

An Interview with Harold Taylor

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Abstract This is an interview with Harold Taylor by Curtis Austin.

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Harold Taylor was one of the first teenagers in Los Angeles to join the Southern California Chapter of the Black Panther Party. Having grown up poor in segregated L.A., Taylor had grown increasingly leery of established authority due to the numerous unprovoked beatings he received from officers of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD). Having witnessed his friends and neighbors gunned down during the 1965 Watts rebellion, he vowed he would never stand by while Blacks were slaughtered like that again. Two years later in 1967, he watched television as armed members of the Oakland-based Black Panther Party marched onto the California statehouse in Sacramento declaring their right to bear arms and explaining their duty to defend Blacks from police violence and murder. Months later, after an encounter with Los Angeles Panther leader Alprentice “Bunchy” Carter, Taylor joined the Black Panther Party. This interview covers various aspects of Taylor’s experiences in the Black Panther Party and ends with a description of him being tortured after local, state, and federal law enforcement officials apprehended him in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Curtis Austin: The date is July 7th, 2009. We are in Jamaica Queens, New York. The interviewer is Curtis Austin. The interviewee is Harold Taylor. Thank you,

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Mr. Taylor, for your time once again. I wonder if we can start off at this point just by talking about a typical day as a member of the Black Panther Party.

Harold Taylor: Well, I worked out of the South Central [Los Angeles] chapter out of 41st and Central but I was assigned to the office on 84th and Broadway. I was stationed at the time in San Diego when I was organizing this branch and trying to put it back on its feet after John Savage [was killed]. I was having a conversation with Sylvester Bell and I was just talking to him about him being an officer of the day and how it was important for somebody to be in the office to run the office that particular day while I was out in the field working with some other Panthers and that he was going to be a point officer today and he agreed.

Then the newspaper came in that particular day and we didn't have cell phones and stuff like that. People would call in. Just checking in to let you know where they were and what they were doing. The people that called in were telling me, "We have no newspapers here. You guys need to come through here and bring some papers and start selling them." We got a few people doing it but we had started selling so many papers, he [Sylvester Bell] wanted to get out and sell papers too. He assigned somebody else to hold down the office while he went out in the field to sell papers. He went to this supermarket plaza, Kroger Market and started selling papers. Well evidently, he was followed and watched by members of the Us Organization and while he was selling papers, he was approached and shot.

When I got back to the office and he wasn't there, somebody told me, "Well, he went to sell his papers." So, I go over to the plaza there and there he was stretched out on the ground, dead. They apparently walked up on him and assassinated him right there. Just killed him. This is all part of the COINTELPRO Program that I learned about later. It was not my first experience [with COINTELPRO] but after John, Bunchy and Franco and a few other people got killed before this, I kind of suspected that somebody else is involved in this other than the so-called culprits [Us members].

CA: Why did you suspect that?

HT: Well, I found out later about [COINTELPRO] but I suspected it because we always had the information. We didn't have the communication. Nobody had the communications then that we got today. It was so funny how they could shape up a situation, send somebody there to kill him for selling papers. At the same time, it was eliminating leadership. John was one of the leaders of the San Diego chapter; he was the captain of the San Diego chapter. Sylvester was assassinated and John Savage had been assassinated, so the puzzle started coming together. These people were being killed, eliminated from the top on down. That's when I started suspecting something else going here.

CA: What was going on between the Panthers and the Us Organization that created a situation where somebody would get shot? The Black Panther Party says it's for liberty and freedom and justice and the Us Organization is saying that it has noble goals. What stopped the two groups from coming together?

HT: Well, what started it is the instigation by the COINTEL Program. Us always thought we were threatening, that we posed a threat. Then we started getting letters and phone calls making it look as though the Us Organization were going to attack us. You know what I'm saying?

That's where it started building animosity. We became paranoid and really conscious of them. Then after Bunchy [Carter] was killed, John [Huggins] and then immediately John Savage was killed, we were like, "Wow. These Negroes are serious." Not knowing that COINTELPRO was involved in it but COINTELPRO created that atmosphere of paranoia. That was designed to do exactly what it did as far as when we started taking each other out. They started sniping at people. They shot Ronald Freeman. They attacked me one time when I was going down the street. They tried to drag me into a van and I had to fight to get away from them. I've been shot at by Us people. I've received telephone threats.

