Narrator: The Rev. Dr. Harold T. Lewis

Interviewer: The Rev. Melana Nelson-Amaker, Collection Development Liaison for the African American Episcopal Historical Collection

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Abstract:
In this interview, prominent Episcopal priest the Rev. Dr. Harold T. Lewis discusses his tenure at the Episcopal Church’s Office of Black Ministries.

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Key:
[ ] = Note or addition of transcriber, narrator, or interviewer

The beginning of each track is noted in red for ease of identification.

Processing and Content Notes:
The recording of the interview was sent to a professional transcriptionist who transcribed the conversation using a “light edit” method. This entails the omission of most verbal pauses and false starts. The initial transcript was then sent to the narrator who suggested further revisions, including minor deletions, additions, and substitutions (e.g., giving an individual’s full name), for the sake of clarity and accuracy. The archivist incorporated those revisions, as well as minor revisions of his own. This transcript is thus an acceptable rendition of the recorded interview. However, the audio, as well as the written edits of the narrator, are also available to researchers. The written edits are kept in the collection control file.

Finding Aid: There is a thorough finding aid that includes information about all of the individual interviews in the Harold T. Lewis Oral History, RG A51. It may be found on this page: http://www.vts.edu/podium/default.aspx?t=131185.

Access Points:
Lewis, Harold T., 1947-
African American Episcopalians
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Episcopal Church
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Episcopalians – Biography
Office of Black Ministries
Allin, John Maury
Browning, Edmond Lee
Caution, Tollie
Porter, Diane
Cook, Ellen
Organization of Black Episcopal Seminarians

[Track 1]

NELSON-
AMAKER: Well, just a little more than a year.

LEWIS: Yes.

N-A: Thanks for coming back.

LEWIS: Happy to be here.

N-A: Glad to have you again. This is Melana Nelson-Amaker. We are sitting at Virginia Theological Seminary Library, actually in the rare book room this time. I am with the Rev. Dr. Harold T. Lewis, and we are sitting for a second interview in his oral history series. Welcome.

LEWIS: Thank you very much, Melana. It is good to be here.

N-A: So I wanted to talk with you this time about your eleven years as the Staff Officer for Black Ministries at the National Church Center in New York.

LEWIS: Right, okay.

N-A: And what I wanted to ask you first was how did you get to be the Staff Officer for Black Ministries?

LEWIS: Well, for several years before I went on staff, I was on the Commission for Black Ministries, and for some years, its chairman and worked very closely with Frank Turner who was then the Staff Officer of Black Ministries and later went to be Suffragan Bishop of Pennsylvania. When he left for Pennsylvania, the position was vacant, and the Presiding Bishop took a poll, and I seemed to be the odds on favorite among the Church’s black constituency, both the Commission and the UBE board and other people, kind of like the heir apparent. So I never intended to work at “815” at all, quite the contrary. But every position I have had in the Church has been a surprise, and that was one of them. So I put my name in, and Bishop Allin who hired me, interviewed me, Presiding Bishop Allin, and he said, “I have heard very good things about Harold Lewis, but I thought I would make some discreet inquiries of my own,” he said. So I said, “I still got the job?” So I began in 1983, and we moved from Washington to New Haven. I had a five-year plan and ended up staying for eleven years.

N-A: So Bishop Allin took a poll, is that what you said?

LEWIS: Yes. A survey you might say, yes.

N-A: Informally to UBE, to the Commission? Who did he talk to? I am interested in the process also. That is why I am asking.

LEWIS: It is kind of vague now. It has been a while, but I know that it was not entirely informal because I remember there was an actual form, ballot, if you will, where people had to write down their first and second choices. So I got more votes than there were people because some people put me down as the second choice as well.
So I know that the -- the only entities I know of were the Commission itself and the UBE Board. There may have been other people that were contacted as well.

N-A: When you arrived, what configuration was there of desks for different ministries and that kind of thing? Did we have several ethnic desks at the time?

LEWIS: Well, we were in what was then called the Department of National Mission, as opposed to World Mission.

N-A: Okay.

LEWIS: And if I am not mistaken, the person in charge of that overall department was Alice Emery who just died, I learned. And I think she was succeeded by Earl Neil who was my boss for some years. So at that time there were four ethnic desks, as I believe there still are: Native American, African American, Hispanic, and Asian. Then, there were other offices there, too, women’s ministries and so on.

N-A: Do you recall something of the political climate in the Church at the time that you came on board as the [Track 2] Staff Officer?

LEWIS: Well, I served under two Presiding Bishops. John Allin was the first, and Ed Browning the second. Of course, there was a lot of concern around Ed Browning’s coming in, only because, as you may remember, in 1985 when he was elected, John Walker, the Bishop of Washington, was a candidate, and many of us were hoping that he would in fact be elected, and the Church would make a statement.

N-A: He came very close, did he not?

LEWIS: He came very close. At that time, the House of Bishops’ votes were still secret. There were no public -- everything was anecdotal based on friends in the House who would share ballots with you and some information. But yes, he was close, and there were four candidates. Bishop Frey was seen to be a little to the right. I have great affection for him. He ordained me. There was Bishop Stough, and I think people felt that Province Four had had its day.

N-A: Yes.

