

Transcript of Video Interview of Gus Newport, Conducted by John Emmeus Davis

Center for Community Land Trust Innovation
(9/21/2020)

John Emmeus Davis: Good morning, Gus. Since I am sitting here in Burlington, Vermont, I want to start by asking you about your long-time friendship with our U.S. Senator, Bernie Sanders. You were elected Mayor of Berkeley, California in 1979 and served until 1986. On the other side of the country, Bernie was elected Mayor of Burlington in 1981, serving until 1987.

So your terms overlapped. Your politics were similar. In fact, you were two of the *only* progressive mayors in the U.S. during a period when a reactionary, conservative President, Ronald Reagan, was dismantling every social program he could get his hands on. (Of course, Thatcher was doing something similar in England at the time.)

Is that when you and Bernie first got to know each other?

Gus Newport: Well, we actually got to know each other right after Bernie was elected in 1981. Bernie, as you know, was the co-chair of CORE [Congress on Racial Equality] when he was doing graduate work at the University of Chicago. Berkeley was the first city to divest when I became Mayor. We had it on our ballot.

So Bernie called me to inquire about that, and we sort of started exploring each other's politics and we became very good friends. And then we would go to the Conference of Mayors meetings twice a year. And a small group of us, Bernie, Harold Washington, and Dennis Kucinich, we'd pull ourselves aside. We didn't pay attention to the general meeting. We'd compare notes on public policy, community planning, and organizing.

So we became very good friends. And during that time also, Bernie, Dennis Kucinich and I were invited to be on panels at eastern universities like MIT, Harvard, UMass-Boston, and other places to talk about our policies. Because, as you said, we were considered the most -- and the only -- progressive mayors in the country.

So Bernie and I, we became close friends.

John Emmeus Davis: When Bernie later ran for governor, he asked you to come out here to Vermont to campaign for him. So why in the world did he think a black mayor from Berkeley, California could win votes for him in Vermont?

Gus Newport: That's really interesting. I flew in the night before we were going to go campaigning, stayed at the hotel.

Then they picked me up and took me to his office the following morning. And there were two reporters, one from the UPI and one from the AP there. And the woman from the AP, as

we started talking, pulled out a long sheet of paper, the old data print-out stuff you had to have for the old computers. And Bernie said, “what the hell is that?”

And she said, “Well, you know, we can put a public figure’s name in a computer. Put Gus Newport’s name in and we’ve got 90 stories.” She said, “Bernie, we want to know why you, a Jew from Brooklyn, who’s a socialist, invites, Gus Newport, a former black nationalist and a socialist, on a campaign in a state that’s 97% white.” And Bernie just sat back and said, “because we want talk about the issues.”

They had no more questions from that perspective. We went on through, generally, what those issues were. And, of course, you know, as well as anybody, having been head of housing for Burlington when Bernie was Mayor. And I first learned about land trusts by visiting Burlington and visiting you guys.

John Emmeus Davis: Did you also get involved, later on, in Bernie's national campaigns, when he's running for the nomination for President in 2016, 2020?

Gus Newport: Yeah, in 2016 my good friend, Danny Glover, wrote an Op Ed piece for *Huffington Post*. And right after that was published, he called me, he said, “Gus, I wrote this piece about Bernie Sanders. ‘Cause I’m really impressed. You know him personally. You think we could get in touch with them and maybe do some work?” I was actually in Kansas City, Kansas doing some community engagement and organizing. A friend from Stanford University had invited me to Kansas City to inform a nonprofit organization of how to set up a health care organization with Federal Funds.

I said, “Sure.” So he said, “Well, how soon can you contact him?” So I said, “Well, let me try today.” So I called Bernie and got him and said, “Look, my friend Danny Glover wants to meet you and campaign for you. And, can I give him your contacts and such for whatever?” So I did.

Before the day was up, Danny Glover called me back, said, “Look, I know you’re in Kansas. I know you’re planning to go back to Oakland, but let me reroute your plane ticket. We’re going to South Carolina and meet up with Bernie.” And we went to South Carolina. We started campaigning. He, James Early, Danny, and I went down there -- and Cornell West. We started campaigning in South Carolina for Bernie in 2016.

