

## Text Transcript of “Off the Shelf” Podcast Episode 1 with Lou Turner

**Augustus Wood:** Welcome to the inaugural episode of “Off the Shelf: Revolutionary Readings in Times of Crises,” a new podcast focusing on showcasing undervalued or hidden scholarship and scholar activists that speak directly to this particular historical moment. As the African American masses face a triple hydra monster of the COVID pandemic increasing repressive state sanctioned violence and a looming second Great Depression in our Black political economy, it is crucial that we reintroduce an intellectual rigor that frames the moment properly so as to break this cycle of racial oppression, that is political subjugation, economic exploitation, and social humiliation. And then therefore conceive an alternative conception of our struggle based on a more radical approach. Thus, we will be discussing those works and scholars that offer such frameworks that both challenge the dominant liberal framework of racial oppression, as well as centralizing these path-breaking texts and people in our struggles for liberation. Crises, excuse me, Off the Shelf, is a collaborative project with the Humanities Research Institute at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, which people can find online at HRI dot Illinois dot edu. And for our first episode, we are honored to have Professor Lou Turner, who is currently in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning. And his, and literally, his jacket is thicker than a winter coat, [laughs] for everything that he's been involved in. Prior to being in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning here at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, he spent 12 years in the African American Studies Program as both a professor and also as a academic advisor and curriculum coordinator. Prior to that, he has spent time countless years organize in Chicago on the south side, as he was one of the prominent people in the Developing Communities Project. And he's currently still working in organizing efforts in Chicago for the Chicago Transit Authority Red Line Extension program, which is a \$2.3 billion project, the largest public works project in the history of the CTA. And so again, we're not only introducing and uncovering these works, we're bringing in scholars who, who also serve as organizers, who both teach, learn, and produce organizing efforts within the African American liberation struggle. And so I want to welcome in Lou Turner. Thank you for joining us on our first episode.

**Lou Turner:** Thanks for having me, Gus, I'm very honored to be here and as usual, excited to be chopping it up with you, man.

**Augustus Wood:** Most definitely, most definitely. And so, the first question we have for today is, one of the most prominent scholars that you introduced me to during my graduate studies, Hal Baron. And Hal Baron is someone who both you and Sundiata Cha-Jua had talked to me about and I had heard in passing before, but I haven't seen anything in terms of the dominant scholarship or pedagogy relating to Hal Baron's work. And lo and behold, when we actually sat down and had a discussion about Hal, I learned that not only had he been instrumental in conceptualizing racial oppression in a, in a, in a very impactful way, but he had also produced so much work both as a scholar and on the ground organizing, that really has been somewhat

hidden over the years. So can you tell us more about Hal Baron, his ideology and his work? You know, what, what is Hal's contribution based on your extensive research and your extensive knowledge in talking with Hal, talking with Paula, reading through his documents, and to having these discussions and presentations. What does Hal contribute to the understanding of struggle?

**Lou Turner:** I think on the one hand there is the narrative of Hal and Hal's narrative captures the development of his ideas. So it isn't simply a narrative for the subjective purposes of showing somebody's life experiences. The narrative really captures the development of his ideas. He's originally from St. Louis and came from an upper middle-class Jewish family. His father was a major lawyer in St. Louis, worked for an important law firm. And this is the first data point on the conceptual part. When his father's law firm existed, the law firm was started by one of the major families in St. Louis. I think it was the Edward Bates family. Edward Bates was Lincoln's attorney general. This is how far back the family goes. And so I think it was Charles Bates was like the grandson worked inside of the law firm and Hal's father worked for this, for the law firm. Hal tells the story that his father asked him, I think Hal was maybe 12 or 13 or 14, his father his father asked him to reorganize his, some of his legal papers for him. And Hal tells the story that he came across a file in which his father's law firm, and I guess his father had represented some banks during the sharecroppers movement in the Missouri Bootheels. And the law firm was on the wrong side of the struggle there, representing the banks against the sharecroppers who were in debt to the banks. And Hal tells, in retelling the story he says, when he saw that, he said he decided he'll never be a lawyer. One of Hal's brothers was a lawyer, he had two other brothers, I forget whether the third brother was a lawyer. He may have as well. And so it was always expected that Hal would go into the family business as as a lawyer. He said when he saw that he decided he would never be a lawyer. So the Bootheel struggle, you know, which had its own tent cities and everything, Black and white sharecroppers in the Bootheel of Missouri. That struggle had an impact on Hal's thinking about his future, his future life. He went to Amherst College in philosophy, and actually he studied symbolic philosophy. And he was going to transfer as a graduate student to the University of Chicago to study with the famous symbolic logic philosopher Rudolf Carnap. Then he discovered once he got there that Carnap was on his way to Princeton. And so then that's when he changed his major from philosophy to history. And so he became a PhD candidate and student in, in history. His dissertation is a whole other thing we can we can discuss. What I maintain that the dissertation which I have here in my office, he gave me a hard copy of it and we've now since gotten a PDF of it. His dissertation is on, Hal was an economic historian. Apparently that was very big in the 1950s and 60s, studying the history of the Depression and things like that, economic historians. And so it's that, it's in that work that I find the origin of Hal's Marxist take, political, economic take on race relations. Although there's very little on race relations in the dissertation, it's a unique dissertation, I won't spend our time, we can return some time talking about it. But I maintain that it's that dissertation about the relationship of the political economy to the subject matter of the dissertation, which was American foreign relations. And so he's looking at the relationship of the economy, the political economy of capitalist development in America to American foreign policy was the, the, the, the topic of, of the dissertation. And I think, and he brought that later on after he finished his dissertation, when he began to work in 1962 for the Chicago Urban League. And he became the Director of Research for the Chicago Urban League throughout the 1960s, which was frankly the most interesting time and the most