LEWIS: There was John and Ed, and Ed had been at that time Bishop of Hawaii and spent most of his ministry abroad. I think the consensus, certainly among black people, was that the Church at large was just not ready for a black bishop. Bishop Walker actually led the balloting. Interestingly enough, that same scenario repeated itself twelve years later when Bishop Thompson was a candidate at the Philadelphia Convention. At that point, the results were posted so the novices to the General Convention ways saw him leading and said, “It is a matter of time. He will get over.” And those of us who had the benefit of history said, “No, this is like déjà vu,” and we predicted that Herb would not be elected either, and that was true. But I am jumping ahead. So I had a great deal of respect for Bishop Allin. He had been the Bishop of Mississippi. He came to “815.” He surrounded himself by and got the
advice of -- I am talking about his role for black people and other things as well – both black and white clergy and laity.

**N-A:** Yes.

**LEWIS:** -- but he listened, and it was under him, of course, that the black desk was restored.

**N-A:** Would you say a little bit about that?

**LEWIS:** Well, as you may know, the previous incarnation of the Office of Black Ministries was called several things. At one point, the incumbent was called the Deputy for Colored Work.

**N-A:** Yes.

**LEWIS:** Or Secretary for Negro Work and stuff like that.

**N-A:** Yes.

**LEWIS:** The incumbent was Tollie Caution who was there for many years and was greatly revered as kind of an unconsecrated black bishop who basically was the deployment officer for black people and the voice of black people. Then, there was a shake up, and he was summarily removed. It was as a result of his untimely departure and firing that the UBE came to be, then called the Union of Black Clergy and Laity. That was 1968 so that was the crucible out of which UBE came into being. Of course, the UBE had had a previous incarnation as the Conference of Church Workers Among Colored People and so on. So there was a long time when there was no black desk at “815.”

**N-A:** From the time of Tollie Caution’s being dismissed -- ?

**LEWIS:** Until Frank Turner came.

**N-A:** Yes.

**LEWIS:** And that was, if I am not mistaken, at the Louisville convention. That would have been 1973.

**N-A:** So it was under Bishop Allin that the desk was restored?

**LEWIS:** Restored, yes.

**N-A:** Okay.

**LEWIS:** So things changed when Bishop Browning came. [Track 3] Well, of course they would. A new head. I think, unlike his predecessor, he did not seek the counsel of a broad base of black leaders in the Church. I think one of his saddest hours, and there were several even before the Ellen Cook fiasco, was the fact that he was determined to go to Phoenix for General Convention. I forget the year. I think it was 1991 or
thereabouts, yes, I think so, whenever it was. Most African American organizations, including even non-African American organizations like the NFL, said it would not go to Phoenix because Arizona would not enact the holiday for Dr. King. So Bishop Browning went through the motions, as it were, of calling in black people. I happened to be on sabattical at that time. Although I was, at that point, close to home, studying at Yale, and I thought, given the gravity of it, since I was the official spokesperson for black people, I would be in the mix, but I was not summoned.

N-A: You were never asked?

LEWIS: I was never asked my opinion about where to go. The people who were there, in fact, with few exceptions, told him that we should not go to Phoenix, but he was bound and determined, and he went. That was just emblematic of his being out of touch I think with -- and having his own agenda.

N-A: Do you have a sense of why he was bound and determined to go to Phoenix?

LEWIS: There is an apocryphal tale that he had been out of the country at the time of the Civil Rights Movement, and this was his Civil Rights Movement. His theology, his theory, was that he should go to Phoenix and protest as opposed to stay away and protest, which I suppose has some merit.

N-A: Did that actually happen?

LEWIS: I do not remember any great protest happening, no. I do remember that at that Convention -- Conventions became a blur after a while -- I think there was a racial audit report, or the Commission on Racism made its report. The Church, I have found, goes from sweetheart to sweetheart; it is a fickle lover. So once the racial statement was made as if racism has been eliminated and eradicated from the face of the earth, and the House of Bishops made a statement, and they said nice things like they should not belong to racist clubs and stuff like that. But they had made some -- how should I put it? -- they made some discoveries. The data showed that black people, even black bishops let us say, were not accorded the same privileges as white bishops, I mean in terms of respect. There was still a stained glass ceiling when it came to deployment of black clergy and stuff like that. So it was a troublous period, I think, under Ed Browning. History will show that he sought the counsel of Diane Porter. Diane Porter had worked for, I think, Congressman Towns at one point, a very able administrator and politician in the best sense of the word. She endeared herself to the Brownings, and she had a series of various appointments. She eventually became the Vice President of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, basically number two, with the PB being the President. I guess my unpleasant moment, most unpleasant moment with him, and that is hard to qualify but one of the unpleasant moments -- I will put it that way -- was when Diane became my supervisor. She was head of what had been National Mission, and I forget what it became. So she was in charge of all the [Track 4] ethnic desks, women and so and so. Then there was a position for a Senior Executive for Program, and that was the person at the level between the Presiding Bishop and the supervisors of each unit.
N-A: Yes.

LEWIS: So Bishop Browning made her the Senior Executive for Program, which was fine, except that she remained as supervisor/executive of the unit. So I went to him, I went to Bishop Browning, and I took with me the handbook, the employee handbook of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society. And I said, “It says here that if I have any kind of grievance with my supervisor, I go to that person’s supervisor.”

N-A: But it is the same person.

LEWIS: Exactly. And I said, “But now that those two people are the same, you have in affect removed my court of appeals.” He said, “I never thought of that,” which I thought was an incredible statement for somebody running the Episcopal Church not knowing. You do not have to run the Episcopal Church to know that. That is just common sense. Certainly, there was no change.

N-A: He did not do anything about it once it was pointed out to him.