John Emmeus Davis: And you continued in 2020, the next time.

Gus Newport: 2020. Matter of fact, Danny and I were campaigning again in South Carolina, North Carolina, Oklahoma, right up until March when this pandemic moment grounded it all. But yeah. And at that time, remember just before South Carolina, Bernie was still ahead.

John Emmeus Davis: So, let’s go back *before* Bernie. He’s not the *only* national figure you’ve known. He’s not even the most famous. In fact, I am pretty sure that you are the only person I know who once heard Paul Robeson and Marian Anderson sing when you were a child. And you met both Malcolm X and Nelson Mandela when you were an adult.

I believe it was your grandmother who took you to concerts featuring Paul Robeson and Marian Anderson? Tell me about your grandmother.

Gus Newport: Well, my grandmother, she was unbelievable. My grandmother grew up in a place called Horse Pasture, Virginia. When she was in the fourth grade, she went to school late one day after picking cotton. She walks into the classroom. White teacher didn't even ask her a question. She just slapped her. And my grandmother just walked out of school. Never went back. She was an avid reader.

In those days, they got married real young. She got married at the age of 16 and her husband was injured in a mine accident. West Virginia at the time. They had one child, my mother.

And so my grandma, when they went on their honeymoon, to show you how bad things were in the South then, they got stopped by the Ku Klux Klan. The police put them in jail for two days and took all their little wedding presents. My grandmother, after her husband was injured, decided to pick up and move to Pittsburgh, where she had cousins. My mother and her mother, they moved to Pittsburgh. And then she moved from Pittsburgh to Rochester, New York, where I was born and where she had a sister.

She was so attuned to community development and stuff. Rochester was well known for Eastman School of Music. Paul Robeson and Marian used to come there to perform often. And whenever they'd come to Rochester, Eastman School of Music -- or within 500 miles of Rochester -- my grandmother would take me to see them.

But the other thing that was interesting about her was my grandmother took me to all kinds of church events and various organizations she belonged to. And although we were living in the North, the community was still segregated. A lot of single white female teachers started moving into our neighborhood because it was more affordable. And every time one moved in, my grandmother would host a reception for them to introduce them to the community. And from a Southern perspective, she'd have us kids speak, call these teachers Aunt Jones and Aunt Jenny and things like that. It created that sense of the love of community, the commonwealth, the kind of thing that Martin Luther King talked about. That was part of my early development.

John Emmeus Davis: So she was very socially aware, politically conscious. Right? I mean, she introduced you to that?

Gus Newport: Well, yeah, but that's what happens. I think that you have to understand what Blacks were going through, the kinds of situations that she went through and whatever else.

Years later, I was head of the biggest civil rights group in Rochester, the Monroe County Nonpartisan Political League, and the police brutality was going on, as it is now. I was in charge of a case, the Rufus Fairwell case, which was the first police brutality case in a federal court in the United States.

The second time the police invaded was the Black Muslim mosque. Daisy Bates from Little Rock, Arkansas, who integrated schools in Little Rock Arkansas when Eisenhower was

President, was in Rochester organizing for the NAACP. And Malcolm X called Daisy and says, "Daisy, I got to come to Rochester to find out about this police invasion of the mosque. Who should I be talking to?"

She gave him my name without letting me know -- and my phone number. So Malcolm X called me. And you can imagine I was taken back when he called me. We spoke for about two hours. And then we did that every night for two weeks.

He flew into Rochester on a cold February day – and it gets cold in Rochester, New York. We're on Lake Ontario, right across from Canada. And in those days, planes landed on the tarmac. So I'm standing inside the airport, surrounded by a lot of white men in felt hats and white shirts and ties. The plane stops and lets the stairway down. And Malcolm walks down the stairways and comes into the airport. We hadn't seen each other yet. He says, "Who is Gus Newport?"

