

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

William Banks
AN ORAL HISTORY WITH WILLIAM (BIL) BANKS

Interviews conducted by
Nadine Wilmot
in 2004

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Bil Banks

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Interview History—WILLIAM BANKS

Professor William Banks was interviewed as part of the *African American Faculty and Senior Staff Oral History Project* series. This series of interviews explores the experiences of African American faculty and senior staff at UC Berkeley as part of the broader history of the University of California and its commitment to access and diversity.

Professor Banks joined UC Berkeley's faculty in 1971 in what was then called the Afro American Studies Program. The Program, as part of the Third World College, had been created in response to the Third World Strike of 1969 specifically, and generally, the social movements that defined the 1960's. Banks played a pivotal, and controversial, role in the direction that the Program took as he became its first ladder rank faculty person, then Director of the Program, and guided the program to departmental status in the College of Letters and Science. He was named chair of the department in 1974. In this interview he shares his perspectives on the birth and the evolution of the African American Studies Department, the culture of UC Berkeley as an institution, the social movements of the 1960's and seventies, and higher education in the United States.

Eleven interview sessions stretching over a five-month period from February through May of 2004 were recorded. All interviews took place at Professor Banks' home in Oakland. All interviews were recorded on audio tape and digital video. The recordings were transcribed, audit-edited for clarity and accuracy, and sent to Banks for his review.

This series is grounded in the premise that higher education is one of the primary strategies for gaining social equality--access to employment and income--for historically disadvantaged communities. Moreover, the University, comprised of its students and faculty and administration, with all of its intellectual and financial resources operates as a critical touchstone in processes of systemic social change. Therefore the university functions not simply as an educational institution, but also as a significant site of past, present, and future potential for imagining and crafting opportunity for ethnic and racial groups formerly excluded from higher education. This project recognizes that the University of California, as California's premier public educational institution, plays a significant role in the socio-economic mobility of all of California's residents. The story that we hope will emerge from this project is a story of California – its people and one of its most important public institutions.

This interview was conducted under the auspices of the Regional Oral History Office. The Regional Oral History Office was established in 1954 to augment through recorded oral memoirs the Library's materials on the history of California and the West. Copies of all interviews are available for research use in the Bancroft Library and in the UCLA Department of Special Collections. The office is under the direction of Richard Cándida Smith, Director and the administrative direction of Charles B. Faulhaber, James D. Hart Director of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Nadine Wilmot, Editor/Interviewer
Regional Oral History Office
Berkeley, California
November, 2005

Interview 1: February 18, 2004

[Begin Audio File 1]

01-00:00:29

Wilmot:

Good morning.

01-00:00:30

Banks:

Good morning.

01-00:00:31

Wilmot:

Interview 1, Professor Bil Banks. February 18, 2004. We usually start off our interviews with where and when were you born.

01-00:00:44

Banks:

I was born in Archibald Hospital in Thomasville, Georgia, September 22, 1943. A hospital that is still standing. I managed to visit it a couple of years ago, and it's still there in Thomasville, Georgia. They don't have a wing named after me, but the hospital is still there.

01-00:01:14

Wilmot:

Did your mother ever tell you the story of your birth?

01-00:01:17

Banks:

No—except it was a difficult birth. A very difficult birth, and as a consequence she was never able to have any more children. That was that. At the time, my father was abroad in the military and we had been, or she had been deposited there in Georgia with her parents while he fought for democracy. I don't recall any stories about the first year as such. But I do know that we were there in a place outside of Thomasville called Beachton, the family home, where the family had lived for some fifty years before that.

01-00:02:15

Wilmot:

This is your mother's family?

01-00:02:17

Banks:

Yes.

01-00:02:17

Wilmot:

So can you tell me—how far back do you know your mother's family? Do you know the history of your mother's family?

01-00:02:23

Banks:

Well, I can go back a bit—I've met my mother's grandmother, Fanny, who was an ex-slave, and through recollections I've heard about a number of other people who were people of note. A midwife—there's a midwife on my father's side as well—but a pretty well known midwife. My mother's grandfather was legendary for his laziness. Apparently he was the laziest person in the history of the state. Again, by folklore. I don't know how much of this is true, but that's family legend.

I knew my grandfather's sister very well. She lived near the family estate or farm, if you will. Again, part of the sort of extended family from my mother: baseball player Jackie Robinson who was, I think, a third cousin of my mother. Part of that family there in Grady County—the Waldens. That came much later, of course, in the forties and fifties when, “Oh, yeah, do you know Jackie?” Jackie Roosevelt, as they called him in Georgia. By this time his family had gone to Pasadena and on to bigger and brighter things. But that's about it, as far as any direct recollections.

I'm trying to think of anything that's significant—my grandfather stands out head and shoulders during that period, but as far as going back further, I can't. I knew my great-grandmother. I have pictures of her, incidentally. For what it's worth, her mother was, I guess they'd say now, “mixed”—the daughter of a slave master at the time. There are family reunions that occur like every other year where much of this is talked about. I've gone to maybe two. I didn't go to the last one, but I've gone to maybe two over the last five years. Not a lot of detail. It's more post-grandfather, my grandfather, in that direction, rather than further back. That's one of the things I plan to do with my leisure time—to dig a bit more and find out more about what's there.

01-00:05:53

Wilmot:

What's your grandfather's name on your mother's side?

01-00:05:56

Banks:

Arthur Thomas Bryant.

01-00:05:59

Wilmot:

Bryant?

01-00:06:00

Banks:

Yes, B-r-y-a-n-t, as in Kobe Bryant.

01-00:06:09

Wilmot:

Are there other family names on your mother's side?

01-00:06:15

Banks:

My mother's maiden name was Bush. Hattie Bush. I'm sorry. Not Hattie Bush. Her mother's name was Bush—Nora Bush. Bush-Bryant union.

01-00:06:32

Wilmot:
Union?

01-00:06:37

Banks:

I mean, the families coming together through marriage, yeah.

01-00:06:40

Wilmot:

Okay. What kinds of occupations are in your immediate family? What kind of work? Is this the grandfather who was lazy, or no?

01-00:06:51

Banks:

No, that was my great grandfather. He was legendary.

01-00:06:56

Wilmot:

Okay. So what kinds of occupations—what did your grandfather do, for example.

01-00:07:00

Banks:

My grandfather was as resourceful, hardworking, and as bright a man as I think I've ever experienced. Certainly that's my recollection today. He did everything that needed to be done. He was a logger. Managed to roam the forest, cut down logs, take them to sawmills. He did that. He managed to acquire—again, over time—several hundred acres of land that's still with the family. And each season, he grew okra, cotton, and other crops. He was as active politically, as African Americans could be. Active in the church. It amazed me when I learned, oh, I guess about twenty years ago, that he was actually elected, or probably appointed, to a school board in Grady County back then. We're talking about the deep, deep South. But he had tremendous respect from everybody in the community. They called him Doc. Probably third grade education, fourth grade education maybe, but he read widely. He was a big fan of the Kennedys.

01-00:08:46

Wilmot:

Okay. We were talking about your grandfather, Arthur Bryant.

01-00:08:49

Banks:

Yes. Through hard work and, I guess, honesty, he managed to accumulate a great deal of land from many whites. That's the only way you could accumulate land, from whites in that area who had run upon bad times. He was a great saver. Plus, he had eight boys, and that helps when you're farming. I mean, he had a labor force there—captive labor force, if you will—that managed to do a great deal with the land that he had. The trees, the farming, and so forth. So people would fall upon hard times, particularly in the Depression, post-Depression, area. He was always there with, "Okay, I'll do this if you give me this." You know, he just managed miraculously. I wish I could have been there to just have an ear into what he did in order to move ahead.

01-00:10:03

Wilmot:

In terms of acquiring that land, did that garner him resentment in that community, or did it garner him respect?

01-00:10:13

Banks:

It garnered him respect. Even when I was old enough to go back there after he passed, when I went back and asked about my grandfather, I heard nothing but unblemished regard for him and his stature. Very honest man. I know this is hyperbole, but I just never heard anybody say anything critical about him. I mean, you'd think that would engender resentment or jealousy, or he'd cheated somebody out of this or that. But that was never the case.

01-00:10:51

Wilmot:

And I ask specifically from the perspective of looking at black-white relations in that era.

01-00:11:00

Banks:

Right. Somehow he managed to negotiate that. [laughs] His next-door neighbor owned a store. An old community store. It was owned by a white guy named Cone. I remember it so well because I had visions of, when Emmett Till—that's later. Anyway, the guy, the owner, drank, and the store was about to get repossessed, along with the land adjacent to it, and my grandfather rather, bought the store, and basically leased it back to the former owner. The guy was happy because Grand Daddy saved his livelihood. Things like that. Now, how the details of that—I really don't know. But this was a fact. Like I said, I don't know, never met anybody in my life with that kind of unvarnished reputation.

I was a favorite. He had eight—actually eleven children—and they all, with a couple of exceptions, had children, so there were lots of grandkids. But I was head and shoulders his favorite. I guess he thought I was smart. I remember once a piglet, or a baby pig, fell into an abandoned well out in the farmland. How do you get a pig out of a well? He knew. He lowered me down in a bucket, and it was my job—I guess I was maybe seven, eight years old—to pick up the pig, and they pulled it up. And he did that. My mother was furious. I mean, she threatened to leave. “Just what is wrong with you, da da da!” It was a big joke to him. You know, macho, “makes a man of him,” and so forth. She says she didn't speak to him for about a week after that. Because it was clearly dangerous. I mean, I wouldn't do that now, and I'm pretty wild myself. But he had that kind of confidence in me.

01-00:13:35

He called me Sluggo, which is from the character in the funny papers: there's Nancy and Sluggo. He liked the Kennedy family, John Kennedy, et cetera. He thought that because they were so rich, they didn't have to steal. He distrusted the *nouveau riche*. If they've got enough money and they don't have to steal, maybe they can do something for people and so forth. He was a Republican. A registered Republican. But political parties were a little different then. Yeah, he was a towering figure. Of his kids, I think one, two, three, four—four of the eleven finished college, four-year colleges. A number of the others went in the military and got careers and did other things. He was a big believer in education and so forth. He was just a sort of beacon for me, certainly in those early days.

01-00:14:55

Wilmot:

Did you spend a lot of time with your mother's family?

01-00:14:57

Banks:

Summers. That was the arrangement. Mom and Dad, I was with them all year, but every summer for about a month, month and a half, they'd ship me out to get peace of mind. I was the only child, incidentally. That helps. "Gee, phew!" They'd send me down and he'd work the hell out of me and a cousin who was a peer, my age. Six months younger. It was something like fun. The first year was maybe fun, but as soon as we got there, a day after we got there, we were in the fields working, doing whatever. It was fun. I mean, it wasn't exactly—we were the boss's kids so it wasn't like we were dogged like everybody else. We'd be water boys. Instead of picking okra or cotton, we'd bring water to people, and it was kind of youthful stuff, but it was work. You had to do it. I mean, it just never occurred to me that people didn't have to work hard all of their lives.

On Saturdays, we'd have a treat. He had a truck, a logging truck. I haven't seen these in years, but basically it was a flatbed truck that people put logs on to take to the lumber yards. My cousin and I would go to town, the town of Thomasville, about seven or eight miles away. We'd get on the back of that truck and we'd go to town. I had an uncle who ran a poolroom. We'd go to the poolroom. Everybody knew us as Doc's grandkids, we were prime time. Top of the social ladder, such as it was. They would give us sodas—grape was always my favorite, I'm not sure why. I don't like grape soda now, but that was always it. We'd walk the streets of the small black business community there in Thomasville. There was a pharmacist there, Dockett's Pharmacy. The poolroom. And a number of little shops that we'd go in and out of. Twenty-five cents to last us all day, but we made it. That was a highlight.

01-00:17:30

Had another uncle that worked in a bakery store not far from the poolroom. We could always count on him for some, probably not "day-old", but "week-old" donuts [laughs] that he could fumble out to us. That's the way it was. Yeah. Good ole bad days.

01-00:17:54

Wilmot:

Was your family, your mother's family, always in Georgia?

01-00:17:57

Banks:

Yes. Far as I know, I don't know of another location. I never heard of any other place.

01-00:18:06

Wilmot:

But it was your grandfather's generation when the family started acquiring land?

01-00:18:11

Banks:

Yes. My grandfather's generation, yes. Before that, no, because his father was, as my Mom says, "not too industrious." That's how it happened. I can't think of any other occupation or characteristics. Plumbers or—what could you do? Everybody was a laborer, or a farm laborer in

one form or fashion, during that time. Grandfather knew that land was the thing. This was the key to the kingdom. He managed to acquire the land, and was a great farmer. And honest. He couldn't afford mules. I remember he had oxes. You go to the forest, you cut a tree, how do you get that tree out of the forest? Well, in those days it was the ox. Tied a tree to a couple of oxes. There was some intermediate contraption, and you'd drag them out of the forest. It's stuff like that I saw firsthand. That's what he did. I always was impressed with that.

01-00:19:28

Wilmot:

So your mother's name is Hattie Bush or Hattie Bryant?

01-00:19:34

Banks:

My mother's maiden name was Hattie Bryant, and her mother's maiden name was Nora Bush.

01-00:20:00

Wilmot:

Was Nora Bush also from the Georgia area?

01-00:20:02

Banks:

From that area, yeah. I don't know as much about her family. I did know—her mother must've died when I was maybe ten or eleven years old. Granny. Again, I have pictures as well. She smoked a pipe, I remember that, and chewed tobacco. And she'd spit all the time. That was always an environmentally unsafe region to be around. But I don't remember much about her as a person. I was young. I remember asking Mom a lot about her, but I didn't get the impression she knew very much other than, you know, the life of a woman who was the wife of a farmer, hardworking, Southern black laborer. But as far as anything distinctive, I just can't bring it up.

01-00:21:12

Wilmot:

We could turn now to your father's family. Did you spend time also with your father's family.

01-00:21:19

Banks:

Not nearly as much.

01-00:21:20

Wilmot:

Actually, I should start with your father's name.

01-00:21:24

Banks:

Yes. My father's name was Banks, W.S.M. Banks. He's Junior. His father was W.S.M. Banks.

01-00:21:30

Wilmot:

I didn't realize you were a Third.

01-00:21:32

Banks:

Third, yes. The Third. Now, his place of origin was Mississippi, Amite County, Mississippi. Again, they were farmers. Tight-knit community, people helped each other build houses. They had a house there and they planned to spend the rest of their lives there.

I should mention, it's relevant here, that my grandmother was a striver. She went to a normal school, which was the top of the line for most black people in those days, and got—I guess it was the equivalent of a junior high school education, which qualified her to teach in other black schools. She went to Paddyrock School. That was the name of the “college” as it was called. But at one point, the house burned down, and Dad today—I mean as recent as last week—speaks in some wonderment about just what happened. He's very conscious of land. Because when that house burnt down, they had to leave, and he never knew what had happened. He was just a boy, he couldn't do very much about it. But in those days, legal protections and so forth, you don't pay taxes on the first, you bring in a check on the third, too late, it's been sold. He believes that that's what happened, but, you know, we're talking about early 1920s. You know, there was very little recourse.

01-00:23:26

Wilmot:

He thought it was sabotage?

01-00:23:27

Banks:

Yes. He thought somebody—

01-00:23:30

Wilmot:

Or arson?

01-00:23:28

Banks:

Yes, that it was arson. But he couldn't prove it, and if you asked too many questions, you have to leave town. So they were fearful. They then left for Louisiana. I think they moved first to a small town and looked for work. What happened was the usual pattern. The male leaves and tries to find a job and as soon as he does, sends for the family. It was that kind of pattern. He did this, and ended up in New Orleans. He was a laborer. My grandfather was a laborer, and my grandmother ended up doing basically domestic work for families there in New Orleans, and she did some teaching. Apparently there was a small school, a black church school, where she could make a dollar a week, teaching in addition to whatever else. Again, she was highly educated for the time in the South. That's where he grew up. He has three brothers and a sister. All the brothers are dead and the sister is in a rest home. He was the second oldest boy. All the boys pitched in to help with the family.

During the Depression it was a very tough time. He gets teary now when he thinks about it. I think he's written about his dad in the memoir. You know, here's a guy that had worked hard all of his life. He was a longshoreman. Every day he'd go down to the New Orleans Port looking for work, but during the Depression years there was no work. All the black people who couldn't get work, chipped in enough money to get together and get some wine, and they would just drink. At

some point he become an alcoholic. Whether that label applies in this case, I don't know. He certainly abused alcohol. My father saw that as really destroying his father, and he was intelligent enough to understand, or to make connections between economic oppression and the fact that this was happening to his father because he could not get a job. He didn't have anything else to do. So he was making these kinds of connections then. These weren't evil or trifling people; they were folks placed in a situation where things unfolded that way.

Dad was a very good student in school. A leader by any stretch of the imagination. He won everything. Hardworking, but had to work 24/7 literally—he and his brothers—to help support the family. He tells me about, they had to move every two months to stay ahead of the landlord. That's what you had to do. You just move to another location and didn't tell them. When the rent's due, you move. That was the name of that game.

01-00:26:54

My father did well in school. I'm trying to think of some other grandfather-y kinds of things. They were, of course, active in the church, and the scandal of the family was that my aunt—his baby sister—married a minister. She was like 18 and he was like 62, and that was cause for scandal. My grandmother hated it. Who am I to say? [laughs] But that was a big family scandal. They had a boy who was about my age, a little younger, and he died about two years later, and all's well that ends well, maybe. But they lived in New Orleans all this time. A longshoreman until he retired. Heavy—very active in formal union politics, the black union, the National Longshoremen's Union. And she was very active as well. Was very, very proud.

In 1959 I went to New Orleans. I went to college in New Orleans and if I had let her, she would have come to every class with me. She would have been there [applauds] cheering. I mean, she just had that vicarious sense of accomplishment and so forth.

I spent time there. Not as much as she would have liked, but certainly a couple of times a month I'd go and have dinner and visit. If there was something special at school, I'd always make sure she could attend. But she would have caught the bus and come downtown just consistently.

01-00:28:51

Wilmot:

She was in your corner.

01-00:28:52

Banks:

In my corner. I remember going to church with her one day, and these were—I mean, it was like total Sunday. You go at ten and maybe by four you're out, and that was just way over the top as far as I was concerned. I had veered off in a different direction like that, but you know, you do it. That's the way it is. She was very proud of me. Every time, she'd ask me to stand and, you know, "His father is Dr."—my father had a degree, and so, "he's this, he's this. He's at Dillard, studying to be this, this, this, or this." I'd do that, and I'm crazy shy. I'm shy, period. And that sense of putting yourself out there, it grated me. But the idea is you're doing it for someone else, you're making her happy, so that's the way it goes.

01-00:30:02

Wilmot:

Can you tell me your grandparents' names on your father's side?

01-00:30:07

Banks:

Yes.

01-00:30:07

Wilmot:

I know he's William Banks I.

01-00:30:11

Banks:

Taylor. She's a Taylor. Adeline Taylor. Green Taylor. Well, I mean—yes, Taylor. And he, of course, was Banks.

01-00:30:28

Wilmot:

Her name, did you say, was Adeline?

01-00:30:30

Banks:

Adeline. I'm sorry. First name Adeline, last name Taylor. Her mother was a midwife. Another aunt, I think, was a seamstress of sorts. A person who made clothes for everybody. You had things broken down like that. You didn't necessarily make a living doing it, but people would get a reputation: "he's a carpenter" or "he's a this or this or this." That's what I know about my grandparents. Big believers—particularly my grandmother—in education, schooling. Very self-conscious and proud to see her kids doing well, and really bragged about her sons, her grandsons. Very much into that. And, you know, that's cool. That's cool, yeah.

01-00:31:33

Wilmot:

I wanted to ask you to tell me a little bit about your parents occupations. If you could just talk a little bit about that.

01-00:31:43

Banks:

My mother, the only occupation she ever had was a teacher. School teacher. Elementary school teacher. In Georgia in those days, after two years of, again, normal college, you could teach school, and she did that. She finished two years of normal college in a place called Albany, Georgia. That was another thing that was critical about my grandfather on her side. He was a big believer in education. You know, the farmer's daughter effect. You send your daughters to school and you make your sons work. That's the sociological pattern during those days. If you're a woman, you go to college, you can teach. Maybe become a nurse. But if you're a male and you go to college, there's nothing you can do. Male teacher? What's that? Anyway, it obviously has changed, but "the farmer's daughter effect," that's how it's described in the literature. So he pushed his daughters—my mother and her older sister—as soon as they finished high school they would go on to college. No working in the fields and all that kind of stuff for them, whereas the

boys had to stay home and do that. So they took advantage of that, and both got two-year degrees and started teaching. That was that.