turbulent time for the Chicago Urban League. And the Chicago Urban League was one of the more progressive urban leagues in the country. I mean, we notice the NAACP, the Urban League, the national office can often be very, have very different politics than the local office. That's what Robert Williams found out, that's what Medgar Evers found out in Jackson. So the national office has one kind of politics, but the local, the local chapters, have a different kind of politics. And so Hal was the one who did research for the, not only for the Chicago Urban League, but what was called the Chicago Freedom Movement. And there, this is where we pick up the real contributions of Hal Baron. Hal did work on public school education. Paula was a public school teacher, very much involved in the Chicago School Movement, as a leader in the Chicago School movement. And that was a very big focus of Hal's work for the Chicago Urban League. In fact, he convinced the Chicago Urban League to become more involved in the Chicago School movement. The NAACP was already in that struggle, but the Urban League hadn't been in any significant way until Hal came along, and Hal wrote a number of research papers on public schools. Now, he did work on the discrepancies, the inequality in funding for Black and white education, long before Jonathan Kozol wrote *Savage Inequalities*, which became big for students and everyone later on in the 1980s, 90s. Hal was doing that work back in the 1960s, talking about the disparities in funding Black and white education. So that was one contribution of Hal. Hal, another area that he worked in, was in housing. Hal was the one who initiated the famous Gautreaux case, the case named after the first lead plaintiff, Dorothy Gautreaux, which became the Gautreaux case. The Gautreaux case began at the district level, made it all into the Supreme Court in the 1970s. Hal was the first one, was the one who initiated it. The Gautreaux case was considered the *Brown v. Board of Education* for housing. That's how important the case was, and the plaintiffs, the public housing residents, won the case. Hal initiated that case and did the research for that case. And he had research assistants such as Richard Rothstein. Richard Rothstein was was a graduate student and worked with Hal on that case. John Bracey was a research assistant, was a graduate student from Northwestern University, worked on, on that case. Rennie Davis worked for Hal, was a famous new left activist and whatnot, worked with Hal. So there was a lot of people who were influenced by him. That's housing. A third area of Hal's work is around labor. He wrote a famous work on the, the Negro worker in the Chicago labor market. That's one of the first studies of labor market segmentation ever written was Hal. This was like 1964 or, yeah 64. All of these were studies done for, and then the fourth, the fourth area of his work was in political power, Black Power, and he wrote a very important paper with co-authors, Rennie Davis, Harriet Stulman, and I forget the third, there's another one here, co-authors on this paper, but he was the lead, the lead author. And in that paper he talked, he documented qualitatively and quantitatively where Blacks were in any kind of political position or political power in Chicago and in the larger Chicago, Cook County region to show that there was instead of Black power, there was Black powerlessness, which was the title of the paper. So his areas were education, housing, labor, and power. And he, he actually wrote path-breaking papers, research papers for the Chicago Urban League and for the Chicago Freedom Movement. And so his theory grows out of these practical and strategic—it's very important because Hal often talked about his work being strategic—He was a great, he laid great emphasis on strategic thinking about issues. Not just research and not just theory and practice, but the strategy that goes behind them.