I raised my hand and said, "I am." He said, "Young blood, you got the best-tapped telephone in America. This is all FBI around you, all these people here." (laughter)

John Emmeus Davis: Well, you drew a crowd. Even in those days you would draw a crowd.

Gus Newport: Right? So the press, some people laughed and other people just were in shock. And then we went right from there, just the County Courthouse to get the eight Muslims who had been arrested out of jail and took them to court and got them out.

And from then on, I became quite friendly with Malcolm.

As a matter of fact, they put so much pressure on me in Rochester I had to move to Harlem. That's how I got mentored by both Malcolm X and Adam Clayton Powell.

Let me tell you one thing about politics. After Malcolm came to Rochester that first time, the New York State Legislature passed a law. Malcolm X could not be allowed to speak at any government-financed institution or any nonprofit foundation or financial institution in New York State. They passed that law in 24 hours. I'd never seen anything like that before in my life, or since.

John Emmeus Davis: What was your impression of Malcolm X? What is your memory of him as a human being, as an individual?

Gus Newport: He was the greatest person I think I ever knew. (You know, next to my grandmother.) Malcolm X, he always had some comedy about him, but he was so intelligent. You know, during his 15 years in prison, he'd read everything he could get his hands on. And he always had a sense of wanting to upgrade everybody that was a participant.

An example. When we used to go into restaurants, we'd sit down. All the waitresses, black or white, they'd come running to see if they could wait on his table. They wanted to get into the conversation. He included everybody. He'd say to blacks, to white people. "Look, I'm a black nationalist. Not because I'm anti-white. I want to prepare my people to be able to sit at a common table with you white folks to create a common agenda, a common plan of

what our society should be going forward.” And, you know, all the white people would stay right there and ask questions and whatever else.

He was just great. I remember, he came back to Rochester like the second or third time after I first met him. We were meeting with the first black elected officials and some other people, a couple of Rochester police and whatever else. And a couple of blacks, who were not as hardcore as I was, was going off on some stuff. And I said, “Stop that bullshit. You know, let's talk about the real things and make a better society.”

He reached over to me and said, “Brother Eugene, let me tell you something. You're very intelligent. You got a great mind. Cool down a little bit. How are you busting people? I want you to process this meeting out of the left side of your brain, while on the right side you're planning on what's going to be our next steps out in the community?”

Well, he was a great teacher.

John Emmeus Davis: What I like about that story is here's Malcolm X, whose reputation was as this firebrand. And he's turning to you saying, “Uh, Brother Eugene, cool it; calm down a bit. There's a certain irony there. **You** were the young firebrand.

Gus Newport: Right, right. But he knew when, where, and how to do that.

John Emmeus Davis: And then, I believe that later on, around 1990, you met Nelson Mandela, after he was released from prison after 27 years.

Gus Newport: Right. Well, remember, as I said, Berkeley was the first city to divest. And by that time I was in Boston. And when Mandela was released from prison, when his first trip was planned to the United States, Boston was one of the cities that he was coming to.

The elected officials in Boston were so mixed up, each trying to make a name for themselves at the expense of this, rather than organizing it correctly. I was participating in some of those meetings. Some of the people knew that Berkeley was the first city to divest, so they turned to me. And I'd gotten very well-known through Dudley Street and they said, “Gus, will you coordinate Nelson Mandela's trip to Boston?” So I did.

And, of course, I knew Danny Glover and Harry Belafonte were both escorting him on this trip. So I was taken to the airport and able to get behind the scenes. Go out to the tarmac and whatever else. And when the governor then, Dukakis, he was there and his wife, and my wife Kathryn was with me. And when the plane landed, oddly enough, it was Trump Airlines! (laughs)

They let the stairs down. And Danny Glover and Belafonte walked down together. Of course, Danny and Belafonte greeted me and introduced me to Mandala. [They] let him know that I had been Mayor and been made an honorary member of the African National Congress because Berkeley was the first city to divest. I was also on the committee against apartheid at the United Nations.

So I got to escort Mandela all that day to various venues. After, we went to the JFK Library where there was a big event. He was one of the kindest, most generous people I've ever

met. He was still with Winnie at that time. So they were both with them. I have a picture together.