01-00:33:01

My dad's side of the story is more interesting and is fully accounted in his memoir. They couldn't afford to go to college, but he happened to meet a college official who said, "Look, if you can pay a dollar, we'll sign you up and give you a job to work your way through." So all he had to pay to get into college was a dollar. They used to call the dean or whatever, "Dollar Bill". So you'd go and work hard to get good grades, and each semester you'd pay a dollar and you'd do it. And he did it. Did well. Came under the influence of the famous St. Clair Drake, who much later ended up at Stanford. He met Horace Mann Bond at Dillard. We crossed paths years later when Julian and I were peers and lived in their house. Or bought their house. Anyway, that's jumping ahead.

A number of people on the faculty there saw him as having talent and thought maybe he should do this or this, but he didn't have any money. This is 1937 in the throes of the Depression. So after finishing college, despite all of this talent, there was nothing for him to do but go out and just become another laborer. But he managed to stay in touch with Horace Mann Bond, and Bond turned him on to some kind of graduate program at—what's that state school?

01-00:34:48

Wilmot:

I think Iowa State.

01-00:34:49

Banks:

Iowa State, yeah. Basically it was a kind of agrarian cooperative program up at Iowa State, and it was free. It was a chance for him to go up there, so he went there and spent a year or two—this is obviously before I was born—and got a masters from there. What do you do? You come back to—no. At that point, Horace Mann Bond had gone to Fisk, or was at Fisk, and found an opportunity for him. "If you can get here, I'll give you an assistantship, a graduate assistantship." So he somehow managed to scrape up money. There are all kinds of stories about how he got a bus fare to Fisk. But anyway he went to Fisk, and Bond had set him up to live with a Jewish family. You know, he was the house boy, basically, for this wealthy Jewish family over in—I forget the neighborhood in Nashville.

01-00:36:02

Wilmot:

Which neighborhood in Nashville? Did you say?

01-00:36:06

Banks:

I can't remember. If I heard it I'd remember it, but upper class. I mean, I imagine they had little Jewish enclaves there, but I don't remember the name. He did live with them and that was room and board, and they paid his tuition so that's the deal. He did, I guess, fairly well at Fisk and got interested in a formal way in sociology. That was his background with Drake. He did his honors thesis with Drake on longshoremen, black longshoremen. Right down his alley.

01-00:36:56

Wilmot:

Do you have a copy of that thesis?

01-00:36:58

Banks:

No. I've looked for it all through his stuff. I still think there's some other places to look, but believe me, I've looked.

01-00:37:08

Wilmot:

Is it archived anywhere? It would be such an amazing resource for people who are doing that kind of work.

01-00:37:15

Banks:

You know the story of poor black colleges in the 1930s. I would have a better shot at finding it by going through his stuff, and I have done it about as systematically as I can for now. All of his stuff is in storage, and I just haven't had the weeks it would take to go through all of it.

01-00:37:35

Wilmot:

But he says he has it still?

01-00:37:36

Banks:

He thinks he does.

01-00:37:37

Wilmot:

Oh, good.

01-00:37:38

Banks:

He thinks he does, so who knows? At any rate, he went to Fisk and got into formal sociology and worked under Charles Johnson, another giant of sociology, twentieth-century black sociology. And Horace Mann Bond. Met a number of people, other young black aspiring scholars who he maintained relationships with throughout this life. Then when he finished Fisk, he got in touch with Horace Mann Bond again. He was a sort of a Svengali, a mentor. He said, "Are you interested in a job?" "Yeah." There were no jobs for black people, so here was this small black college in Georgia, "You can come down here and work if you're willing to do this." So he, of course, got on a train.

That was his first job. It was an all-purpose job. I mean, they were heavily into a sort of Booker Washington cooperative philosophy. You grew your food, all that kind of stuff. At this time he was sort of a nickel-dime intellectual, trained to think sociologically. But, you know, you do what you have to do. It was a job, and jobs were hard to find, so that's what he did. He worked in the cooperative movement.

01-00:39:21

One other thing that's important around this time, and I could go back and try to identify specific years later, but he got involved in the American Friends Service Committee. He was recruited for their summer camps. These were Friends, American Friends, Quakers, and they had summer camps that emphasized cooperative politics, economics, and so forth. This was his first experience with inter-racial anything, and he was—you know, he could put two words together and he was a hard worker, and every summer he got invited to one of these camps. That made a tremendous impression on him. To this day, he insists on giving big contributions to American Friends Service Committee, and he's always done that. They expressed confidence in him as a leader; they emphasized to him that: "You can do it." If your first contact with white people happens to be affirmative like that—and I don't want to reduce it to only that, but I know they were very supportive of him and he excelled in a number of situations. For two summers he'd go to their camp in Pennsylvania, another one in Tennessee. And, he no doubt heard some left-wing stuff, and that just sort of helped him make some sense out of race at a personal and class level as opposed to just "us-them" kind of thing. It was a key experience for him.

01-00:41:08

Let's see. After the war, he went to Fort Valley State University, and, like I said, he was hired ostensibly to teach social science or social studies, or whatever it was called, but he just got drawn off into all these other things which—that's the way it was. Around this time he met my mother, who had come to Fort Valley. She'd had this two-year degree but wasn't satisfied with that, and had come to Fort Valley to get a four-year degree. They met, hooked it up, and he was talking about this last week, when we spent some time together. She was a student. You can't do this any more. If you're a student, I can't hit on you. But in those days, that's where professors met the eligibles. I mean, that was a good eligibility pool. At least you're in college and you want to be something, da, da, da! He was impressed. Again, just this week, he was saying, "Well, you know, I'd give her this extra reading and she would read it. I thought, she wants to be something." You know, he says it just kind of unfolded from there. So they got married—

01-00:42:25

Wilmot:

He writes about their meeting in his memoir as well. He writes about their meeting in the classroom, and how she was the one who challenged him in class.

01-00:42:34

Banks:

Right. Right.

01-00:42:35

Wilmot:

And so at first he was a little taken aback, and then he was like, "Whoa!" Interesting.

01-00:42:39

Banks:

"This might be the real deal." [laughs] So around that time, he went to war and all that kind of stuff. He was drafted and the rise was meteoric because he was smart and hardworking and wise. More importantly than smart, he was wise. He went through basic training, and everything, Officers Candidate School, he did all that kind of stuff. He ended up going overseas, and was stationed in Italy. At that point, my mother went back to Georgia to stay with her family. They

didn't have all these lucrative veterans' benefits. I mean, she had to go where she could live. I remember going back there for a while.

01-00:43:41

Wilmot:

You were how old at that time?

01-00:43:44

Banks:

Maybe three-ish, four-ish, something like that.

01-00:43:49

Wilmot:

And you stayed there for about a year?

01-00:43:50

Banks:

Yeah. I'm guessing. I was born in '43 and the war was over in '45 so I'm thinking like that, yeah. That was that. The war was over. We can talk about the war stuff now or later, but after the war he came back and resumed his career at Fort Valley for a few years and got connected to a possibility of PhD, graduate work in sociology at Ohio State. In large part, through Bond again. And he did that. Tried to do the first two years during the summers but he realized he would never get through, so he just packed up the family. It was amazing. He just packed up the family and moved to Columbus, and kicked butt. He was the second person in his graduating class in sociology. I have a picture around, I'll have to dig it out. It was amazing. You talk about—graduation ceremonies at a football field. There's a sea of white faces, and here's this black cat. He got his PhD, I think, in 1951. He finished. All his counterparts were getting these offers at Indiana University, at Washington University, and so forth. His dissertation was published in the *American Sociological Review*, which is the top journal in the field. He did a study on Gunnar Myrdal, which I use in my work, and I'll quote it next week in my talk at the law school. But, you know, when you're a black PhD in 1951, what do you do? Where do you go? You go to a black school. He had these connections with Fort Valley and Horace Mann Bond so he went back there, and stayed there forever. At one point he could have gone, could have been a dean some place else, at Dillard. But his career sort of moved towards the big idea: service, as opposed to scholarship. Here's a guy who'd done that, but the reward system at Fort Valley wasn't based upon high-powered scholarship. You'd teach and get people who were barely educated—not “barely”; that's an overstatement—but you're a teacher first. A scholar when you get a chance.

That can be said about Horace Mann Bond himself. I know a lot about him. We came back and lived in Bond's house. Dad eventually bought it from him. No, that's not true. The house that he was living in. He didn't buy it. It was probably a college house, but I know we lived there. Julian was sort of a contemporary of mine, a couple of years older. We knew each other as younger people, and I stayed in touch. We've gone in different directions, but the families certainly know each other. I knew his mother Julia up until about two years ago. I think she might have passed. They were very good friends of the family. She and my parents stayed in touch even after Mom got Alzheimer's. So there's a kind of networking, if you will. The classic sort.

01-00:48:08

Wilmot:

It's very important.

01-00:48:09

Banks:

Yes. It couldn't have happened otherwise, because every—he understands that. I mean, towards the end he says, “Look, a whole lot of people helped me. If it weren't for this, this, this”—and he just beat that through my head. “You didn't do it all alone. Always, if you get an opportunity to open a door for someone else, do it.” And that's been sort of a guiding principle in my life. Yes.

01-00:48:48

Wilmot:

I have a question for you.

01-00:48:49

Banks:

Sure.

01-00:48:50

Wilmot:

Actually, it looks like you're about to say something else. Were you thinking—?

01-00:48:52

Banks:

No. Go ahead.

01-00:48:54

Wilmot:

So this is where you grew up, then. In Fort Valley, Georgia.

01-00:49:00

Banks:

Basically in Georgia, yeah. I spent some time in Columbus, Ohio when he was in grad school. Two or three years.

01-00:49:07

Wilmot:

But really where you grew up is in this Fort Valley area in Georgia.

01-00:49:11

Banks:

Georgia, yeah.

01-00:49:11

Wilmot:

Okay. Well, what was that community like?

01-00:49:16

Banks:

It was a college town. The main employer, other than the college, was Bluebird Bus Company. They're still in business. The school buses that you see, even today, I'll bet 90 percent of them

were made there in Fort Valley. People who owned the company were rabid, racist guys. I'll show you how things operate. The owner Luce was a big-time racist, kept the unions and other businesses out of town. However, when the time came to integrate—busing; school busing—he was all for that because that meant he would make a fortune selling busses.

But back to the black community. It was a very integrated community. I mean, there was no—

01-00:50:08

Wilmot:

I guess that should be my first question. Was this community black or white or integrated?

01-00:50:13

Banks:

Oh. Integrated with black people. There was total segregation. Total segregation. I didn't speak to a white person till I was in college. That's not literally true,—not total segregation. You give them your money in stores, but I had no white friends or no white people I looked up to, or white anything. We just lived in a segregated world. That's the way it was. But as far as black people, it was pretty integrated. That is, here's my father, a guy with a PhD, and I'm hanging out with people whose fathers are laborers. Social integration, that's what I mean. Class integration. There were no distinctions that certain people are better than other people. My father wouldn't have allowed it, in my own case. Everybody went to the same school. Until I was age 7 I went to a one-room schoolhouse about as big as this living room. All three grades were there. And it was the best school.

01-00:51:19

Wilmot:

Until you were seven?

01-00:51:20

Banks:

Until third grade.

01-00:51:21

Wilmot:

Third grade.

01-00:51:27

Banks:

Yes. And it was the best school. It was what they called a demonstration school. Just like this college, Fort Valley State College runs a school and people can come to that school, as opposed to the public school, normal public school. It's simply a matter of space. Most of the kids there might have been the sons or daughters of college kids—not kids but parents who were secretaries or janitors. I don't really remember now how they were selected. I've wondered about that often. It was a one-room schoolhouse. I remember having to make a fire, in a big stove. All the classic "poor me, rags-to-riches" stuff. Been there and done that. That's the way it was, and I don't think anything of it. But early on I was probably a very difficult student. I liked to read. Let me qualify this a bit. Say, from first grade to third grade, most people thought I was smart and I liked to read. I read a lot. I was never a particularly good student. That was somewhat constrained. I guess I would say—I'm not sure all the reasons, but I never got the super grades that other kids

got. Certainly those first few years, the next three years, the next three years—on and on. That wasn't the deal.

01-00:53:16

My parents never pushed me. I mean, sometimes I think to my regret, but they never were “do this!” My dad was horribly busy and my mom was working too. But they didn't instill in me that kind of discipline that I wish somebody had put in place. I was extremely confident in myself, I could do whatever I wanted to do if I needed to, and I'll show you how this works out later on. But that day-to-day kind of dum-de-dum-de-dum-de-dum, I mean, I was just interested in everything. So many things. Political stuff. My dad made me read the paper, the *Atlanta Constitution*, every day. He'd get up in the morning, “Let's see what the white folks did last night.” That means read the paper. Read, read. Become aware of the world around you. That's just the world I grew up in. I'm sure the teachers were terrible, in their way, but that's life. That's what people had to work with. Or, what I had to work with.

I started the regular public schools, I remember about two or three teachers that I thought might have been good. The rest were just—were not good. And I challenged them, and so forth. I was difficult. What goes along with this too, is I was very young. I finished high school when I was fifteen, so that means that I was younger, maybe two or three years younger, than everybody else. My own immaturity came out. Some of that undoubtedly was a factor in the crazy stuff I did growing up. Wanting to be older than I was. But, you know, the academic thing—people knew, my peers thought I was a good student, my teachers thought I was a good student. Never “applied” myself, that was the code word. But the teachers weren't that good, and I didn't apply myself. On and on and on, you know, that's the way it was. All this time, my parents were very much into me reading. They pushed books at me. Churchill. I was reading really rich stuff—Sophocles—I was doing stuff far beyond my years. But they just never really pushed about grades and stuff. That's the way it was.

01-00:56:18

I was popular. My senior year, I was an athletic star. Before that, I was a pretty popular guy. Had my share of things.

01-00:56:48

Wilmot:

I have a question for you.

01-00:56:49

Banks:

Sure.

01-00:56:52

Wilmot:

What was the name of your high school, where you were at school.

01-00:56:55

Banks:

Henry Alexander Hunt High School. Henry Alexander Hunt was a famous educator, protégé of Booker T. Washington, who gravitated towards the W.E.B. Du Bois school of thought back in

the period. That kind of academic study. Started out with Washington and ventured over into the Du Bois sphere. Anybody else but Henry Alexander Hunt—

01-00:57:25

Wilmot:

Do you mean he started off with Booker T. Washington and ventured over into the Du Bois sphere?

01-00:57:31

Banks:

Camp, yeah.

01-00:57:31

Wilmot:

Okay. Got you.

01-00:57:36

Banks:

Why don't you ask some—I don't want to go into too many spur directions. Impose some order on me.

01-00:57:41

Wilmot:

Okay. Who were your good friends in high school? Are there any kind of connections on that level that stand out to you?

01-00:57:51

Banks:

Good friends, let's see. Well, my best friend in the early years—meaning before eighth grade—a guy Carl Holsley, who now is a—you know, a profile in courage. He lives in Detroit. An anesthesiologist. A diabetic. Lost two legs, blind. We stay in touch. He went to Morehouse College, the year behind me. He went to Morehouse and I went to Dillard. Later finished University of Michigan med school, and he was my best friend. We hung out together until about the seventh grade, when his family moved to Michigan. So he was clearly my best friend. After that, a range of people. None—I liked to hang around with smartish people. Not bookish smart. I never had any middle class friends, any friends who were middle class. I guess I was near the top as far as class in that community, but all my friends were more from the underside. I don't think on purpose, but it's just that I wasn't in a kind of rat race that a lot of the middle class, kind of bourgeois students were into. I always wanted to do things differently and all that kind of stuff.

01-00:59:27

Wilmot:

Was that something that you kind of excused yourself from? Or is it something that your parents helped you say, "You don't need to be hung up on all this kind of—"?

01-00:59:37

Banks:

Well, they weren't. See, given my dad's history, he wasn't like that. I mean, he knew where he came from. With his kind of history, there are no assumptions of privilege. You don't assume you're privileged. You just say, "Hey, look. We're not for this, this, this. This is what I have and

you don't look down on people." You don't feel that you have to be—to play piano. I mean, I did that. We had a Thompson's piano. Got to third grade. Okay, that's cool. Like church. That's another example. My father [coughs]

01-01:00:16

Wilmot:

Want some water?

01-01:00:18

Banks:

No. I'll get some. We'll stop in a second just to get some water. My father, for instance, taught Sunday school for maybe twenty-five, thirty years. How did he end up doing that? Because he saw a captive audience. This is adult class in the Baptist Church. He wasn't Baptist or anything like that, but he says, "Hey, this is where to reach people. This is a way to move things forward." And he was a political—the civil rights movement, during all that time, he was doing his thing. You know, okay, well. Connecting the two ways, very creative. I always respected that. And with me, the religious thing, I chose to join the Episcopal Church.

01-01:01:07

Wilmot:

When you were—?

01-01:01:08

Banks:

I guess maybe eight or nine or something.

01-01:01:12

Wilmot:

Wow!

01-01:01:13

Banks:

Yeah.

01-01:01:14

Wilmot:

You were eight or nine and you made a choice to join a different—

01-01:01:18

Banks:

A different church, yeah.

01-01:01:18

Wilmot:

—different congregation and denomination than your parents.

01-01:01:22

Banks:

Yep!

01-01:01:23

Wilmot:
Uh-huh.

01-01:01:24

Banks:
Still good reason. That's where all the pretty girls were. Pretty girls were in the Episcopal Church and—but they let me. “All right.” I went to church. I was an acolyte. I did the whole nine yards. One of my best friends is now a priest in Philly. Isaac Miller. I did that. I stayed with it. I got a good—an excellent—grounding in Christianity. Just as you learn about it. It was not a heavy duty—I mean, we said grace before meals all the time. We do it now. So there was that grounding, but as far as a particular expression, “Okay, that's where you want to go. That's where I go.” No big deal. Yeah. That was religious foray. I did summer camps with the church and so forth, and I was active in it. One of my good friends of those summers was—you'd know, you've heard of the singer Lionel Richie?

01-01:02:35

Wilmot:
Hm-mmm.

01-01:02:35

Banks:
The Commodores and all that stuff. He was from Tuskegee, and I would tease him. I guess he would throw a rock at me if I ever saw him again. I'd tease him unmercifully at this summer camp, cause he couldn't do anything right. He couldn't knit lanyards; you know, all the things that you could do in summer camp. I was cool. People tease me about that now when I got back to Fort Valley. People who knew us then, “Man, you'd better hope Lionel Richie never sees you because you were death on him.” I was a big tease and I was death on him. Too much. I was over the top, I'm sure, but it's one of those things. All that was a church camp, and he was Episcopal, and we'd come together and do that. [coughs]

01-01:03:24

Wilmot:
Let's take a break.

01-01:03:24

Banks:
Yeah. Please.

[End Audio File 1]

[Begin Audio File 2]

02-00:00:26

Wilmot:
I want to ask you this question about high school, which is: What was your social life then? What was going on for you socially?

02-00:00:45

Banks:

I was—what’s the word? Monogamous. I’m trying to see, when did high school start? Let’s say twelve, thirteen. I liked a girl and she liked me, and we were, quote, “going together.”

02-00:01:15

Wilmot:

Where did you go? You know how people always ask that question.

02-00:01:18

Banks:

Yeah, “where did you go?”

02-00:01:19

Wilmot:

I’m making a small joke. Sorry.

02-00:01:22

Banks:

No, it’s legitimate.

02-00:01:27

Wilmot:

No. Actually, I really intended it as a joke. It’s that funny thing where people don’t understand the term “going together” and then—anyway.

02-00:01:34

Banks:

Yeah. We broke up. She got interested in another guy, Ray Pitts, who—that’s another story but his father ended up in Sacramento as the Superintendent of Schools in Sacramento. Worked for Wilson Riles.

I was shattered because he was fair-complexioned, and I thought that was the reason why we broke up. That he was fair.

I had game. I mean, I was smart and stuff like that, but sometimes I wonder if that experience—just what does that experience do to a thirteen, fourteen-year-old kid. I was, quote, “in love,” et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. But I was active socially. Sexually. I was a football player. I had game.

