapitalized? Okay. This is what happened with me. I had gotten a bank loan back in February to open (the) baggage center. And by June, most of that money had been used (for) organizational stuff like that. So when the porter service came along, I didn't have any capital. I had a business, and the business was trying to catch hold. And then we got six airlines. Now, the airline contracts, in those days, were very good. But you billed them one month after services were rendered. They usually paid you about one month after you billed them. So you've got two months. You've got sixty days before you receive any income. But during those sixty days you have a payroll, you've got four payrolls, coming up. So here I am without any money. And what I had done was try to be as impressive and provide as great a service. I'm back into the business and I want to prove that I am the operator, I am the man for this type of service. So we staffed heavy. We gave A-number-one service. We hired possibly more than. . . . I sort of cut my staff to the bare bone now, but I may have had more than I needed in those days, but I carried a heavy payload. And to not to have any income for sixty days, and pay out everything I could rake and scrape to keep my employees, I got behind in taxes. And this tax thing stayed with me. I never did really get rid of it. I still have remnants hanging on even to now. I'm in much better shape now. So with taxes and everything else and with the baggage center not bringing in any income hardly at all or very little, I decided to dissolve it. Close it up.

WN: I see.

EG: So it wasn't the concept. It was the undercapitalization at the time. My payroll for that first two months was very heavy. I used every bit of money saved, but I didn't pay the taxes. And it was very competitive in those days, too, when I first started out. So I paid my guys and didn't pay Uncle Sam and the state. So that's the main reason why I couldn't stay in that thing.

WN: So today you have two airport contracts, right?

EG: Yes. Japan Airlines and [*Northwest Airlines*]. . .

WN: How many employees do you have?

EG: Twenty-six.

WN: Twenty-six. And they're all skycaptains? You don't have administrative help or anything?

EG: My daughter works part-time for me. I take care of most (of the) administrative needs. Twenty-six, some part-timers, some full-timers. About two-thirds full-time, about one-third part-time.

WN: And how many such companies are there today?

EG: Oh, my lord, I don't know (WN chuckles). But the biggest out there now is Paradise [Skycap Service, Inc.]. This was the man and I that started out together in '81. He's the biggest now. (There are) one, two, three, four. There are about five companies now that are known as skycap (companies). But then you take some of the trucking companies that also have porter services doing the same thing, in a sense. You have maybe anywhere from five, ten or more. Yes, more than that, because you have some travel agencies and ground transportation people who are doing the same thing. They're just not contracting with the airlines. But it's the same thing. There are several porter companies out there.

I'm thinking of starting a skycap school. If I could combine---skycaps and bellhops are not that different. I'm doing some research. If I feel that there's a need for bellhops to get the same training, and it's just servicing passengers, I will definitely go with it. But I'm looking at a school that will serve skycap needs for the state. You've got bartenders' school. You've got this or you've got all sort of schools, right? And ours is a profession. It's definitely a profession. It requires as much skill, as much training as a lot of the other organizations. We do primarily the same thing a ticket agent does except we don't write tickets. But the passengers that they deal with, we deal with on the same basis, and they go through extensive training. But I'm researching it. This would be a part of the diversification of airport baggage that I'm going into. I'm seriously thinking about it.

WN: Okay, I'm going to ask you to make some assessments here. Number one, the business climate in Hawai`i and situation with Blacks in Hawai`i, for example, in business. I remember we talked a little bit about this before in terms of proprietorships and so forth for Blacks in Hawai`i. What is your assessment of the situation today?

EG: Of Blacks in business in Hawai`i?

WN: Mm hmm.

EG: (EG sighs.) I wonder? I think we're operating under a handicap, and that handicap was self-imposed. This is all my point of view and you know that. The thing that we accomplished many years ago when we first came to Hawai`i is now coming back, to my way of thinking, to haunt us, and that was our ability to assimilate so very successfully into the community, and that's to lose our identity. And in losing our identity, we lost one or two other things. We lost, in my estimation, political clout, economic clout, and along with that, a certain degree of our culture. We're not a united people. We are a group, and I don't know if I'm using the term "group" [correctly] or not, but we are a body of achievers, individual achievers. Some more successful than others. And I think there's a reason for this. There's a reason for our not wanting to be a unit and that was because of our background. It was necessary that we be a unit, because when we're on the Mainland our society did not permit anything else. And because we had to be with ourselves we, in turn, did business with ourselves, and you had Black[-owned] businesses. One of my pet gripes, though, is that we only competed with ourselves instead of competing with the best. That's the gripe. But, nevertheless, we did have Black businesses.

Over here, we didn't have the unity, and because we didn't have the unity, we didn't have the opportunity to have businesses that would draw on Black clientele because there was no Black clientele to draw on. And what we were trying to do was avoid anything that would come close to any sort of unity, which unity, in our estimation, equated with ghetto. So we decided, "Look, let's not create a ghetto. And if we're not together there can be no ghetto," so we just disappeared into the Hawaiian society. But by doing so, no one knows we're here. We're an

invisible group of people, and there are a heck of a lot of us. There are a lot of Blacks in this state. And most of us. . . . And again, I'm using terms here that's debatable. A lot of us married local women. And a lot of us have local children. And a lot of those children, our offspring, have grown up. They're adults. And what you have, the wives regardless of what ethnic group they come from, when they marry a Black person or a Black man, their interests becomes the same. The interests of their children become the same. And you combine, put all these people together, and you have a large number of people out there. If they could come together, and I don't mean to create a ghetto, I mean come together for some common good, some common cause, then you would create a certain political clout because politicians are going to look at this. We had a meeting in 1985 that was brought together by a man named Harold Franklin. Harold Franklin pulled together a group of people in 1985. He wanted Black and professional people. He was able to draw together 106 people. And Abercrombie? How do you pronounce that?