John Emmeus Davis: A couple of years before Nelson Mandela visited Boston, you were hired as executive director of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative. That's how you happened to be in Boston at the time, when Mandela came to visit. I'm curious, how did *that* connection originally get made? How did you become acquainted with the folks at DSNI?

Gus Newport: Following my term as Mayor, in 1986 I was invited to UMass Boston to be the first senior fellow at the newly founded William Monroe Trotter Institute.

I was teaching a course on alternative economics and public policy. I was supposed to be working with Black and Latino legislators, helping them examine public policy that was necessary and whatever else. But quite a few people from Dudley Street started coming down, monitoring my class, including Peter Medoff.

After two or three visits, Peter Medoff pulled me aside and said, "Gus, why don't you come out to Dudley on the weekends and participate with us in some of our discussions?" First, I said, "No, I ain't got time for that." And Peter, with his little sharp self. "Goddamn it. I thought you were a real revolutionary." So he's telling me. So I went out there and it was love at first sight, the kinds of things that Dudley was doing.

You must remember what preceded the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative. There was a ballot initiative put on the ballot in Boston for Roxbury to secede from Boston.

John Emmeus Davis: Yeah. And what were they going to name that new city?

Gus Newport: They going to name it "Mandela." It was because the City of Boston would use all the CDBG [Community Development Block Grant] money and other kinds of money downtown, like most cities – rather than using it to build up inner cities that were poor and such whatever else.

Well that failed. But then the city was going to bring urban renewal, re-planning and rebuilding the Dudley Street area. And at one of those early meetings, it was run by Steve Coyle and some other people, a couple of black women who were in the Nation of Islam stood up and said, "Wait a minute, you got this panel up there; all planning for what the Dudley Street area is going to be and whatever else. Do any of you live here?" Well, that's a no. "Always we got somebody planning for us that doesn't know a damn thing about our area. Here you go once again, proposing that."

That's when they started organizing, put together a small nonprofit, hired Peter Medoff to do some of the planning and things.

And Steve Coyle, when I came on board, was aware of the fact that there's a statute in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, it goes back to the 1800s, that a nonprofit organization could get the powers of eminent domain over certain areas of land if they could create a

master plan. It was only been done once before, and that was by . . . I forget the name of the insurance company. They must have been nonprofit at the time in the 1800s.

We were able to hire a couple of guys that helped us create a master plan. We engaged with the community. MIT helped us, the Department of Urban Studies and Planning, Tunney Lee, who was one of the greatest community planners. That's just true.

Our master plan was accepted and we got the rights of eminent domain. But we still had to have legal help. And that's where David Abramowitz at Goulston and Storrs came in so that we could legally take the land. Some the city conveyed to us because the city had taken it by tax arrears. But others were owned by people. So we had to get the legal right to purchase them at the right cost. Goulston and Storrs made that analysis, et cetera.

And Ford gave us a \$2 million Program Related Investment, a PRI of \$2 million to purchase those vacant lands. We were also able to convince the city to mitigate all outstanding taxes on the properties they owned.

John Emmeus Davis: But once you started getting the land, once you had the power to get the land, you then had to figure out How do we hold it? What do we do with it? How do we develop it? That's the point at which DSNI started exploring creating a community land trust. You were the executive director at that time. So, I'm wondering, why did you believe that a community land trust might be a good strategy for holding the land and improving conditions in this area of Roxbury?

Gus Newport: In the beginning, I had no idea or clue what would be the best process. But through engaging the community, through organizing with them, the community people said, "Look, we'd like some kind of housing that is permanent; that allows us to maintain and be existing."

The community started out wanting to clean up all the vacant lots. I mean, they were used for illegal dumping by developers. Which we found out was happening to Black communities all across the country, because developers didn't want to pay any tipping fee or anything. They knew that these four black communities didn't have any political clout. If you ever saw the vacant lots in Dudley in those days they was just covered with rocks and dirt and debris. Meat packing companies with drop off kinds of meat that was spoiled and things.

