

Telling History in Public: Loyola Project for the Innocent Oral History Project

Obie Anthony

December 7, 2020 (interview conducted on Zoom)

Interviewed by Elijah Blanton & Giovanni Katzaroff

SUMMARY:

The following is an interview with Mr. Obie Anthony, an exoneree and founder of the non-profit organization Exonerated Nation, conducted by students Elijah Blanton and Giovanni Katzaroff. Convicted of murder and attempted robbery at age 19 (in 1995) and wrongfully imprisoned for 17 years, Mr. Anthony's was the first case taken up by the Loyola Law School's Project for the Innocent. In this interview, Mr. Anthony discusses his personal experiences while in prison as an innocent man, the process of his exoneration (which came in November 2011), what it was like to reintegrate into society after years of incarceration, and what needs to be done in holding the system accountable to help prevent such miscarriages of justice.

TRANSCRIPT

EB: Good morning. Today we are interviewing Obie Anthony, an exoneree and founder of the Exonerated Nation, a nonprofit organization that helps other exonerees transition from life in prison to following their dreams. This is an oral history project for the course Telling History in Public the Loyola Project for the Innocent. I am Elijah Blanton, one of your project interviewers.

GK: And I am Giovanni Katzaroff, another project interviewer.

OA: Yes, nice to meet you both. Good morning, and I definitely appreciate the opportunity, in other words, to participate in this. I think it's a wonderful thing to talk about the role, not only the wrongful convictions, but more importantly, I think, it's really a beautiful thing to talk about what happens afterwards, which is, you know, how do they transition back into a community that they've been away from for so many years, so.

GK: Thank you once again for agreeing to do this interview. For our first question, we were wondering if you could describe your general background.

OA: General background, now or like overall?

GK: I suppose either or.

OA: General background now, I'll say general background now. Founding director of a national nonprofit, working with exonerees across the United States, in one manner or another, whether

it's through counseling, or connecting them to the community, or providing them some sort of service. Generally, I'm a dad. My little guy is two years old now, my firstborn son, and I'm married now. Oh, I don't know, man, what is it been, eight years? Going on eight years, I believe it has been, somewhere around in there. And I'm really excited about doing this kind of work, that's my passion. You know, assisting and helping with legislation and bills that have been put in place in the state of California, one being named after myself, called, being named "Obie's Law." So I'm really excited about that other aspect of my life. And I also flip houses, out here in the state of Missouri. So that's sort of my background now. My background then, prior to, which was, you know, the second stage of my life, as I always call it, I'm in the third stage now in my life. And in my second stage of my life, I was, you know, I grew up in South Central Los Angeles. I was involved in gangs, I ran around the streets of Los Angeles for maybe, I don't know, maybe like 12 or 13 years of my life, starting off at the age of 9, 10, 11. Mom was, at that time, on drugs. My dad was out here in the state of Missouri, where I'm at now. And so I was being raised in a single-parent home at the time; my mother was on welfare. Then it was back in the 80s, you know, late 70s, early 80s, and it was really, my background was, I was a kid growing up in a drug-infested neighborhood, riddled with gangs and, you know, poverty and all the things that comes along with that. So, you know, I really, I was just a little street kid, you know, I mean, I even, I had, you know, I think now, in being what I am now, the just minimum of the kid what I was. Because I'm, you know, I'm really considerate of, you know, where we at in different, particular times in our life and circumstances that is around us at that time. And so my background then was really the background of individuals that was trying to survive as a kid in a city neighborhood where it was a lot of gangs, violence, and drugs.

EB: Thank you. Well, if you don't mind, since we're on the topic of circumstances, what led to your sentencing? If you don't mind sharing.

OA: So, what led to my sentencing was a plethora of different things, one of which being prosecutorial misconduct. The prosecutor in the case in which I was convicted of had withheld evidence from my defense attorney at the time. My defense attorney at the time had failed to do a proper investigation of the case, was really lackadaisical, really did no follow up with his investigators, had faulty identification, was cross-racial identification. So that was also circumstances that led to my sentencing, me being sentenced and sent to prison. And, you know, wanting to, like I said the biggest thing in there was things that happened. You know, they had a witness, a so-called witness that they had, you know, that they was in relation with, where they had, you know, gave this guy a deal; he began to start working with them, as they worked with him, kept him out of situations. And it was, it was a partnership that wasn't just

birthed at the consequence of the death of individuals in this case, but it was something that was already, they was already in a relationship with this guy. He was already informing. He was being an informant for the cops, for the LAPD at the time. And so those things, those circumstances there, led to me being sentenced to life without the possibility of parole plus 50 years.

GK: If it would be alright, could I shift topics and ask you, what exactly was your experience like while in prison?