CA: Why don't you describe some of that for me? This trying to drag you into a van. Describe that.

HT: Yeah, I was walking down the street from my office. I lived down the street from the office. I lived on 84th. There's a row of hedges about five houses before you get to my house. They were hidden behind the hedges—these two people—and I noticed that this van was coming down the street behind me when I was walking. I became really conscious of my surroundings. When I got to those hedges, I looked back at the van and two dudes jumped out.

CA: Of the van or from the hedges?

HT: From the hedges and then the van door opened, the sliding door on the side of the van flew open and they were trying to push me into the van. I had just locked up the Panther office on Broadway. I was on my way home. I'm thinking that if I let them take me in this van, they were probably going to take me somewhere and kill me. I was really just fighting my heart out.

I couldn't get to my pistol because I had each one [of the men] on my arms. I'm trying to get away. Finally, I did get away from them. I don't know where I got the strength from but I freed my hand and I was reaching for my pistol and then one of them saw where my left hand was, saw that I was reaching for this pistol. He was looking at me and he was looking at the pistol but by the time I got my hand to the pistol he let go. Everything's going so fast and I was off balance like hell so I started going backwards because he let go suddenly. I was trying to pull my pistol out. By the time I got it out, they both were in the van so wasn't no sense in shooting because they were inside. They were taking off. That's what happened on that occasion.

It was pretty obvious to me that Panthers were being hunted. That you really got to be on the job and watch what's going on around you and then when I got to San Diego, that's when Sylvester gets killed. Somebody bombed the Us Organization's office and another house was shot up really bad.

CA: Somebody bombed it?

HT: Yeah, somebody bombed it.

CA: Was it a member of the Black Panther Party?

HT: I couldn't say.

CA: Okay.

HT: It still had that atmosphere, that tension. Everybody's watching each other now. You got killing and bombings and shootings and shooting at people. Those days were really touch and go in the Party. Really, touch and go. There were numerous occasions similar to that and plus we also had the police at us all the time with their harassment. Coming through the neighborhood, coming through the office or even breaking into the office and destroying material, taking papers, taking forms, kicking over food that we had for our breakfast program. They'd break in and do that. We knew it was the police because most people in the neighborhood supported the breakfast program. They liked that breakfast program. But then the same kind of things started happening to us in San Diego.

I left San Diego and I went to Santa Ana to work out of that branch for a while organizing the breakfast program. There were very few incidents there. They were just starting up and basically it was like training for them.

CA: Now, what does it take to organize a chapter or branch of the Black Panther Party? You're the one who gets sent to San Diego, now you're being sent to Santa Ana?

HT: Yeah.

CA: What exactly are the nuts and bolts of putting a chapter together?

HT: Well the [main] thing was knowing the [Panther] program and how to set up breakfast programs and food drives and try to get some volunteer doctors to come in and give us some free medical care for people in the community. Basically, what you want to do is you're training these other people how to go about organizing that breakfast program, how to go about getting doctors to come in and volunteer their service. Most of them are interns that came in and volunteered their services. Many of them were from various liberal white groups. The Santa Ana Panthers already had an existing office, they just needed somebody to help them take it to the next level and show them how to draw more people in and create more resources. A lot of them didn't have the ideas or know the formula to do those things.

The ones that knew the ideas and the formulas, they were used to go and organize those chapters and organize those branches and to get people to follow the rules of the Party and at the same time, inspire them to want to serve the people. Remind them why they joined the Party, the reasons why they say they joined the Party. People needed housing; they needed

food for the breakfast program for the kids. They needed after school programs for the kids and other things. We needed medical care because everybody couldn't afford to go to doctors; and we did clothing drives, shoe drives, coat drives, all those things. We went through the community and I asked people to donate stuff that they didn't need or use that we could put into our program and let people that needed stuff like that come and look at it, pick them out something to wear. That was the purpose of that.

CA: Do you recall any other members of the Santa Ana branch?

HT: Not by name. It's just so long ago and so many people that I met while in the party come and go. At that time, the party was like a swinging door with all the conflict with the Us Organization and the police department. Some people stayed some people left. It started depleting the party. We were losing a lot of members and in some cases maintaining a lot of the bad members. There were a lot of good ones who felt exploited, felt like they were being misused. A lot of the women left too because of how they felt about their experiences with some of the brothers in the Party at that time and their experiences with leadership. I tried to encourage that non-sexist approach and taught them that the women needed to be respected as much as the men needed to be respected and that everybody was a part of the tool to work and fix the situation. To start exploiting people and doing the same thing that the oppressor's been doing, that makes us no better than him.