So the first thing we did was challenge the city to pass a statute that would cite these developers. And then the city starts sending out trucks on the weekend. And we went and cleaned up those things. And at the end of the day, we had a barbecue and celebrate. And then we went to some flower companies and got seeds and planted flower seeds. So where there was blight then it became beauty as it's growing.

We begin planning with this group of organizations that was helping us with that kind of planning. But once they told us about CLT housing, I had to go out and find out what it was, and that's when I discovered the community land trust.

I knew some of the people at ICE [Institute for Community Economics] and other kinds of places. I got to know the history, the role Mahatma Gandhi played to provide community

land trusts for people who were victims of the caste system. Then as you know, it was transferred to Israel, to the kibbutz. And you are the one who made a documentary about New Communities. They sent people to Israel to look at how land trusts worked. So we thought that was the thing.

Now, all the nonprofit housing people were opposed to land trusts. They said, “My God, they own the house, but they don't own the land. How can that be?”

But they didn't understand that it stabilized lives. At the end of the terms, some of the affordable housing that nonprofits were making, when it came to term, they'd end up getting brought up by the private sector and whatever else. They hadn't thought through the distance, something in perpetuity like land trusts.

John Emmeus Davis: I imagine you also had some skeptics in the Dudley neighborhood itself. I mean, **you** may have become convinced that a community land trust was the right way to go. Your **staff** may have become convinced. But I would imagine you had to do some convincing out there in the community. How did you do that? What did you say to folks?

Gus Newport: A lot of the homeowners were certainly opposed to it. I mean, homeowners are generally opposed to anything that benefits renters anyway. Well, what we did is we looked at the land that was available. One of the things we said, “We're going to beautify this whole community.” So we gave homeowners access to part of the land that we were taking to extend their yards and ownings and whatever else.

And we showed them the plan, that we were **not** just talking about housing. We're talking about small businesses. We're talking about upgrading the quality of education, health care, transportation. So the working poor would have access to the jobs and stuff and all those kinds of things. The plan wasn't just around housing.

So as they began to learn more, they got more and more involved. And then of course, we had to elect a board. We created both the DSNI board, which included people who were going to be homeowners, other community people, small businesses, religious institutions, some representatives of local government. We also created a sub-entity called DNI [Dudley Neighbors, Inc.] to hold the land and to maintain it, to pay the taxes, and all those kinds of things.

We got one of the foundation's board members who was a lawyer to do all the early legal work with us. And Ted Kennedy found out about it and assisted us. It was a lot of work. And MIT played a great role. MIT also provided us with students to help go door-to-door with us, to engage mainly single-family households. Usually in neighborhoods like this, 72% heads of households are single woman.

We identified the things they didn't like, as well as what they would like to see. So with all that data we created GIS [Geographic Information System] maps through MIT to educate bankers, small businesses, government, our community, you name it.

And what happened, that was around the time when the Community Reinvestment Act was being negotiated in Congress. And so we challenged the banks. Six nonprofits give us a few million dollars to help with some of our work, but they said we're never going admit it.

Steve Coyle got Northwestern [University] to do a study on redlining. And sure enough, we were able to prove 30 years of redlining by the banks. We met with the banks for a year. And after a year, the banks decided they would create a small business CDC [Community Development Corporation] and an affordable housing CDC. They put me on both boards.

The banks, the small ones, put it in a half million dollars, \$500,000. The big ones put in a million. And that became a fund for affordable housing, as well as small businesses. They tried to get me to become the CEO, the small business CDC, but I ain't got no banking background. But it was a learning, because they began to understand through our master plan, that they had better data analysis than for some of the private sector things that they were financing. So it was all a learning situation.

John Emmeus Davis: Even after DSNI created Dudley Neighbors, Inc., its community land trust subsidiary, it kept doing community organizing. One of the things that I've always been impressed by, with DSNI, is that unlike many nonprofits that start doing more and more development and then start doing less and less community organizing and leadership development, DSNI continued to be **both** an organizer and a developer.