**Augustus Wood:** And I want to just kinda go ahead, just get run it right back into where you left off and talking about Hal's strategic thinking. Because his big thing was, you can't just solely

theorize. And his experiences show that he put his theory into practice on the ground in Chicago and other spaces. But now this strategic element of it is where it all comes together to actually understand the framework for how oppression actually operates. So can you talk more about how strategic thinking, especially in terms of how we, how we can think about this current moment?

**Lou Turner:** Yeah, I would also want to reiterate what I said in the first part of this, that we have a website that at least folks on campus can access. And we have a number of different areas of work that graduate students have done really incredible editing work, research, and the like. One of the graduate students, now a professor at UNC, Donald Planey, who was in the department of geography, actually has been doing interviews with a number of people who knew Hal. And so those interviews are available, and Donald has written a few vignettes, as he calls them, on Hal's life and work. So I encourage people to, to, they want to find out more about Hal, it's right here on this campus. At our website. In terms of strategic thinking, I was looking through the table of contents of our first of our manuscript that collects Hal's writing, particularly the writing from the Chicago Urban League period. And the first part is entitled Think Tank of the Civil Rights Movement, the Chicago Urban League, 1961 to 64. And one of the documents in it is, in fact, it's the second document, is a paper that Hal wrote called Negro Unemployment, a Case Study. And in that document, in fact I wrote a discussion paper on it, Hal develops a concept in measuring black unemployment, which now is called, and I think he called it that in the paper, the "discouraged worker," or he called it "social unemployment." And apparently this paper got, came across Robert Kennedy, who was the Attorney General at the time, is a whole background of why the Attorney General would be and be interested in black unemployment, particularly black youth unemployment. There was a whole juvenile policy center within the Justice Department and within the White House at the time. And one of the areas that they were looking at was Black youth unemployment. So that's how the Justice Department would become interested in a paper on unemployment amongst Black young people. But apparently the story goes, Hal somehow got, got this story that Kennedy wanted to know what is this discouraged workers concept? And I don't know, I mean, we'd have to do some more research and some of the, I think the graduate students that we have working on the project, will do that research. This may be where the term, and now it's an official category in the Labor Department and the Department of Labor statistics of the discouraged workers—they're now being counted. But I don't know if it's the case that Hal is the origin of that or not. But apparently, Bobby Kennedy didn't know what it was and it wasn't in labor statistics at the time. And again, we don't know, but we're going to do the research to, to, to find out. Another piece that Hal did was ballots and race on Chicago voting participation. And the way he looked at the demographics of Black voting in Chicago, both at the congressional level but also at the aldermanic level, and at this time during presidential elections, is a really wonderful case study ahead of it's time, I would argue, in terms of Political Science on the patterns of Black voting that you can use today in looking at Black voting patterns and when people come out to vote and when people stay home to vote and not vote. And so that was, that became important strategically for when Hal left the Chicago Urban League in 1968, it's at the time of the Black Power movement, became involved in Black nationalist politics, both in Chicago and in Detroit. When the Dodge revolutionary union movement, the League of revolutionary Black workers, was created and Hal was involved with them very, very intimately. And then later in the 19, early 1980s, he became involved with Harold Washington, who was running for, to be the first Black mayor of Chicago, Hal actually was the architect of Harold Washington's policy agenda for his campaign and became the chief