LEWIS: No, right. Ed Browning’s principal concern, the “-ism” that bothered him most was sexism, which is fine except that everything else kind of took -- many people, even people who were closer to him than I was, I mean people like Brian Greeves who came with him from Hawaii and that crowd -- Bishop Stough who was a lifelong friend from Sewanee days and all of that -- even they would say that it was almost like a blind spot for Bishop Browning. So that the joke was if you complained about a woman in authority at “815,” and there were several, the first time you were sexist, the second time you were misogynist, and the third time you were gone. I think this really came to light in the Ellen Cook fiasco because there were multiple warnings about her from people very close to him, but he would not hear it. So finally, he was forced to hear it when she absconded with $2.1 million.

N-A: Yes.

LEWIS: My Wall Street friends asked me right after that, “Why is he still there?” He says, “In the real world, anybody who is CFO…

N-A: Allowed such a thing.

LEWIS: …he would just be gone.” I think we were talking about the last triennium of his reign, and the Episcopal Church -- they decided just to let things lie until he was out anyhow. But the morale at “815” with every issue, every problem, just eroded more and more. We had a time when -- we were there -- I survived two cuts, staff cuts and, of course, some people did not. But Ellen Cook, apart from her criminal record, was just an unpleasant person and was bad for morale. I remember once when it was announced that there would be a freeze on salaries, somebody at a staff meeting asked, “Well, can we expect at least a cost of living increase?” which is not a raise as such. She said, “You people are lucky to have a job.” That was the contempt with which we were held. The other thing that happened -- and I am probably saying far too much -- is that the number of black people, black appointed staff at the Church Center began to dwindle. I think I wrote in my book -- and I wrote that book, and it
was published in 1996 – there were maybe one or two African American male clergy left when there were 20 or so -- not only clergy but appointed staff, lay and clergy -- and that is not good. So that’s all. I think it was clear that it was not a good place. It was not a healthy place.

[Track 5]

N-A: Where did the tour of black congregations and black neighborhoods that Bishop Browning took come into play?

LEWIS: That is interesting. I wanted him to have a bird’s eye view of black ministries.

N-A: Yes.

LEWIS: And because I do not think he was really intimately involved with what blacks were doing on the ground. So I devised a program, a tour. It was chosen -- the places we visited were chosen to show the length and breadth or at least a diversity of ministries. We began at St. Luke’s, New Haven where I was helping out while I was at “815” -- I lived in New Haven -- which is largely a West Indian parish. We went to Emanuel, Memphis, which had a great outreach ministry. We went to St. Edmund’s, Chicago, and I think we also went to Martini Shaw’s parish in Chicago, too, St. Thomas’. So it was really quite a good experience. The PB preached and spoke and -- oh we went to Charleston-- went to Pawley’s Island because Father Tony Campbell was there then going great guns. So it was a good experience. One of the highlights, I think, of my ministry there.

N-A: That was some distance into his post, was it not?

LEWIS: Yes. It was 1992, and he came in 1985.

N-A: Yes. Alright. I want to come back to your own work. Thanks for all of the context of what was going on at “815” during your years. What were you most passionate about in terms of your work at the National Church Center?

LEWIS: Two things. One had to do with the recruitment, training, and deployment of black clergy and the mentoring of seminarians through the process. Even today, some of these people still remember that and comment to me about how grateful they are for the help I gave them. I preached about thirty ordination sermons. Mainly, a lot of them came out of the relationships I had with the men and women who I mentored.

N-A: Thirty ordinations, did you say?

LEWIS: Yes, right. Have you heard what happened at the House of Bishops yesterday in terms of the election?

N-A: Just yesterday? No, actually I have not.

LEWIS: I have not either, but the reason I mention it is that Carl Wright is up for the Bishop of the Armed Forces.
N-A: Oh, okay.

LEWIS: He told me about that at Convention.

N-A: Did you bring the Organization of Black Episcopal Seminarians into being?

LEWIS: Yes. We decided that we needed a support group because we had at any given time maybe 20, maybe 16, maybe 22, whatever it was. But they were pretty much spread out across the board. So the lion’s share were either here at Virginia or at General, maybe three or four each or something. Then, there was one at Nashotah and one or two at CDSP and one at Austin and so these people very often did not know. First of all, whereas in my day most black seminarians came out of black parishes -- predictable places that used to have a “C” next to it in the Red Book, for “Colored” --

N-A: Oh, yes.

LEWIS: --now, I think people came from less than traditional places and mostly white congregations and dioceses where there were no black congregations and so on. So Tollie Caution did not mean anything to them. John Burgess did not mean anything. Frank Turner. These things, they were just names. So they needed some grounding in where black people fit in the Episcopal Church. [Track 6] Or what the history had been because very often, even though they did not come out of that crucible, eventually the deployment practices would emerge so that they would be serving in these places. But apart from that, apart from the history lesson, it was just good for morale for them to be with other blacks that go through the process and compare notes. So we had two meetings a year usually at one of the seminaries. So let us say you go to the Seminary of the Southwest or Nashotah where they are used to having one or none.

N-A: Yes.

LEWIS: Then, all of a sudden there are twenty people. It is an education for the people there. I remember when we went to Nashotah, it was right after Barbara Harris’s election. She had not been consecrated yet. So I preached a sermon in which I made some remarks about the process. A delegation came up to me afterwards of guys, men, and they said, “Father, you have abused the homiletical privilege.” [Inaudible] and I said, “Why is that?” They said, “You have offended some people in the chapel by what you said today.” And I said, “Well, you know, if you spend your whole life preaching and you never offend anybody, maybe you have not been preaching.”

N-A: The gospel.

LEWIS: Then, they left and another group came, all of women, and they said they felt affirmed by what I said because they had felt like second class citizens at -- well they were in fact -- at Nashotah.