Gus Newport: Right. Well, we recognized that, if you're going to develop a community, you do development for the people who live in that community. In order to keep on top of it, if you're doing a good job, what they need [to know] was what's the ongoing concerns? You have to have community.

An example. Every two years, they have an election for the board. This past year, 61 people ran Can you imagine? This many years later, 61 people ran. Right?

John Emmeus Davis: You had 61 people who ran for the available seats, the open seats at DSNI?

Gus Newport: Yes, this past year. And it was really interesting, because people began to understand more what it meant to have a functional community, affordable housing, affordable businesses.

And we created a co-op for the businesses so that they could purchase common goods at lower prices and compete with Walmart and stores like that.

We learned a whole lot of things. We learned that we needed better healthcare and transportation. And so as communities begin to recognize, this is what a community is all about, this is what manifests. Great communities are usually lived in by only middle class or upper class or the wealthy or whatever else. People begin to understand this is the way to go.

Nonprofits were opposed to it for awhile, but after they saw what was happening, we actually were able to gain more money for them because the foundations started sending

their proposals to me to see if this coincided with our planning things. Of course, the more housing developers do it, the more work they got. This is what you tried to show them is how these things work.

John Emmeus Davis: I imagine that most people first learned about the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative by watching the video that Mark Lipman and Leah Mahan produced a number of years ago called *Holding Ground* . If I'm not mistaken, *Holding Ground* was made under your watch. **And** , if I remember correctly, you made a guest appearance, your first performance as a rapper in that video. So, tell us, how did *Holding Ground* come to be?

Gus Newport: Well, I happened to give a lecture at the Kennedy School at Harvard about Dudley Street and Leah Mahan and a young man named Derek were both there. They were both working as interns on *Eyes on the Prize* . And the very next day they came to my office to visit me. And Leah walked in and said, "You know, Gus, we heard your lecture yesterday. And we love that story. We'd like to make a video documentary about it."

I had always felt that nonprofit communities should be making more documentaries so that people could see what was happening. So I said yes, and I took them to a board meeting of our executive committee and I said, "Look, these two young people want to make a video documentary. They're just getting started. So I'd like for us to appropriate some money for them to buy a camera and just start engaging and interviewing people around the community. And the board went along with it.

Then she met Mark Lipman, who knew the business more. And they started interviewing and coming to all our meetings and they were accepted. No questions about them.

The way the rap happened. Some of our young people with Paul Yelder had written the rap about Dudley Street. We're going to have a meeting and the young people said, "Well, we're not going to do the rap unless you do it with us, Gus." So we get there and they start going "bup, bup, bup." And I noticed I was the only one rapping. But it was on video tape.

John Emmeus Davis: It was one of the highlights of *Holding Ground* .

Gus Newport: Right.

John Emmeus Davis: Years later, you became executive director of the Institute for Community Economics. That was the organization that was started in 1967 by Ralph Borsodi to promote and develop CLTs in the United States. And it had considerable success. But by 2005, the year that you were hired as the executive director, ICE had pretty much run out of steam. You were hired to turn things around, but you made a decision, along with Chester Hartman and other members of the ICE board, that maybe it was time to wind things down at ICE and to distribute its assets and its programs and its functions to other nonprofits, including the newly formed National CLT Network – that actually you helped plan; you were on the planning committee for that. Reflect a little bit about the he last days of ICE, if you would.

Gus Newport: Well, yeah. You know, ICE was a great organization. You know, because you worked with them. Borsodi and those people were very committed. I think that post them

being there, some staff came on. For them it was just a job. Remember, the Community Development Financial Institutions all started out of ICE and whatever else. But some of the data that was being kept on some of the money and some of the lending before the CDFIs [Community Development Financial Institutions] got set up, was being run out of ICE. I sort of got a feeling that what was going on, wasn't all straight in.

As I challenged people about it, they got upset. You know, who is this guy? Why is he coming in here with all this? But I was able to get Chester Hartman on my board after I came on board, and a few other people. Chester has always been a sharp analyst and lived in D.C., where there was a potential of another organization taking over ICE.