But I was limited in some ways. This is an interesting anecdote regarding the senior prom. Well, you have to be sixteen to get a driver’s license. Everywhere, I guess. Maybe older. So I remember going to my father, say, “Okay, I have this big date with Mae Alice. We’re going to the prom.” “Okay. Fine. Fine.” I say, “Well, look, Dad. I’ll be using the car.” He says, “No, you’re not.” “Why?” “Because you’re fifteen.” So we go through this drama. You know, shattered ego. “Everybody else is doing it.” All those things. But I wasn’t crazy. I knew my dad wasn’t going to budge. I’d already made arrangement with a friend, who was at a local college to borrow his car. That was the kind of thing that I was often dealing with. That age thing. I was fifteen, but just knew all my buddies were eighteen and could use their parents’ cars. They didn’t have cars, necessarily. You know, you have to make do. You just said, “Well, I know my dad’s

not going to do this.” I’d argue with him, just to make him feel good [laughs] but I’d know he’s not going to give in. He just held the ground. Okay, cool. And a college student friend of mine left his car on the corner and I picked it up. I mean, you know, logistics were easy to come by for me. That kind of stuff.

02-00:04:23

I was dating, such as it was. That became more iffy when I went to college. I’m trying to think of some other significant—

02-00:04:38

Wilmot:

What kinds of things were you and your friends kind of getting into? Your football team mates. What kinds of social life were you pursuing then?

02-00:04:52

Banks:

Small-town Georgia in the pre-civil rights—there were movies. You’d go to the movies. That’s basically it. House parties. Movies, house parties, that’s about all I can remember in terms of organized social events. I liked music. My father was into jazz, and early on he helped me develop an appreciation for jazz which was far beyond anybody else’s of that period. Anybody I’ve ever met really. I mean, I’ve been into the music longer, I think, than any of my friends. I daresay. But that’s not—that’s a solitary thing. I still wanted to hold hands, and do the boy-girl things, and I did that. But there was this music thing that could sustain me and interested me. And I read. I was an avid reader; I just ate books. You tell me something, and I’d read it.

02-00:05:59

Wilmot:

Is there anything that sticks out in your mind as texts?

02-00:06:01

Banks:

Sherlock Holmes. I read the Sherlock Holmes series. I remember that as being really—Dr. Doolittle books. The early ones. I remember that as a series. There was a Thornton Burgess series about animals. Again, this is about seven or eight years old, but of the series that I remember. James Fennimore Cooper stands out. No black stuff to speak of, then. Paul Laurence Dunbar. I’m sorry. That was the first kind of black writer that I was exposed to. Which is ironic, but that’s the truth. Paul Laurence Dunbar. The dialect, the stuff like that. At school, that was the exposure in my high school. Yeah.

02-00:07:08

Wilmot:

You mentioned that you were dating in this time and I’m wondering where did you hear about and learn about—rather, learn about—sex and sexuality. Was that by conversations with your parents? “Look, these are the birds and the bees.”

02-00:07:20

Banks:

No.

02-00:07:20

Wilmot:

How did you learn about these things?

02-00:07:23

Banks:

Something I've often wondered about. I never—my parents and I never had a conversation about sex or sexuality. Never. Ever. And I've often wondered what did they think, what were they assuming by not talking about it. Particularly my dad. My mom and I, that's maybe going down later. No, there was never a conversation. You learn—everybody has—you think everybody has sex. If you going to have sex, use a condom, or rubber as they were called during the days. That's what you did. That was the risk—getting pregnant. Disease—I mean the kinds of concerns and considerations now, were not on the table then. Obviously, there were venereal diseases around, but you're in high school: "Don't get her pregnant. Don't get her pregnant. Don't get her pregnant." That was the risk factor. This is pre-pill. Pre-any of that. That surfaced when I was in college. Yeah, I remember those crazy pills. Women would get sick for days trying to take those things. It was sexist. Anyway. Nothing from my parents.

It came, no doubt, from friends or reading. I would always have the sense to check things out. "This doesn't sound right to me. Check this out in the encyclopedia. Look this up, or look this up." No Internet, but I'd figure out ways to "if this, then this and this." That was basically the deal. I came through that, through the high school years unscathed as far as getting into trouble. Nothing like that.

02-00:09:32

It's an interesting question. I was trying to think back to other, in my high school, the women that—girls that might have might have gotten pregnant. Because if you got pregnant in those days, you'd had it. Well, I mean, it was nothing like get pregnant and a month later you're not pregnant. Abortion was not something that was available.

02-00:09:53

Wilmot:

An option.

02-00:09:54

Banks:

Yeah. I'm sure at some levels it happened, but that was the name of that game. There were some girls—if I stretch it, I'm sure I could think of some girls that got pregnant, but it wasn't nearly as common as it seems to be at today's schools. In spite of sexual permissiveness. And guys undoubtedly didn't have sex. I look back, I was sexually active, but I'm thinking that that probably meant to me, like, having sex every two weeks or sleeping with a girl every two weeks. Usually the same girl. Back seat of cars. You know, the kind of James Dean shit. Yeah.

02-00:10:37

Wilmot:

Okay.

02-00:10:37

Banks:

I never smoked cigarettes. I didn't drink. That came later, but throughout high school, my father was the campus representative for Brown & Williamson Tobacco Company. He had samples.

02-00:11:02

Wilmot:

Wow!

02-00:11:02

Banks:

Yeah. I made a lot of money like that. He'd have all these sample cigarettes in his closet, and I'd steal them, go to school and sell them. Five cigarettes for a dime.

02-00:11:18

Wilmot:

That brings me to another question, which is: How old were you when you first started working or held your first job?

02-00:11:29

Banks:

I sold *Jet*. My first job—no, I'm sorry. *Pittsburgh Courier*. I was delivering the *Courier* for the wife of the president of the college—who would drive by people's houses, and I would run in and deliver the *Courier*.

02-00:11:41

Wilmot:

This was in college?

02-00:11:42

Banks:

No, no. At Fort Valley. I was in elementary school, I dare say. *Pittsburgh Courier*, the black newspaper. She had a route and she'd drive around, I'd run in, give the people their paper, get their money and come back to the car. That was my first job. I did that. My next job, which was same line. I sold *Jet*. Did very well. Because I'd always pick out the sexiest thing. Emmett Till, that was my biggest seller. The Till case, when *Jet* had it. There was a picture of the casket and so forth.

02-00:12:21

Wilmot:

Open casket.

02-00:12:23

Banks:

Yes. I must have called back to Chicago two or three times to get more copies.

02-00:12:28

Wilmot:

That was when you were eleven years old.

02-00:12:30

Banks:

Yeah, '54. No, '55. It happened in 1955, I'm pretty sure of that. Yeah, I must've been eleven or thereabouts. But I had a great *Jet* route. Let's see. Other jobs. Later on, like—I'm trying to think. Peaches. That was a similar job, just the summer. That was between—I was going back and forth in the summer. During the school year, I just sold *Jets*. I made grand-theft money for those days. Me and my girlfriend, we'd see the latest movies and we'd get popcorn, the whole nine yards, because I was the bad *Jet* man!

02-00:13:21

Wilmot:

Wow. While you were in school.

02-00:13:23

Banks:

Yeah. High school. Other jobs. My parents never paid me to do anything. I had to work like hell around the house, but I didn't get money for chores.

02-00:13:37

Wilmot:

Allowance.

02-00:13:37

Banks:

No, I never got an allowance.

02-00:13:39

Wilmot:

Do you give allowances at this time?

02-00:13:41

Banks:

Very little. Like fifty cents. My kids talk about kids getting five dollars a week. But they don't think about it. I don't know why. I mean, it's not an issue. If they asked for more, I'd give them more. I don't know. You know, I've read these books about teaching financial responsibility, and I do teach them. They understand the deal. They look at me and they say, "How did you do this?" I explain. Do this, and this; don't do that or that. As my dad did to me. See, he was a Depression kid. His idea of a risk was the credit union. That's a risk. You don't take any chances. Now, I go to the credit union with my dad. "We're going to put this in a mutual fund." But no.

02-00:14:34

Wilmot:

He would see the mutual fund as a risk?

02-00:14:37

Banks:

He wouldn't take that risk. Later on, you know, about ten or fifteen years ago, he let me kind of manage things a bit. But he never had any bonds. "Hey look, there's very little risk attached to this." I tried to explain. But, again, he was brought up in the Depression; he saw people lose

everything. For us, banking is an instrument. It's one of a number of choices that you can make about how to handle money.

02-00:14:59

Wilmot:

A very different relationship with money.

02-00:15:00

Banks:

Exactly. People don't understand that. He was—I was telling him the other day that I got this, just last week I said, "I've got this house coming up, man. I'm going to be moving." I said, "It'll probably go for about seven hundred and eighty." He said, "You mean seventy-eight hundred?" I said, "No. I mean seven hundred and eighty thousand." He says, "Unbelievable."

02-00:15:29

Wilmot:

Is this his house?

02-00:15:29

Banks:

No, this is my house. A house that I have. I own a couple of places. In Rockridge. I was telling him, I'm selling a house that I own, here in Rockridge. Oakland. And I'll likely get somewhere around eight hundred thousand dollars for it. To him, that's just unbelievable.

02-00:15:51

Wilmot:

Well, in the past—that's one of the things that's very interesting, is that between his generation and your generation real estate has transformed—real estate as an investment has transformed. So we're just in a whole different moment now. And land value is just—it's not going to go back.

02-00:16:10

Banks:

Yeah, that's what I tell people. I say, "Once you get your foot in the door—" And my daughter understands that. They're doing it.

02-00:16:23

Wilmot:

I have another question related to this, which is—unless you had more to say about your employment, the kind of jobs you had while you were in—

02-00:16:33

Banks:

That's it. When I get out of college, I head to New York. That's pre-college. But up through high school, I was a *Jet* man. I sold *Jet* magazines, and from time to time—well, it was seasonal—I sold peaches. At a big peach orchard at the back of my house. I'd go out and steal peaches, bring them back, and sell them on the street. That kind of stuff. No outlay. I was always—I had an eye for no outlay. [laughs]

02-00:16:59

Wilmot:

Yeah, it sounds like you did! It sounds like you did have that eye. That's good. I wanted to ask you another question, which is: You mentioned that you sold the *Jet* issue with the image, that kind of unforgettable image of Emmett Till on the cover in his open casket in—1954?

02-00:17:26

Banks:

'Fifty-five.

02-00:17:27

Wilmot:

Nineteen fifty-five?

02-00:17:28

Banks:

The year after *Brown*.

02-00:17:30

Wilmot:

Okay. I wanted to ask you how that impressed you as a young man and as a young black man.

02-00:17:35

Banks:

Oh, it enraged me.

02-00:17:38

Wilmot:

Was this something that you and your friends were talking about?

02-00:17:40

Banks:

Oh, yeah. For sure.

02-00:17:41

Wilmot:

I mean, you lived in the South.

02-00:17:43

Banks:

Oh, yeah. I mean, it was—there's an off-color thing about this too, but, yeah. I mean, people—more than *Brown v. Board of Education* or any of the other legal or symbolic kinds of things, that just galvanized people. When that happened, and the fact they were not convicted of anything, it just, "What are you talking about? What are we talking about? Justice and the law and so forth." It was, you know, it was just a shattering experience for that to happen and to have *Jet* put it out there, inciting people, as I imagine they knew it would. I remember that year, or—I'll show you how sick people are. You know, I mentioned before there was a white guy that had a store next to where my grandparents down in Georgia, in Thomasville, Beechton.

02-00:18:55

Wilmot:

How many miles away was that, by the way?

02-00:18:56

Banks:

Excuse me?

02-00:18:57

Wilmot:

Hours away.

02-00:18:59

Banks:

Oh, about, in those days, maybe two hours. Yeah. Less now, but no freeways. There was a white girl—I was about eleven or twelve, maybe, who was about the same age that lived there. She was the daughter of the shop owner, storekeeper, or whoever. I remember—she seduced me. I was a little smarter than to try to seduce her, but I wasn't smart enough not to let her seduce me. Let's put it like that. And I remember having sex with that girl, twice a day. I mean, kid sex. It wasn't like deep—no JLo. But for a whole summer, in the backdrop of that—later on, you know, I'm saying, "God, I would have been dead had—" There's nothing I could have said, but I was young. I was maybe twelve, eleven or twelve at best in those days, but who would have—my cousin and I, we talk about it often. We grew up together. Contemporaries. We kid each other about that now. He says, "Man, how stupid we were!" She would go tell him to come get me. She was living next door. "Hey, tell Billy to come out." This was a farm. You go to the barn or somewhere out of the way. My grandmother was there—my grandparents, actually my grandfather might have been dead at that point. I don't remember, but bottom line, there were plenty of places to go, and you have the sex that you have when you're twelve or eleven years old. She might have been eleven or twelve, and so forth. Like I said, Emmett Till—I just later on...phew! You dodge the bullets. You dodge the bullets.

02-00:21:10

Wilmot:

It sounds like that was something that might have been kind of a specter at that time, and I'm wondering if there was that sense of a threat of violence to your person—

02-00:21:27

Banks:

Certainly, I'm trying to remember, was it—

02-00:21:28

Wilmot:

—from white people?

02-00:21:29

Banks:

Well, yeah. You didn't want to get caught. It's the difference between getting caught, just—you don't want to get caught with anybody. If she's a black girl, you don't want to get caught. But the drama, the historicity of it, of a black guy screwing a white—a black boy screwing a white girl in Southern Georgia in 1955 or so. That kind of enormity just never occurred to us.

02-00:22:01

Wilmot:

To you.

02-00:22:01

Banks:

To me, yeah. Maybe stupidity on my part. You knew you didn't want to do it—it wasn't stupid, but the horror. I remember Emmett Till just brought that into focus. You said, "Damn! This could have—."

02-00:22:20

Wilmot:

Let me ask you something also. The year prior, 1954, that was *Brown v. Board of Education*. You said before that you were kind of educated in a racially segregated school system. Did that change anything in that respect?

02-00:22:47

Banks:

No.

02-00:22:48

Wilmot:

Was that something that people were very aware of in thinking about and talking about?

02-00:22:55

Banks:

No.

02-00:22:55

Wilmot:

That decision, that ruling?

02-00:22:58

Banks:

I'm sure some, but nobody in the South assumed that that would happen, it would affect the South—Georgia—any time soon. And it didn't. I mean, Charlene—you know Charlene Hunter-Gault? From NPR [National Public Radio]. She was a contemporary of mine at Turner High in Atlanta, and she was the first black person to go to the University of Georgia. That was in '60, I think. Six years later. So in between that, was nada. I mean, there was agitation and people talked and so forth, but from '54 till about '60, therefore—and when I got in too, in sixties sit-ins. I was head and shoulders, but before that time there was a kind of fear in the South that—there were no collective protests in the South say from 1950—

I mean, Montgomery was in '56, I believe. And that didn't start off in terms of integration; they just wanted more space for black people to sit. There was nothing radical about that. That wasn't nearly like integrating the schools. We were just saying that black people should be allowed to move up, come in. But as far as any groundswell of demand for integration and so forth, that didn't happen. I remember my parents taking me to see Marty King in 1956, I'm pretty sure. Because that was during the boycott. [phone rings] I'll have to figure out how to do that.

02-00:24:43

Wilmot:

It's okay. It's fine.

02-00:24:47

Banks:

I remember that, and I remember conversations surrounding that. He came by our house and he just kind of talked about what was happening. Raising money. One of his buddies was there at the college—Dean Walter McCall—who’s mentioned in all the biographies. Gradually, you know, by the time I got to college—about 1959, when I left high school—I kind of had a good feel for what I thought would go down. Yeah. But anyway, that’s it. In terms of political consciousness, no, not at age twelve. I can’t claim that.

02-00:25:35

Wilmot:

I want to ask you also about your family’s—you mentioned that your father had an affiliation with American Friends Service, and that there was a level of political thinking happening. You mentioned also your grandfather on your mother’s side, his political involvements and affiliations. What was the environment for you in your household as you were growing up? What did you learn about politics from your parents?

02-00:26:03

Banks:

My dad was a classic left-liberal person, but you couldn’t actualize that. It’s one thing to understand class conflict, class struggle, the origins. I could talk that shit all day, but how do you operationalize that in the context of the South in 1956, ’57? It’s easier said than done. So intellectually I was there, but—I heard it all the time. I had the kind of family, we ate breakfast and dinner together every day all my life. It wasn’t the kind of “I’ll get a hamburger here, and a hamburger—.” No. We’d sit down and eat, and we’d discuss things, and there was this kind of dialogue. My dad was an extremely critical thinker. He was hard on me. He looks back now and talks about how hard he was. I mean to say, it’s made me tough. It prepared me for a whole lot of stuff that comes later. So, intellectually it was there, but in terms of translating that—for instance, like my Dad, right? He never went to a segregated theatre. Never. He just vowed that he just wouldn’t do that. Me? Stupid. Hey! Twelve years old, what was there to do? You know, *The Last Picture Show*. This is what you do in a small town. I went. Later on, I called myself rebelling by sneaking in. But that’s not really protest. That’s just chickenshit. But he never went to—I mean, think about that.

02-00:27:42

Wilmot:

Does that mean he didn’t go to the theatre at all?

02-00:27:44

Banks:

That’s right. John Hope’s like that. John Hope Franklin. He doesn’t know anything about movies, because the period he was living in the South, he just did not go. That’s just one part of American culture that he just never chose to partake of. He say he got a little habit when he went to Chicago. I remember him getting—what was it? *Gone with the Wind*, or something. He said “I’m gonna sit here and watch this.” In his home. Anyway, there was this whole generation. That’s just how he fought that battle. Just refused to acquiesce to segregated movie theatres and whatever.

Here's another example: my father—I think it's mentioned in the memoir—never used the name William. It's always W.S.M. Banks, so nobody could call him “William”—no one could get too familiar in a disrespectful way. “What's your name?” “W.S.M. Banks.” He just would not tell people his first name, because he'd become “William.” Or “Boy.” Stuff like that. That's a way of resisting, of just not complying with the system. I learned from that.

02-00:28:56

Wilmot:

There's been a few times when I've talked to you outside of this interview where you've said, “I'm from the South,” and I wanted to ask: What does that mean to you to be from the South?

02-00:29:30

Banks:

It means to be a—well, at different points it's meant different things. [pause] I've used it as sort of a trope, frankly, to establish myself as an outsider. This is my thing. Everybody else is urban and slick and hip and so forth, and I position myself outside of that: I'm from the South. When you say you're from the South, people start with assumptions that you're slow or you're not so smart, you're not so wise, you don't know what's happening. And I've always thought that to be a very advantaged position to be in. That's a Southern thing too—never let people know what you know. Never let people know what you know. The greatest single advantage—always let people underestimate you. Through Berkeley, that's just—if I can teach my girls that, get them to understand that. But it's hard, because there's this tendency to want to, “Let me show you what I know: da, da, da, da, da. I know da, da, da, da, da.” Without that kind of cold-blooded confidence that comes from—nobody can take it away from you, and when you need it, use it. But *always* have people underestimate you. And the South helps you do that, because there's that coloration of the South.

I don't want to jump the gun, but I can tell you some college stories about that, how that worked. It's a gimmick, in large part, because I haven't lived in the South since—how many years? Fifty years, maybe. No, I'm sorry, that's not true. Certainly forty years.

02-00:31:30

Wilmot:

Since you were about twenty-two?

02-00:31:31

Banks:

Went to college in the South, and I finished college at nineteen.

02-00:31:35

Wilmot:

Those are important years, though.

02-00:31:38

Banks:

Oh, yeah.

02-00:31:38

Wilmot:

Birth through twenty-two are important in terms of really establishing your universe and culture. So I think it's a very interesting way to self-identify.

02-00:31:52

Banks:

Yeah.

02-00:31:55

Wilmot:

But I understand what you're saying.

02-00:31:56

Banks:

I tell people, a woman I see, "I'm just a kid from the South."

02-00:32:04

Wilmot:

Okay.

02-00:32:05

Banks:

Take it from there. "Bring me along slowly. Just tell me—talk slowly and tell me what I've done." I just kind of do it like that. I don't feel the need to impress people. I mean, I could go deeper. Like, family, a sense of place, a sense of not being entitled to anything. I don't want to draw the line too narrowly between—that's not exclusively Southern. Lots of people have identity crises. I never had that problem. Given what I've said, there's no question what I was. There's no confusion about what I was. No identity crisis, and that's a value, at least to me. There's a lot of things other people worry about, I just never have to worry about. I respect them. Who am I to say what that is to other people, but these are experiences that I share. It gives me that. It gives me a sense of: Just don't take anything for granted. You're just on the edge.

02-00:33:25

Wilmot:

Hm-mmm.

02-00:33:28

Banks:

We'll see later it takes me on some strange and crazy places. Gets me to do many, many, many dumb things, and a few things right.

02-00:33:40

Wilmot:

Okay. Let's stop there for today.

02-00:33:43

Banks:

Sure.

[End Audio File 2]

Interview 2: February 24, 2004

[Begin Audio File 3]

03-00:00:02

Wilmot:

Dr. William Banks III, interview 2. February 24, 2004. [setting up sounds] Good morning.

03-00:00:43

Banks:

Good Morning.