It was basically a re-education process when you go in there to reorganize a chapter or branch. You got to reeducate them because some of them have learned the wrong way and you have to change that and correct it. You had to basically re-educate them on the principles and the rules of the Party. That was simple for me and it was my main function at that time, among a few other things.

CA: Now, when you joined the Party, it was called the Black Panther Party for Self Defense.

Now obviously, you cannot have a party for self-defense if you don't have people actually doing it.

HT: True.

CA: What did self-defense mean to you? What did it look like in real life?

HT: In my opinion, it's to let the police who are coming down on the community, on black folks, know that you're there. Meaning we will do unto you as you do unto us. If you attack us, we have every right to attack back. Then if you want to shoot at us, we will shoot back. I saw nothing wrong with that. As a matter of fact, that's one of the reasons I joined the party. I wanted to be part of a vanguard. To protect my community and help the people in my community, to defend my community. Do the things that need to be done for the children in my community and then make sure that it was a comfortable place so whenever I had kids, they'd

feel comfortable being raised in that community. Yeah, I was all for self-defense. I don't see anything wrong with that.

They're always arguing today about the right to bear arms. They made strict laws because of the California Panthers and changed some laws about gun control and who can have a gun and who couldn't. Where you could take it. Now, they take them everywhere. Who goes to a presidential rally with a gun to hear a speech from Obama or talk about Obama? Who takes a semi-automatic rifle and stands up there with a gun talking about don't try to take my gun? When we said that, they flipped the script and said we were crazy, said we were maniacs and they wanted to take our right to bear arms. They wanted to limit us.

If I was allowed to still have a gun if I wasn't convicted of a felony, I'd have three or four, five guns because I'm a firm believer that unarmed people are subject to slavery at any given moment and that you have the right to defend yourself. And whatever it takes to defend yourself, you do what you got to do. That means when you say yourself, you say your property, your family, your neighbor. You have that right to do that and I'm not against that, but I know I've experienced some incidents with the police. I've been shot by members of the Los Angeles Police Department. I've been ambushed by them. I've been set up by them and if I didn't have a gun, I wouldn't be here today. The only thing that kept them from killing me was I had a weapon to defend myself, so that made them think twice about rolling up on me. I was captured, wounded and stayed in jail for almost 18 months before I got out on bail.

When I got out on bail, there was a split in the party. I just decided that I wasn't going to be part of the Party no more and I wasn't going to stay and go to trial. This was during the Watergate Hearings. There was no justice then. Richard Nixon ran this country like he wanted to. COINTELPRO was in full effect. I'm lucky that I did jump bail because in a way if I didn't, the exposure of COINTELPRO wouldn't have come until after they convicted me because of the way they set us up. By me being gone, when I did come back, COINTELPRO was exposed, which gave me the opportunity to tell my lawyer. My lawyer, when she saw it, she said, "Well, now we are going to subpoena all records from the FBI about COINTELPRO. About what it was designed for, who it was for." We got a chance to expose some things.

We were going to expose a lot more if it, but the FBI bulldogged it and they didn't want to give up the information; but the judges were insisting on having it. It was a tug of war going backwards and forwards so that took another 17 months just for discovery. At my trial, I was acquitted of all charges [of assaulting police officers and attempted murder on police officers]. Yeah, I'm all for arming yourself and defending yourself and I think that that's a great concept.

CA: Okay. As time goes on, there's this split and there's other work to be done. You're no longer organizing chapters and teaching people how to set up breakfast programs and you're involved in some different activities.

Can you talk a little bit about what it's like for someone to have the FBI actively chasing them?

HT: It's completely nerve wracking because he's around every corner you turn. You have to try to see around the corner before you get to the corner. You trying to constantly anticipate. Take noises for example: in real quiet places—like you get home and you don't have no radio or television on or nothing and you're just lying there reading or just lying there relaxing, it's still noise you hear outside. A squirrel running up a tree. A cat or a dog running across some leaves. You say to yourself, what was that? When you get comfortable enough, you go open the door and possibly circle the house just to see if anybody IS out there. You are always on the lookout for strange cars and strange looking white boys with JC Penney suits on, them little sports jackets and them big old shoes. What's he doing over here?

