

Excerpt from Oral History Interview with Ngoma Ali

Ngoma Ali was interviewed by Keith Rice, Dr. Karin Stanford, and Karimu for the Tom and Ethel Bradley Center in 2015. His family lived in Arkansas until World War II when they moved to California for better opportunities. Ali was born in 1949 in South Central Los Angeles at Hoover Street Receiving Hospital. In this clip he recalls the death of Emmett Till and the impact it had upon him at age 6.

Transcript:

KR: So what did you think, you know, as a little kid and you realized—you realized this is— this is racism. You don't have a title for it or anything, you know, because they're moving and nobody is explaining it to you?

NA: Well I didn't think that much of it until Emmett Till got killed.

KR: 1955.

NA: Right.

KR: You're six.

NA: Yes, and the Jet (magazine)—I did not understand why this brother's face was so big. I mean, as kids you have rumors and different type of wild thoughts and they was saying they put a hose in him and blew water up in him and that made his head big. I mean, all kind of things, but I thought it was horrific. You know, why would they do something like that to this—to this brother. They was taking freedom rides from our church. The bus that they went in got—they got rocked. The bombing in Birmingham, you're starting to look at that and now you're starting to be affected by it because you're a child—you want to—why don't they fight back? What's going on? We need to—I mean, you ain't thinking about the police protecting them. You think they think they need to get guns and start shooting them. You know, if they need to carry guns you need to protect yourself against things like that. You're starting to see the hoses and the people that are being washed away and the dogs and things. And, you know, and you want to—it infuriates you. You want to do something. You want to go protect them. Or, you know, you're like if they come down in our community you're going to fight. There ain't going to be no—they're not doing us like this. You know, this type of stuff starts building up in you and you—you know, and the Jet was something that you looked for every week to find out what was going on in the community. You know, and the Jet, you know, they had this, of course we were going to look at it, like they had a little centerfold in there and you're reading all the sensationalist stories that they would have in there and everything. And the TV was really the thing that really introduced me to racism, because you could see the reaction because for whatever—my father at one time joined an organization. And it was labeled a communist organization. And I think the FBI came around him and then he was done with it. He wasn't going to be in nothing else.