03-00:00:44

Wilmot:

I wanted to start today with some questions about the end of your high school years.

03-00:00:53

Banks:

Hm-mmm.

03-00:00:53

Wilmot:

And when you began thinking about going to college. Was that something that was just kind of assumed, that you would go on to higher education? Or how did you begin to think about going to college?

03-00:01:06

Banks:

Well, yeah, it was assumed—I just could not have thought of any other option, growing up, given my father. Most of his friends were academics and college was the only game in town. I remember thinking something about what after college, and so forth. College was sort of the baseline for the black middle class growing up in the South in late 1950s. I finished high school in 1959. And that was just assumed. I wasn't a particularly good student in high school. Well, I'll qualify this a bit. I had other issues. I was younger than most of my peers—

03-00:02:02

Wilmot:

You said that, yes.

03-00:02:03

Banks:

Right. And there were the usual kinds of adjustments and acting out, things that I had to go through. Other things compensated. I was an athlete, so on one hand I'm probably immature in some ways, but I had this big stick called sports at which I had some abilities. It never was translated to grades. I don't think my teachers were particularly good—a couple of exceptions, but by and large I'd say it really was a third-rate high school. As were many high schools in the South, the segregated South, during this time. I probably had something like a B average going into my senior year—I can't remember specifically, but a conversation with somebody who said, "You really are an underachiever; you really aren't doing as much as you can do." I says, "Well, okay," and I got straight As my senior year. That one year. Maybe I associated that with getting

into college and so forth, but I knew I would—like I said, it was not: How do you get in? Not that kind of anxiety that people experience now. I always tested well. I broke the mold for many African American students. I always tested pretty well. Grades, that's another thing. So I remember getting, on the basis of some test—I forget. I have no idea. Maybe the whole profile was different then, but I remember getting a letter from Harvard [University]. Basically, there was an early entrance program where you'd skip your senior year and you'd go directly into Harvard, blah, blah, blah. I remember getting a letter from Harvard—well, my family, my dad got the letter—and they wanted me to go to talk to, I guess, a Harvard alum or something there in the area about going to Harvard and skipping my senior year, bottom line.

03-00:04:40

Wilmot:

Willing to go to Harvard, matriculating at Harvard at age fifteen?

03-00:04:46

Banks:

[laughs] Yeah. Fortunately—yeah, I guess it would have been something like that. I went. I remember it was a physician. I can't remember the specialty, but I remember talking with him and—

03-00:05:00

Wilmot:

Was this person African American?

03-00:05:02

Banks:

Oh, no. No. This was Georgia. Well, anyway, he was not an African American. A white guy, alum of Harvard, and my dad took me up and I talked to him for about an hour, as I recall. He asked me about this and that and so forth and so on. That was that. I didn't want to go. I mean, I'm fourteen years old. Fortunately, my parents were smart enough—I don't know, I think the process would have been I would have had to say, "Yeah, this is something I want to do" to go on to the next step, and so forth. But they decided—sensibly, obviously—that this was insane for a fourteen-year-old kid to get thrown into the world of John Kerry and people like that at that age. They understood that. Nothing ever came of it, in terms of something that I wanted to pursue and so forth. I just wasn't mature enough for that.

Now, my senior year, given my grades and so forth, and given the political culture of the times, all of the, quote, "smart" black kids went to Morehouse, Howard, or Fisk. Those were the big three. Middle class kids, you know. Morehouse, Howard, or Fisk. My dad had gone to Fisk, and I knew millions of people at Morehouse, Atlanta, and so forth. Howard, for some reason, didn't excite me, so my choice was based upon a school that was far from home where I felt I could make my own mark. Morehouse, I knew that scene. A lot of people were going there. Howard, there were several people who went to Howard. Fisk, the same thing. I would have known twelve or thirteen people going into the freshman class at Fisk, from other parts of the black bourgeoisie strata. It's just fighting against this stuff, so why not Dillard? It was a good school, given the black colleges in the South, and that's where I went. Again, like the traditional pattern, what are you going to do when you get there? What are you going to major in? Well, I'll be a doctor. That's what, quote, "smart" black kids were channeled to be in the late 1950s South. A

doctor? Okay, good. I majored in biology, pre-med. It was biology, but the idea was that when I finished, I would go on to medical school.

03-00:08:25

The first year, I did fairly well. I sort of saw it as a challenge: Let me see if I can do this. Like I said, I did fairly well, meaning for me like a B+ average. But I got a couple of awards in specific areas like writing. I got a couple of writing awards—the Brawley Prize, whatever that was—but the overall performance was not a stellar academic performance at all. But I grew up quite a bit. I was away from home, of course, for the first time. My roommate was a guy from Washington, D.C. I was coming in at about age fifteen, and he was maybe twenty-one, because he'd been out of school. He had a turbulent background and so forth. We were thrown together, and actually we were roommates for the whole four years there at Dillard. I got into the social scene. There were girls. You don't want to do that. You want to sort of carve out your little totem there. And I did that. Stupid stuff like drinking.

In New Orleans, literally anybody could buy wine. I remember the second day I got to campus, going to a drugstore down in the Seventh Ward, London Avenue, and buying a pint of wine. It was muscatel. Now why that, I don't know. And coming back to campus, and more or less drinking it, and getting, of course, sick as a dog. Maybe this was sort of a rite of passage or something like that. I had to see what that was all about. On my own. There was drinking in my home all my life. My dad's a two-fisted drinker. There was liquor always around when friends come over. It's not like it was something new, or I had to rebel like that. It was just, again, this adolescent madness. The girls thing went as well as I could expect. I had my share of successes and bumps in the road there.

The faculty, I did manage to meet a really inspiring professor, biology professor. His field was genetics. A West Indian guy, Clifford Bryan, who was Episcopalian. I was Episcopalian. I think I mentioned before, I went to the Episcopal Church, and when I went there, I joined the Canterbury Club, which was a club for Episcopalians and so forth. I met him and his family. He was a very inspiring kind of guy. I guess he believed in me, and pushed me, and so forth, and I did well in his classes. But he didn't have the kind of range I was looking for. He knew science, and if I wanted to be a dedicated, full-blooded scientist, he was the person. But I didn't. So, he couldn't fill that broader need that I had. Maybe looking for a father or something. At least that kind of intellectual persona or something.

03-00:12:31

The other faculty members were good, and that was also a kind of race thing. For the first time in my life, I had several white teachers and I remember wanting to see if they knew as much as my father and his friends, who were academics. They were faculty members at this small black college in the South. I remember thinking that. I quickly learned that it wasn't like that at all.

03-00:13:14

Wilmot:

What do you mean when you say that?

03-00:13:15

Banks:

That they were no better. They were no better trained. They were not brighter. They were not all this or that.

I did pretty well in my freshman year, and, like I said, I got a couple of awards. What else did I do? I was active. In high school I was an actor of sorts. I won a prize for the outstanding actor in the state. It was, again, segregated, but that's all you can do. An Oscar Wilde play, *The Birthday of the Infanta*. I played a dwarf, a deformed dwarf. Like I said, I won that prize as the outstanding actor. When I went to Dillard I acted in a play. I'm pretty sure it was my freshman year. I think it was my freshman year. A William Saroyan play, *The Cave Dwellers*. Actually, the director there was a famous African American—well, a very notable African American dramatist, Ted Shine, who's produced a number of things off Broadway. He was very good.

03-00:14:43

So I was dabbling in a number of things. I was pretty much out there. The fraternity thing was big at Dillard, but—

03-00:14:54

Wilmot:

Did you end up pledging?

03-00:14:57

Banks:

I ended up, but the first year—yeah, you pledge after your freshman year. You're there for a year. You get the grades, and you go on to a fraternity. I didn't pledge in my freshman year. It was silly stuff. I thought I was a little too cool for that. So I didn't pledge my freshman year, although I got an award from Kappa Alpha Psi, some student award. You know, "Most promising this or that." But I thought: "You can't buy me."

03-00:15:26

Wilmot:

Were people from different organizations reaching out to you?

03-00:15:32

Banks:

Yeah. People thought I was smart, so I should be an Alpha. You had these stereotypes. The wild people were Omegas, and the cool people were Kappas. Most of my friends, in fact, were Kappas. That was the sort of urban, black urban North fraternity. If you were from Chicago, Detroit, DC, you'd pledge Kappa. Again, that's just the way it was configured in our heads. But I didn't want to do that my freshman year.

03-00:16:15

Now one of the most dramatic—and I have to get my years right. I meant to check on this a couple of times, but the most dramatic thing that happened to me that year—

03-00:16:24

Wilmot:

Your first year?

03-00:16:25

Banks:

First year of college. I think it was the first year; maybe the second year. The Cuban missile crisis. I think that's '61. Maybe my sophomore, but it was—I can check that out. It's very easy to find that. I was a liberal. I was sitting in class, I was for civil rights, or something like that. I thought Montgomery was on the right page, and I had the standard kind of unthinking attitude about race. That black people have caught hell, and we should just get along, and so forth. It wasn't very sophisticated at all. It was just a kind of knee-jerk, liberal jargon, boom, boom, boom. I had it down, but in retrospect I hadn't thought very much about it. Anyway, it certainly wasn't linked to any other broader sense of society. But I was sitting in class, I remember when this thing came up about Kennedy demanding that they should get the missiles out of Cuba. I agree "Of course, they should get them out of Cuba." This professor, Georg Iggers—he was a German Jewish professor of Western civilization, who went on to be a very famous figure at the State University of New York, Buffalo—he just said, "Well, why?" Basically, why does America have the right to keep missiles out of Cuba? I'd never thought about that. I was just parroting what everybody else was saying: "Yeah, get 'em out, get 'em out, get 'em out." I remember feeling stupid because I couldn't answer that other than, you know Monroe Doctrine, we said this, this. But this raised the whole notion of authority and rights, and how these things are a little bit more complicated. I remember waiting around after class to ask him about that. He was very inarticulate. He was legendary. They had two kids and they slept in drawers, dresser drawers. You have a baby and instead of a bed, they were in drawers. I just thought that was—they were clearly superstar intellectuals. His wife was a German professor.

03-00:19:04

I asked him, I said—in my own way trying to—"How do you come to think like that? Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." Just kind of looking and—he concluded that I was sincere, and he started suggesting some things that I should read. Periodicals. Not a lot of books at first. But, you know, "If you want to learn more about the Cold War, you might want to take a look at this." And he named a number of things. I guess, for a semester, like three or four hours every Saturday I would go to the library. Nobody goes to the library on a Saturday at black colleges. [phone rings] I am expecting sort of an important call—

[interview interruption]

03-00:19:53

Wilmot:

Learning about the Cold War. Imperialism.

03-00:19:55

Banks:

Imperialism, the Cold War, a kind of—certainly, left, and a critical perspective about things. Making connections between things like civil rights and broader world issues, so forth and so on. Civil liberties. Again, just a kind of sophistication that was not there to this fifteen- or sixteen-year-old person. He was active in CORE, the Congress of Racial Equality, in New Orleans. Through him, I ventured into sit-ins and demonstrations—locally—designed to do the normal things, get people sitting at lunch counters and all that kind of stuff. But more importantly, from where I sit as I look back, it was just the reading. I mean, I just ate books. He'd say, "Read this," and I'd just go out and do it.

03-00:21:02

Wilmot:

Is there anything that sticks out that you remember? Any text that sticks out?

03-00:21:07

Banks:

Oh, yeah. I remember Richard Wright's books were very important to me. C. Wright Mills, even more so. He's not a black writer, but he certainly was a sociologist who was very influential to me when I was coming along. St. Clair Drake's essays and a book by him. *Black Metropolis*. *Silent Spring*, too. Rachel Carson. The environment and so forth. These are some of the titles that I remember.

And journals like *Dissent*, and *Commentary*, which at the time was pretty left. *New Leader*, *The Guardian*. Again, kind of leftist, liberal—*The Nation*, *New Republic*. Publications like that. Like I said, I'd just go over about ten o'clock and stay three or four hours just reading, thinking. The problem for me though, in hindsight, I didn't have a lot of people to talk about this stuff with. I was too cool to spend a lot of time talking to him (the professor).

03-00:22:35

Wilmot:

This was Georg Igger?

03-00:22:35

Banks:

Iggers. I-g-g-e-r-s. And G-e-o-r-g. No "e," incidentally.

03-00:22:42

Wilmot:

Okay.

03-00:22:43

Banks:

But I didn't have any peers, not many peers—a couple of people maybe, but certainly there wasn't the kind of community of, quote "intellectuals" interested in the things that I was interested in. Again, I don't mean this in the sense of arrogance. I mean, they were great people in the sciences. Many of them went on to distinguished careers as physicians. But there was that kind of thing in black colleges then—hopefully not now—where, why do you go to black colleges? The black middle class goes to college to become a doctor. Not lawyers, then, but doctors—

That whole kind of careerist approach to education, you get good grades to get into this or that field. No broader kind of thinking. And money. Again, that's my own kind of privilege. Because money was not important to me, because it'd always been around—you know? My parents weren't rich, but there was never any question about surviving—money was not important to *them*, and I never learned that it should be important in my own life. And I had free reign to make whatever choices I wanted to make. They weren't grounded in status. I ate breakfast and dinner with a PhD all my life, so the idea of status just didn't overwhelm me. So, unlike some of the other people who might have been first-generation college, and all the hopes of the family were invested in them, I didn't have that kind of pressure. I was pretty cocky. I knew that at

some point, I could do what I wanted to. Or I thought. And that's just the way that it was. So it allowed me to read.

Of course, grades and that kind of stuff suffered because I was just totally immersed in this social, political, cultural world that was sort of beyond that. I really can't think of a single professor that I could get engaged with about some of this stuff. Not so much agreement. I could care less. I've never been a party line person, but it was just like they were doing their own thing, and they were friendly and helpful in their own way, but I just never connected. Maybe it was just me. Remember, I'm sixteen, now. Really smart, really sophisticated. [laughs] That's the way that was. That's what I missed. I missed the kind of sessions that I've seen in Berkeley where people get together and argue and debate things, who've read stuff. Not just sentimental things. But the movement was kind of good, civil rights and so forth. I was part of that.

03-00:25:36

Wilmot:

Did there come a time when you had a community of peers with whom to discuss politics?

03-00:25:45

Banks:

Not at college, no.

03-00:25:46

Wilmot:

Not at college. When did that come?

03-00:25:49

Banks:

It came in graduate school. In a very limited way, incidentally, but that's—we can talk about it now or later, if you can remind me.

03-00:25:58

Wilmot:

Talk about it later.

03-00:25:58

Banks:

Okay, yeah. So, what else was significant about college? Oh, yeah, after my sophomore year, I did join a fraternity, Kappa Alpha Psi. All my friends were Kappas—and it was almost whimsical. Just, "Okay, I'll do this." The whole business of pledging and all that kind of stuff.

03-00:26:31

Wilmot:

Was it a very rigorous pledging process?

03-00:26:33

Banks:

Very rigorous. Very violent. I was a leader of sorts in the pledge club. I had a lot of heart. I never knew fear like a lot of people did. I was that. It was violent, but it happened to everybody, you know. I got the brands and the uncivilized stuff like that. I did that. That's the way that was.

03-00:27:06

A couple of other things I wanted to say about college, in particular. As you can imagine, Mother and Dad had planned that I would go to college, and they'd saved and done all the right things so that I'd be able to go to college. But as it turned out—based on whatever people base these things on—I got scholarships. Not everything, but almost everything was covered. They didn't have to pay the kind of money they thought they would have to pay. It was funny. After my senior year, when they realized that I was going to Dillard, I had this scholarship, da, da, da, da, da, they bought a new car. They took my scholarship money and bought a new car, which was cool with me. I do remember that.

But all through college, certainly after my freshman year, I worked, which is kind of interesting. Not the usual kind of job, but here again, this is the insanity. I worked at a racetrack. I served drinks at Fair Grounds, a racetrack there in New Orleans, and I made a lot of money. It was seasonal, because they race part of the year and the rest of the time it's something else. I did that. And a couple of times a year, all the Southern politicians, white—of course all white. I mean, I'm a black guy, waiting on them. And I remember names like Leander Perez, and Morrison and other political figures, waiting on them. These are people I'd read about in the paper. Very racist, Southern segregationist guys, and I was waiting on tables and so forth.

03-00:29:20

I learned how to make a lot of money. The way it worked, you were—the drinks were free. They were hosted by some corporation. You served drinks, but at a certain time, after like the fifth race, you couldn't buy any more alcohol. I looked at the situation and thought: "Hmmm! Need. Demand. Supply?" So I'd sneak in several bottles of Scotch or whatever the preferred drink was, and after that, "I could maybe get you some, sir, but..." Bottom line, I sold bootleg whiskey. It wasn't bootleg, but I mean after the bars had closed, I always had a couple of bottles that I could get to if you were willing to pay \$3 a shot or something like that.

03-00:30:07

Wilmot:

So you would hold back some because there wasn't enough?

03-00:30:10

Banks:

I'd bring it.

03-00:30:11

Wilmot:

You'd bring it?

03-00:30:12

Banks:

Oh, yeah. That's how capitalism works.

03-00:30:16

Wilmot:

You would bring it to the racetrack.

03-00:30:17

Banks:

Yes.

03-00:30:18

Wilmot:

And then you would sell it there?

03-00:30:24

Banks:

Exactly. At a price, you know, when they can't get it any place else, and they're already stupid drunk.

03-00:30:28

Wilmot:

Hm-mmm. And they want it.

03-00:30:30

Banks:

Yeah. Oh, yeah. So you just, you do that. Like I did. I must've done that for about three seasons and I made a lot of money doing that. Just stuff

Of course, you heard the racist stuff. Again, this is '61, '62, '63. That's civil rights, the integration of schools in New Orleans, all this kind of stuff, and you hear this. You hear these people talk. "Yeah, that's such-and-such. That's so-and-so." It was kind of interesting to be that close—the *Invisible Man* kind of phenomena. You're there, but it's not as if—I mean, they were saying "nigger" and this and this and this, and I'm standing there. You know? All right. Cool. It's all right with me. I was from the South; I didn't have this identity crisis. I hated them, I hated what they represented, and that was it. I wasn't about to think any less of myself because of what they were saying. It was like more a war: you want to learn as much as you can. You want to do this, you want to exploit them financially as much as you can. I mean, I recast the whole thing like that. Later on, I look back and you wonder about different decisions. You read biographies of other people, how they'd handle that very differently. But that's life. You re-tread the water, and "Hmmm, this was good; this was bad."

03-00:32:04

Wilmot:

Are there any of those kind of experiences of hearing, overhearing, that stand out to you? Is there anything that you remember especially? Or remember especially as a learning experience?

03-00:32:18

Banks:

Not any particular comment. It was just the [pause] irrationality. You know? How people are talking about this and they get to one point and they can't see, or refuse to see—I mean, just rationally. I guess you could defend segregation, quote, "rationally," blah, blah, blah. But they would just get that and just rely on power: "We're just not going to do it." It's not because you think this, I think this; this is different. No, it was: "We're just not going to do it." And that's where it went. I was sort of disappointed in that, because I was still, in some ways, a liberal. I just thought if people knew what's right, they would do what's right. But like I said, I was gradually learning.

03-00:33:17

Wilmot:

I was just so struck by, when you said in our last interview, when you said, “I didn’t really know many white people until I went to college.” And then I’m understanding on one hand, that you had people like your professor, Georg Iggers, and on the other hand you have these people to whom you’re serving drinks who are kind of irrational and brutal. I just wanted to ask you were there lessons that, as someone now who has done work in the area of looking at ethnicity and gender, what did you learn about the creation of whiteness—and white masculinity in particular—in that environment?

03-00:34:02

Banks:

It was clearly Southern white. You’re talking about the cream of the crop—well, not cream; the bottom of the barrel, really—as far as masculinity goes, the traditional macho thing. These were all red-faced people, their wives were demure, with their blue hair. All the stereotypes were there, and I detested that. I guess whiteness had already been constructed for me, Southern whiteness.

I think that my father was bright enough to never let me get into “All white people are this; all white people are that.” He gave me a lesson that—I can’t say I’ve gotten that far away from it even today, as old as I am. He said, “Think of white people as being guilty till proven innocent.” That gives you a lot of room. I mean, you go into a situation, you just—but, based upon behavior, ideas, you’re open to change. How important is it to just assume that people are people? I’ve just never crossed that hurdle. I mean, race matters. Even today, to say nothing of back in the sixties. Like I said, I’ve had to inhale that a lot. Berkeley. You name it. You just—when you go into places, situations. I go into a committee meeting on campus. Now these are all, quote, “smart” people and I guess I’m supposed to be smart because I’m there, I’m a professor. But I understand.