policy advisor for Harold Washington when Washington was elected. And in both cases, as the issues coordinator for the campaign and as the chief policy advisor for the administration, it was their reliance on Hal's strategic thinking about politics and about community involvement. Hal was principally involved in bringing community organizations and community residents into government and impacting governments. So panels were set up during the campaign and that was, that was Hal's idea to create these, these community panels around specific issues, many of the issue areas that he had covered when he was the Director of Research for the Chicago Urban League. So that was the way the, the Harold Washington campaign was structured on the community side of the campaign. And that was essentially the, Hal was essentially the architect of that. And he sought to do that and bring that into the actual governing, um, governance model of the administration. We have found since, we'd gotten the papers that Hal was working on a book on the Harold Washington years. We have parts of that. We have that manuscript. We also have a few smaller pieces that he was writing and offered to write for the Nation on how the Harold Washington administration represented a new urban governance model to be followed. So we've done a lot of research, we have much more to do on that area of how's life and work. And lot of that was due to the strategic kind of framework that Hal always brought to his policy writing, his research writing, and his political writing, was this strategic approach. And he often emphasized this in the interviews we did with him near the end of his, his life, was the importance of being strategic in one's thinking about these, these issues that we're all committed to around social and racial justice. So he had he brought that you brought that to his work. But the point that we want to focus on is how, after leaving the Urban League, and his writing of more theoretical work, such as the "The Demand for Black Labor" is a major essay that appeared in the review of, of radical political economics, and works like "Building Babylon" about public housing, racial domination in advanced capitalism, the theory of nationalism and division. Divisions in the labor market and racism transform the implications of the 1960s. These are more theoretical writings of Hal, but what's brought into those more theoretical historical writings, actually historiographical writings of Hal, is a whole strategic dimension that he sought to disclose in any particular historical period he was he was writing on. He wasn't just looking at what was happening on the ground, but what was the strategy behind what was happening on the ground? He was an early proponent and I would argue, originator of racial formation theory. There seems to be some debate amongst folks about that. But even Omi Michael Omi and Hal were not, in the introduction, or chapter one of their book, which is supposed to be the classic work on racial formation, racial formation in the United States, give Hal Baron credit for that. It's a much more complicated story because there's a very important figure by the name of Harry Chang, who is a Korean American Marxist up in the Bay Area, but Hal's work goes back to the 60s whereas Harry Chang's was the 1970s. I find it curious that Howard Winant in their book they don't mention Harry Chang since Howard Winant was in the study groups that Harry Chang ran up in Berkeley. He kind of fell out of the story.

**Augustus Wood:** Yeah, yeah, you know there's more to that story then.

[LAUGHS]

**Lou Turner:** Yeah, yeah, a whole lot more to that story. So racial formation theory and later on, he developed the concept of racial transformation theory, and that plays a significant role in his writing of the Myrdal manuscript. We also, he and Bracey at the at the time, John Bracey had begin, had begun as the co-authors of that project. Bracey somehow fell off of the project in the late sixties or early, in the early seventies, I'd say. But they'd actually done an interview with Myrdal, and we have that in the papers as well. So there's a lot to be found in these papers. A lot of the papers have to do with the writing of the Myrdal book, but there's a lot on other periods of Hal's, like he wrote, for instance, I'll give you a very good example of strategic thinking. He wrote a paper which apparently never sought to publish. I don't know why, because one big area of Hal's work is planning and I'm over here in the Planning Department. He wrote he wrote a piece, actually a pamphlet, a debate over the 1966 Comprehensive Plan for Chicago. And it was called Planning and Black and White or the Racial Aspects of Planning. And the city had commissioned through its Department of Planning and Development, the writing of a comprehensive plan for the city of Chicago, 1966. It hasn't done a plan like that since. Presently now, we got word from the city, just this week that the city after I don't know what is it, since 1966 is now doing, initiating a new comprehensive plan for Chicago.

**August Wood:** Really?

**Lou Turner:** The last one was done in 1966. And Hal Baron actually organized a debate over that one, pointing out the racial, the structural racism in the 1966 comprehensive plan.

**Augustus Wood:** Really? It's been that long?

**Lou Turner:** Yes. Yeah, they haven't done a plan for the city at in all these years. And now they announce under the Lightfoot administration that they're going to initiate, and they acknowledge they haven't done a plan since 1966, they are going to now initiate a new comprehensive plan for Chicago. Given all that has occurred, including gentrification, displacement of Black people, the real decrease of nearly 210,000 Black people in Chicago over the last 50 years, the shrinking Black community in Chicago. Many of them go on your way toward Atlanta. But the idea that, you know what their comprehensive plan looked like in 1966 and what one will look like in 2020 or 21, will be very interesting. But Hal was very much involved in critically assessing that 1966 plan and using it. That's one. Two: Hal wrote a piece, again, he didn't look like he, the one for the plan for 1966 was actually published by the Urban League. He wrote a piece in 1972, I think it was, we found in this paper is it didn't appear anywhere else. Didn't look like he tried to get it published. It's called "Planning by Judiciary." "Planning by Judiciary." And it's about the Gautreaux case. And he makes the point, one of the points he makes is a very important point because people often compare the Gautreaux case, they say it was the Brown v Board of Education and for housing. He makes the point that unlike Brown, where the Supreme Court makes the Brown ruling and then washes its hands of anything, it doesn't do it doesn't try to implement it at all. In the Gautreaux case, it went back down to the district court and the court became very involved in implementing the Gautreaux decision. And so it's two different views

on how racial justice cases get followed through on. In the case of Brown, there is no follow-through by the judiciary. They leave it up to the states, which is why nothing really changes. In Gautreaux, the courts actually become very involved. The lower court, district court becomes very involved in implementing and overseeing Gautreaux. And so so again, it's planning by, the title is called Planning by by Judiciary. And so there's just so many of those kinds of things we find in Hal's writing about strategic matters of policy and practice in the movement.