You question everything and then eventually you're going to leave that spot. When you think nobody sees you leave. You relocate. Anything you left in there, it's gone. You don't see none of it anymore. Somebody might, they might go get the rest of it for you but you wouldn't let them know where you stay or where you're at. You just send them to get it, and tell them to take it to their spot then you'll come pick it up or have them go somewhere and put it somewhere where you can find it.

You're constantly covering your tracks. You don't want to make phone calls from nowhere near where you are. From a big city, you may be able to. You got to go in town to make a phone call. If your mom is sick, well, you need to go to at least a city away from your spot to make the phone call. Don't stay on the phone no more than two minutes if that. Limit your calls. You never tell anybody where you live or where you are. Always buy cars from owners, never from lots. Unless it's a really run down lot where you get a jalopy and you pay cash for it. If it's a four or five-hundred-dollar car, you buy it then and there. You don't want to look overly dressed. You don't want to be under dressed. You don't want to draw attention. You just want to blend in like a fish in the sea.

You also have to start cutting a lot of attachments. You got to hang with a whole different crew. Make sure you got more than one set of identification because you never know when you have to throw the other one away. Show somebody else [who you are so they'll know] and when you assume another name you got to leave your old spot. Because you can no longer pay your bills in that name that you gave them. You got to move to another spot, change all that until it's completely brand new. It was pretty easy to do that because technology like they got now, laptops and computers, they didn't have that back then. You see how far this country has come in forty years?

CA: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

HT: That's a long way. Technology, today they could get up on you in a heartbeat. You'd leave a long footprint and you'd be caught. Back then, we had some space to work in.

It's intense. It's an intense feeling. And you easily get a very quick adrenaline rush at the wrong sound. You see something. You immediately get suspicious. Your adrenaline goes up. You go in a defensive mode really quick. You're always ready to go to plan B, C, or D. Whichever one you need according to the situation, that's how far you have to go. Plan B may not work, C might not work, so you need plan D. You need to have all that figured out before time. If this don't work and that don't work and this don't work, well, what's another option? You have to create another option. It's like a chess game. More than one move at a time. You got to plan three or four moves ahead. When you start thinking like that, after a while that's how you perceive things and that's how you think about situations and stuff like that. How you feel about different things.

For instance, if you get a bad feeling that makes you very uncomfortable. Don't hesitate to follow that feeling. You think to yourself, "This is bad. This is really bad. I feel it." Don't just stay there and feel it, act on it. If it says get up and go, get up and go. If it says run, run. If it says move, move. If it says get your pistol and get ready, get ready. Because mostly, I found out through my own experience with that, when you get those kind of feelings, they're not really feelings. They're really dead giveaways. That's an instinct or whatever you want to call it. Like they say, animals can smell fear, they can also feel a threat. You feel a threat, you'd be messed up if you don't act on it. Even if you wrong, at least you did something about it. What if you right and it's something really going to happen?

You'd feel really good if you act and everything worked out like you planned it. [For example,] say you get the feeling that the police are about to come through these doors. There's a fire escape out there and I just had a feeling something's going to happen. I got my gun, I grabbed my jacket and decided on the spot that I don't need this other stuff. Suitcase and stuff, to hell with that. I got my ID. I don't have nothing else in there that could lead them to me. You got to make sure of that. Don't leave nothing behind that'll lead them to you.

You can't do that. You don't take freebies from places where you lay your head. When you get a bad feeling that they're coming through that door and you get up, you're already a step ahead of them.

HT: You go out that damn door, go out that fire escape and get downstairs and you leave a cigarette burning in the ash tray and you get away because of that instinct. Do you know what that does to the police if they come through that door? The first thing they do is say "Where the f**k did he go? He was here. Here's his cigarette. All our information was right. How did he find out? Who warned him?" That's psychological warfare. That f**s with them. "He had to go down the fire escape. Who's covering the back? We hadn't got around there yet." Say you left four seconds before they are supposed to come and go to the back. Psychologically, that f**s them up. "Where did he go? He left all his things. But it's nothing we can use." When you staying in spots like this and you get that feeling, you got to go down the stairway or something. Get the hell out of here. You can't stay up in this room. You got to put distance between you and the spot

automatically. That's blown. Go get to one of the safe houses, get your other identification and don't be that other person anymore. He's dead. Throw that ID away or burn it, or whatever.