OA: Man, it was radical, brother. You know, it was, it was real, I say radical in the sense of radicalness inside of controlled chaos. You know, if that makes any sense. Everything is always out of control with somebody that was getting, specifically and particularly in the county jail facility when I was in there, and I did 22 months in the county jail facility. And specifically and particularly, there was a lot of, you know, beatings, stabbings, you know, you know, have a lot of people that was just, you know, strung out on medications, because they had took the wrong medication and now they sort of zombied out or no function. It's almost like being in a crazy house with a lot of, oh, it was just, it was that way. And it was always for me, like the scariest thing ever, because I had no, sort of, at that point, I couldn't see the light at the end of the tunnel. You know, I was being accused of something I didn't do. I had no way of disproving a lie. Being in jail, one, and having, you can't disprove something that someone is saying, period. I can't, I can't disqualify that, so I'm forced to prove that I'm innocent now. Versus anything else. And so and that was a complication. Because again, I grew up in South Central Los Angeles. I had no, I was, I was coming from a bad background from the top. So, you know, jail was just, you know, what it was, it was horrible. It was one of those places where, you know, it's hard for me to get away from now and then by way of my always being hyper-vigilant. Always, you know, my head always on the swivel, like, you know, not, you know, can't really trust nobody. You know, man, you always like this, wondering, like, you know, man, watching this dude over here, wondering, you know. As my wife always saying, she tells me, like, she said, you thinking too much about it, you know, it's not always that much on it, you know, they just said this, you don't have to go that far away. And that's what I mean by that's what happened is that, you know, you know, in jail, people say one thing and, you know, you turn around and it's something else. I'll give an example of that. One time, there was this situation, this Hispanic guy had gotten drunk, right? He was drinking homemade pruno, as they call it, homemade alcohol in jail. And they were walking to chow, him and this Black guy, they was friends, they'd talk, you know, they did things together. But the Hispanic guy was drunk on the way to chow, and he said, you know, he, he referred to the Black guy as a mayate, right? But he wasn't saying it in a malicious way or anything like that. But he said, "yeah, you know, mi

mayate." And it kicked things off, there became a racial issue between Blacks and Mexicans, right. And so the Hispanics said, "hey, listen, you know, he was drunk, don't worry about it, that was nothing, we'll take care of it, don't worry." It was a full-blown riot the next day.

GK: Thank you.

OA: So you know, that's what jail was like for me. And it was just like, and so that's why, you know, it was just a terrible place. It was a place where you know, you, your dignity is stripped away from you, creating a new you in all sorts of different kinds of ways. It's a constant 24 – I don't want to say 24 hours, maybe 20-22 hours of the day – of punishment. So it's not a correctional place, it's not a rehabilitative place. Because you always getting attacked, either by the correctional officers, by inmates, the free staff even, those individuals who work there preparing the meals and the laundry, PIA places; those are free people, what they call a free staff. I mean, like, you even get demoralized by those individuals. And so it's just a constant cycle of that, you know, every day. Can you imagine that happening? Every day for 17 years? There's like, so you didn't, didn't break from that on freedom, right? So you get free from that. Now, it's a break. But it's a constant. So the prison is always on. That's what it's like.

GK: Thank you for sharing your experiences.

EB: Thank you. Um, I know you've talked about the dynamics of the prison between the free staff, and a little bit, but can you speak more on like the dynamics in the prison between prisoners and officers or, again, among the free staff and the...?

OA: Right, right, understandably. So I mean like, you know, it really, it really varies the dynamic between a group of inmates, a particular inmate, specific inmates, because it really teeter-totters on respect, right. However, they are always on a constant attack of that and they always, are always, you always, the dynamics is this. You know, it's not a cop and robber dynamic, you know, playing cops and robbers type of thing, but it's more of the punisher and punishee, acceptant and acceptee, right, how am I accepting and you know, how am I accepting this. And so, the dynamics was this and so, again, you know, I use myself as an example. You know, I was considered as a jokester, right. People would say, you joke too much, and everything ain't always funny, this and that, and blah, blah. They used to always say that, you know, I'm out there, so my thinking is out there. That's because the way that I related with inmates and the correction officers and the free staff was just different from a lot of, where it wasn't that, everybody wasn't doing it. For example, you know, so they used to, it's crazy, but this is what it used to happen. You have to go back and forth, to go get your chow with the chow boss. You