N-A: Yes.
LEWIS: I do not know if women can yet celebrate at Nashotah’s altar. They were willing to take women’s tuition money, but they were not at that point even in favor of women’s ordination. Anyway, so the black seminarians were one important aspect of things.

N-A: When during your time as Staff Officer did that get up and running?

LEWIS: I think fairly early on. The years are a blur. But I started in 1983 so I guess the first year or two.

N-A: Yes.

LEWIS: And also in connection with that, we had I guess Venture in Mission funds for recruitment, training, and deployment of black clergy, and we gave out scholarships to black seminarians to supplement what they had gotten from their other sources. We had recruitment conferences and other events to help raise the need for and encourage young people to offer themselves to the ministry.

N-A: What about on the side of those who were already ordained?

LEWIS: Like Tollie Caution, I was a kind of de facto deployment office because people thought, and rightfully so, that I knew where there were jobs. And where there were vacancies and so on, both in terms of traditional black parishes and, to a lesser extent, places that perhaps wanted to have a black clergy person on the staff in a non-black congregation. So I was there kind of recommending placements and fielding that process. I also did a lot of traveling, and I did workshops in stewardship, or I would preach for events and kind of went all over the country.

N-A: And beyond the country, too.

LEWIS: And beyond. When I got to “815” -- and this was the other passion you asked about -- there was no real Africa desk. There was no Caribbean desk, and so I kind of took black ministries to include everybody who looked black, regardless of where they happened to be. The lost people, the people who were neither fish nor fowl in the Church’s eyes, were the people in Province Nine who were black and part of the Episcopal Church, but they were not overseas ministries, you see?

N-A: Yes.

LEWIS: So the Bishop of Haiti, the Bishop of the Dominican Republic, the Bishop of Nicaragua all were black people of West Indian stock, but they were Caribbean and Central American and also Hispanic. People like Bishop Ottley of Panama. [Track 7]

N-A: Yes.

LEWIS: And so because they were not from Tanzania, you see and they certainly were not from Cleveland, the Church did not know what to do with them. So one of the very
first things I did at the suggestion of Bishop Dennis, of blessed memory, is to bring all of the black bishops together.

N-A: Yes.

LEWIS: I remember at our first meeting was in Spokane. The House of Bishops met there. Bishop Garnier, also of blessed memory now, said, “I am so glad the Episcopal Church recognized that I am black, too.”

N-A: Yes.

LEWIS: Later on, some years later, we had kind of a black bishop summit in the Dominican Republic. Bishop Ottley told stories about how he would be threatened with arrest just for being on a corner in the Canal Zone because it is kind of a white enclave. And I think, unfortunately, there was a certain myopia among black Americans, African Americans in the Episcopal Church, who felt they had a corner on the market of oppression and discrimination and racism. So to hear Bishop Ottley’s stories and Bishop Sturdie Downs’s story of Nicaragua just made it clear to them that this was a universal problem.

N-A: Yes.

LEWIS: Ed Rodman wrote a book, *Let There Be Peace Among Us: A Short History of the UBE* [correct subtitle: *A Story of the Union of Black Episcopalians*], and I always take -- besides great pride -- the fact that he mentioned that my contribution, among my contributions, was bringing together the African Americans and blacks of the diaspora as part of my ministry at “815.” So I guess that is what I am most proud of and, of course, that led to the Afro-Anglican Conference in Barbados in 1985, which has been replicated twice -- Cape Town and then Toronto. People are now talking about 2015, and what is going to happen then.

N-A: Yes. What obstacles did you run into to carry out your vision for your work? You have mentioned some things about the climate. Were there specific obstacles that were placed in your path or that you ran up against as you looked to carry out how you wanted to minister to black folks in the Church?

LEWIS: Yes. I think, I do not think I had the real support of Diane Porter or of Ed Browning. Why that was is hard to say, but there was some tension there. I do not suffer fools gladly as most people know. I am not a shrinking violet.

N-A: As most people know.

LEWIS: So therefore, I think, my outspokenness kind of rankled some people sometimes, or threatened them, or threatened their own sense of authority. I think that was the major impediment.

N-A: When you came up with a notion like, “I want to get the black bishops together from around the Church,” or, “We are looking to sponsor a recruitment, training and development event,” to whom did you have to go for approval?
You conceived the thing. How was the money arranged, and who had to say yes to you once you came up with something?

LEWIS: I guess it depends on what it was, and it would depend whether or not it was something that historically had been done or something that had not been done before.

N-A: For the new things?

LEWIS: A new thing, I think often these things were engendered by or blessed by the Commission of Black Ministries. It was the advisory council to my office. Normally, a bishop, one of the black bishops, was chair and so that made it not my program as such but a program endorsed by the black leadership of the Church as represented on the Commission. So it was in some ways more difficult to say no to Bishop Walker or Bishop Dennis or whoever or Bishop Williams, whoever was the chair and the other people, than just me. Not that necessarily they would have said no. I am not saying that everything was resisted. I think -- I guess the biggest problem was when I -- it was not so much programmatic stuff -- but I would venture opinions about things. I mean, for instance, Diane formed a task force on the role of the black male in the Episcopal Church, which in fact did happen. I pointed out that there were people absent from the table -- you know what I mean -- who would have a stake in this, namely the black male clergy.

N-A: Yes.

LEWIS: And therefore the process, I remember using the words, was flawed.

N-A: Yes.