Change your name, start adapting to it. Start memorizing the birth date. See, that's another thing, if you get a new ID and you don't know your social security number, you can be cited. If you don't know your date of birth or where you were born, information on your birth certificate, who's on there, who's the mother, who is the father. You don't know none of that? The police automatically think you lying. They'll say, this ain't even you. Let's finger print you and see who you really are. You know what I mean? Now you've given them excuses to run you through the system. Man, you know how many times I've been stopped on the street and the police let me walk away? With warrants? If I didn't have the right name, they would have locked me up with no hesitation. That's when they didn't have computers and stuff where your picture will come up on the computer screen. They had none of that. There was radio, they only communicated by radio.

I can't tell you how many times I walked away showing that phony identification. And some of them didn't even have picture ID. Different states didn't have pictures on the ID, on your driver's license. See, that's unheard of now. I walked away one time I was casing a bank. Police said that I looked like I was loitering. I was outside the car when he asked, "Were you driving sir?" "No, I'm not driving." "What are you doing right here?" "I was just having a cigarette. Taking a break. Just looking around." "Can I see some identification?" Asked me my name, I tell him my name. "What's your date of birth?" I tell him my date of birth. I never hesitated. He says, "Well, you know, sir, there's no loitering in this area and I suggest that you move on." I was casing the bank [because we were going to rob it]. I wanted to know when the armored car come and all that. I wanted to know when it left. Does it take out [money] or does it deposit [money]? Some armored cars come to pick up money and some come to bring money.

Preferably, you want the car that's on the take out. Because banks order according to what they need. When they come to take out, that mean we got more than we need here. We need to move this out of here. I was watching all of that, then the police come right up to me. He on a stake out, I'm on a stake out. He watching for loiterers and whatever else, and I'm watching for money.

CA: Did you just take it for granted that the feds would be involved?

HT: Oh yeah. Well after the Party split we started finding out some things about the government's involvement in this whole thing. That was before it was fully exposed. Then when you start hearing some different reports from home, some people saying so and so were visited by the FBI. Well okay, what did they visit them about? They wanted to ask them questions, show them pictures of you and so and so and so and so. Okay, then you get the same answer from somebody else. Now we're learning how to do surveillance. Keeping up with them. You can't live in a city where you have any relatives because they start backtracking cousins, all that in that

particular city. You got to go where you don't know nobody and nobody knows you. You disappear. Because they're going to go find where those cousins are.

They were just two steps behind Herman in Mississippi. They were coming towards his grandmother's house. They were coming out there looking for him. All right? He was already gone from there. They got Noah. Noah's in San Quentin with Jalil serving a charge for assaulting the police. Herman was the last piece of that puzzle, so they say. That brings us in the equation.

CA: How so?

HT: Well, when they got Ruben, then they started putting it together. They tortured Ruben and he started telling them stuff. He started naming people's names and stuff. I'm not going to blame Ruben for that. He didn't have a choice but to say whatever they wanted him to say. What he basically did was corroborate their theory. They had a theory about what they said had happened. Ruben went along with it which, [ultimately], it helped me and JB. When they captured us, me and JB went along with that theory and Ruben's statements.

CA: Talk about that. Talk about that day.

HT: That day when they got arrested?

CA: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

HT: I don't know if it was a Saturday or a Friday. It was so long ago but I will say it's a Saturday morning. Friday morning or Saturday morning. I know the next day was not a work day and we were going to put some work in. Go look at something and at the same time, do laundry. It was a strategic location where we could observe and do our laundry. We got the car, Kathy was driving and I was in the back seat with the baby. JB was on the passenger side. A red car come out of nowhere. I mean that car was all over the road the way he was driving. It was blatant, he was just flashing his head lights off and on telling us to pull over and then I saw another one coming from the front and then another one coming from this side street. They blocked us in. He comes out with a 12-gauge double barrel shotgun and another one comes out with a shotgun, another one comes out with a shotgun and they made local cops come out with their pistols and I looked at JB, I said, "Man, this is a bust." I said, "This ain't no traffic ticket for damn sure." I said, "This is a bust."