go to the chow to get your meal, you eat in there, breakfast time, maybe a sack lunch, you take that back to your cell for your lunch, and then you go to dinner, and then you walk back. So sometimes they search you when you come out of the chow hall, or they may even pat you down going inside the chow hall; they may pull you out of the line and say come here, let me pat you down. And so for me, my thought process in this whole thing was this, look, man, you just made, you just riled me out of the cell, took me through this whole little gate, now you walk me into the chow hall, and you want to pat me down again. And you searching me because you saying that you're looking for me to bring out of the chow hall contraband, like weapons, food, because they call you, if you bring food out of the chow hall, it's contraband. So this is my dynamics, this is the way I've interacted with them. I'll play with this. And they like, Anthony, step out and I'm gonna search you. So I'm like, alright, cool, I'm cool with it. So even though it's not like, I'm not really cool with it, but I'm giving off like I'm cool with it. Like, oh, you want to search, here, bam, so I start taking off my clothes, bam, you you want to search? He said, well, wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute, no, no. So I give you that scenario there because it was like, it was a play. Ultimately, what happened was this, there was a sergeant named Steven, because of those dynamics, how me and him interacted before he became sergeant. And then when new correction officers come in, they'll intentionally pull me out of line, like, hey, Anthony, come here and search, because they need some new officers right there, and hey, search him, and they already know what kind of shenanigans I'm going to pull off. And so, but you have those, but you have other individuals that may fought against it, and became, it now became where it's a, it's a situation now, where it's aggression between the two people. Because, man, you ain't got to be searching me coming out of the chow hall. Well, you gonna get searched, get up against the wall, press you up against the wall, now you, now you just own you, it becomes a total situation, you have that. And so it's really on how individuals is, and the dynamics vary, and it just varies between that because you got inmates that cop out. And what I mean by cop out is that, you know, they don't want to, they can't deal with the stress of being in prison, and specifically with long terms, you know, 40 years, 50, 80 years, 90, life, things like that. And so they take medication, and when they take medication, then, you know, they just, you know, they want to sleep, they don't always go into the chow, they don't want to be involved with the prison program, as they call it. And the correctional officers, inmates, and free staff alike treat those individuals different. They treat the individuals differently who they perceive to be, you know, respected by other individuals, whether they think they are in gangs, whether they could take part of this, part of that, or whatever. And so it just really, it differs on how the person carries themselves in that situation, or how they dealing with being in prison, and it really dictates the dynamic of the environment. And that's, even when it comes to inmate-on-inmate, individual-to-individual. If I perceive that, hey like, you coming in, you know, I'm thinking, you know, I work in the laundry, you just getting on the

yard: Hey, man, you know, what you need, man, you got some clothes? For me, I'm taking your answers as this guy is a softball, right? You have to, you have to defend against that. You got to put your view out there because people are pressed up against you, people will do things, people will, you know, they'll try you in different kind of ways, whether it's by manipulating you to sort of kind of see if they got, hey look, man, you have some family that can make them do this, or make them do that, to pressure you to get your families to start doing things. And then when you say you can't do it, now as a problem. Oh, what you mean you can't get...you've been doing it and now it's a problem, and now you can get harmed. So those are the dynamics, or some of the dynamics. The play between correctional officer-inmate, inmate and inmate, free staff. You know, with the free staff, it's really about, you know, sometimes they'd be cool, like, you know, they understand, like you did something wrong or not, they're not there to punish you, they're just there to work in an institution, and that's it. But then you have those free staff that think like, you know, you in jail, you deserve to be here and got that kind of attitude against you, so.

EB: Thank you.

GK: Thank you. In speaking about your personal experiences, I was wondering if you could tell us, what was it like to be in prison knowing that you're innocent? How did you cope with the whole situation?

OA: I mean, I did a lot of reading, brother, that's how I coped. Later, I mean, like after the process. In the beginning, and almost til the end even, maybe to like 2000, honestly, until, I believe, they took, when the Innocence Project took my case. When Loyola Law and the Northern California Innocence Project got involved is like literally where I literally had an absolute stop. But, and that was like 14 years, after 14 years of being. I didn't cope that well. I was in the hole a lot. I fought almost all of the time, all of the time, I never not, I always fought. I was, you know, I was really short-tempered. And you know what I mean by, I didn't know, I wasn't the guy to be the one, you know, people talking, and, you know, you know, they talking, and they going back and forth. And for me, I just, expressions for me was enough, and if I felt like your expressions was aggressive, I'll start fighting. And it's because I was frustrated, because I wasn't supposed to be there. I'm not supposed to be in here, and it's like, and for me, it was like, I'm not going to be victimized, I'm not supposed to be here. And, and it's not like, I'm not gonna let nothing happen to me, so before something happen to me, it's gonna happen to you. So I had to be that man, and then so I fought a lot. And you know, it was like, and then, for and then like, I think it was around maybe 98. My feet initially hit the penitentiary in January 1996. I hit the county jail in April of 1994. So those 22 months in county jail I was in,