LEWIS: And that was resented. This very tour -- we had -- I think I mentioned all of the places we went to -- but Diane one fine day convinced the Presiding Bishop that there were too many places. So she said, “Why don’t we cut out St. Luke’s and cut out some of the others?” And this directive came from the Presiding Bishop, but it was actually Diane’s. Or maybe -- I know -- it came from Diane who spoke on behalf of the Presiding Bishop, but it was she who convinced him. I said, “This is unacceptable.” I said -- and the reason everything went according to plan, according to the original plan -- was that I said, “You do not realize what you are doing. These people are starching the corporals. These people are festooning the church. They are polishing. The PB coming to their place is a big deal. I have advertised this, and they are making ready. So it would put the Presiding Bishop in a terrible light to, for no particular reason, just say, ‘I have decided not to come.’ It is just bad PR.”

N-A: Yes.

LEWIS: Now, you should not have to tell the Presiding Bishop that, but once I did, they restored the whole program. And, of course, I went right to the Presiding Bishop with the complaint and told him that I thought he would be embarrassed if we did not show up. So he rescinded. When Diane got the word, she summoned me to her office, and she said -- these are her very words – “St. George’s Brooklyn, I
understand, is open. You may be interested in applying.” That, kind of, is a parable of the whole situation. That says it all.

**N-A:** Generally speaking, then, what I am hearing from you is that even though you were the Staff Officer, when there were times when it would have been natural to seek your counsel or to listen to your voice, that somehow it did not work that way.

**LEWIS:** No. Ed Browning, unlike John Allin, who had been Bishop of Mississippi, in many ways the crucible of struggle and strife and racism and everything else, had lived through that. But he had borne the burden of the heat of the day and had seen strife and struggle. Okay, Bishop Browning spent most of his ministry abroad: Taiwan, Hawaii, well, Hawaii is part of the country, but you know what I mean. He was the [Track 9] head of World Mission for a brief period at “815.” He was also the Bishop in Europe. But he was absent for the Civil Rights agenda and movement. And that is not a crime. That is just where his ministry took him.

**N-A:** Yes, right.

**LEWIS:** But the crime was that when he got back, he did not seek the counsel of people who had been here all along to say, “This should be done. This should not be done. This is what we think. This is who is important. These are the people who used to advise your predecessor,” or whatever the case may be.

**N-A:** It did not seem important to him?

**LEWIS:** He had a plan B, and that was Diane became his -- all the advice he needed. She became the spokesperson by default, but many people felt that their interests were not necessarily represented by her. So that was it in a nutshell.

**N-A:** Did your sense of your vision for your work as the Staff Officer for Black Ministries change over the course of the eleven years or shift?

**LEWIS:** I think I grew, and the office grew. I think the biggest, the most identifiable sign of that growth, or expansion might be a better word, was that when I got there I was the new Deputy of the Colored Work.

**N-A:** Yes.

**LEWIS:** By the time I left, I had opened the doors and brought together blacks in the diaspora. I raised the consciousness, I think, of black Episcopalians. Another thing we did was that we were instrumental -- kind of like the grandfather for the counterpart organization in the Church of England.

**N-A:** Yes.

**LEWIS:** Glynne Gordon-Carter had been appointed what the Church of England called the Secretary for Black Affairs, I think it was called.
N-A: Yes, there are those titles again.

LEWIS: Right. And so she had heard about me, and she came over -- went to a UBE Conference and saw how we did it because we had -- there was no sense in her reinventing the wheel. England is a very different place, to be sure, but she could learn something. So this developed into a relationship that went back and forth, and I went to speak there on a few occasions. I spoke to a group called the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Council for Urban Priority Areas. That was the group that eventually formed the said Office of Black Anglican Affairs. I remember on one particular trip, I spoke to that group, I preached at Westminster Abbey, and had an audience with the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie. So I think the profile of the office just took on a new aspect.

N-A: The gatherings of black clergy for conferences, you had a hand with that as well?

LEWIS: Yes. I think we all have our stories. There are a lot of leitmotifs, as it were, that run through them which are similar, we being black clergy, regardless of where we exercise our ministries. So it was important for the clergy to get together to share those stories and have fellowship. And kind of like the black seminarians, sometimes people were in isolated situations. Now, people in Chicago or New York or Miami had a lot of black clerical colleagues, but if you were the vicar of the mission in Little Rock, there was nobody else for miles. So we got together triennially, I think. We had a theme, and we had speakers, but very often the fellowship and the sharing of stories was exciting. I remember there were -- in Yet with a Steady Beat, there is a photograph of Tom Logan Senior and Junior, and there were several father/son groups from time to time, like the Curry’s. I think the elder Father Anderson had died already. But that is another story that needs to be written: the generations of black clergy. I was at Holy Cross, Pittsburgh early this week, and Shelton Hale Bishop had been the rector of Holy Cross, Pittsburgh at one point before he went back, as it were, to St. Philip’s, Harlem to succeed his father, Hutchins Chew Bishop. Hutchins Chew Bishop appointed Shelton Hale Bishop who appointed Moran Weston. So for a hundred years, there were three rectors without any search committee or anything. Chet Talton was the first rector to be elected in memory. One of the great stories about Father Bishop -- the Bishops are very fair skinned, and in those days, Harlem was changing to black. St. Philip’s bought up a lot of property in Harlem, tenements and apartment houses and so on. He -- Shelton Hale -- would go to negotiate, and they thought he was a white man.

N-A: Yes.

LEWIS: And they would say, “Father, we are so glad you are buying this because there are so many black people coming to take our property and moving in.” And Father Bishop would say, “Yes, isn’t it a shame,” sign on the dotted line, and then, once he bought it, transferred it over to St. Philip’s. Amazing. Amazing stories that we can tell.

N-A: Yes. It seems to me that having a handful even of black clergy in one place is not the norm. There are so many places across the Church, you have one priest or
two at the most in an entire diocese. So the gathering together of several is very important work for the support and the education as you said.