**Augustus Wood:** And then so just kinda going with that topic, I think that one of my favorite conversations I've had with you about Hal has been his arguments on the Myrdal "American Dilemma." And I think that what we talked about plays a major role into the way people are framing this current, this current historical moment. And so can you speak to that? Because I do think that that's one of the most crucial elements of Hal Baron's legacy and what I argue is going to lead to a new watershed reemergence of his work over the next 20 to 30 years. So can you talk more about that? We have about ten minutes left and I think that would be the best way to kinda send this off.

**Lou Turner:** You're absolutely right, Gus, and I really appreciate you leaving some time to discuss that. Everyone is going to want to get with Hal Baron [LAUGHS] in this coming period. I mean, if the outcome is going to be what most people suspect after November, and whatever Trump does to try to stay in power, is one thing. But if things go according to the norms of bourgeois democracy and Biden is, is elected, you're going to need Hal Baron to make sense of what comes next. Hal's point on Myrdal, and it appears in the first book proposal that he wrote and submitted to Random House back in 1968-69, and he says this in terms of his initial findings and Hal not only went through the Carnegie Myrdal, excuse me, the Carnegie Foundation papers, he went through the Carnegie Corporation papers. He was that kind of scholar who was very, very meticulous. He always went toward primary sources and whatnot to find that information. And what he came away with is that as against the notion that American, which was held by most people, whatever their critique of "American Dilemma" was. That as against the notion that "American Dilemma" was a social science project in the study of race relations in America, he argues that it wasn't that. He says that instead it was a paper that was, it was a treatise on social engineering for crisis management of race relations in the post-World War II period, for corporate liberalism. That was what he says the Myrdal project, what Myrdal made the project into. There's a whole other issue and I think Hal would support that, I'm, I've been a proponent of this view, is that the memoranda or much of the memoranda that was written for the project, which either did not make it into the final, there's thousands of pages, of memoranda that were written. Some of them by radicals. Back in the day when different people had been radical, that didn't make it into the project, that Myrdal got to shape the final project and the final project which became about the American creed and American values, and that the so-called "Negro problem," which was the subtitle of the book, was a problem that had to be resolved and solved by white Americans. There was no place in Myrdal's view of Black Americans solving the quote unquote "Negro problem." And that was, a lot of people have critiqued that. But Hal's point was that Myrdal's take, this Keynesian take from the point of view of political economy, was that the, the treatise was a treatise on social engineering or how to social engineer risk and risk management of racial crises in American society in the post-World War II period by corporate liberalism. The title, the final title, he had different titles over the 50 year, nearly 50 years of writing it, the first title was make the Making of an American Dilemma. The final title, which was interesting and it's the one he had a couple of years before he passed away, but he reinforced it when he saw the election of Donald Trump. And the title that he

ended up with was the Reconstruction of the Rhetoric of Race: An American Dilemma. The Reconstruction, the Reconstructing of the Rhetoric of Race. Because he saw that race and racism and racialism was always being reframed rhetorically. And that's what we're seeing a lot and can expect in a centrist government of, of, of Joe Biden, is all the racial crises that we see in America, they will have imposed on them a frame for managing these crises. And Myrdal is the, so to speak, the progenitor of these. And when I said the seismic impact of this is that there's very, in terms of race relations social science in this country, all of all areas of race relations, social sciences has been influenced in one way or another by Myrdal and the "American Dilemma." So it wasn't about that, it was about the social engineering of race relations is what Hal demonstrates.

**Augustus Wood:** And you're already seeing roots of that today with a lot of what's happened since the George Floyd murder and also now with the Jacob Blake shooting, we're starting to see the elements of, well, you know, I don't want to use the word prophecy, but what, what Baron saw coming in that you're seeing a lot of these corporations, you're seeing Amazon put, put, "we're fighting for Black lives" on their website at the exact same time that the majority of the Black workers at Amazon are making below living wages and are non-union are fired for complaining about Amazon. You have, you have NBA players withholding their labor. But then they get, they get these very blase and general dedications from these billionaire owners, that they're going to donate some money to a general idea of social justice projects, or putting Black Lives Matter on a basketball court, and investing in a minimum payment to placate the masses and to see if that's the way. So, so yeah, so you're already seeing elements of it seep into society now. So in 10 to 15 years, when it's going to be looked upon as being a more, a more small rate racism, in terms of the explicit nastiness of it and is more so of this corporate liberal understanding of racism, where you still have a disproportionate number of African Americans suffering via the political economy via social conditions and via imperialism, neocolonialism, when all these things are still in the place, this is where Baron's work, is going to come into play and why we have to resurrect and centralize his works on these things. Is that where we're going with this?

