

1940's.

I happen to be an Italian, ethnically. Everybody should know who they are and they should know why they are. I learned who I was from my father. He had been a coal miner and he believed in a world of justice and fairness. He taught me that everybody has a claim on that fairness and justice. Like most kids, we grow up and you hear adults talking about the struggles between the mine bosses and the workers, and you know which side you're on cause you're on your dad's side. But I didn't really understand the issue of fairness until I went into military service. When I went into service, I went into a segregated army. Because I was White, I went to a White infantry division. I didn't have any choice in that. That's where they put me. When I went overseas, I got sent to an Army school and studied the French language. I was assigned to the military police operation because I could speak some French. When we landed in France, you immediately saw the kind of learning that was taking place. Whites were over here, there were plenty of Blacks around, but where were they? They were always in the quartermaster corps. They were driving trucks. They weren't going to see any kind of combat at all.

In the army, we were divided as a team. So the infantry guys would say, these Black fellas that are in the back, they got it cushy, and there were bad attitudes.

When we got into the Battle of the Bulge, and we got trapped, our guys were all exposed. That was the moment that

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a Black tank battalion came into our quarter and saved the lives of those men, there was never any other word except that these are our buddies. Now I learned that lesson in the Army, that men and women measured by the same standards have either performed as genuine human beings or they failed. And to our credit in the Army, we all passed the test. It's a lesson I never ever again forgot. As a matter of fact, that was really the beginning of the integration of the United States Army.

People have a right, in my judgment, to use the town in safety and security and if there are problems, we all have a responsibility to deal with them. And that's what this agency did. This little agency that started after the first race riot in 1944 had three people on the staff... three people to do something about a problem as big as American race relations. When I came back from the service, I could not even go out to lunch or go for a cup of coffee in downtown Detroit with a Black member of our staff.

We became a city overwhelmed by the issues of racial hostility in the war years. The riot was really an outgo of people registering on the problems and the feeling that nobody was prepared to help out, to do anything. So, when I went to work for the agency, it was very clear that the first thing we had to do was to get people together to the point where we kept the peace. You can't keep the peace unless you do justice.

I did a study of racial factors in Detroit hospitals. We

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found out that while some of the hospitals were beginning to hire Black nurses that were trained, none of the hospitals in Detroit had at that point ever trained a Black young woman in their nursing school. At Mercy College when I went out there with my research materials and I said "How does this go out here" and the Sister said "Well, when a Black girl comes we just tell them they can't enroll." I knew that the minute we put that in a report and published that report, that the reactions in this city from the good people, white and black, Catholic as well as non-Catholic, would not let them continue that and that's exactly what happened.

We also took a look at the hospitals. At that time, no other hospital except Receiving Hospital, a public hospital, had ever trained a Black man or woman as a doctor, as an intern, or a resident. Harper Hospital, a hundred years in existence, never had had a Black doctor on it's staff. We said that has got to change. We got lots of agreement that these things had to happen, but still nothing much was happening. Then they decided they wanted to clear all the area and expand those hospitals and the Black community took the position that there was going to be no movement, no clearance. They were going to oppose it right on up to the Supreme Court if necessary, unless there was agreement that those hospitals would open up their training facilities for nurses, for doctors, open up their hospital staffs and open up their hospital rooms.

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I served under three mayors. Under Mr. Cobo who was a Republican. I was a Democrat. He didn't want me but my best friend was the editor of the Michigan Chronicle and the mayor knew that and so did the business community. It was tired of all this race baiting and hostility. They wanted somebody in there that would get the job done. So I got appointed even though Cobo didn't like me. Cobo was the darling of the property improvement associations. All those groups that were always out there fighting the movement of any Black person into decent safe and open housing. But I got appointed, and as I say, I served under Cobo, he died several months after I was appointed and I served under Mr. Mariani and we did the public housing issue and we solved the hospital issue under his administration, but at the end of his administration, he got kind of wild. He decided that there was too much crime in the city and that they had to "crack down" on criminals. The way the police department defined criminals was literally anybody that was black that wasn't where they were supposed to be was subject to arrest.

I took the position that the crackdown was immoral and unworthy of a city so I knew I was going to be out if Mariani got elected and damned if Cavanaugh didn't get elected. Saved my neck.

In government, you don't survive forever. In my later years, we worked on problems like the Police Department. It was the primary problem because it was a department that

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refused to hire on an open basis. It did take until the administration of Coleman Young to complete the opening up of the job of police officer in the community. So that whites and blacks can share in the opportunities for jobs and in the responsibility for maintaining a lawful and orderly community. But I got ahead of them because I made a statement at the time when they told me I should shut up. They said, "You be quiet" and I just couldn't conceive of myself giving leadership to a community and just putting tape over my mouth, and I didn't want to fight them. But never-the-less some reporter asked me a question and darned if he didn't use it, and darned if I didn't get fired.