LEWIS: I am the only black priest in the Diocese of Pittsburgh even as we speak.

N-A: Yes. Who comes to mind as an important ally for your work during your time at “815”?

LEWIS: Walter Dennis.

N-A: Yes, who was where at the time?

LEWIS: He was the Suffragan Bishop of New York.

N-A: Yes.

LEWIS: It was he who first suggested that I get the black bishops together.

N-A: Yes.

LEWIS: I said, “Oh, they are so busy. How can I do that?” He says, “They are all always together already at the House of Bishops meeting every year. You go to them.” So I did that every single year.

N-A: Yes.

LEWIS: Sometimes we brought in spouses. Sometimes we had lunch. Sometimes we had breakfast, but it was, again, like the clergy or the seminarians, and even in the midst of their House of Bishops, they wanted to get together as black bishops and talk about things that affected deployment and ordination. Or talk about what was coming up and what the black agenda was in relation to that. Also, the bishops provided for me a -- how should I put it? If -- and there was nothing ever breathed - - I told you the story about how it was suggested that I might find something else -- but no one ever threatened to remove me, although the thought had to have occurred to people. I think the powers that be knew they would have the bishops of the Church to deal with, and they did not want to take on fifteen guys, mostly guys, yes.

N-A: Was that [Track 11] booklet from the black bishops But We Would See Jesus, did that come about during your time?

LEWIS: Yes. I think Lynn republished it later on and may or may not have given credit to the original, but that came out of the Santo Domingo Conference. That was the official statement that came out of that, and Kortright Davis who was a consultant to the meeting, although not a bishop, had a hand in its authorship.

N-A: In terms of allies, Walter Dennis. Who else?

LEWIS: The said Kortright Davis was good personally. It was he who directed me to the University of Birmingham in terms of getting my Ph.D.
It was he who actually got my thesis published as a book, *Yet With a Steady Beat*. He had the theological gravitas so that when things came up like the Afro-Anglican Conference -- I call him the father of Afro-Anglicanism -- Kortright had a way -- he could be in a room with twenty people discussing anything, whether or not we should use maniples or whatever, but at the end of the session, he has a manifesto. He has a document. He has a complete summary, polished with codicils and whereas-es and so on. He is just a great mind. So he was a kindred spirit, and I certainly appreciated him. I think, too, another person I worked with was Deborah Harmon-Hines who was I think one of the great presidents of the Union of Black Episcopalians. That is another aspect of the work because we had the Union of Black Episcopalians and the Commission on Black Ministries.

Our shorthand was that the Commission on Black Ministries spoke for the Church because we were in Pharaoh’s house. We were part of the establishment. So we were the official word about blackness from the point of view of the Episcopal Church. But it was the Union’s role to speak to the Church, to maybe even rile it or to challenge it and so on and so forth. So there is a fine line. There were certain things I literally could not say. People would say, “God, what could that have been?”

Because to be critical -- too critical of -- biting the hand that feeds you, as it were, would be --. There were times when we would kind of get other people to say things. All secrets can be out now, I guess -- but maybe this should be published after my death -- but anyhow, I remember one occasion. I asked Ed Rodman if he would write something to the PB. I do not remember to this day exactly what it was. It could have had something to do with the whole deployment of black clergy issue. So I kind of drafted a thing for him to edit and sign and send it back as if it came from him. So he got the letter, and he called me up with raucous laughter. He said, “Brother,” he said, “the letter is fine, but I have to change one word. You are the only person who would use the word ‘troublous.’ ‘We live in troublous times.’ That will blow our cover, and they will know it really came from you.” So he changed that. Working with the Union, we --

And Deborah, you were saying Deborah Harmon-Hines.

Yes, Deborah Harmon-Hines. I mean, there were other presidents. [Inaudible] came along, but I mean Deborah kind of looms large. We were in some ways the same: outspoken, straightforward, and unambiguous.

Are there other accomplishments from your tenure that you are really glad for that you recall?
LEWIS: Yes. *Linkage.* *Linkage* was the official [Track 12] publication of the Office of Black Ministries. We took our name from the phrase in one of the prayers of intercession, “Bless all those whose lives are closely linked with ours.” So it became a chronicle of basically what happened in the black church during that time. I dedicated my book, *Yet With a Steady Beat,* to George Freeman Bragg who published something called *The Church Advocate,* I think, at St. James, Baltimore. So we often have been accused of being oral.

N-A: Yes.

LEWIS: And not putting things down in writing. So *Linkage* became a history of what went on. Not only current history, but Carlton Hayden, another great support of mine during this time, would write an article almost every issue about Artemisia Bowden or James Theodore Holly or James Solomon Russell or somebody just to raise up people for the Church. So I am glad that somewhere those copies exist as a testimony of what we -- Do you have them here?

N-A: Yes, we do have quite a number, yes.

LEWIS: Okay, good.

N-A: Yes. Was there something that you wanted to see done while you were the staff officer that did in fact not come to fruition?

LEWIS: I cannot remember that there was. Everything may not have developed exactly as I would have envisioned it, but I did not feel that something did not happen.

N-A: Okay. Would you like to comment on what it was like looking to deploy black clergy at the time that you were the staff officer? How that was in the Church and whether you think it has changed now.

LEWIS: Well.

N-A: How did it work? You knew clergy, and you knew positions, but we know that it does not function the same way for black clergy as it does for white folks. What thoughts have you about the process of deployment then and perhaps now?