I got white-carded from almost every institution in the county and LA County Jail, and ultimately they ended up putting me in a gang module, because I was in fights everywhere that I went. And then like, no, no, we don't want Anthony back out here, at north or at east, or at max, wherever, you know. And so I had to stay in the LA County downtown facility. And it was like, that was a headache. And it was like, man, so, but then in 98, in 96, the same thing when I first got to the penitentiary. You know, it was like, I was, I was 19 years old. I was 19 years old, 20 years old, and there was dudes already there that had been at that prison for 20 years. So they'd been in prison and at that prison as long as I've been on the earth. And it was like, man, like, I'm not gonna be nobody's nothing. And so it was just that kind of attitude. And you can see it only, like, you know, I was little dude, like, I'm still a little dude, I've always been a little dog. Never, you know, when I initially touched the penitentiary grounds I weighed 145, I was only 145. And so experiences for me personally was, you know, was that way, but what my cope, I began to start coping with prison when I begin to start reading, and studying, and getting into not only studying about the law and trying to figure out how I'm going to get out, but reading and learning about, you know, studying theology, studying, you know, psychology, all of those different things, getting into the ologies, be really learning, period, and that there began to start, you know, start manifesting itself. Knowledge manifested itself inside me and in my actions, because of the information that I was bringing in. And so I began to start, you know, working around me, and people who I socialize and how I talk with them and how I begin to start behaving with people. And I just began to start and then and then I found the Creator. I mean, like, well, He snatched, I'm sorry, finding me, period point blank, and that ultimately settled my spirit down to where, you know, it begin to start bringing good stuff. And I'll say good stuff, because in 2008 the Innocence Project picked up my case, my dear fiancée, at the time girlfriend, me and her just got back in contact with each other, we got in contact with each other. And so good stuff began to start happening for me when I began to start connecting myself to Him and settling myself down and allowing myself to be fine. And now that was my coping mechanism. And I held on to hope, realizing I was innocent, you know, maybe so.

EB: Thank you. Did you meet anyone else who was in the same, similar situation as you were? While we're in?

OA: Most definitely. I mean, yeah, I mean, like, I know I have. You know, like for me, I like, you know, like I tell people all the time, there are, there was a plethora of different innocent individuals that was in the prison with me, that's home now. Just home now, John Smith. Me and John Smith, we did time but at the same institution, Corcoran State Prison, and on the same yard, worked out on the same bars, played on the same basketball court, walked the

same track, went to the same chow hall, wore the same clothes. So literally, you know what I mean, and he was innocent. And I always say that this is that, you know, when it comes to John and I, we didn't talk about our innocence to one another, because we didn't know who to trust. We proclaimed that we was innocent, anyone who was in it, and then we didn't do what we were supposed to do, I mean like what we was in there for and so both because of it. But we didn't get into the details that we needed to get out, so we couldn't, one couldn't say, oh, yeah, I know that he's innocent for sure, because I read his stuff and whopty whopty woo. It was just based upon your feeling, like you can tell if someone is being forthright or when they just blowing smoke up in your ass about some stuff. Excuse my language, so.

EB: Thank you.

GK: Thank you. Um, so you mentioned how the Loyola Project for the Innocent picked up your case. I was wondering if you could elaborate on how that exactly happened and what were your experiences with that.

OA: Crazy how that happened, bruh. And you know, getting back to the power of words, His power and words, and my ultimate know. Two plus two is what?

EB: Four.

GK: Four.

OA: Off the top, you know that, right? You don't believe that. And I transitioned from believing to knowing. I started knowing my Creator, right. And what happened was, you know, crazy thing, man. So I was also incarcerated with a codefendant named Reggie Cole. Um, Reggie Cole was doing time down at Calipatria State Prison, and I was doing time at Corcoran State Prison. I was in Central Valley / Bakersfield / Fresno area, he was down next to the border to Mexico, Mexicali, and all of that. Well, down there, he was at the time, 2001, 2000, he was getting bullied. This about around our sixth year in, five, six year being in prison, he was getting bullied by this guy named the Devil. And you know, Reggie has his own story about, you know, what happened with that. But Reggie defended himself one day and stabbed the Devil, and the Devil died there on the yard, he bled right there on the yard. And they put, they put Reggie, they took Reggie, put him in the hole, charged him with the death of the Devil, and sought the death penalty. They was going to give him the death penalty now, because we already had, him and I, based upon that false conviction we was in there up under, we already had a life without the possibility of parole for that. So now they was trying to give him a death