They come up to the car and they called me Herman. "Get out Herman, get on your knees, Bell, blah, blah, blah." They were hollering at JB and told Kathy to keep her hands on the wheel, told her don't move! The baby is crying. Kathy said, "What's going on? What is this about?" He said, "You guys are under arrest." They took me and put me in the back seat. I looked over in the front seat and I saw pictures of JB. Me and JB are in the back seat. They didn't have any pictures of me and they just took me. Then one of them kept calling me Herman. I'm like, "Oh, this officer thinks I'm Herman Bell." So, I was like, what's going on? Man, I don't know what's going on here. I looked at JB and said, "JB, there

are pictures of you on the front seat.” JB was like, “What?” I said, “This is a bust. This is not bullshit here. They found out who we are.”

Then they rushed us to the police station. The feds took me. New Orleans police took JB and Kathy and the baby and the New York police also had JB. The feds had me, took me in a room, finger printed me, took me back in the back and started questioning me. “Well, Herman, we finally got you blah, blah, blah.” I said, “Man, I don’t even know what you talking about.” He said, “Come on now. It’s you Herman Bell.” I said, “Herman Bell?” I said, “Man,” I told him my ID name because I had my ID on me. He said, “Well what are you doing with him?” I said, “I just met him.” I’m playing it off. “Man, I just met him. I don’t know that man. He was giving me a ride.” He said, “Well, you’re running with somebody that’s wanted for attempted murder of a police officer and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. His name is John Bowman, yada yada yada.” They don’t even know me. I’d only been there for a few days. They’d been watching JB for a while. I walked into a trap.

They were hoping that Herman would show up because they had Ruben already. Ruben told them where JB was. They beat it out of him but Ruben didn’t know where I was. When they saw me with JB, because me and Herman are about the same size, I’m just a little taller than Herman, they were like, “Oh, that’s Herman Bell.” The dude comes back, he says, “No, it don’t match Herman Bell’s prints.” They didn’t want to just let me go so what they were doing was matching my prints to Herman’s prints. He said, “Well you should be released in a little bit.” I said, “Well all right, thank you.” I’m sitting down. I’m sweating like a race horse now because I’m in the lion’s den. All of a sudden, the door flew open, he said, “You lying son of a bitch.” He said, “Yeah, no! You ain’t no fucking Herman Bell. You fucking Harold Taylor and you wanted with that other little bastard! Where is that damn Boudreaux?” Then when the police come in they just started whooping my ass. I was like, “Oh shit”.

It was on then. That’s when they started asking me questions and wouldn’t even give me a chance to say yea or nay. They went to whooping on me. “Oh, this is going to be good, nigger.” That’s what they told me. “Oh, this is really going to be good. You ain’t never heard of Ka-chee have you?” I’m like, “What is a Ka-chee?”

CA: Ka-chee?

HT: Ka-chee. I’m like, “What is Kachee?” He said, “While you thinking about it, I’m going to tell you what it is, bitch. It’s pain. I’m going to put some pain on your ass,” and he did, Curtis, right there on my head. He started beating on me, and he started hitting me on my ankles, coming up my shin, hit me with that black jack. I was like, “God damn!” I’m hollering out, man. He got up to my knees, I thought he was going to break my kneecap but he fooled me. He hit me on the inside of my knees. Damn! that hurt worse. Just shock waves going around my leg. I hit the floor and he said, “Oh, hell no. Get up, bitch.” He put me in a chair and said. “Take your damn clothes off. I don’t want you in nothing but your

draws.” I took my clothes off. He came over and handcuffed my arms behind my back. You know how desk chairs were with the little round thing in the back?

CA: Mm-hmm.

HT: That little rod? He put my arms up under that, handcuffed me where I couldn’t move without taking the chair with me. Then put my legs down on the little rods and handcuffed me to that outside rod around my ankles and feet. I can’t get up, can’t do anything then they went to work on me. Right here in the back of my neck with that black jack, all the way down here, under here, hitting them points and nerves. Over here, on my elbows, come back up, the shin bone. It just went on, man. I don’t know how long it was but it was damn sure long. You’ve seen that documentary *The Legacy of Torture*, you know what happens. I don’t want to have bad dreams so I don’t want to talk about it too much. *

*In the documentary *Legacy of Torture*, produced by Freedom Archives, Taylor explains his harrowing ordeal at the hands of his New Orleans jailers, who, in conjunction with the FBI, used extra-legal methods to extract information from him. A brief excerpt is below.