LEWIS: I think sometimes black congregations are unrealistic. Bishop Burgess, of blessed memory, used to say that he was always struck by black congregations who wanted a black priest. They were complaining there were not enough black clergy to go around, and they had to have a white priest or a woman or this or that. Bishop Burgess says, “When was the last time you supplied a black priest for the Church? Where do they come from? They are raised up in parishes, and if you do not raise them up to go someplace -- You cannot always be on the receiving end.” So people kind of felt there was a black clergy button you pushed, and somebody appeared. So they were unrealistic about the numbers. Then, given the short numbers or small numbers, they were unrealistic about -- and unreasonable -- about whom they wanted and whom they did not want. They would tell me, “We do not want African. We do not want a West Indian, or we cannot understand them,” and all that
type of thing. I said, “Well, I am very sorry. We are not going to honor that restriction. A – because these people are competent and wonderful and so on. B - because we will not be party to that kind of thing.” And I would point out that if it were not for Africans and West Indians, there would be no black Episcopal Church as we know it. And then, some of our black parishes subscribe to the idea, “Lord, you keep them humble. We will keep them poor.” So if at the end of all of these problems of finding somebody, somebody emerged, then they would offer a pittance. And we are not just talking about small, struggling congregations. Because I remember Jay Walker was interviewed by St. Philip’s, Harlem, as many of us were after the great Moran Weston stepped down after twenty-eight years, I think. [Track 13] So Jay’s words were, “They expect me to drop my dolls and dishes in Detroit and move heaven and earth just for a pittance” because there are places like St. Philip’s, Harlem who think that part of your salary is the honor of being the rector. So they were not at all -- they wanted top dollar.

N-A: Top skill.

LEWIS: Top skill but they did not want to pay top dollar.

N-A: Yes.

LEWIS: There was not a correlation there. They really had this view that clergy really did not need money or did not want it or something. So those are some of the issues that we faced in terms of matching, playing the matching game.

N-A: Were you able to speak to congregations in those instances or at gatherings of the Union of Black Episcopalians to raise up how people might more effectively --

LEWIS: Oh, yes. I was very clear about the unrealistic views and small-mindedness. I was big on stewardship. My thought was that West Indians came out of an established Church, and they literally did not have to give. When they came to this country, they still translated shilling into a quarter, and they gave that. Black American parishes often grew up founded by the diocese or mother church to be kept separate but unequal. Therefore, they were paid for and kept, and they did not have to give, although they were often pillars of their community, driving up in eight cylinder cars to put a dollar in. So I think what I did not do was buy into a “Woe is me. Isn’t it terrible what the white man has done to us? The Church has oppressed us.” thing. Yes, there is some history, but what have you done for yourself lately?

N-A: Yes.

LEWIS: I used to tell the story about St. Mark’s, Jackson, Mississippi, which was across the street from Jackson State, and all of the vestry members were faculty members.

N-A: Yes.

LEWIS: They would -- at the vestry meeting, the first words were -- and I got this from a former rector of that place – “Well, what are we getting from the diocese?” When,
in fact, they were individually better off than some of the white people who were supporting them. But the bishops, you see, very often did not want to take a stand because they thought it was racist.

N-A: Yes.

LEWIS: But, in fact, it was racist and patronizing to let it continue. So I sang this tune constantly.

N-A: What is it like now in terms of deployment? Obviously, you are not in a national post, but you are around the Church, and you know many people. What is your sense now of the way the deployment picture is playing out for black clergy?

LEWIS: First of all, I have not done a study, but I think we have a small pool.

N-A: Still?

LEWIS: Still. The good news is that the stained glass ceiling has been removed in some cases, or at least raised, in that there are more and more black people at places, black clergy at places where we did not darken the door before. I am an example. Hartshorn Murphy has just retired from St. Augustine’s in Santa Monica, California, and there are several blacks on diocesan staffs. We have at least – we have four, I think, currently -- black diocesan bishops and some suffragans and some recently retired like Chet and so on. So there are more opportunities. But that means, of course, that it removes people from the pool that would serve the black church. So I think, in some, ways things have improved in that there are doors opening now that did not before, and people are, in some cases, more likely to consider people for their merits and not not consider them because they are black. For that, we have to rejoice because it is exactly what we fought for. I just wish there were more black clergy to go around so we could serve our own congregations, if that was our desire, or the broader Church.

N-A: There has been a lot of shifting the last two or three years about structure at the Episcopal Church Center, things about the ethnic desks, etc. Do you have any sense of how the Office of Black Ministries might best relate to the Church at this point? Or maybe the most important thing for that office to be doing in 2010 concerning the ministry of black people in this Church?

LEWIS: It would be hard for me to say because I really do not have my finger on that particular pulse right now.

N-A: Yes.

LEWIS: And I might make some suggestions based on my memory of the structure, which has drastically changed and drastically reduced.

N-A: Yes. Yes.
LEWIS: Not only has it been reduced in actual numbers, but my understanding is that we now have field offices. So some people are here, and some people are there. We are living in a very different Church. I was at the beginning of kind of a disgruntled period, but people are voting with their pocketbooks and have been for quite some time. Now that they are glass pools, who knows what more that will cause, but people have a way of withholding support when things do not go their way.

N-A: Yes.

LEWIS: This trickles up and affects the coffers at “815,” and that is why the staff is such a skeleton staff now.

N-A: Yes.

LEWIS: People who have been there say that it is almost depressing.

N-A: Yes. It’s very different.

LEWIS: It is more difficult even now to work in that environment.

N-A: Yes. I will ask you to take just a moment in which I am willing to sit in silence for a minute just to cast your mind back over that time of having your desk at “815” and ask you to call up a memory of something that you utterly loved from that time period. You have mentioned lots of things that were important to you and places. Just a memory of some event or some time in which you said, “I am so glad I am the staff officer for Black Ministries.”