penalty. And what happened was, he ended up, you know, fighting that. He got, this lawyer got involved by the name of Christopher Plourd, that was working out of, was working at, down in San Diego and, at the university there, and a lawyer he was working with was in San Diego Innocence Project, and he was also a lawyer. And he took the case and start fighting and found out, he found out information that we didn't have in our original trial to prove that this dude Jones, the informant that they brought in was, had lied about everything. And the district attorney knew it, and they had held his deal, and he had this deal and all his stuff. Bull. And he represented that information to the court on Reggie's behalf, to show that, you know, he was in there, he wasn't supposed to be in jail originally. So they couldn't seek the death penalty in this case, because the first case wasn't a valid case. And that, and that happened in 2006 or 7, the court came back and affirmed that Reggie Cole was, didn't have a fair trial in his original case. And Christopher Plourd then told me, hey, um, hey, you know, you need to reach out to these, to the Innocence Project to see if they can pick up your case. And I'm like, man, I already wrote them. I wrote them back in 2001. Like they told me this and that. He said no, do it again, right. These individuals, right, talking about the Northern California Innocence Project, because Loyola Project for the Innocent wasn't even in existence at the time, it didn't mean, they didn't even have no Project for the Innocent. And so I did, I sent the letter to NCIP, Northern California Innocence Project. Um, that was in 2007. Well, in 2008, they sent me a letter telling me that they was going to take the case. I was like, wow, they own it, like, right. So, but they was in Northern California, though, they up in the Bay Area, San Jose. The case is down in LA. I tell you, man, that's why I love students, that's why I will, every time you ask me to do something, I'll do it every time, no matter where you are. Because it was another student named Adam Grant, Mark Hong, and a couple of other students that went to Laurie Levenson, who was their teacher, and said to her that they wanted to do something else meaningful before they left school. It was, you know, they was year three, their third year or whatever, they 3Ls, they ready to go. And at that same time, the Northern California Innocence Project, well, you know, somehow or another they got connected by way of Ms. Levenson reaching, you know, putting the broadcast out there, that Loyola, that they was looking to help, that they they was looking to help in some matter or another to the Innocence Project. And it was perfect timing because NCIP just picked up my case. They said, perfect, look, we do have a case that we just got, that's in L.A., and this is the one, Obie Anthony's case, and, boom, they hopped on board. And Loyola began to start doing the footwork down in L.A. They got involved, they brought in Deborah Crawford, which is a federal, she's a federal private investigator who came in a pro bono, assisting Laurie Levenson to investigate the case. And so maybe like in, sometime in 2008, Deborah Crawford, by way of working with Laurie Levenson and then Loyola Marymount project, it wasn't even a Project for the Innocent at the time, I don't think, innocent, I don't even know what they were calling it. But start working with them

to investigate the case, and boom, that's how I started. And it was like, it was like, I don't know, man. It took them three and a half years to reinvestigate the case. I didn't even, I didn't even meet Ms. Levenson until we was sitting in, we were sitting in, we were sitting in my evidentiary hearing. I was back in the holding tank waiting to come out to the courtroom. And that was the first time I seen her. She came to back to the thing to ask me one specific question, and that was, do you know John Jones? And I was like, no, I do not. And she's like, look at me when I'm talking to you, do you know John Jones? I was like, no, I do not know John Jones. She walked out, and that was my experience with it, and with Loyola. That's been my experience, it's been a magnificent, it was, you know. I don't even know how to describe it, because you know, I always go back to this is that, you know, doing by commune time while I was being refined by the Creator, I prayed. And I asked specifically to send me some help that can do the work, then I'll do this, do, you know, this is what I'm on, send me somebody to do the work and I'll work it till they get here, to help them to whatever information I'm able to gather to give to them. And boom, and there they was, Loyola Project for the Innocent, by way of Laurie Levenson, Adam Grant, and all of the students there. Cookie Ridolfi, Paige Kaneb, Linda Starr, and all the students at NCIP. And so that was my initial experience, that was my, that's how they got involved. That's how it all happened. Because NCIP needed, you know, Loyola said that they was there for help, and NCIP needed the help, and they started working together.

EB: Thank you. Can you tell me the day that you were, about the day you were exonerated? How were those feelings?

OA: Man, I don't even know. It was, it was, you know, that's what it was like, like that day like, I don't know if you can see, can you see that picture right there? You know, that's what it was like. You know, you know, the judge is, the judge is, you know, your honor is up there, and he's reading through this stack of papers that he's got. And he's starting off, to me, you know, it started off good to me. It sounded like he's going to say it, but you know I've, you know, I've read through legal documents before where the court may start off saying good stuff but then at the end, they deny it because of one specific thing. And you know I'm there at the edge of my seat, bruh, like this. He, I'm like this, just like this, man, just keep saying to myself, say it, just say it, man, just say, just say it like. Because like he said all the right stuff, talking about all the things that was uncovered, all of the facts that was proven. And it was just like, he's just like, it's like being revved up, you know what I mean, like, those little things you rev up, rev up, rev, rev, and you know, soon it's getting tighter and tighter and tighter. As soon as you let it go, you know it's going to spring off. That's what it was like, it was like being revved up till you took off. Feel the tightness, tightness, as tight as it as soon as he said it, it was, it was such a

relief. I don't, you know, the only way I can feel, you know, I don't even know, if you've never experienced almost drowning, then you don't know.

EB: Yeah.