So I began to say, look, under these circumstances, I don't want to stay in charge, but I think we ought to transfer the assets and the potential of what land trusts are to another organization. And Chester and various other people on the board helped me do that. It took awhile, but the transfer was fairly smooth.

And, of course, as you said, the organization was put together, the CLT organization, kept the community of people doing CLT work involved. And it was a smooth transition. I think today we're at the highest level from a CLT standpoint. As a matter of fact, in the world. Because you know, people come to the national conference. And CLTs are flourishing. I mean, this country, I mean, look, what's happening to Europe. In the UK alone, I think there's 300 or more and various others. So it's a great process.

And, of course, there's more people learning. And in this post-pandemic moment, I and a lot of people are talking. It's going to be need for more reorganizing and planning, because in places like Berkeley and Oakland and San Francisco, you built a lot of market-rate condos and things, but based on people working from a viral standpoint to zoom, a lot of people coming out of Silicon Valley want to be in their homes, working in places.

So a lot of those market-rate condos is not going to go so well. I've been talking with people saying "Well, let's see if we can make those affordable housing and assist the homeless and people who need them and rebuild those neighborhoods. And put solar panels on the roof to gain more energy as such whatever else.

I think this is a new planning time that's going to go for post pandemic, the need health care, et cetera, whatever else. CLTs are going to play a continuing role.

John Emmeus Davis: *You've* played a continuing role in planting seeds around the country – and around the world – about community land trusts, particularly in communities of color. Periodically I would get calls from places as different as Delray Beach, Florida or Seattle, Washington. And I would pick up the phone and someone would say, "Gus Newport was here last week and he said we should create a community land trust. And he told us to call you." Many times, those were folks calling from African-American communities who were hoping to do something similar in their neighborhoods to what you and DSNI had done in Roxbury.

Do you believe the CLTs can help solve some of the many problems that plague African-American communities, and other communities of color in the U.S.?

Gus Newport: Very much so. As you know, while I was in Florida, I ran a project called the Partnership for Neighborhood Initiatives in Florida in the mid-Nineties.

That's when I found Delray Beach and various other places. They were going through the same kinds of things that communities of color were in other places. They could use affordable housing, permanent affordable housing. So I introduced them to the land trust. That's your intercourse, as you said, Seattle, or there's more cranes in the sky than any city in the States.

And, of course, you got Amazon and all those big companies up there. So we need to learn how to tax the rich, put this money into programs to help the poor, et cetera.

And of course, whenever anybody shows interest, then of course I give them the name of John Davis, the man who most knows land trusts than anybody in this world. And, of course, Jason Webb was on my staff at Dudley Street, and I give them Jason's name.

I plant the seeds wherever I can and stay involved with places as they learn it. And, of course, we show them *Holding Ground* and other kinds of things to get an idea of it. And I get people doing videos, so their progress as they go forward themselves too.

John Emmeus Davis: I'm wondering, is there a place for CLT in the larger conversation about reparations for African-American descendants of slavery? I think this is coming up from time to time, particularly among young activists associated with Black Lives Matter and Right to the City. They have raised the question of whether community land trusts should be tied into this larger conversation about reparations. What's your view on that?

Gus Newport: Yes. I think not only should community land trusts be tied in, but a master plan has to be tied in. Because reparations, if was just taking the bulk of the mountain, just giving money to people, people without knowing how to spend that and raise the quality of life would still end up with nothing in the long run.

My point is, we need to have a plan of how to appropriate that money to make sure these are functional communities, raise the education quality, et cetera. Remember in the 2008 fiasco, Blacks lost 72% of their wealth when the economy went down, predatory lending as such and all that stuff.

So, therefore, the education and knowledge of how to plan, how to spend this money invested. Everything else needs to go in there.

John Emmeus Davis: I think it's like the Great Recession of 2008. There was something like \$7 trillion of home equity that was stripped from American families. And *half* of that was taken away from Black families, Black homeowners. There was an article published last week in *Shelterforce* magazine by a wonderful writer by the name of Anne Price. She called this "the greatest confiscation of economic assets from Black people in modern American history." That's quite a statement.