I mean, I don’t feel a need to represent or to act like black people act. Whatever I say and do now, that’s how I would do it any place. I think I’ve—well, those are personal kinds of things. But in terms of gender issues, I was probably as sexist as anybody, then. There was no particular sophistication there at that point. Civil rights movement were all men-dominated. No literature—I’m trying to think of women writers. Gwendolyn Brooks. I did like Gwendolyn Brooks. I remember reading some of her stuff. That was urban, but—no. I was as backwards as anybody at that point. I had the typical kinds of Southern male frameworks.

03-00:36:58

Wilmot:

When you say “typical kinds of Southern male frameworks,” what does that mean to you?

03-00:37:05

Banks:

Oh, “I’m the man. I’m the leader.” The idea of egalitarianism or sharing leadership or decision-making and so forth—“No, that’s what the man does.” I think that’s not particularly Southern, and again there’s sort of a noblesse oblige: “I love you, I care about you. I’m going to protect you. I’m here to provide for you. I’m here to...” So it’s not a hostility, a kind of competitive thing. “You’re my woman and it’s up to me to treat my wife this way and to be nice, and you

don't have to open doors," and all that kind of stuff. I don't think it ever translated to the intellectual world because these were all struggling students, and if people were bright, that's one thing, but in the broader social sphere that's what I mean. Not that women aren't intelligent. I mean, that's kind of stupid, but still—in relationships or a whole range of other informal behaviors, I guess I was, like I say, I can't claim any revelations early on. That's just the way it was.

03-00:38:22

Wilmot:

Okay.

03-00:38:27

Banks:

College was more or less—I grew up quite a bit. The civil rights movement was going on everywhere. Different dimensions, and so forth. The movement—I just read. I devoured papers and reading about what was happening here and there. I was growing up.

03-00:38:46

Wilmot:

Where were you, kind of vis-à-vis the civil rights movement? How did that enter your awareness? You mentioned some actions you participated in. I wanted to just kind of ask you more about that.

03-00:38:59

Banks:

Sure.

03-00:39:00

Wilmot:

This was the early sixties.

03-00:39:02

Banks:

One of the dramatic things—you've heard of the Freedom Riders?

03-00:39:05

Wilmot:

Hm-mmm.

03-00:39:06

Banks:

When the Freedom Riders got beat up in Anniston, Alabama—the first Freedom Riders, the famous ones—I was part of a group of about six people that met them at the airport, Moisant [Field] airport in New Orleans, and that was a shock. They were all bloody. I mean, they'd just been beat up and thrown on a plane, and they came to New Orleans and a group of us picked them up and took them to local houses. That had all been pre-arranged. But just to see that.

03-00:39:39

Wilmot:

Was this "a group of us" as in "a group of us who were also involved in CORE"?

03-00:39:42

Banks:

No, actually, surprisingly it was a group of fraternity pledges. The Kappas. There was a guy there—Phillip Baptiste. “Hey, you guys go pick up these Freedom Riders—they’ve been beat up—and take them to this address, this address, or this address.” We went to the airport, and to see these people coming off this plane with bandages and just—I’d never seen anybody like that. The non-violent character of the movement, I think that was pretty—that played a role in that. I’d do stuff like that. Or we’d sit in restaurants, fighting the administration on campus, because we thought this guy was a puppet for the white power structure and so forth. “We demand this; we demand that.” I don’t remember anything like courses on black anything in college. [laughs]

It’s easy to admit, I’ve never had a course about black people in my life that was designed to be a course about black people. I’ve just never, in my life. And I wish I had at some point, but they didn’t exist. They didn’t exist at Dillard. You had black professors, and of course they emphasized more stuff about race, but the notion of a course devoted to black literature or black history or anything, that just never—I just never had that kind of intellectual training.

03-00:41:21

Wilmot:

Do you recall professors in, say, an English course, assigning a range of authors?

03-00:41:31

Banks:

Frankly, no. But I’m sure they—Voltaire. I mean, I was a Voltaire freak. I just thought that was the hippest cat. I remember them liking it. Liking the idea that I liked it. You’re teaching, and you say “I’m doing it because I’m supposed to do it. Everybody’s supposed to do it. Everybody’s supposed to have read *Candide*,” or whatever. But I really liked it. I’d raise questions, different questions and so forth. They liked the idea that I was intellectually curious about things that your typical Southern black was not curious about. Sure, they wished I had a little more discipline, and was more mature, and all that kind of stuff, but I just kind of remember that. Gwendolyn Brooks, Richard Wright. I read, of course, Ralph Ellison, but I think that was later or maybe on my own. It never occurred in a classroom. That never came up in a classroom. Langston Hughes. Langston Hughes. I actually met Langston Hughes and I thought he was real cool. A friend of his—one of his biographers, in fact—was a friend of my parents and came through. He was cool. I just thought he was very into who he was, and no pretension, and that was cool. But no. I had no kind of—I did civil rights stuff at the campus level, at the local community effort, meaning lunch counters. That was the only game in town.

03-00:43:20

Wilmot:

In New Orleans.

03-00:43:20

Banks:

New Orleans, yes. That was it. Yeah. Yeah. Towards the end of, like while you’re in your junior year you start thinking about what happens next. By this time I just had come to the conclusion that I didn’t want to be a doctor. “That’s not me. I don’t want to do that.” Yet I had all these courses, enough for a major, and hardly enough for anything. So, as it turns out, the second

semester of my senior year, I decided I was interested in psychology. I had three psychology courses. Fortunately, I'd finished all my physics and all the other stuff. I didn't high-perform, particularly. I probably could have—anyway, I thought, "Maybe psychology." And I did that. And applied to graduate school—maybe about six or seven graduate schools. I had a couple of professors there that were encouraging and so forth. One was particularly good, a particularly great teacher, but he had no hookups. These are all white guys, incidentally. These are two white guys. That was the psychology department.

03-00:45:04

Wilmot:

And they were the ones when you say "hookups." You're talking about social or professional networks that your professors had—

03-00:45:14

Banks:

Professional networks. Exactly.

03-00:45:15

Wilmot:

—in order to kind of connect you to graduate school.

03-00:45:17

Banks:

Right. They did *not* have those. They meant well, but they just didn't have—I mean, I can get a kid into a number of law schools right now, by virtue of credibility, let's just say that. If I write, "This person can do this, this, this. This is a can't-miss person," that carries weight over and beyond your As or Bs. There were no people like that at black colleges. I'm sure there were some, but by and large I wasn't in that network. But I did apply and I got into, I think, three schools.

03-00:45:59

Wilmot:

What was the universe of schools that you applying to?

03-00:46:02

Banks:

Second-rate schools. I mean, I had three courses. Come on, nine hours of [laughs] undergraduate work in psychology and you want to enter Harvard? I was smart enough to understand that, so these were second-tier graduate programs.

03-00:46:20

Wilmot:

Such as?

03-00:46:21

Banks:

University of Missouri. University of Kentucky. Where else? I'm trying to think of ones that I got in. The University of Washington. I think maybe [the University of] Kansas. It's been a long time. I'm sure there were a couple of others, but what are we talking about? We're talking about

second-tier schools where I could go and maybe catch up on what I needed to know about all the psych stuff that I just hadn't been interested in, in college.

03-00:47:06

Wilmot:

Did you think of applying to places like Harvard, or continuing your graduate studies at an all-black institution?

03-00:47:17

Banks:

No. I guess I could have. Howard did have a PhD program in psychology, but I didn't think of that. I don't remember thinking of it, certainly. And again, maybe these white guys were sort of channeling me into white schools. I don't remember. I can't say with any surety. That's a good question. Well, anyway. I don't want to, in hindsight, rationalize it, but I didn't.

My parents accepted all of this. There was no, "Oh, you should have done this, you could have done this," or "Why didn't you do better?" and all that kind of stuff. I mean, that was not the game. Even in getting into graduate schools, it wasn't grades, it was test scores. I, quote, "tested real well" and people, I guess, figured that if I got in the right situation I would at some point live up to what people expected of me. "Yes sir. Yes, ma'am." That's the way that was.

03-00:48:33

I remember eventually deciding on—now, what kind of psychology did I want to do? I was interested in a kind of therapy with addicts, drug addicts and so forth. I'd read some of the literature, da, da, da. It wasn't very sophisticated. I hardly knew anything about it at any deep level.

03-00:48:59

Wilmot:

Did you know anybody who was—

03-00:49:01

Banks:

An addict? No.

03-00:49:02

Wilmot:

—addicted?

03-00:49:03

Banks:

No, not to drugs. I need to be careful. No. Not at all.

03-00:49:12

Wilmot:

So it wasn't from your own personal—

03-00:49:13

Banks:

No, no, no.

03-00:49:14

Wilmot:

It was more just that was your interest.

03-00:49:15

Banks:

Exactly, yeah. They didn't have heroin in Georgia. That's not true, but it was—alcohol. Everybody's drunk, but not—that's cheaper, I guess. I remember, the narcotics hospital was there in Lexington. They had a formal internship program there at the—

03-00:49:37

Wilmot:

Lexington, Kentucky?

03-00:49:37

Banks:

Yeah. The federal program there, so that's what I said, "Okay, why not?" Again, stupid, hit and miss kind of thinking. But it was to continue, this kind of thinking as you'll see later, in later chapters. I went there and hated it. I was the first black ever in the psychology department. And as a first year—I had three courses in psychology. The first year I had a TAship, teaching an all-white undergraduate course. A general basic course, and it was horrible. It was new to them, new to me, and it was just a very bad experience. The faculty—racist. I remember so well one professor. His name was Frank Pattie. He was old at the time, but he just made it a point every lecture to say something disparaging about black people, most typically Africans. I remember him saying so clearly, "I don't know what these people in Africa think. Ten minutes out of swinging in trees and they just think that we're going to give them their own country." Something as vulgar like that. You know, I'm cool. I mean, you're there. It was war to me. I just could not let myself get enraged about that. That's the kind of stuff where you'd get killed in the South.

There were no other black students in the graduate program. All white students, typically Southerners. There was one notable exception, a woman there that I developed a good friendship with who was from Connecticut. Carolyn Simmons. She was just a very liberal, sensitive person. She was married to a guy, Roger Simmons, who was a physician, and her father was on the Supreme Court in Connecticut. She had the kind of openness—I mean, she was the only person who would, well, I wouldn't say "talk to me," but we had lunch together sometimes. Just as students, blah, blah, blah. And it was like that. I couldn't live on campus. I had to live in a place about five miles from campus. I didn't have any money for a car.

03-00:52:38

Wilmot:

You couldn't live on campus? Why?

03-00:52:40

Banks:

I was a graduate student and they didn't have any graduate student facilities for people on campus, so I had to live with this black family a long ways from campus. I didn't have a car. They wouldn't lend me money for a car; that's just not something my parents elected to spring for. It was just a bad situation—we started raising sand about that, the lack of facilities on

campus, how black people were treated and so forth. So they finally relented and gave me housing in a basement of a men's dorm with a number of other disabled students. I mean, this was the "disability" wing there. There was one guy there, another black guy, and we've been friends ever since. He went on to get his PhD. He's a dean of students at another college, in Atlanta, but we were these two black people in a wing. Everybody else was disabled. Men. And white. That was Kentucky.

03-00:53:55

Wilmot:

Wow.

03-00:53:55

Banks:

Yeah, I mean, that's the deal.

03-00:54:00

Wilmot:

When you say "we raised sand around housing," who is "we"?

03-00:54:03

Banks:

Basically about four of us. The rest of them were pretty much strivers. They were so happy to be at Kentucky—undergraduates. There may have been two or three others. I remember a dentist. Wish I'd stayed in touch with him. And another guy, Carl Watson, who incidentally is a big-time OB/GYN here in Berkeley. He was the first black ever to get admitted to the med school ever to graduate. We weren't that tight. He was older, and so forth. But when I came out here, back in the seventies, he'd been here for several years, and—well, I'm getting into personal stuff. But, yeah. He's here practicing now. Around. Carl Watson and his wife, Nanine Neale Watson, who again I knew. She was an undergraduate when I was a graduate student.

03-00:55:00

Wilmot:

At Kentucky?

03-00:55:00

Banks:

At Kentucky, yeah. In fact, she was dating somebody else, and we'd even double-date occasionally. She became something very different out here, but that's life. There were about three of us who were hard core. And a couple of people in the community. Again, this is where the intellectual camaraderie comes in. There were people who were well read. One guy was basically an orderly at the hospital, but very well read. He could talk for days about Herman Hesse. This sort of world just opened up to me. That there were black people with no degrees and so forth who just knew a lot. Thought a lot. That was the first time I'd ever been around a lot of people my age. Contemporaries, more or less. They were older, of course. Again, I'm nineteen now. You've got to remember, I'm a little hardened veteran or something.

03-00:56:03

Wilmot:

So you're nineteen years old—

03-00:56:04

Banks:

At graduate school.

03-00:56:05

Wilmot:

—when you're doing your PhD

03-00:56:07

Banks:

Nineteen. Twenty

03-00:56:09

Wilmot:

Wow.

03-00:56:10

Banks:

No, no, no. When I went there. When I went there, I was right out of school, so I must have been nineteen. Twenty that first year. Something like that. But anyway, there was this camaraderie there and it was really good. Dating was strained but that was my first sort of foray into interracial dating. That was, in some ways, new. The kind of idea of being concerned about that kind of consideration. It's hard enough making things work, just straight up, for me. But there are places you can't go. You know you can't go. You're either here or there. It's basically segregation. It's all about a relationship. It was not the kind of thing that could be done openly. Not secret, nobody's at that level, but still there were places you could not—you couldn't go to a basketball game or a theatre. Well, maybe a concert. That's just the way it was. That had its down sides.

My second year I developed a super relationship with a woman, who was white. She was in the graduate program, not the one that I was in. It was real long-term, and I learned a lot about myself through that. She ended up in California. Spanning my marriages. She never got married. I get poignant now. I found her dead. She had a place right on Lake Merritt, a condominium there, at the time. One night we were scheduled to see *The Wiz*, the Broadway thing. I said, "Hey, I'll be over at such-and-such a time." I went over and, obviously this is out of whack, but no answer. This was not like her. So I go back home and call. I had a key for emergencies, but I thought I should call. Anyway, later on that night I went there and she was—she'd had a massive heart attack. She was putting on her stockings to go to the concert.

03-00:58:53

Wilmot:

She was how old?

03-00:58:56

Banks:

Let me see. Let me start with how old I was. She was a couple of years older than me.

03-00:59:01

Wilmot:

When did she die?

03-00:59:02

Banks:

When was *The Wiz*? Seventy-five. I could figure it out, but she died in 1975, '76.

03-00:59:10

Wilmot:

She died young.

03-00:59:10

Banks:

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. No question about that.

03-00:59:15

Wilmot:

I'm so sorry.

03-00:59:15

Banks:

But anyway, I met her first back in Kentucky and we had a pretty good relationship. She was a good person. Naive in some ways, but maybe that's what I needed at the time. I wasn't looking for the street thing. I had a different—but, anyway, that's neither here nor there. And there were other girls. Actually I married my daughter's mother—Querida, my first wife, was a graduate student in business there at Kentucky and we got married my last year there. I can't say exactly. Maybe '65. Yeah, '65. That was really tough. We got married and I moved to—well, let me put a little sequence to this. I'm getting a little scattered.

03-01:00:18

Wilmot:

We can take a break from it, if you'd like.

03-01:00:21

Banks:

Yeah, let's do that.

[End Audio File 3]

[Begin Audio File4]

04-00:00:18

Wilmot:

I have a couple of follow up questions. We kind of moved in a smooth sweep through your undergraduate and graduate years, and I just wanted to go back to a couple of questions I had.

04-00:00:28

Banks:

Sure.

04-00:00:31

Wilmot:

First, in terms of like culture and social context, how was New Orleans, Louisiana, different from Georgia? Was this a familiar place when you got there? Was it unfamiliar?

04-00:00:44

Banks:

Hm-mmm. Very good question. It was *very* different. One, it was a city, and it was a city with a long tradition. I mean, I was aware of the history of the city, the Spanish, French. I knew about that, but to dig deeper was pretty much untouchable for me. I remember so well walking around in the French Quarters, museums, and looking around at everything that was heavy duty public. You couldn't go to restaurants or—again, it's pre-civil rights. Riding around town on the buses. The buses were real cheap. It was seven cents to ride the bus and you could go all around town, just looking at these places that I'd just heard about. The cathedrals. The whole Catholic thing. That fascinated me. I'd go to—I never will forget. I was doing this hustling thing. Buying, going down to antique stores buying rings that I liked. Saying, "Wow! This is really—." I don't know if they were any good or not. What was I, sixteen, seventeen years old? Fancied myself as Butterfield and Company. But I just liked to do that.

04-00:02:10

Wilmot:

What were you doing with the rings? Were you selling them to your family?

04-00:02:12

Banks:

No, I'd wear them. I'd wear them around, and it was a conversation piece. You know, I'd take you out on a date and it makes you go, "Oh, what is that?" And I'd create some story about—

04-00:02:23

Wilmot:

Beautiful antique rings?

04-00:02:25

Banks:

They were beautiful. I'm not sure if they—

04-00:02:27

Wilmot:

Like, diamond rings?

04-00:02:27

Banks:

No, not diamonds. They were mostly stones. And again, they probably were just jive things, but they looked old and they certainly were unique and interesting.

04-00:02:41

Wilmot:

That's something, when you think of New Orleans, that's something you think of. Those kind of "old things."

04-00:02:44

Banks:

Exactly. Exactly. The square—Congo Square—where the slaves danced, and a whole lot of stuff. I just remember going there, looking at that but not having anybody to talk to about that. The worlds were so segregated, I mean, you just couldn't do that. Buses were segregated when I went to New Orleans. Again, we're talking about '59. You could move the little stand thing, but—and

it was a city. I liked the food. I didn't like the black people in New Orleans—very color- and caste-conscious. That was there. I didn't particularly like that. Because it affected me.

04-00:03:32

Wilmot:

Color was not feature in your family, growing up at all?

04-00:03:39

Banks:

No. I think that's a general African American thing, to start with. Color consciousness. There's always been that connection with "lightness is better." Marry white or marry light, or something. That's always been the way. Growing up, it really wasn't a major league issue. But in New Orleans, it was. There were certain parties where you couldn't—no matter how attractive you thought you were or whatever your conversation was, and so forth. It was very color—color meaning not race, but color-conscious system. That affected me more than race. With race, I had a construction: White people, guilty. But if you were fair, that's more ambiguous. Do I diss you? Do I put you over here or over there? Can I just assume that we have something shared, and I say, "Hey, let's go out." Boy-girl stuff, if you say No because I'm dark or darker, that's heavy duty. I mean, that affects you more so than the white stuff. Because you've already figured that out. Racism, da, da, da, da, da, da. But the color thing. There were certain sororities that preferred—where lighter people gravitated, let's put it like that. That's just the way that happened to be.

04-00:05:25

Wilmot:

That was one of the reasons that you really didn't, you didn't connect with other black people who were from New Orleans?

04-00:05:35

Banks:

I'm sure that was a factor. Because at a lot of parties, a lot of people who were at college were from New Orleans, and you had the whole Creole establishment—it was worse at Xavier, but that's another story. You'd go to Catholic things and you'd see fair people. You pick up that color matters, and that's just a tough sell. It was a tough sell for me. There were exceptions, but that was the first time I had encountered that at that level. We liked white movie stars. I thought Marilyn Monroe was cool. Fell in love with Ingrid Bergman, Ilsa, the first time I saw *Casablanca*. You know, I had to marry her. I had the usual kind of fantasies, but what do you do when black people, African Americans, were like, heavy-duty? I remember being pained by that, because I saw something you can change. It wasn't about personality or smart or rude. Hey, this isn't it. And you had nothing to protect. White people had something to protect. They could go, "Well, I'm going to protect privilege." What does a light black person, you know, blah, blah, blah. I don't know.

04-00:07:11

And the Catholicism. That was another kind of a—I just didn't see a way to fit into that.

04-00:07:21

Wilmot:

As a self-ordained Episcopalian.

04-00:07:25

Banks:

Self-ordained, yeah. [laughs] I just thought it was a little too much of a presence. I didn't want religion to be that much of a presence in my life, and it never had been, but a lot of these people just—and this is old school. This is Mel Gibson Catholicism. You don't eat meat on Friday, and the whole nine yards. So, hey! Go to Mass. But again, I understood the hypocrisy of these people. But anyway.

04-00:07:59

Wilmot:

That's interesting. I have another question, which is in terms of socially, when you think about—this is this question. I'm interested in what was the social geography. If you were to draw a map of what were the kind of different social venues, or cultural pockets, or identities within your campus. Where were all the different points that one could be, if one wanted to be, if they wanted to fit in?