OA: But if you experienced almost drowning, then it's like that. It's like drowning and somebody saving you. And it's that moment, that moment right there, it's like that relieving...phew. But that's what it was like, it was just, just like that, it was that intense. It was, it was, but then after the intensity of it, it was the excitement came into it. Because then you was just like, they did some magic that took place, like all the stuff you free to do. Like, oh, I can't wait now. And you be like, ooh! That's what I was like, just revved up. Then I was like... So it was it was a burst of those two things merged together. And then, phew, gotta get out. And then for me, you know, I, you know, it was just like. I remember watching the presidential election, and at the time, Barack Obama was becoming, you know, was seeking election, 2008, right. And he said, you know, he said during this campaign, don't hit the ground running. That was my attitude I got, that's what I kept saying, I gotta hit the ground. And you know, again, you know, there's power in words and sometimes affirmations take their effect upon you in different ways. And that's all I've been doing since I gone out of the door. Is running, nonstop, till right now, it's nonstop, still going. Um, you know, and so, you know, I always say, you know, freedom aint't free, man. Freedom isn't free, at all. You know as much as, you know, people say that, he free now, he knows all of this, but you really never free from this stuff. You really never free, you maybe free from the bondage. But you still locked up from the stigma that comes along with being in prison. You still locked up from the prison traumatic stress that you went through. You still locked up from the disconnections that has transpired over those multiple years. So you've got to un-prison yourself now, from those things. And so, exoneration, freedom for me was all of that and that, in that moment, like, realizing all of that. And, uh, you know, I wouldn't change it for the world.

EB: Thank you.

GK: Thank you. Um, so after your exoneration, could you describe, I guess, the process of readjusting to the outside world?

OA: Well, the transition was, you know, the process is really difficult. I mean, it was really difficult when I got I got exonerated because. So, when I was, what I didn't know was this, is that after, you know, you've been incarcerated for more than 10 years, the Department of Motor Vehicles disposes of your identification, your kind of identification because of inactivity.

So you don't get it renewed, you don't do those things, it's inactive. And after ten years they dispose of it. So I had that issue. So I had to be identified walking out of the door, right? I have, you know, yeah, you know, I'm Obie Anthony, they know all of that. But California, I have no ID, I have no, I gotta get my birth certificate, I got, I gotta get a, I gotta get my Social Security card. But you can't get none of that stuff, you can't get no ID without your birth certificate; you can't get no birth certificate, you got to get your Social Security card. So it's, you know, so that was sort of the process for which was that, getting ID, getting identified and identification. Then, you know, but actually. So the Creator also blessed me with, again, like I said, I came home to my, my dear fiance. So I didn't have the worry of shelter. And so because I didn't have to worry for the shelter, now I can, I have, I have a place to be identified, here is my name, this is where you can send it, I have an address that you can send it to. So, but when I have no address to send no identification to, you know, be it that, you know, you don't have nobody there, you know, that process was difficult. So that is there. So it's really about identification, housing, job, because you have to get acclimated back in. But again, all of that takes major time. It took a year for me to get a job. It took six, five to six months for me to get properly identified, then a year for me to be able to get a job. And then, so the inbetween from day one to day 364, uh, imagine a place of where it's just you, you don't have, you know, your mother may, your parents maybe passed away, everyone is scattered out, you have no, no come home to, so you may be staying with a lawyer or maybe staying at a hotel, or maybe not, or maybe going from place to place to place in that 364 days of freedom that you just now coming into. After being in a place where you had all of that, right, where when I was in jail, I had it, I had an address, all that stuff, I had an ID card. So I got my ID card and I had an address, got another place and all that stuff. So, so that's what the process is like, it really is a difficult transition specifically for those individuals...be careful!...specifically for individuals who do not have support. There's just been, the process of reintegration is is difficult, specific, even when you have support, but even more difficult when you do not have support. Because it complicates your opportunity, in other words, to get those things that you necessarily need to establish yourself as far a person, as an individual now back into the community, but also, then, you know, getting jobs and such things.

GK: Thank you.

EB: Um, thank you. Can you tell us a little bit about how you started your nonprofit Exonerated Nation?