We were taken to the New Orleans Police Department. We were stripped of all clothes, down to our underwear. I was thrown in a holding cell. Inside that holding cell, there was Ruben Scott. He was really afraid. He was scared and I could tell he’d been beaten. I was in there for maybe five minutes and the door opened. Three police officers from NOPD came and dragged me up by my heels, took me to a chair, handcuffed me to the chair, hand cuffed my ankles, my feet to the bottom part of the chair. Without asking me any questions, they commenced to beat me. They beat me, they punched me, they kicked me, they spit on me. They called me a lot of vile names. And then they told me that they were going to kill me if I didn’t cooperate with them. They came out with a plastic bag and put it over my head. Then they started beating me with the bag over my head. By the time I was about to lose consciousness, about to pass out, they snatched the bag off. And while I’m trying to catch my breath, they started beating me again. So, I asked them, ‘what do you want?’ And they just continued on with it. They didn’t ask me any more questions. They didn’t ask any questions really. Then he came out with this cattle prod. I knew what it was because when I was a kid, my family used to go to Louisiana every year to work the family farm, and my uncles and I had some cows and we used cattle prods to move those cows up the chutes and stuff like that. So, I saw that and I knew what it was. [With the electric cattle prod, they shocked me,] down on my private parts, under my neck, behind my ears, down my back. I think I passed out one time and they woke me back up. They were taking me to another room. Two detectives had me by each arm and a detective came out of nowhere and knocked me straight out. I was unconscious. They took me to a holding cell. They put water on me. I was soaking wet. It was cold. [Then they] pulled me out of there at maybe about six or seven in the morning and told me they had somebody they wanted me to talk to and I better cooperate and if I didn’t I was going to get more of the same. So, they put me in there with two detectives from San Francisco. I later found out that it was [Frank]

McCoy and [Ed] Erdelatz. They started asking me questions. They told me they had a script. I'm sure I saw a recorder too and they were reading to me about what took place in San Francisco and I told them I had no knowledge of it.

All while this is taking place, I could hear John Bowman in another room where he was hollering. You can hear the licks being passed. They took what you call a slap-jack, it's like a little short black-jack and they started working the back of my neck, my shoulders, then one would get down and he'd work my shins and between my knees. They would beat me like that. They did that, I don't know—it seemed like it was an hour. It could have been thirty minutes, it could have been an hour, it could have been two hours. I don't know. [Then they came] back again with the plastic bag. This time they had a blanket. I don't know what they soaked it in but it was really, really, hot and they just covered me with that blanket and put that plastic bag over my head and I couldn't scream, I couldn't holler, I couldn't get my hands up to poke a hole in the bag because my hands were handcuffed to the chair and my legs were tied to the chair and they kicked the chair over and let me just suffocate. I was just about to pass out; they snatched it off, spit in my face and left me sitting there for a little while. [After this,] McCoy and Erdelatz, they started asking me questions. I had no idea of the things they were asking me so I couldn't answer them. So, they turned off the recorder and they said, "We'll tell you what happened and after we tell you, that's what we want you to say." [When I failed to cooperate,] One guy got behind me and he took his hands and he slapped them over my ears. I couldn't hear nothing. My ears were just ringing so bad. I could feel fluid running down the side of my face and they were talking to me but I couldn't hear them. All I could hear was just the ringing. Whenever they stood me up to make me walk, I couldn't walk. They kind of just carried me back to the room and when they got me back in there they'd start again.

[From there,] they beat, and they beat, and they beat, and then Erdelatz and McCoy would come back in and they would kind of grin and laugh. They were all laughing. They thought it was funny. They thought it was a big joke. They started asking me questions so I started talking to them. I followed their whole script. Everything they told me to say I said it. Just like whatever Ruben told them, I repeated it, what Ruben said. So, they said, "Well, we got what we want." [After that, a] federal magistrate in New Orleans ordered me out of the custody of the New Orleans Police Department. That's the only way I got away from them. They put me in the custody of the sheriff's department and they had pictures of me and had doctors that said I had bruised eardrums. And they ordered us over there, in prison under the sheriff's department where they kept us in a cage.