04-00:08:36

Banks:

There was a striving group—let's make this gender for the time being and I'll try to mix them. There were people who were science majors, pre-med students, who were typically bright. Most of them came from New Orleans, incidentally. I won't go that far to say Catholicism discourages critical thinking; I won't go that far, but most of these people were smart but very tunnel vision. Had a very kind of tunnel vision. They tended to hang together, and they dated girls who aspired to be the wives of doctors or teachers. This is just the way it was. And that was a minority, but a sizable—they wanted to be student leaders and presidents of this and that and so forth. That was the deal. One woman that went that route—Gail Moore—she was president of the school board in New Orleans for a while. That was one. Another crowd, the native—very few people from New Orleans, participated fully in the campus. See, it was basically unlike some of the black colleges. Most of the people at Dillard lived in the city, or were from the city. Ah, a sizable percentage. I'd have to think more about the absolute numbers, but they lived in the city. Commuter students. And that's a problem, because at night you had these people—or on the evenings and so forth—you had a much smaller group of students and the campus explodes in the daytime and you don't know how to make these connections, and so forth. There wasn't the ease of transportation that might exist now. A few people had cars, and Dillard is isolated. It's way down in Seventh Ward, and it's not round the heart of the city like a Morehouse. Morehouse is right there on the street. You had a lot of poor kids who were from Mississippi, Alabama, less sophisticated but hardworking, so forth, who looked up to everybody. They just seemed to spend their lives finding people to look up to. I never figured that out. But, you know, that's maybe not fair.

04-00:11:14

Wilmot:

And that's not the same as being a striver?

04-00:11:16

Banks:

No. Oh, no. The strivers looked down on them, because they say "ain't," they say "he be."

04-00:11:24

Wilmot:

They're country.

04-00:11:25

Banks:

They're country, exactly. They're country. They're hardworking and all that kind of stuff, but they're country. And strivers let them know that.

04-00:11:40

Now, girls. I don't remember any women that I thought of as being particularly intellectual. There weren't many men, either. I knew some smart women, but most of the women there—most of the Northerners there were men. Sports, often. The women were—ah, that's probably unfair—just, like I said, not very bright. A couple of them I've known they went on and got degrees and so forth, but they're probably still not very bright. I mean, I say that in a sort of snobbish way. They just don't think about a lot of things.

04-00:12:37

Wilmot:

Okay. Do you mean academically bright, or do you mean, like—

04-00:12:41

Banks:

Thoughtful.

04-00:12:42

Wilmot:

Thoughtful. Okay.

04-00:12:43

Banks:

Yeah. Let me clean that up. Thoughtful as opposed to just—you know, you can do this, get everything right, but don't have a bigger picture.

04-00:12:52

Wilmot:

Engaged.

04-00:12:52

Banks:

Exactly. My circle, I sort of played it very loose. I could never get into athletics and that full-fledged social crowd. I could never do that. I was always on the margins. If I had to describe my own movement and positioning, it was kind of marginal. I had the social skills. I had the personality to—I could talk to anybody. I mean, I could do that. I didn't have anything to prove. And I did that. I just sort of moved between groups, fairly easily. Fairly easily. I was maybe popular in that sense. People thought I was smart, but they really didn't know me. They knew that I could come into a situation, I probably knew a little bit about this, a little bit about that. And I was very careful not to distinguish myself in a way that might create problems or narrow my choices.

04-00:14:11

Wilmot:

Very interesting.

04-00:14:12

Banks:

Yeah.

04-00:14:20

Wilmot:

I'm wondering, did you have dear friends or—yeah. Do you have life friendships that developed from that time, or people who were your {running?} partners at that time?

04-00:14:33

Banks:

There are a couple of people now, that I know from that period. One guy, Herschel Peterson, who was from Chicago. We stay in touch. He comes through here often. I'm thinking of real friends as opposed to just people I know who were there. [pause] Hmm. It's telling that no names immediately come to mind. Like my roommate. We had a very disruptive thing that happened later on, but we were tight for a while.

04-00:15:17

Wilmot:

Hm-mmm. This is the wild one from DC?

04-00:15:19

Banks:

From DC, yeah. You young people say, he had issues. But no, I really can't claim to have a lifelong close friend.

04-00:15:32

Wilmot:

It may be that the "lifelong" is the wrong—because things happen. But just if there was a dear—connections that you made as friends. It doesn't have to be lifelong.

04-00:15:46

Banks:

No, they were not very tight or intimate—maybe that's strong too. But I don't have any good friends, with the possible exception of Herschel, from that period. Now there were dozens of people, since I've been in California, and they come through, "Hey, let's get together!" We do that, and that's always cool. But as far as the kind of lifelong friend. I did have a long friend that goes back to high school, which I didn't mention. I'm not sure why. Actually, he was a student at high school. I'm sorry. When I was at high school he was in college at Fort Valley. We became friends. He was sort of a mentor. He was maybe like seven or eight years older. He introduced me to dope, and I thought he was so cool. He was from Pittsburgh. He dressed well. {Roberto Don Jose Antonin?}. He had an exotic name, and he knew jazz. We became friends when I was in high school and to this day I would number him as one of my best friends. There's more I can say about him, but—

04-00:17:05

Wilmot:

Is he the one who loaned you the car when your parents wouldn't loan you a car?

04-00:17:09

Banks:

No. He would have. He had a car. He certainly would have. He went with me to—where's the first place? Indianapolis. Later to Washington, DC. I'd go on jobs and bring him along, and so forth. Like I said, we were just very good—we have been very good friends all this time. He's still in DC, incidentally. College, no. That's an interesting question. But again, the marginality. I just was not—if somebody comes up and says, "I'm Kappa," my eyes are going to glaze over. I have buddies now who are Kappas. They feel the same way. You know, John Burris. He's a good friend. Oliver. David Alexander. All these people are Kappas, ostensible Kappas, but that represents nothing to any of us. I think.

04-00:18:05

Wilmot:

That's so interesting. Well, that's another question I wanted to ask you, which is: What was the social life around being a Greek—

04-00:18:14

Banks:

They had parties off campus. Basically, I remember the Neville Brothers was a sort of a cheap entertainment. Anybody, if you had a party, you'd have the Neville Brothers to come and sing. Hey, I'm telling you—little did we know, but they were just a local group. Cheap and fine. Dance and music. Drinking. That's the other thing, too. I learned how to drink in college. That is, how to manage alcohol. I never really—New Orleans is a very party, heavy. You know, it's a wild place and I managed to learn that. My dad taught me a lot of stuff. "Do this. Don't drink like this. Don't mix this and this." Just the basics. I always had a reputation for being able to hold alcohol. That stood me in good stead, because I never had the kind of episodes of being total drunk, embarrassing myself. Things like that. But socially there were parties. Greeks had a party, and you'd invite the circle. Usually sometimes church halls and stuff like that.

04-00:19:40

Wilmot:

As an Alpha, was there a sorority that was your counterpart?

04-00:19:42

Banks:

A Kappa. No. Alphas and AKAs, that was the—

04-00:19:50

Wilmot:

That was your sister—?

04-00:19:52

Banks:

Okay. I was a Kappa. I'm sorry, I maybe misspoke there.

04-00:19:55

Wilmot:
Sorry.

04-00:19:55

Banks:

The Alphas were the smart people. The Hayward Henrys, the Charles Brinckleys, the Claude Smiths, and other people. Billy Guillory, who actually came out here. He got a Ph.D. from Berkeley in physics. They were the smart people. They hung out with the—their sister was the AKAs. Omegas. The Deltas.

04-00:20:22

Wilmot:

And Kappas.

04-00:20:24

Banks:

I was freelance. There was no counterpart. I could pick and choose. [laughs]

04-00:20:30

Wilmot:

Where did you live?

04-00:20:31

Banks:

On campus.

04-00:20:33

Wilmot:

You lived on campus all four years?

04-00:20:34

Banks:

Yeah.

04-00:20:36

Wilmot:

Okay. There's this theme that's emerging which I guess I could just ask you about, which has to do with your fighting but being very much among and one of the black bourgeoisie or the black bourgeoisie strata at the same time that you were kind of positioning yourself opposite it, or trying to distance yourself from it. How does that play itself out for you in college? What is that about?

04-00:21:20

Banks:

I just saw a lot of phoniness in that at Dillard. Why did I see that? Because I'd grown up in a setting where, on paper, my dad's like white bourgeoisie. He looks like that, but he is as earthy and down-to-earth as anybody. And that was my model. You don't have to act like that to be smart. You don't have to be ostentatious or use big words, blah, blah, blah. That just was a part of it. When I got there, I saw these people who were not so smart, not so wealthy even, acting like this. I just saw a bunch of hypocrisy. Pretence. And I just decided that I did not have to be

like that. I didn't have to dress like that. I didn't have to join the Alphas. I was an outlaw. The kind of marginal person on the fringes. To me, middle class meant being civil, being nice, always had a reputation of being kind and a good listener. I wasn't overbearing, and people like that. I had a sense of humor and didn't take myself too seriously. That's the kind of stuff that was important to me, and God I missed a lot! Kind of intellectual camaraderie that I mentioned, I wish that I could have had that, but I just realized, you'll probably never get this kind of group that you're looking for. You'll never find it. Later on a person defined it "pockets of health." I thought, maybe that's as much as you can hope for. Whatever setting you find yourself in, just find small groups of people here and there that you can connect with. There are these pockets of health. If you do that, you're ahead of the game, as opposed to a faculty or a department or some big larger body that's on the same page, and so forth. And I've just learned to live with that. It's lonely. It can be very lonely, because you do want to—maybe I'm wrong about some things; can I engage and grow and stuff? It's not easy to do it. And I'm shy. That's the other thing. I'm not a glad-hander: How you doing? I let it come to me. And if you do that, particularly as you get older, it just becomes harder and harder.

04-00:24:17

I remember just so many times being around guys. They were talking about sports and stuff. That's all right, but I wanted to talk about something else, and I was smart enough not to bring up Tennessee Williams because they hadn't read Tennessee Williams. Although that might have been interesting to me. So what do you do? Do you abandon your interest in Tennessee Williams? No, but you compartmentalize it. Who do you talk to about that? These little shape-shifters that you do, and you try to stay—make sure there's a core there. Nothing in the world of black academic life in that period—I have an interesting tape that I did in connection with my book with Skip Gates. I just remember being so jealous. He was talking about his kind of community at Yale when he was an undergraduate. "All these smart people, man. They were so smart, and I just loved to sit and argue. We'd get high and just—on and on." And I thought, why couldn't I have experienced that? According to him—and there's some truth in that. I know other people who were there. Just guys going at it and arguing and growing and testing. Everybody doesn't come out right, but still that excitement that I just never experienced. Like I said, I just remember being so damn jealous of—Phew! Yeah, I should've gone to Harvard at fourteen—nah! You're right. [laughs]

04-00:26:08

Wilmot:

Okay. Let's close for today. How's that?

04-00:26:13

Banks:

That's fine.

[End Audio File 4]

Interview 3: March 2, 2004

[Begin Audio File 5]

05-00:00:06

Wilmot:

Good morning. Dr. William Banks. Interview 3, March 2, 2004. I'm wondering if you could say a few words.

05-00:00:15

Banks:

To make sure that the sound is just right?

05-00:00:19

Wilmot:

It's just fine. Perfect. So, when you matriculated to University of Kentucky's Ph.D. program in—educational psychology?

05-00:00:33

Banks:

Yeah, actually, initially it was the psychology department. I was admitted to the psychology department.

05-00:00:42

Wilmot:

How old were you? You were twenty-one maybe? Twenty-two?

05-00:00:47

Banks:

A little younger.

05-00:00:49

Wilmot:

You were twenty when you went to pursue your PhD.

05-00:00:53

Banks:

I turned twenty that first year.

05-00:00:57

Wilmot:

Right. Okay.

05-00:01:02

Banks:

I looked old.

05-00:01:03

Wilmot:

You looked old. What did the lay of the land look like in terms of the kind of classes you chose once you went there?

05-00:01:16

Banks:

My interest in psychology, first of all, was very late developing. And I had hoped for much more of a human social focus in psychology. This was naiveté on my part, because I guess all graduate students, in doing psychology, have to go through the range of fields—experimental, learning, sensory, and a whole lot of things that I was not particularly interested in. Perhaps I was not mature enough to see this as maybe two years of that. I wanted immediately to begin dealing with issues and matters at least affecting people, and so much of that first year was spent in areas that—and it was a prescribed curriculum. It wasn't as if there may have been an option.

Everybody did it. That's just the way it was, but I wasn't wise enough to understand that. Or I didn't have a lot of options because I wasn't a can't-miss student, so that's what the first year was like academically. [phone rings] So, like I say, in terms of straight academics, it wasn't an exciting place to be.

05-00:03:08

Wilmot:

It wasn't exciting?

05-00:03:10

Banks:

It was not. It was not. There were some pluses, but maybe out of sequence. The other element that was certainly a factor in my life, broadly defined, was the fact that we're talking about a period in which the civil rights movement was in quite high gear. There was this kind of social and political ferment in the land. There was early rumblings about Vietnam and so forth, and these things excited me. I was an activist of sorts. You'd go through these questions about role. Why am I here? Here I am, at this all-white university studying patterns of responses in white rats, when there's a turmoil, this social upheaval going on in the street. Particularly being black. I mean, there are other people who no doubt experienced the same kind of tension, but that was the first time that it had been pressed upon me very dramatically. In college, I could handle that. This was a black community and you were connecting with other black people and so forth, and although there wasn't the kind of engaged intellectual idea context, nevertheless they cared about things that I cared about. There, nobody seemed to care about things I cared about, and that was kind of different. Again, I was nineteen years old. I wasn't as independent. I wanted to talk about these things. I wanted to argue, debate, and people just didn't care. That was difficult.

05-00:05:09

Wilmot:

Who were you talking to?

05-00:05:10

Banks:

I had friends—off-campus, typically. A very good friend was, of all things, a jazz organ player in the town. He was a dropout of Oberlin [College]. A very, very bright guy. A bit odd, some would say, but extremely well read. We were good friends. We became good friends, and he was in some ways like me. He wasn't as strictly academic, but he was a bright guy. We could talk about anything you wanted to. He really valued ideas. We became friends. Eventually there were other people, but all of these people are outside of the campus community. Later on there's a figure that looms large, but a couple of things before that, perhaps.

05-00:06:07

But this was the tension—I remember so well, I was in the library studying. The psychology department was in the med school, physically, at that point. I remember being in the reading room studying one Sunday morning, when—I can't remember if it was a loudspeaker or something—that the Birmingham, those four little girls. Just hearing the snickers, and these were med students at the University of Kentucky Medical School. The snickers, and this kind of chuckling atmosphere. I just remember walking out—and I'm not an impulsive person. I'm not a fly-off-the-handle; I've always managed anger pretty well, but I just felt that. Walking out and having some witty conversations with people about what I was doing, how I could make sense of my life, and could the academic world be integrated into my kind of world at that point. I remember having those conversations.

05-00:07:27

Wilmot:

The medical students were chuckling at the murder of those four little girls?

05-00:07:31

Banks:

Yeah. Oh, yeah. I mean, it was sort of a “ha, ha, ha, ha.” Obviously I can't—it was very clear that it was a sort of “see what they get” attitude about that. Apart from the details. There was no question about it. I remember another incident that loomed large when Muhammad Ali (Cassius Clay, at the time)--beat Sonny Liston—the first time. In our lunch room, I mean, people were just furious about that. Like the world had come to an end. I was studying one night, I can't remember the specifics but I just—they just went off that this upstart Cassius Clay had beat Sonny Liston. It was all racial, there's no question. Racial, political, even. {I'll pick my shot?}. Those were some of the early anecdotal things that fed into this more general problem that I was dealing with.

05-00:08:40

Wilmot:

I'm trying to understand though. Okay, so this was early in Cassius Clay's career, and he was fighting other black fighters?

05-00:08:53

Banks:

Yeah.

05-00:08:57

Wilmot:

And people were concerned about him winning?

05-00:08:59

Banks:

Yeah.

05-00:09:02

Wilmot:

Because of the kinds of political things that he evinced? His stance?

05-00:09:07

Banks:

Oh, yeah. At that point, number one, there were rumors about he was about to become a Muslim or already was a Muslim. He'd come under the spell, so they said, of Malcolm X. So that was out there. It's just like a rumor: "Oh, I've seen, watch who she's with," that kind of thing. Even so, even when he came to fight black fighters it was always that "good for nothing,"—he was evil. There's no question about it. Ishmael Reed, did a piece recently where he talked about this change of opinion about Muhammad Ali; how now everybody likes him because he has Parkinson's and he's a sympathetic figure. Back in the day, people hated Muhammad Ali with a passion. It was that, and later on the war. So any time he fought—black or white, whoever—he could be, as Sonny Liston, a dope addict, all kind of bad criminal record, but if you were in the arena against Muhammad Ali for a minute, you became white America's hero. It doesn't last, of course, but that cultural dynamic's at that point of time. There's no question about that.

05-00:10:21

Wilmot:

How were you relating to Muhammad Ali and his interests?

05-00:10:26

Banks:

I liked the persona. I liked the arrogance. I liked the courage to speak up. A kind of pleasantness about him that I liked. I saw this Southern—I mean, he didn't worry about breaking, splitting verbs and all that kind of stuff, and he had this supreme self-confidence. Certainly, after he announced himself to be a Muslim, I just said, "Wow! This is tremendous." Here's a person that chooses to walk a path and he knows the kind of flak that's going to come at him as a result of that decision, but nevertheless this is something he believed in. The faith, that wasn't my particularly schtick—Islam, the Nation of Islam—but nevertheless we had a romantic sense of the hero, the kind of hero figure that I just admire tremendously. This was Kentucky, and he was from Kentucky, which sort of added to that. He was from Louisville. All of those things sort of played into my thinking about Ali at that point in my life, his life—his career, my life.

05-00:11:52

Wilmot:

I want to return to something you said. You said that many of your colleagues, not colleagues, but social connections were people who weren't in graduate school with you but were in the town surrounding. What was that area like? What was the town surrounding your graduate school? How did you relate to that? The whole idea of town and gown, I don't know if that operated there.

05-00:12:19

Banks:

Sure. There was very few blacks at the University of Kentucky at that time. There weren't even athletes. Think about that. A school with no black athletes. Well, I don't want to be too cynical about that, but no athletes even. So you had this sprinkling of black students who—it's very hard to categorize them. They were, I guess, middle class in the main, but they were hardly isolated. They had their fraternities. I mean undergraduates. You have to break it down. There were very few graduate students. There probably weren't—this is a guess—ten black graduate students in the whole university. So forget that. Not even law school. I remember the first black guy that came into law school was there, he came when I went there.

05-00:13:10

Wilmot:

Do you want to say his name?

05-00:13:11

Banks:

Henry Tribble. There were a couple of people in the professional schools. Carl Watson, I mentioned him before, who has a big practice here in Oakland today. But they were so busy. I mean, doctors trying to do what they had to do. I had one buddy that was good. We could hang together. A dental guy in dental school, Ben Nero. Black guy named Nero—I always thought that was cool. I wonder did he name himself that, but he didn't. Anyway, there were a few here and there but by and large the people at Kentucky were undergraduates and while I was young—say twenty, twenty-one years old around this time—I couldn't get into the kind of undergraduate life that they were into. Apart from girls. I mean, that's who you date. There might have been some graduate students there who were women, black women, but that wasn't the thing. The undergraduates, that was the pool, if you will. The main pool. I interacted with undergraduates during that time. Political stuff, they didn't want any parts of it. They were worried about getting expelled. They were so glad to be at Kentucky, and they were the—I understood that. That's what it was like. Very small numbers, disproportionately undergraduate. So that was the name of that game.

05-00:15:02

Wilmot:

And in terms of the community surrounding the University of Kentucky, were you in the town of Louisville?

05-00:15:08

Banks:

Lexington. The big employer there was IBM [International Business Machines], and probably the university. It's a horse racing town.

05-00:15:21

Wilmot:

Again?

05-00:15:22

Banks:

Yes. That's interesting. I knew that world. I knew that culture. I did some interesting things there, too. They bred racehorses. That's the bluegrass. That's the whole myth there. That and basketball. That was the distinguishing feature of Lexington as a town. Very meager—there was one guy who was on the city council, black guy. Schools were integrated, primarily. There was a black high school, Dunbar—Lexington Dunbar—but by and large most of the schools were integrated. They started reconfiguring in terms of the suburban schools—the county schools, as opposed to the city schools. You could see that coming, but it wasn't nearly as pronounced as it came to be. That's the case everywhere.