OA: Yeah. So, you know, you know, early on, I talked, I said a little bit about, you know, I wasn't, I've never been much of a kind of a guy that sit around with this group of us and we get

all kind of chat about stuff. In the group, I'm never the chatter in the group. I'm always the guy that likes to sit there and listen, and then specifically if it's about complaints about things that should be, that isn't, and it's because I'm always looking through processes. And so for me, like I said, that's how I was in prison. I wasn't, even when it came to the bad side of me, I wasn't the guy that sat around and did the talk, and it was just fight. And here in this atmosphere, what happened was, I thought, well, you know, after I'd gotten home and gotten exonerated, you know, I went to, it was two conferences. I went to the first conference. We have these innocence conferences every year. Once a year, they have an innocence conference where they gather all exonerees, as many as they can, that has been exonerated across the United States to one particular place. And at this one particular conference, 2012, maybe 13, because I had already been to the one in 12, had already been home since 11. And I had began to hear individuals complain, and I had been already, what I had been going through was the same thing, right, not having something from the state, you know, therapy, social work, or all these things that we need, like you would, everything was given to people who didn't commit the crime, someone who's gonna help them reintegrate back into the community, but what about me? I was supposed to be in here, you framed me, I was innocent, and then you have nothing for me. And so there was a lot of that conversation going on. And so we was at this one conference and, you know, a lot of, one of the Innocence Network directors and Barry Scheck and Peter Neufeld was having to sit down with another one of the Innocence Project directors and Justin Brooks, a few exonerees from all around, some from Texas, some from Michigan, California, all, we was all over. And so we was sitting in this room, and we was talking, and they was talking about, you know, the causes of wrongful convictions in these different states. Right? What caused the wrongful convictions and then they was talking about, you know, what was there for these individuals after that, right. And what happened was, you know, I just, you know, for me, it's like, look, man, like, I just felt that that conversation was doing, what that conversation was doing to me was the same thing that prison was doing to me, it did to me. It was segregating us, right? Blacks, whites, Mexicans, Asians, and others. And they was doing the same thing by saying exonerees from California, New York, Texas, New Orleans, and I'm like, man, nah, like, we not these different groups of exonerees like y'all say. We are an exonerated nation, we are one body that has been affected by that one body, by this body over here, the same system that did this, that framed me, framed him; the same system that, that withheld evidence against him is the same system that withheld evidence against me. So we are in an exonerated nation, and that's where it started. And, you know, I began to start asking around about, uh, you know, just different questions about, you know, what do it take to do that? How do you start a nonprofit to do this? Is this work already being done in that space? What's going on and all, this and that, night and day. Also doing advocacy work at the Capitol and talking to legislators and similar individuals there about things that weren't, that the state

should have had in place, realizing, you know, you know, my brother, rest in peace, Q Douglas Walker says it the best, that the arrogance in the state was that they could commit these common mistakes, that this didn't happen, that innocent people aren't locked up for crimes they didn't commit, that it's all guilty people incarcerated. But the fact of the matter is that we have 217 people in the state of California to prove you wrong, that have been exonerated, that were innocent and was in prison. And so that there brought forth, it was the energy, it was the passion, it was the curiosity of how to create something and react in that atmosphere that birthed Exonerated Nations.

EB: Thank you.

GK: Thank you. So speaking about the issues of the justice system, I was wondering if you could tell us from your perspective of what specific kinds of reforms are needed if we are to change things?

OA: Well, one of the, I mean like, when we talking about reforms, because you're right, there are a lot of different reforms that needs to be made and looked at in regards to the criminal justice system is concerned. But I think that, you know, to really put our, put our head on, put our hand on nail, on the gate, ultimately, I believe that there needs to be accountability. And that's not reform, that's implementation. And I believe that, that implementation will reform the system, because accountability be there. And the inevitability of accountability is that it corrects. And so ultimately, it will, that accountability will stop, I mean it won't stop, but it will create a situation that have the judges act in the arena in which they sit, instead of sitting with their hands folded up under a gown behind the desk, a high-arching desk over ,over the audience. And so, because accountability will place, will put the presumption of innocence back into the courtroom. Right now, the presumption of innocence has been removed, and that everyone is presumed guilty until proven innocent, and not innocent until proven guilty, it's the other way around. And so specifically and particularly, accountability needs to be implemented, so that reform can then begin to have a real conversation. Because when we talking about Brady, we talking about reforming a system that has a, when we're looking at prosecutorial misconduct, when we're looking at ineffective assistance of counsel, when we're looking at identification issues, when we're looking at official misconduct by way of the detectives that are involved in the cases, that are initially investigating cases, when we're talking about judicial misconduct, because you have magistrates, they have, typically, have authority and/or cuffed it, hid it, or overexerted it, and where they have missed, you know, either that, you know what, you know, the famous federal term, unreasonable application of the law, or in direct violation of that law. And so that's for me, when I, when you think, when I

for me, what needs to happen? What kind of reform? We talked about reform, you know, it's always about, you can't reform accountability, because it wasn't put there in the first place. And so you have to put accountability there so that prosecutors know that when they withhold, when they hold evidence against the person, then it says that they that they can be punished for that. It will correct from happening, right, when you put accountability on the defense side, when they are held accountable for the deficiencies in them investigating the case properly and defending the person properly, according to statute. And I think that's what happens. So for me it's accountability. And I think that that will reform.

GK: Thank you.