**Lou Turner:** That's exactly where. If you just take as two bookends, the piece that I mentioned by Hal where he wrote the "Menace of American Racism" in 1969, and just the book proposal he wrote that same year for the Myrdal book where he lays out in a preliminary way, the what I just, we just discussed about what "American Dilemma" was about, about values and valuations of the American creed. And by the rhetorical manipulation of these values and norms as a way to socially engineer and risk manage racial crises. They go together. The two. One is the, the, the menace of American fascism, the rise of white nationalists, and the other one is about white liberalism, And frankly Black liberalism, as constructing, reconstructing the rhetoric of race to manage racial crises. So there you have it. [LAUGHS] I think, again, I think people will come to Hal's work, and it's a lot of it depends on us getting it published in getting it out there. We're developing a new website, a more public facing website to present his work in this present moment to hopefully, to use your term, to "turn a moment into a movement." And two, have Hal's work intervene in this moment and in this movement because I think it can help a lot of people make sense of the present, of the present moment. I think one way, and I think actually it's a, it's an important way of framing and getting into who Hal Baron was, is really to take it

from the point of view of myself as a scholar in African American Studies, and, and Sundiata. For years, we were familiar with Hal Baron's work. I've taught Hal Baron's work in, not only here at University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, but when I taught at North Central College and that's what race and ethnic relations, sociology. And Sundiata has taught his work, Sundiata's new book that he's completing takes up Hal Baron's work on racial formation and racial transformation theory, which we can talk about. But in all that time, in Black and African American Studies, [LAUGHS] the joke... and the joke was on us... we always thought that Hal was, was a Black man. [LAUGHS] And it wasn't until quite recently, and frankly by accident, I was over in African American Studies, Keeanga Taylor was a postdoc at Afro at the time, this must have been around 2015 or earlier, and just by happenstance, she was on the corner waiting for a bus and I come out of Afro I was on my way to my car to go home, and we just struck up a conversation and I mentioned Hal Baron and said, oh, it's too bad that we have don't have someone like that around these days. I thought he had passed away. She said, what do you mean? I just saw him last month and that was how I found [LAUGHS] out that Hal Baron was still alive. Then a month later, and again, it was happenstance, I work with a group of folks in creating a Black think tank in Chicago, and we were having one of our planning meetings, and this is after the, the encounter with Keeanga, and I mentioned Hal Baron's name again and somebody by the name of Steve Alexander who turns out worked with Hal says, "yeah I, I take Hal to the University of Chicago library at least once a month." And I said, wow, so that was that second confirmation, and then right away I asked Steve could he introduce me to Hal and he said, yeah, I'll be glad to. So we went back and forth with emails. Sundiata wanted to come with us and my wife, Ruby Mendenhall, wanted to come as well. And the three of us went to have lunch one afternoon in Chicago with Hal and his wife Paula Baron, who is has survived him. Hal passed away in January 2017. And it was at that meeting, and we recorded it, the idea came up, I believe was Sundiata's idea, of collecting Hal's work into a book. And since we were saying, that first of all, not a lot of people were up on Hal Baro's work, and number two, like nobody knew, at least in African-American studies where his work is used, knows that you know who he was. And so he agreed. And and so we began working and I guess we workrf for maybe a year and a half with him. I wrote, I think four different discussion papers, which is an idea of Hal's, on each on four of his, of his works as a way of thinking about how to structure the collection. And somewhere around, I guess 2016, we became aware that Hal had cancer and that it was terminal. And it was actually my wife Ruby who said, well, listen, you guys have worked with Hal for a year now or nearly a year, why don't you collect all all of the work that you've done? All of his writings, at least put it between two covers to put it in his hands before he he passes away. And so I worked over the winter break in Afro with the heat off and my my finger's going numb from the cold and working ten hour days to pull documents which were PDFs, which were many of them in the mimeograph, and turning them into Word documents. And I had to actually reformat every paragraph and often every sentence in an article because the transition made it very crazy. So I collected it all, it came to a 500 page document, and I designed a cover, put it on there, and by then Hal was in hospice in his home, was a hospital bed in his living room. And I was, Ruby and I made a trip to Chicago where he again, he was bedridden, and I was able to put the book in his hands and I think it was three days later he passed away.