05-00:16:27

When I got there, I lived with a black family miles and miles from town. I had no car.

05-00:16:34

Wilmot:

Who were they?

05-00:16:35

Banks:

They were just a sort of middle class family. It was in a black middle class development. I think their names were Philips. I can't even remember—oh, yeah. That was the thing that a fraternity did for me. Through some fraternity connection I got the name of this family and I lived with them for, I guess, about two months. It wasn't my style. A room in a suburban house, millions of miles away from the campus. I took the bus. That was life. I wasn't unduly pampered like that, but I wanted to be closer to either the school or the city. I eventually made my way into that other kind of environment.

05-00:17:26

Wilmot:

You mentioned that you, after some activism for change, or agitating for change, you and another person were housed in the basement of a house for disabled students.

05-00:17:48

Banks:

There was a dormitory and the wing of this dormitory was reserved for disabled students. Black being a disability, I guess they were progressive in that regard. They constructed blackness—anyway, I'm being facetious. In part.

05-00:18:04

Wilmot:

Yeah. You could take that further if you like.

05-00:18:06

Banks:

No, no. There were three of us. A black guy from Detroit. My roommate at the time—a guy named Jerome Ron Ratchford, who went on to get a Ph.D. He's a dean of students at a college in the South—Kennesaw State University. A small college in the South. Did okay. But that's where we were. I got to know a couple of the disabled students. That was the name of the game. After, again, some agitation. I said, "Look, I live way over here. I can't get a regular room in the dorms." Well, it would be disruptive—all the stories and so forth.

05-00:19:01

Wilmot:

I was going to ask this one question pertaining to this, were any of your conversations with the disabled students that you got to know, was there any kind of discussion about the construction that was being made? The construction that was being created about blackness and disability. Was there any kind of discussion about that?

05-00:19:21

Banks:

Oh, yeah. Very pointed. I said, "Why do you think we are here?" You know, you're legally blind—Jack Wolfe, that was one guy's name. Bright guy. And there were other people around with various disabilities, but we made a point of saying, "Can you understand why we're here?" You just leave it there. It wasn't their fault. I'm not into browbeating, but you just sort of put it

out there, in a way, and then do what they wanted to. So that was basically that. That was the year—when was Kennedy assassinated? That was '63. Right. So I must've been there, I guess, two years. Because I remember I was living there when he got assassinated. November. Yeah. But that was the experience, part of the experience of graduate school.

05-00:20:29

The other thing that's a very important element: I did meet a person, Robert Carkuhff, who was a post-doc there at Kentucky, in psychology. His field was research in psychotherapy. We became good friends. He was a family person. Had, like, three kids. From Buffalo, New York. German. Instinctively conservative, but he took the issues seriously, as opposed to the sort of muddle-headed liberals, the people would fancy themselves to be liberals. He took me seriously, and he would argue and debate and so forth. We became good friends. We'd play basketball. He actually formed a basketball team that played against integrated black teams in the city. The narcotics hospital was there. They had a team. So, I mean, he was the kind of, I guess you'd say macho—clearly macho, clearly a chauvinist—but he was useful to me in terms of giving me a kind of confidence because he was so good. He was so great.

Certainly for that period he was probably one of the top three national researchers in psychotherapy during that time. His work's just off the top. People could never understand our connection. People saw him as thoroughly academic and he was doing these tightly controlled experimental studies and so forth, and hanging out often with Bil Banks, who was this outsider. He was very important. He taught me a lot of lessons about being confident, and having the courage to not let other people decide whether you were smart.

05-00:22:55

I'll show you just how limited my world was. I remember the first week of classes in graduate school, after a class people would say, "Look, we need to Xerox this. If you can do this..." I never heard of Xerox. These people are talking—everybody seemed to goddamned know, but I'd never heard of Xerox. So you'd have to listen very carefully and see what they're doing. You pick it up. Obviously, that didn't mean I was stupid, but it was just a different world.

05-00:23:26

Wilmot:

But you didn't let them know that you didn't know what Xerox was?

05-00:23:28

Banks:

I probably asked somebody, said, "Look, tell me what Xerox—" I'm pretty sure. Oh, no. I would not just say in a meeting, "What's a Xerox?" I figured I could figure it out, and I did. Or maybe I asked somebody. But at that time I probably didn't, because I didn't know anybody well enough. Later on you said, what's this, what's that. That's the way it goes.

05-00:23:54

But he was—he just became a force, a major force in my intellectual life. His thing was: "Get out of school as quickly as you can. Don't assume that you're going to learn in graduate school. You'll be here forever figuring that there's something you have to learn. Take this course. Take this. Look, get out of this place." Again, I was thinking about dropping out. He said, "Yeah, I understand. But this shit is easy. Get out, get your union card, and go out and do all these things you want to do. Don't let them steal that."

Again, here is a person who was the cream of the crop in America in psychology, in American psychotherapy, just working with me, closely. And it wasn't a faculty member. See, that's the other thing, too. He was a post-doc.

There was Charlie Truax, who was also eminent—and I mean, he just sort of helped me frame my academic career to make it manageable. So I made some choices and got through. Did my dissertation—I designed and did a dissertation that was quickly published in the *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, which was probably the most prestigious journal in clinical psychology—a very experimental thing; just four or five pages.

05-00:25:37

I didn't mention what it was about. I did a study, one of the first—maybe the first, but certainly one of the first—experimental studies of race as a factor in psychotherapy. Everybody was, “Oh, yeah. Black people don't get along with white people in therapy.” There was the rhetoric, but I designed a study to actually identify the dynamics. It was an experimental study, where you have matched pairs and some level of sophistication. Like I said, it became a feature in some of the—almost all the early work about race and psychotherapy.

05-00:26:14

Wilmot:

I want to go back to something, and then I want to pick up your dissertation.

05-00:26:17

Banks:

Sure.

05-00:26:18

Wilmot:

Perhaps this is actually answering this question, but there is something you said about Robert Carkuhff. You said, “He helped me make some choices about my time there.” I wanted to ask you what your choices were about your time there.

05-00:26:36

Banks:

My choices were—again, this is generalized some—but to do what everybody else was doing. These were people who listened to professors and took these seven or eight courses here. Were just directed by faculty members. As opposed to: What do I want? Satisfy the minimum requirement, but beyond that, think for yourself. Do the things that are interesting to you. Read widely, blah, blah, blah. Pay deference to that only as much as you have to, and boom! And I did that. I did that [laughs] to the max, and as a result of that I—like I said, I did okay. I got out of there, and I know I could not have stayed much longer than I actually stayed. I went through it real fast. This sort of jumps the gun a little bit, but again I was young and I reasoned that—I was maybe twenty-three or something like that. Very young. I'd married and had a family, and I just thought nobody's going to hire anybody this young in any kind of position. So I decided to take off for a year to work, just so I'd have experience. These kind of things. Like I said, don't hesitate to stop me.

05-00:28:02

Wilmot:

Okay. When you said you did that to the max, you were reading broadly and widely, and kind of inventing your own academic agenda and curriculum, what did that look like for you? What did reading widely look like for you? What was exciting? What was exciting to read at that time?

05-00:28:23

Banks:

I went through my existential phase, which Carkuhff thought was bullshit.

05-00:28:28

Wilmot:

Who?

05-00:28:29

Banks:

Carkuhff. He'd say, "Oh, that's ridiculous. Don't pay any attention to that. Navel gazing." You know, Phenomenology. My buddies on the outside were reading that stuff. Rollo May, Frankl, the neo-Freudians, that was always very interesting to me, and I never did get completely away from that. I was reading that kind of stuff, and I was reading social psychology. I remember being impressed by the work of a guy who was at Berkeley. He actually ended up as dean here. I knew his work. Jerry Mendelsohn, psych department here, did some work that I connected to in my own dissertation. I think I probably quoted him. I'm sure I used that. But if it didn't clearly relate to my mission—you're talking about a specialist. I just determined I could not be a specialist. I would not get drawn into all of this stuff. [dog barking] Is that somebody in the yard?

05-00:29:33

Wilmot:

Yeah. In fact, there's a voice out front. [interview interruption]

05-00:30:15

Banks:

Anything that wasn't directly related to me getting out, I just ignored. There were lots of things I could have—and, again, I don't cite this as the high point in my life. In some cases, you wish you knew more, you had spent more time with this and this and this. But his powerful message—and, again, this is not from a guy on the street but from somebody who understood, who had been there. He talked about how much of what he had learned was totally irrelevant to what he needed to do. That's a dicey proposition, because we don't always know. I don't know everything that I need to know at some later date. Again, I would not encourage anybody else to do that. But given the pressures that I felt on me—maybe self-imposed; social commitments and so forth—that was the choice that I made. It's maybe not the best choice, but you can't go home again. That's the way it was.

05-00:31:25

Wilmot:

You mentioned that Robert Carkuhff, who was a post-doc—

05-00:31:31

Banks:

At the time, yeah.

05-00:31:32

Wilmot:

—student postdoctoral researcher?

05-00:31:36

Banks:

Researcher, yeah. He had a grant at N.I.M.H.

05-00:31:40

Wilmot:

Were there faculty there who you worked with, or who were influential?

05-00:31:52

Banks:

Obviously, I worked with them. I can't say that—nobody approached his level of influence with me. There are some people who were personally supportive, who thought I was able and shouldn't be doing all this other stuff outside. They really cared. They wanted me to be a great psychologist and all that kind of stuff. I respected that, but they were not influential. Carkuhff said an interesting thing that I've carried with me. He said, "Beware of liberals. Particularly in academic life, because they never tell you how to get to where they got. All these liberals who've done this great work, they don't want to tell you how they got to where they got. They want to put you in a box, like you can't really do this." It was somewhat racialized, but it was something I've always remembered and just distrusted, "Well, you don't have to study as hard. You don't have to be as rigorous."

05-00:33:03

Wilmot:

What kind of experience did Carkuhff have that he knew about that?

05-00:33:07

Banks:

It's amazing. He grew up in Buffalo. Working-class guy who was tough. No inner city kind of stuff but just working-class Buffalo, where I'm sure he had some contacts with blacks, but I never remember him talking about any buddies. In the military. He went through that. He was like an officer, not CIA but some military police training. A really conservative guy. Ideologically he was like that, but he went on to do very different things, and dedicated his life to human relations. It was meaty stuff. But there was nothing that jumped out in his background that—that's what was so strange. He wasn't urban. He didn't have long hair at the time, he wore a crew cut, and was as German-looking as you could get. Traditional family. Bernice, his wife, made baby after baby every year. There was nothing counterculturish about that, but when it came down to that kind of humanistic, person thing, he was there.

05-00:34:35

Wilmot:

What was your aesthetic in terms of your dress and how you looked at that time? How did you present yourself?

05-00:34:43

Banks:

I was always furious because I couldn't grow an Afro. We're talking about the times—maybe a little before then—when people wore their hair nappy and all that kind of stuff. My hair gets to a certain point and it won't grow. Facial hair too. I couldn't grow a beard, I couldn't grow a mustache. It just grows to a certain point and it stays there, which looks ugly. In terms of my own aesthetics, that's the way it was. I dressed kind of urban collegiate. I remember liking cardigans for some reason. I guess that's kind of New Englandy. I didn't have any money, so that's the way that was. My music, I liked [Bob] Dylan. I remember just spending hours drinking wine and smoking dope trying to figure out *Desolation Row* and *Visions of Johanna*. I kind of like that stuff. And, of course, black music. That was the core, but in terms of the campus, academic thing, that's what it was. Motown was, I imagine, bubbling around that time. Certainly Aretha Franklin. Again, just black music. I've always been into that. And jazz.

05-00:36:18

That's the other thing, too, that's very important. There were people there who understood, could appreciate jazz. I could spend an afternoon listening to jazz with them, and they could understand and appreciate what was happening there. That's been rare in my lifetime. Just a few places. Years here in Oakland and Berkeley, in DC somewhat, but I just wondered—but anyway that's just another piece of that, aesthetically.

05-00:36:51

Wilmot:

You just wondered—?

05-00:36:52

Banks:

How would it be to just have a community of people who really, really listened and understood the culture and where that music came from, and were almost as interested in it as I was. I've never been involved with a woman—well, one woman; friends, a kind of relationship—that liked jazz. They'd say—everybody, if I like it, they like it. Okay. Good. But you get past *Kinda Blue* or some of the staples—and so what? I mean, people have their different tastes, but I've always wondered. Billie Holliday, people have that poignant, romantic notion. That's always workable in a relationship, but you get the impression that it's here [indicates head], where I want to see it as all-encompassing, in everything, and so forth. But anyway, that's an aside. I was telling you about the musician, my best friend—

05-00:38:00

Wilmot:

The organist.

05-00:38:00

Banks:

Organist, yeah. He played with Joe Tex. That's before your time perhaps. He played rhythm and blues on tour and he did a lot of stuff like that.

05-00:38:13

Wilmot:

Were you somehow involved then with what was happening musically?

05-00:38:19

Banks:

No, no, no. I can't play nothing. Nothing. I remember at one point thinking, but I just was embarrassed by—I was listening to what people were doing and I thought, I could never do that. So, hey, don't even go there. Don't even try. It's enough to appreciate it and respect the art, rather than trying to do that. I can't do that. I can't be a great basketball player—a lot of things you can't do, you just have to look within yourself and see yourself as a fan. The superfan. That's okay.

05-00:38:59

Wilmot:

Understood. Understood. I want to ask this other question, which is kind of connected to this. One time I had asked you off-tape when did you become a one-L "Bill." When did that happen? And you said it was graduate school.

05-00:39:16

Banks:

Right.

05-00:39:17

Wilmot:

So how did that happen?

05-00:39:19

Banks:

You always have these name tags and ways of identifying—"Bill," and several people would raise their hand. I can't remember the first time I did it. I'd never heard of that before. I'd never seen that before, but for some reason, I just put one L and everybody remembered that. I should've known that to be black in this setting, that was probably enough.

05-00:39:49

Wilmot:

Just to make sure.

05-00:39:50

Banks:

Yeah. It's like [thumps table] I decided this. I didn't decide the black thing, but this is the one L. It took hold and I've never had a problem with that. I don't declare war. People do it, it's fine, but—

05-00:40:11

Wilmot:

Did your family get on board quickly?

05-00:40:14

Banks:

Oh, yeah. Quickly. Well, my family calls me Billy. My immediate family. That's Billy, that's what I was growing up: Billy Banks. But Dad writes now "Bil."

05-00:40:32

Wilmot:

In terms of other students, colleagues, were there people that you were thinking with. Were there colleagues that you would hang out and think with and discuss books and study with?

05-00:40:51

Banks:

At university?

05-00:40:52

Wilmot:

Yeah.

05-00:40:52

Banks:

None.

05-00:40:52

Wilmot:

In terms of other graduate students. Was most of your intellectual stimulation coming from outside of the—non-students and also, you know, this Carkuhff?

05-00:41:05

Banks:

Outside, yeah. My first answer would be “No.” I just did not have that kind of intellectual engagement with faculty members. Other graduate students as well. Some of them were very nice. I mentioned this woman Carolyn Simmons, who was in the psychology department, who was a blue blood from Connecticut. She was very friendly and I’m sure I was invited over for dinner and stuff like that. She came to be useful. I stayed in contact with her for maybe twenty years. She ended up as the dean of L&S at the University of North Carolina, Wilmington, years ago, and my daughter—anyway, that’s neither here nor there. She was friendly, and we were good friends as graduate students, but she was a New England blue blood [laughs] and I was an outlaw from Georgia.

05-00:42:08

Wilmot:

Oh!

05-00:42:09

Banks:

[laughs] What can I say?

05-00:42:10

Wilmot:

Okay.

05-00:42:11

Banks:

That didn’t seem to work. I mean, it worked in terms of that, but it was just one of those things.

05-00:42:23

Wilmot:

That's important. I'm wondering also, then, while you were in graduate school, were you working?

05-00:42:27

Banks:

Hm-mmm. The first year I had the usual assistantship. I did that. Fifteen hundred dollars a year, I never will forget that. It managed to cover—

05-00:42:39

Wilmot:

That was significant because that was a lot of money or a little bit of money?

05-00:42:44

Banks:

It was a lot of money. It was enough for me, in a way, because I—well, it's kind of significant. I got this fellowship the next year. Again, this is pre-integration. [fakes old voice] “Young lady, let me tell you this story.”

05-00:43:05

Wilmot:

Okay.

05-00:43:06

Banks:

This group, the Southern Regional Council, some educational fund or some group in the South, had an arrangement whereby they would pay the difference in the tuition at the University of Georgia. I lived in Georgia, but rather than integrate the school, they would pay tuition if you went some place other than Georgia.

05-00:43:31

Wilmot:

Ah!

05-00:43:32

Banks:

Got it?

05-00:43:32

Wilmot:

Hm-mmm.

05-00:43:33

Banks:

Okay, so I had that. Whatever the tuition at Georgia was, it just paid the difference, so that, okay, you don't have to—equal protection. [laughs] That's what the lawyers would say: That's equal protection. So I had some money there.

05-00:43:47

Wilmot:

Were you financing your own education at that point?

05-00:43:49

Banks:

Oh, yeah. I've never—

05-00:43:50

Wilmot:

Were you totally responsible for your graduate education?

05-00:43:52

Banks:

And undergraduate, yeah. Technically, I was. My parents would have helped me, but I just had that kind of attitude—again, the outlaw. Let's rob banks, and do a lot of other things to make it.

05-00:44:10

Wilmot:

I used to know someone whose last name was Outlaw.

05-00:44:14

Banks:

Lucius Outlaw?

05-00:44:15

Wilmot:

I actually went to school with his son, I believe.

05-00:44:18

Banks:

Lucius Outlaw.

05-00:44:19

Wilmot:

Yeah.

05-00:44:21

Banks:

He's a lawyer now, I think.

05-00:44:22

Wilmot:

I'm not certain.

05-00:44:23

Banks:

Mississippi.

05-00:44:24

Wilmot:

No, not Mississippi, but there somewhere. I think so.

05-00:44:30

Banks:

This guy's a professor at Vanderbilt. He's a philosophy professor. I met him at a conference. We were on the same panel, about last month, and that's a name you kind of—

05-00:44:41

Wilmot:

I know two Outlaws. Both African American, and both Southern. I always wonder where the last name comes from. I think I did know Lucius Outlaw's son. I went to college with him. But in any event—you were working, you had an assistantship as TA, first year, and that was \$1500, and the second year, you got a scholarship.

05-00:45:16

Banks:

Yes. That's a good question. I was trying to remember, as you were saying it, some type of fellowship, university fellowship. I got support and I didn't have to teach. But I frankly don't remember. It was some kind of university—I didn't have to work and pay stuff. I had to pay for housing and all that kind of thing, but I worked. I did some things on the side to help myself.

05-00:45:47

Wilmot:

Like what?

05-00:45:48

Banks:

I did some waiting tables, working at the racetrack. I knew about that scene, so I waited tables for a while. Just did other things to make ends meet best I could.

05-00:46:08

Wilmot:

Okay. All right. Interesting. So, by the third and fourth years, through '66 and '67, were you still working, or were you past that continuous scholarship? How did that work?

05-00:46:23

Banks:

I got married in 1965. I think.

05-00:46:27

Wilmot:

When you were twenty—?

05-00:46:27

Banks:

Twenty-two. Maybe twenty-one. Thereabouts. Born in '43, so whatever it is. I got married. That's the year—remember, I was following the advice of Carkuhff, just doing everything academically. And I realized that, damn, I'm going to be out of here at a very early age, and people are either going to think you're just a nerd, a bookworm, and you don't know anything about the real world. You need to get some experience. You need to get something—a job title other than "TA" and stuff—behind your name. Plus I was married. I got married, so—

05-00:47:21

Wilmot:

Who did you get married to?

05-00:47:23

Banks:

Her name was Querida McClendon at the time. She was a graduate student. She was working on a masters at Kentucky, taught in Cleveland, Ohio. That was a regular job, but she'd come down summer after summer. I didn't know her all of these summers, but that's what she was doing. Her father was an eminent basketball coach. He's in the Hall of Fame, coached the Olympic team. He's passed now, but he was really a giant in the field.

05-00:47:59

Wilmot:

Were you also thinking about supporting a family, as you still went to leave school?

05-00:48:04

Banks:

Oh, sure. Sure. Not as I left school, but I just wanted to work for a year. We got a job at a Job Corps Center in Indianapolis. I was director of psychological and counseling services there at the center, and she taught business stuff. Not superstar business, but the kind of Job Corps population, these are dropouts, the whole thing. Which, again, fit into my idea—my idea was to do this, finish my dissertation, finish writing my dissertation and then go off into something else. I wasn't sure, but this was sort of a way station. I never saw it as a career.