LEWIS: I am closing my eyes and seeing a photograph that was taken. Paul Smith is a good friend of mine who took a lot of the pictures of these events, and the picture is the lawn of Codrington College, Barbados. I was just there last month to preach, and I will be going back later this year as part of my sabbatical. Barbados is where my family home is from so it means a lot from that point of view. But, in 1985, in fact I would like to hold up 1985, okay, and three things happened in that year which were very significant. One was the first conference of Afro-Anglicanism. And, as I wrote somewhere, we wanted to show that Anglican history did not come to a grinding halt when Hooker’s pen ran out of ink. And that just because people were Anglicans, they were not the same as the Church of England. They bring their own culture, their own issues, their own struggles to the story. So we gathered all of these people to [Track 15] tell their stories, give papers, and launch a movement. So I remember we had sung Evensong. Codrington College is just a beautiful place. The long avenue of palms at the end of which is an archway, a life-size crucifix over the arch, and through the arch is the lawn. Below that lawn is the Atlantic Ocean. Bishop Rawle wanted to be buried so that he would, as it were, face Africa. The other two events that year: One was the enthronement of Desmond Tutu as Bishop of Johannesburg. Before he went to Cape Town. Desmond had come to “815” and had asked us to come to Johannesburg for his enthronement. So everybody else thought it was just a thought. When he left, I went to Ed Geyer who was then the head of the unit, and I said, “I think Bishop Tutu is quite serious about wanting us to be there to show a black presence and solidarity with African brethren and sisters.” So he said,
“You really think so?” I said, “Yes, I think so.” So anyhow, we sent about twelve people there. *Linkage* has a story and picture there of some of us. I think Diane Porter was there. I think the late Bob Powell was there. Preston Hannibal was there. That was an exciting time. I remember preaching at St. Mary’s Cathedral in Johannesburg while I was there, and that was great. The other event that year was we went -- it was the Feast of St. James, I remember that, the 25th of July -- we went to England for the consecration of Wilfred Wood. Wilfred Wood was the first black bishop in the Church of England. He, of course, is from Barbados, had been archdeacon, and then became bishop. It was a major event so again we went over for that. So those events kind of stand out. When I sent you the box of stuff, among the few things I took out was my old passport. I had to have extra pages to fit in, and it kind of hangs out like an accordion. That told the story in and of itself. So 1985 was a big year. I had not been there that long, just two years, but those events kind of speak to the breadth of the work and the vision that we had, which was an international vision.

N-A: Yes. What have you carried with you from that time at “815”?

LEWIS: I am grateful for that period. It certainly afforded me the opportunity to do the very things we just talked about and to be part of history and to leave a small mark along the way. Another event, which was not in 1985, was the Bishops Meeting in Santo Domingo. So I am grateful that I was kind of a catalyst, I guess might be the best word. To bring people together who otherwise would not have come together. I think I have never actually said that before, but I guess mainly because – partly because of my own West Indian roots -- that whole sphere is ordinary. It’s common to me. Natural for me. And yet I grew up here so I was a natural kind of conduit. I have studied in England so I had been there. Another time, we took the Commission to Haiti, now very much in the news of course. So bringing people together who were not -- and not just black people in different parts of the diaspora -- but black and white people and others. [Track 16] We are still -- the relationships formed are still bearing fruit. Archbishop Ian Ernest, who came to Barbados as a priest from the Diocese of Mauritius, is now the Archbishop of the Indian Ocean. He has invited me to teach over there this summer. So I will spend the first part of my sabbatical there.

N-A: Which, as I see it again and again. You brought seminarians together that would not have been. You brought bishops together that would not have been. You were involved in going overseas and seeing to it that overseas folk also came here. Just again and again, the people that would not have been together came together as you worked as the staff officer.

LEWIS: Yes. Getting back to your question about what did not happen, I will tell you one of my great disappointments. Because of the very thing we just discussed, I thought that I would be a good candidate for the position of Executive for World Mission at “815,” which position came vacant while I was there. All of the vacant positions are posted at the elevator at “815.” I think in the box I sent you, there is some of the correspondence from around that. I sent a letter to the Presiding Bishop. I sent letters from people around the world to him, as well as local people. I pointed out that I had been ordained in Central America. I spoke French and Spanish, and I could actually talk to people, some people, in their own languages. So people said there was nobody
that could better do the job than I could. I did not get the job, and what was painful about it is that the advertisement of the job, like so many jobs there, was a sham.

**N-A:** Oh, okay. They already had in mind --

**LEWIS:** You see, they are duty bound to post it, but Pat Mauney had already been chosen, as I later discovered. But somebody said, the late Curtis Cisco, said to me, “Harold,” he said, “Sometimes, the World Mission person when he travels with the PB acts as his chaplain. If you carry the primatial cross in front of Bishop Browning, nobody will see him.” And that was both literally true and figuratively true about…

**N-A:** That you might upstage or -- yes.

**LEWIS:** So often, well, it is no secret to you, when we put black people in positions of authority -- and this is not a church thing -- so often we want window dressing. We want to have the image, but we do not want a challenge. So that is an answer. It was not part of my job, but a job which [inaudible]. And all of that work is quite public and quite known by the people who would have to hire me, but that did not happen.

**N-A:** Even though you were disappointed by not coming to that position, the quality of your work and the things that were accomplished and all of that cannot be taken away from you.

**LEWIS:** True, true, fair enough, yes.

**N-A:** Thanks so much for telling us about it.

**LEWIS:** Thank you. It was a pleasure.