Gus Newport: Yeah. There's gotta be a plan. There's gotta be legislation. I mean, I'm just thinking about the legislation that the U.S. House passed to give money to people who are

unemployed in this pandemic moment. But the majority of that money went to millionaires and billionaires.

John Emmeus Davis: So, Gus, one last question. This is a pretty grim time in the United States. We're still living in the shadow of a corrupt, authoritarian president; a pandemic that's been mismanaged by him; a rise in white nationalism, encouraged by him; and a crippled economy. At 85 years young, you haven't stopped working to create a better world. You haven't given into despair. My last question for you is: how do you keep going? How do you keep hopeful in these times?

Gus Newport: Well, there are role models, and one of our greatest role models just died, Ruth Ginsburg. Even though she had all kinds of cancers, she kept health workouts and social, whatever else. And, of course, I've been inspired by the elders I've met. And the fact is, no one of us knows at all.

So I'm lucky enough for what my grandmother instilled in me: "Don't think you know it all, boy, learn something new every day." I learned it by engaging with people and having an analysis and understand the integrated role that can be played by communities, universities, government, all kinds of people, investors, even including bankers and whatever else.

And certainly we don't live in a community that has reached its limit as to what's best. The fact that I have been exposed is the fact that my grandmother told me, only after I was active in civil rights, that her mother was a slave. After I looked at her as a model of what's kept her going. She lived to 98, as did my mother.

Right now, I'm with the National Council of Elders, a group of people founded by Vincent Harding, who was Martin Luther King's speech writer, in 2011. You had to be 65 or older. But people who were part of the civil rights movement, environmental movement, free speech movement, feminist movement. From Delores Huerta [co-chair of the United Farm Workers] to people like that and whatever else.

We get a lot of calls during this time from a lot of young people, Black Lives Matter and whatever else, who's out there demonstrating now. They want to know how we dealt with some of the problems of dissension and stuff within our own organizations and how we planned and did stuff. So we share with them, both our successes as well as the mistakes that we've made.

I reorganized the police department when I was in Berkeley. That's come up now. So I'm able to share with people how we did that. Ronald Reagan was the Governor of California when I got elected. He closed all the mental health institutions and all those people start flowing to places like Berkeley and San Francisco, because they felt we'd be more sensitive to their needs.

I was the Mayor of Berkeley. I began seeing all these homeless and I went down and engaged them. And I let them use my conference room to have discussions and I gave them the first hour on my city council. Then we bought some old yellow school buses to put them on our Marina, with porta-pottys in em. We put portable showers outside and gave each one, the homeless, mail post office box so they could apply for SSI [Supplemental Security

Income]. And we began planning with them what the needs are. 'Cause a lot of these people were people with jobs. They got strung out on opiates and other kinds of things. And you got to know what are the needs of community. Well, I've been through a lot of that and I've been with a lot of people, including yourself, who knows that. And together I think we can engage the society and make us a better society going forward.

John Emmeus Davis: I'm glad you're still out there. And you can keep guiding “young people” like me (laughter) in how to stay hopeful and how to stay active.

Gus Newport: Thank you, sir.

John Emmeus Davis: Thank you, Gus. And thanks to the Center for CLT Innovation for sponsoring and recording this conversation.

Stay safe, everyone. You've got to stay hopeful out there. And Gus, you get the last word, because you *always* get the last word. Go ahead.

Gus Newport: I just want you to remember one other thing I forgot to bring up. David Abromowitz is probably the greatest nonprofit lawyer I've ever known. He worked for Goulston Storrs, which gave Dudley Street pro bono assistance when I was there and right up to 30 years of existence. His firm has called me recently. They want to assist Black communities looking to gain the intelligence and the knowledge in the legal process of gaining land and maintaining land and whatever else. So there's help where we wouldn't have expected it on the way.

And David Abromowitz is one of the greatest people I've known.

John Emmeus Davis: So, there you go David. We're going to end this interview with a shout-out to you. Thank you, Gus.

Gus Newport: Thank you.