EB: What is the main takeaway for people from your experience? I know that's a lot to put in one takeaway. The main important advice you would give to someone that is experiencing what you went through?

OA: That is experiencing what I'm going through or what I went through?

EB: Yeah.

OA: Oh, my goodness, never give up. That is the ultimate, the only, like, the takeaway for me is that, it's to never give up. Our realiza...we know that we're innocent while we sit there, right. And we also know that the challenging, the challenge that is there to disprove a lie, right. How do you know, you know, and so, you know, just one takeaway is to never give up, is to rely and not to rely but to know, as I said to you before, you can believe that justice will come. And I can bring you with somebody, maybe a guy named Samuel Miller, dude named Samuel Miller, that will change your mind about about that. However, on the opposite end of that, if you know that justice will come because you're innocent, then can nobody come and change that. And that's the difference is that sometimes even innocent people wonder whether or not they believe, they believe justice coming, justice is coming, justice is coming, justice is coming. And they sit and they fight and they hope and they wish and they pray, and we all do that. And when they go, and they, when they transition in they mind to when they say, I know I'm getting out, I know justice is coming, I know that's going to happen. It manifests itself in this reality. And so never give up. Stay focused on, you know, your innocence. And you know that ultimately, you know, you never know, man, maybe a student that is just going through a library, that fumbles across some case, like man, get interested based on one thing, maybe. There you go. So never give up.

EB: Thank you a lot for all your thoughts and your answers and responses, for telling us your story. I personally learned a lot being from L.A., Los Angeles, and it's a big world out there that we never even shown. And you're shedding a light.

OA: Right? Well, you know, man, so for you and I, I tell you this, and maybe even like three people could come in and tell you the same thing. That you are me. In a lot of ways. You look exactly almost like me. Right now, right now, if I call my wife in right now, she'd be like, damn, you look like that could be your brother, you all could be related. And when I say to you why I bring that up to you is this. It can happen to you. It can happen to you, bruh, like this, specifically and particularly growing up in Los Angeles, period. Because there's always that chance that they say he was light-skinned, and I joke you not, and your friend, he doesn't, that's your friend right there. So I'll show you this. Because he and I look alike. See when I had my hair just like you...yeah, yeah. See, I have my hair, I wore my hair just like you wear your hair, all of that. And so and again, if I was to call my wife, she'd just be like this right now and be like, goodness, that look like you. And so it could happen to you. Mistaken identifications happen, just by, you know, for the main reason it is. Cross-racial identification is the biggest issue that you can have in identification, and particularly when it's, when that identification is predicated upon an event that happened, right. Right now, you and me, me and you are hanging out, and we run into his room, kick the door up, run into his room, snatch the TV off the thing, run up out of it, right. Then here comes along the guy that looks similar to us. He's, he's seen us, he don't know us but he's seen us. So he described to everybody what you see, what he's seen. He was light-skinned, he had braids. And I haven't even seen you stand up nor, but I was looking at your weight, and I can see you weigh about like, cool about like 150, 140 something. And you're about 5'9", 5'10". How tall are you?

EB: Like 6'2".

OA: You're kind of tall! You're like tall-tall. Yeah, see, so. So but we have that issue. And so for those reasons, I say, one, to never give up on things, or give up on yourself. Realize that it can happened to you. What you students, what you guys are doing, by way of studying, reading on it, learning about it, it, it's gonna help. It's for young kids, it's for y'all kids at the end of the day. Because the work that you're doing now is to prevent these. It's why you put that information out there, studying that, you don't want that, you don't want to go to jail for 17 years. How old are you now?

EB: 19

OA: So, yeah, you'll be leaving right now. That's when I left, right now, right now. And then brought back 17 years later like. You don't want that for your life. And, and so, because you don't want that for your life, you, you go to school, you learn and you study so that you can help someone else. Not be in that situation but specifically thinking about yourself and the kids that you may have, because you don't want them to be in a predicament of being framed and put in prison for something they didn't do. Because either they was mistakenly identified and the detective was so hard pressed that he didn't want to look further into any of that. Or not, you know what I mean. So I applaud you guys, the both of you, the students, the whole body, and the work that you guys are doing. I think that is a magnificent thing. And as I always say, you know, I know the difference between use, use and misuse. And so as long as I'm here, I know that I'm here to be used. So you can always call upon me to do things such as this and others. So keep up the great work that you're doing.

EB: Thank you. You have anything else?

GK: I think, yeah. Thank you so much for sharing all of your experiences and taking out your time to do this interview. It was really enlightening.

OA: Yeah, absolutely. You guys, be blessed. Keep up the great work. Stay safe and healthy. You know you how you do, you know. We mask up nice because we want to look like that, because this person over here, my neighbors COVID. You guys, stay self, man, and be healthy.

EB: Alright. Thank you. Have a great rest of your day.

OB: Alright, you too.