WN: [*U.S. Representative*] Neil Abercrombie.

EG: Yeah, was a speaker there. And he was the first one to say, "Look, you people are invisible. Nobody knows you're here." And politicians count numbers. And until we decide—and I don't know if this is ever going to be possible now—to undo what we did, then we won't have the political clout that we need. We will not have the economic clout that would be possible. Not as a group. And the few high achievers that we have, have done so in spite of. We have a contractor here, good friend of mine. He's been quite successful, but he's been an individual achiever.

WN: What about yourself? Do you consider yourself a high achiever?

EG: I don't know. I consider myself taking care of a need—a drive and a need. A need that I have in order to take advantage of an opportunity. And I don't think I've taken advantage much of it. You see, I've thought about this. See, other ethnic groups come to America, the land of opportunity, to take advantage of the opportunities that exist. Hawai`i provided me with that. I don't know if I've exercised that potential that I could have. I've sort of delved into things. I was talking to a friend of mine at the airport a few days ago, and she didn't quite understand what I meant. We were discussing almost the same thing. And I said that on the farm, you'll find—and I used the equation of the pig—they have the runts in a litter of pigs. And then the runt is the one that runs in and out of the trough, in and out of the trough. And he never stays in one place and feeds long enough, whereas the one who's fattened is the one that stays right in one spot. He never moves, okay? I've been in and out. I've gotten into too many things. I should have stayed somewhere, then I would've been fat. There are no obstacles here to prevent me from achieving. That's one of the things Hawai`i offers. And I think some of us have seen that. There are [*Black*] business people here. But they are few and (far) between, and I think that if we had more unity, we would have had more successful business people.

I know one thing, we are too much into the service industry. And I think we ought to go into some phase of producing some of the things, and I think we should do it on a quality basis that would supply the needs of all people, not just Black people. We, by and large, to my way of thinking, are only in the service industry. I guess the greatest criticism of me is that I'm in the service industry, and someone should break that mold and produce something. And it's not a lack of know-how. It takes daring and it takes adventure. It takes an adventurous nature to go out there. But I don't think Blacks in Hawai`i or anywhere in the country or anywhere at all are going to be successful until they become producers. Producing anything, any of the things that

people use.

We have tried some things and usually it's been in the restaurant business. There have been one or two that I have seen who have gone into this business on a scale that I thought merit some sort of praise. There have been some who just got into it and just made do. This thing still comes back to me. If you're going to do it, do it well. And again, some of these things, there's a natural line of evolution from one business to another. You take that laundry. [*Ernest Golden points to Young Laundry & Dry Cleaning sign.*] Okay? Young Laundry. Laundry, in general. Did you know when I was a child, my aunt used to take in laundry. We would go and pick it up, bring it back. She would clean it, iron it, and we'd take it back. That's a pick-up-and-delivery service. We did this for---we Blacks did it. It never got beyond that stage. It should have evolved into this sort of [*business*] thing. That's a natural line of evolution.

WN: That's how it probably started.

EG: Yes. Pick up and delivery. If we're going into the restaurant business, I think this should be another. This is a service business. But this is one of the things we should have done, but we never, to my knowledge, did it on a big enough scale. You've got Italian foods, you've got French foods, you've got Chinese foods, you've got Japanese foods. You've got all these various foods who started out as ethnic foods for a certain group. Evolved into big, big, big time. We never got—and I've looked over the Mainland. Soul food. Southern food. Anyone who has anything of note, (is) White-owned. And you know who's doing the cooking in a lot of cases? Blacks. Blacks doing all the cooking. But the White owned it. Why didn't we move into that direction? Something's wrong.

And this is one of the criticisms I have of me and anyone else who has not taken that direct line of . . . This is why I went into this baggage thing with the same thinking. There are other things. We've done many other things that now someone else took over. The Italians, I think, in San Francisco took over the shoeshine business and made that much more sophisticated than we ever would have thought. That's way down here with other types of services. So, I don't know. Those are my feelings as far as what we did, what we haven't done, what we should do, what we could've done. What we still should do.

In Hawai`i, I think we're getting further from that. I don't see us moving in the direction that I would think we would have after all these years. And, I guess, this is another one of my pet peeves. You know, I started out by saying that when I first came here, the Filipino and, to some degree, the Japanese, because of the war were down on the bottom of the totem pole. But they have all moved up. I don't see us having moved up, not to the degree that the others, the progress that the others have made because at that time there was nothing to stop us. There was no barriers here to stop us. That's one of the things that Hawai`i has given me is the freedom of barriers.

WN: So the potential in Hawai`i is better than nationally.

EG: Yes. Like I said, you find a lot of people coming to America, because where they came from the barriers were there, and they came to America where the barriers weren't there. The barriers weren't really there, I guess, as far as I was concerned but less so in Hawai`i. Funny thing. I think people in Hawai`i wanted to see the Black man forge ahead. This is why these individual achievers (did well). If they had anything going at all, they could always find someone who'd come along and assist them. Always someone to give him assistance. As long

as you have something to offer. If you've got anything to offer here, Hawai`i will help you. This is my feelings. And to not take advantage of that, I think, is a gross error on our part. I can understand what our feelings were from the background from which we came, but we tend to dwell on that too long or let that become a crutch. Maybe I'm being overcritical, but this seems to be what we've done to some degree. Used it as a crutch.

(Telephone rings. Taping stops.)

END OF INTERVIEW