**Augustus Wood:** Wow.

**Lou Turner:** So may have been more than three days, but he passed away not long after that. So we're able to do that. And then, apparently, he had left instructions to for his his wife, Paula, to turn over his papers to me, to us. And he had an office a block away in a I think it was in an Episcopalian Methodist Church. There was a Latino Workers Center in the church and he had rented an office there where he worked and had files and Paula went and boxed up all of his papers and files. And I, you know, I drove up one day and collected them all. I think it was nine, maybe there's maybe ten boxes of of things or nine boxes initially. And then there were, I think three more boxes later on and brought them down here, and for, I mean, I'm ashamed to say, for nearly a year those boxes were in my basement. And that's, that's unacceptable. But in that time, we were trying to find a an institution, a repository for those documents. That is Paula and I, and we went to Northwestern University, cause Hal had actually been a research associate there after he left the Chicago Urban League. We'll loop back around and talk about that period. And we, we tried to get them to take the papers. They wanted the papers, but they didn't want the second part of what we were proposing, and the second part was what was Northwestern going to come up with? What was going to be their contribution? And what we were asking for was an archival and publication office for to continue to work to pull his papers together for publication, which was the project that Sundiata and I had started. And again, the library wanted the papers, they were committed to that, but the second part, apparently the academic side of Northwestern couldn't get their act together and we'd actually gone up and given a presentation, I have a whole PowerPoint that I gave on Hal's work, but that second part couldn't come together. We did the same thing at UIC, University of Illinois at Chicago and it principally came down to the same thing. The library wanted the papers, but the academic side couldn't get their act together. And so at the time, I confess, the question would obviously come up by now in this story, well how come you to try to do it here? And I guess at the time I wasn't feeling a lot of love from this institution. The last I was looking to do it. But when, you know, things change, and frankly, it was due to the really serious and committed intervention. Dean Kevin Hamilton over here at the College of Fine and Applied Arts. And at that time Professor Hamilton hadn't become dean, but he had been I guess an associate dean at the time, and he made things happen. And both opened up space here for me at Urban Planning and resources. And that changed a lot in both my way of thinking about housing Hal's work here. In the meantime, Hal's Family Foundation called Communitas, I wrote a grant with Kathryn La Barre over at the I School, who became the Project Manager for the Hal Baron archival project. In the first year, we wrote a grant to Communitas and we got funding from Hal's Family Foundation, which funds graduate students to be research assistants on a project. And we had five graduate students our first year, actually six. And we have four graduate students this semester. And we've gotten refunded for a second year now from the foundation. So it's funding that comes in from Hal's Foundation, Family Foundation, to do work on his archives. A tremendous job was done by a PhD graduate student Courtney Richardson over at the I School in, actually doing really great work under the supervision of Katherine La Barre, of creating a an inventory of all of Hal's papers. We have nine boxes there behind me. And she has itemized every piece of paper in there. I mean, so it's, spreadsheets, I mean, just a huge, huge—

**Augustus Wood:** That's yeah, that's amazing, yeah.

**Lou Turner:** Amazing work that she did and it's kind of a, it's what we use for our, for our work. So right now, we have a a four-phase project. The first phase has been completed, delivered, and that was the inventory. The second phase which we're in now is to prepare, what we call manuscript one for publication. And that work was, the first part of that work was done last semester with five graduate students, and that was the manuscript that Sundiata and I had begun to work with Hal on, work is still being done to prepare that manuscript. We're kind of down to the to the last part of that. We hope to have everything completed by November to present to publishers. And we're looking at the University of Chicago Press. Naturally, if that doesn't come about, we'll see if University of Illinois Press shows us some love. And the phase three is on a manuscript that Hal was working on, had worked on for nearly 50 years, it's a major project. And it's in a nearly finished but yet still unfinished state. And it was, it's a manuscript that he had written on Gunnar Myrdal's "An American Dilemma." So in the Making of an American Dilemma, and it's an incredible, incredible work. I mean, it, I claim, and I'll have to prove it obviously, but I claim that it will be a seismic shift in the social sciences about thinking about race relations and race relations social science, as it has been influenced, influenced by Myrdal, the Carnegie Myrdal, of course the Carnegie Foundation funded the project back in the 1940s. The Carnegie Myrdal project. And so Hal has a very original take on as a vast amount of scholarship on American Dilemma. And I think his is original and sometime, and at points consistent with much of the scholarship, but I think he has his own points of departure from the, the overall scholarship. And so that's phase three. The last phase, phase four, is to create a website for the digital presentation of Hal's works, his papers, and his articles as well. We found, since we began this work, documents that no one knew existed for some, for Hal wrote articles on subjects which he never got published. Some of them he didn't even seek to publish, for instance, one of the most important ones we've found is an essay that he wrote in 1968-69 at the time of the presidential campaign involving Richard Nixon and as you will recall, George Wallace. And the title of the paper is the "Menace of American Fascism." That's the title of the paper. And it doesn't look like he got it published or even sought to get it published. And it, it's, it's, it's totally eerie how prescient it is in talking about the rise of white nationalism.

**Augustus Wood:** Yes.

**Lou Turner:** And the whole, you know Nixon's whole southern strategy and Wallace's entry into American and international politics. And it, it has so many echoes of today. It's, like I said, it's eerie. And he wrote this, the end of 1968-69 about that, that campaign. We're still looking for journals to publish it. We tried, I guess about a year ago, and we thought Monthly Review was going to do it, but somehow they dropped the ball and I've sent it out to a number of other journals. I'm very interested in getting it getting it published. The the research project, the Hal Baron archival research project here at the University of Illinois, we have a website, it's a working website. People can visit it, it's mostly where we put up the research assistants' work. The website is at [publish dot illinois dot edu](http://publish.dot.illinois.edu) and then forward slash Hal Baron Project, one word, forward slash. So that's [publish dot illinois dot edu slash Hal Baron project slash](http://publish.dot.illinois.edu). And it's called the Hal Baron Project and it gives, it presents the work that the research assistants have done, have carried out. This is, I'd like to mention one other thing that's very important about the funding for this project, because it has to do with students, and particularly graduate students. Communitas, Hal Baron's Family Foundation has funded this project for pretty much the strict

purpose of funding graduate students to do this work. And most of the money goes to graduate student salaries.

**Augustus Wood:** Yes.

**Lou Turner:** At the livable wage rate that GEO, then again, so we're very-- Hal and Paula were very big on youth becoming intellectual activists around, around issues and so Paula, as Paula would say, he would be very proud of how the funding for the project is being, is being used. So I want to mention that, that's a very big part of the project in terms of funding the work of, of graduate students here at the University of Illinois.

**Augustus Wood:** Oh no, that's definitely important because again, one of the biggest things that we want to put forward is that the intellectual rigor that's needed for understanding or framing this moment, there has to be some type of funding around moving from moment to movement, you know that's always going to be one of the biggest issues we face under struggle is funding, particularly because of the class issue. And that as you mentioned, when you go to some of these so-called liberal institutions that claim that they are, they really want to engage with these ideas and publish these works or support this, then all of a sudden when it's time to ask for the money or when it's time to ask for a serious support, then the emails stop coming and so, yeah. So I so I think that's incredibly a succinct point in understanding why we're talking about Hal today and his work and understanding that he, he he got the point that there has to be a dedication and also a funding element to understanding where we currently are and where we're going to be. You know, that's the kind of scholar, Hal was and the kind of work that he puts out, and I think that's the perfect way to sign off. And again, I think that one of the best parts about starting this podcast series with Hal Baron is that discussions with you in relation to Hal, discussions with Sundiata in relation to Hal, and I was fortunate enough to be able to transcribe a lot of y'all 's interviews, you know, in those early stages, and I really learned a lot about my own personal journey and framing the social conditions of our people and where we're heading. And actually got me more into political economy as my central focus. And so it's a very important project for me personally and also systemically as something that we have to put into the lexicon of any type of struggle, any type of scholarship, what, Hal Baron has been doing. And so I will be definitely a part of that emergence of the work. And we have more like you said to do of researching and talking about it and actually getting it out there. So don't worry, it's gonna be, it's gonna be a long road, but we're going to get it out there because I do believe that you know, Hal Baron played a major part of my dissertation. And as you and Sundiata have as well, is something that has really helped me understand what I'm going to be doing and what the movement could look like if we envision what we want for our future. So again, Professor Lou Turner, thank you so much for joining us on the Hal Baron inaugural episode of "Off-the-Shelf: Revolutionary Readings in Times of Crises." Because we are in a crisis today and we need to understand the crisis to be able to frame the problem for us and the solutions to dealing with said crisis. And so again, thank you, Lou Turner. We'll see you next time on "Off the Shelf," and take care. Power to the people always.