But it got dicey there. Again, this was the—we were in very political times, and students that—what did we call them? It wasn't clients or inmates. Corpsmen. That's what the population—there were protests and so forth about one thing and another. Black this or that. I had come to be identified with some of that. I was the kind of person that was—I remember being called in and it was suggested that I speak to the six or seven hundred students who were there, corpsmen who were there, and denounce Black Power, the black consciousness. I got it very clear that that's not the way to go, and da, da, da. Oh, please! I refused, and I was essentially fired or laid off or whatever you want to call it, and that was that.

05-00:49:57

It was a great thing for me because it forced me—because I'd gotten involved in this stuff. I was doing things, and here was this dissertation, but it forced me to, Wow! I mean, I wasn't shocked. I've never been a liberal about things like that. You take chances and you fight, and sometimes you lose. I wasn't, "Oh, I thought these people were nice." Carkuhff taught me that. He said, "Look, if you fight—these people are bad. If you believe they're bad people, very often they're gonna act like bad people, and you've got to be prepared for that. Don't be like liberals, wringing your hands and 'Oh, I didn't know that they were really terrible. Wah!' That's part of the analysis going in."

So when it comes down and you get vamped on by the system, you just pick up and go from there, rather than just wallowing in self-pity. These people, they were playing hardball. It was a very political and conservative area, Indianapolis, but nevertheless I got fired. But my wife was still working. I guess they didn't want to fire both of us. That would have been a little too crazy. And my daughter was born that year, my oldest daughter was born that year in Indianapolis. There's some interesting connections there. I think I was fired maybe—I don't remember dates, but I finished that academic school year there. I went back and forth. Commuted from Indianapolis to Lexington just enough to finish up my dissertation and get out there in the job

market. But it was—I hated Indianapolis. It was the worst year of my life. I say that without any—no doubts about it.

05-00:52:07

I had some buddies. That was kind of nice, but still it was just empty in all respects. I didn't like Indianapolis. I didn't like my job. And, you know, we're struggling with a baby and all the things that people shouldn't have to struggle with as much at that age and stuff. But anyway, I finished—by hook or crook I finished up and got in the job market. I try to look back over graduate school. I don't want to skip things.

05-00:52:40

Wilmot:

I have some questions for you as well.

05-00:52:41

Banks:

Sure. Go ahead.

05-00:52:43

Wilmot:

If we both take a minute, we can think about what else we want to get to. I have some questions for you when you're ready.

05-00:53:01

Banks:

Can I hear how this unfolds? I know you're busy, but—[interview interruption]

05-00:53:20

Wilmot:

I wanted to ask you about your dissertation. If you could tell me your dissertation topic and how you came to it.

05-00:53:32

Banks:

The Differential Effect Of Race in Helping and Psychotherapy, or something like—I mean, that's basically it.

05-00:53:44

Wilmot:

What did that mean? The racial background of the client or the counselor?

05-00:53:50

Banks:

Both. The general question—to what extent does race make a difference in the initial therapeutic interview, not over time. That's the other thing I should qualify. When you walk in the room and there's an African American or a white therapist, what happens? Blacks and whites, vice versa. When it's mixed up like that.

05-00:54:22

Wilmot:

How did you arrive at this as a question?

05-00:54:17

Banks:

These were the signs of the times. It was political in that there should be more black therapists for black people—this whole historic pattern of blacks don't respond as well to therapy. That's been a long—maybe they don't respond to white therapists. There's all kinds of questions that flow from that. What I wanted to do was to try to establish, was this in fact true. At least at the beginning. You can't answer all the questions. They still haven't been answered.

05-00:55:02

Wilmot:

How did you measure that? How did you measure people's—

05-00:55:05

Banks:

There were scales.

05-00:55:05

Wilmot:

—reactions to seeing a white or black therapist? Or clients. They were primarily African American clients?

05-00:55:13

Banks:

All of them were. Basically, there are some scales that were developed—Carkuhff helped—that you trained people to measure. You listened to a tape, a taped interview, and you can make judgments as to the quality of the process. Whether he gets it, or she gets it, or not. That's it in a nutshell. I could elaborate, but that's what—an objective measure. An instrument that was designed to measure the quality of the initial therapeutic interview.

05-00:55:52

Wilmot:

That sounds like it would be so subjective, though. That part of it. Just thinking about the success of the interaction.

05-00:55:59

Banks:

You could argue that the measure is subjective, but it's consistent. If they're using the same subjective measure, then if you see differences maybe—just maybe—that might mean something. I could argue that it wasn't as subjective—these are scales that had been tested. But still, your point is well taken that, by definition, it's subjective. But, again, if you're using the same subjective measure, then it just might mean something. It might not mean—you might say it's not good or bad, but it means something. And that's where another set of research should take place.

05-00:56:40

Wilmot:

Was a component of the interviews with the clients about what they experienced as clients?

05-00:56:45

Banks:

No.

05-00:56:50

Wilmot:

Did you interview the therapists about being therapists?

05-00:56:54

Banks:

Not for the record. I did talk to them, but, see, when you do that, you contaminate the process. Strictly objective. Not how you felt, or what you think about the person. Because you get into—you really get into subjective things. “Is this a good session?”

05-00:57:14

Wilmot:

Right.

05-00:57:14

Banks:

So, to avoid that: nothing but the facts. Quote. Measure: boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. Everything you say is certainly relevant, but again it opens up—think about the possibilities of this kind of research. If I had stayed in the field—gender issues. Woman-male therapist. And later on, years later, you begin to get all kinds of permutations and combinations. It depends on what issue you have. Why do women choose male therapists? They do. Even today, in spite of the movement, and there are reasons for that. Reasonable people can disagree but—and it depends on the kind of problem. Physicians. It’s on and on and on, but you have to start somewhere just establishing that there is a difference, and then think about why that might be.

05-00:58:07

Wilmot:

How did you locate your client pool? How did you create that?

05-00:58:11

Banks:

Local.

05-00:58:11

Wilmot:

And then also, how did you locate your therapists?

05-00:58:15

Banks:

Therapists were people who were practicing therapists in the Lexington area. Some of the people were in the university orbit. Eastern State mental hospital. That was basically the pool.

The clients were adolescents who had been in, or were entering into, the system. They had not had a lot of experience with therapy. They didn’t have a long history of dealing with a white or black therapist. They were pretty much new to the system. The idea was to get some people who brought as little baggage as possible, other than, maybe, what racial attitudes they might have had—that all people have at age such-and-such. That was the idea. There you have it.

05-00:59:10

Wilmot:

What were your findings?

05-00:59:12

Banks:

That it did. That it did. A pretty tight, well-argued, cautious study. Like I said, for those reasons that I mentioned, you don't go too far. I didn't want to go too far. That's the kind of stuff that Carkuhff said, "Look. Don't generalize too far. This is what you found." "But people argue, 'You should do this, you should do that.'" "Let them do it." That was his thing: "Let them do it." You know? "Fuck 'em. Let them do it." You do the core. If people want to quibble, "You should have done this; you should have done that," let them do it. That was his—just an aside to show you how arrogant and self-confident this guy was, he'd send journal articles to the *Journal of Such and Such*. He'd write and say, "I'm not going to change a word. Take it or leave it." Can you imagine that? Again, this is a postdoctoral guy. You're trying to get in print, pad your vitae or whatever it is: "Take it or leave it." Eight times out of ten—

05-01:00:21

Wilmot:

They would take it.

05-01:00:22

Banks:

Yeah.

05-01:00:24

Wilmot:

What was his area of study?

05-01:00:25

Banks:

That was research in psychotherapy. Race wasn't his specialty training. He was talking about—he had this very interesting idea. Again, there were all kind of things that I wished—vicarious pre-therapy training, VPT, that I worked on this summer stuff with him. How much better it is, say you're going into therapy—group therapy—if you could just see a video of how people operate in group therapy. Training you how to behave in this novel setting. You're supposed to disclose. You're supposed to be honest. Basically training you to be a good group participant. Tremendous results there. It's kind of hard to implement, but I think that's very important because group therapy is such a novel experience to many people. Some people take to it very easily. Black people tend to. But there are lots of people, the idea of strange people who are talking about this—and if you say, "Hey, this is the way it's supposed to be," you establish the norm. That's the idea. Anyway, he and Charlie Truax were doing stuff like that. I think, just fascinating work. I was not going to get back in the rat labs.

05-01:01:58

Wilmot:

So that was your baseline entry in grad school? That's where they started you off, doing that kind of work?

05-01:02:07

Banks:

No, this is maybe second or third year. That's when I started, again, through this individual contact. But the first year, I had to do what everybody else was doing—statistics, and da, da, da.

05-01:02:24

Wilmot:

Okay. It's really interesting. So, how was your dissertation received?

05-01:02:32

Banks:

That's the funny part about it. You have this defense of your dissertation. You do your dissertation and defend it and so forth, with, normally—your committee—technically, it's open to the public. You have your adviser, committee members, and that's it. But there must have been like maybe twenty-five, twenty-six people at mine. By that time, I was “a figure.” Controversial. The data. In other words, a lot of people were interested in, I think, messing with me, and who actually came to the so-called defense of your dissertation. Let's just say it went well.

05-01:03:21

Wilmot:

Interesting. I'll have to ask you more about that. Let me change the tapes.

[End Audio File 5]

[Begin Audio File 6]

06-00:00:04

Wilmot:

So when you say that the defense of the dissertation garnered a lot of attention, could you describe to me a little more, the circumstances surrounding that?

06-00:00:18

Banks:

Part of the study—and I think in some of the write-ups or what was talked about was the fact that you had a mental health population, or a therapy population, a counseling population—a black population—that was served by primarily white professionals. What if one can establish that these white professionals are disadvantaged—or, more importantly, that the black clients are disadvantaged by the race, cultural factors that white therapists bring into the situation? All kind of implications might flow from that. Hiring blacks—training blacks, for instance. Can these people be trained? Okay, that's a question; legitimate. How permanent is it? All kinds of ways of thinking about race that hadn't been talked about. Everybody said, “Well, a schizophrenic is a schizophrenic. Race doesn't matter. It might matter a little bit, but if it's not a racial topic then it's no big deal.” And here I was, “Yeah, it is a big deal. This whole class of people, when a white person walks into the room, something is happening and the therapist is poorly served by that.” Class. You can make it really complicated.

06-00:01:49

Wilmot:

The therapist is poorly served by that, or the client?

06-00:01:51

Banks:

The client. I'm sorry. If you think about a profession—I mean, it's just like with doctors now. Study after study has said there's a problem in terms of treatment modalities. Whether we're

talking about heart problems, so forth, and so on. People are beginning to say, “Well, look. It might have something to do with race why these people get”—let’s stick to psychology—“psychotherapy as opposed to just drugs.” Take this Prozac. Take this Zoloft. Black people are differentially prescribed a psychoactive drug as opposed to whites, because of: Does verbal therapy work? Different patterns are very well established at this point in time, even now.

06-00:02:45

Wilmot:

So your work was in some ways eliminating the racial-cultural baggage that the therapists brought to their work?

06-00:02:56

Banks:

I was pointing a finger at it, in an empirical way. That’s where Carkuhff came in: “Look, don’t just say it.” People were saying this all along. “We can’t get along because you’re black and I’m white.” Prove it. That’s what the significance—you couldn’t dismiss it: “He’s just this, this, this.” And he was right. Nobody could dismiss the study. Nobody could attack it. They just said: “Well, we need to do further study.” “Okay.”

06-00:03:32

Wilmot:

Did you have a dissertation committee?

06-00:03:38

Banks:

Oh, yeah.

06-00:03:39

Wilmot:

And who was that?

06-00:03:43

Banks:

You mean names? These were people who were—

06-00:03:46

Wilmot:

Were they people in your corner? Names?

06-00:03:48

Banks:

Oh, yeah. There were people in my corner. An anthropologist. Another person who was in ed psychology. Another person in social psychology, Al Lott. Yeah. I’d say they were supporters, or at least they were—without question. I don’t have to qualify that at all. They supported what I was doing. They felt it was a tight, well-done study, and that’s the way it goes. I wouldn’t have worried about the politics of it. They didn’t worry about it.

06-00:04:31

Wilmot:

Were there other people there besides your advisory committee, at the event?

06-00:04:35

Banks:

Oh, yeah. Graduate students. Graduate students had heard about this Bil Banks, that kind of stuff.

06-00:04:43

Wilmot:

And you defended the dissertation successfully.

06-00:04:47

Banks:

Yeah. That's one of the—before you got out of school. Part of the whole therapy thing in the field was you had to go through this session, a sort of exit interview, and that was one of the interesting conclusions that my person made about me—the person interviewing me; my therapist in this context—that “You really thrive on hostility.” Hmm. I thought a lot about that since then. It's remarkable, because this lady was as far from my experience as the man in the moon, but she did pick up that. That I'm at my best—well, I'm maybe not at my best, but I certainly thrive on hostile situations. I can't prove that, but just in the spirit of—

06-00:05:46

Wilmot:

You're putting that forward.

06-00:05:47

Banks:

Yeah.

06-00:05:47

Wilmot:

I'll ask another question then. When you began this work, you were getting a doctorate in psychology. Was there ever a thought in your mind that you would become a psychotherapist? Was that ever something that you contemplated?

06-00:06:03

Banks:

Oh, yeah. That's what I wanted to—that's what I thought I wanted to do. But by the third year, when—you know, you do your internships, you do all that kind of stuff, it became clear to me then—and it became even more clear in my first job, that I have a—how to put it? I have a need for more gratification. I want feedback. I want to see that I'm making a difference, and I just didn't see that happening enough—for me—in psychotherapy, and I think I was very, very good. But at the end of the day, you had to have a sense—I did—that I was making a difference. Not just that I was—procedurally I was doing everything very, very well. But “this person's living a better life as a result of my intervention, and my working with them,” and so forth and so on—I never did get that.

In addition to what was a kind of intellectual formulation, that many of the problems and the issues that people were facing had to do with social structure. Social constructions. Things that didn't have—were not intra-psychic. Were not a function of some youthful or adolescent tension between Mom and Dad, and all that kind of stuff. No doubt that's real, but writ large, if we can do more about changing some of these broader kind of things, that will make a lot of difference.

06-00:07:50

I wrote an earlier article, “The Militant Counselor,” and that was the focus of that. That was, I think, quite well received in the field. Instead of just focusing on victims, I looked at the structures and procedures that led to these people being screwed up.

06-00:08:08

Wilmot:

Larger societal issues.

06-00:08:10

Banks:

Yes. At least institutional. It wasn't a Democrat-Republican thing, but let's look at the school. How do schools operate? Let's look at hospitals. How do hospitals operate?

06-00:08:21

Wilmot:

How they situate people.

06-00:08:23

Banks:

Exactly. Isn't it normal to respond in some of the ways that these people are responding to these constraints?

06-00:08:30

Wilmot:

To oppression?

06-00:08:31

Banks:

Yeah.

06-00:08:32

Wilmot:

Interesting. Really interesting work. Amazing work.

06-00:08:39

Banks:

“Riffraff or Vanguard?” I think was the name of the subtext. “The Militant Counselor: Riffraff or Vanguard?” I think.

06-00:08:46

Wilmot:

I would like to see it.

06-00:08:52

Banks:

It's probably in some files.

06-00:08:55

Wilmot:

When did your career—professional horizon—begin to shift? When did you say, “Okay, I’m not going to be a psychotherapist.”? When did your professional horizon begin to shift, and a life as an academic begin to seem like that was the way you were going to go?

06-00:09:21

Banks:

Something a little bit in between. I finished up, got the dissertation done, that was the first step. That’s the first step. So you look for jobs. What does a black, presumably conscious, person do? What is a black scholar worth? What is a black intellectual worth? I had opportunities when I finished up to go to a number of places in a traditional setting. University of Massachusetts, Amherst was one of the places that I could go and do psychology, teach in the graduate program, all that kind of stuff. There were no jobs that described what I was interested in. You could forget that. There’s no—nobody was going to hire me to do what I wanted to do.

06-00:10:18

Wilmot:

Which was?

06-00:10:19

Banks:

I don’t know. Even looking back. But this kind of activist, nobody wants that. I mean, I wouldn’t hire somebody like that. But that was the value of being able to adapt—this sort of bicultural stuff. I could do the academics. I understood research. I was very, very good at that, and that in itself distinguished me, because most of the people who were certainly as bright, brighter than I was, didn’t bother to do the research, the hard-nose, positivistic stuff. They were heavy, and could talk about Sartre, but I could design a study. I could critique methodologically why something did not answer the right questions—I could do that. Plus, I could dabble with writing, and a lot of people didn’t do that.

It is one of the sad things about Berkeley—all the bright graduate students that came through here that got sucked in, I think, by liberals, who never forced them to dig deeper, and to develop that kind of rigor that would serve them in the end. It was kind of like, “Oh, he’s very bright.” Yeah, but if he’s bright, push harder, push harder, push harder.

06-00:11:37

But anyway, back to your question. After graduating, I looked around at a number of possibilities. Sociologically, where does a black academic, lecturer, scholar come to rest? No question. Howard. A black university, black city, the heart of D.C.—Vietnam and all this stuff was going on. It was a no-brainer, and I went to Howard. I went there in the Counseling and Psychological Services. Again, doing some therapy—or maybe “counseling” is a better word, because it was an institution. It wasn’t a medical model, per se. I did have people I saw for a time, but it was more short-term than that. But more importantly, in terms of what they wanted me to do, was the research. Because I could do that. Research on the students there on the campus: psychological research, social research. I was the research arm, the empirical person who went out and designed the studies and analyzed data. That was what I did. I did stuff and published, again, some things that were credible. Adorno’s *Authoritarian Personality*, looking at

how attitudes of black students were changing, usually with the kind of militant—I mean, that was my ideology—I did that.

06-00:13:24

Wilmot:

Would you finish that sentence: “Usually with the kind of militant—”

06-00:13:26

Banks:

Well, yeah. I mean it was basically a sort of a black consciousness—the trendy word now might be “oppositional”—a posture affirming the militancy of students. That this makes sense from their perspective. That was one of the things, one of the early pieces that I did.

There again, you get into how this stuff works. Here I was, still relatively young. I went to Howard in 1967 maybe, '67, so I must have been twenty-four, thereabouts. Something like that. And here was this guy, a certain kind of image to students. And here was this university, this administration, that was desperately looking at the heart of black student militancy at the time—Stokely Carmichael, a whole lot of people. That was the deal. The war, all this stuff. So here's this guy, Bil Banks, who's in the psychological counseling services area doing work that has some credibility in the field, and yet he's young enough and jazzy enough.

So here's a university administration that can't relate, as young people would say. “He can't relate.” They were older and traditionalist and stuff like that. “Hmmm. Let's gather this guy, put him in here.” The dean of students—a guy named Armor Blackburn—was older. “Let's make him dean of students, or associate dean of students”—or something like that—“and let him deal with the protests, and all that kind of stuff.” People taking over buildings. Wanting to create a black university. “Let's throw him into that mix.” So I ended up getting picked out of the straight psychology stuff and put into student affairs. Yeah, dean of students office. Let's just say, I was—the number one person was on leave, and I was formally the number two person, but I was put there to deal with the students. Front line.

06-00:16:11

Wilmot:

Did you have that kind of awareness, that that's what their strategy was?

06-00:16:15

Banks:

Oh, yeah.

06-00:16:17

Wilmot:

How did you approach that work?

06-00:16:30

Banks:

Power. Two pieces of your question: Did I understand? Oh, sure. I'm from Georgia. I understand. I remember that. [laughs] That's the frame. Once you start there—I understood that. And the other side of it was that I had an opportunity to get things done. I could change some things.

06-00:16:56

Wilmot:

What were you interested in changing?

06-00:16:58

Banks:

Getting student voices heard. Getting people to take students seriously. They had some of the right issues. I mean, they were crazy in many respects. That's another thing, but basically to get a traditional, authoritarian, old-fashioned administration to take seriously the intellectual, social, political lives of students. You could do that. Committees. It's okay to look at these. Something as simple as—I know this sounds neanderthal to you, but like co-ed visitation. What's wrong with that? Curfews. Do we really have to do that? Just the things that were unthinkable. I knew the boundaries. I knew how far, but I'd just get to the edge, get to the edge. And I got a lot of stuff like that done.

06-00:17:52

Wilmot:

How did students respond to you? This was in the sixties?

06-00:17:56

Banks:

This is '68, part of '67, '68, and part of '69. Those two or three years, I was there. Students couldn't trust an administrator. They could trust me. It's structural. It didn't have anything to do with me as a personality. A lot of people would come to me. I was the enemy. I made sure that I said, "Look, I'm the enemy. Don't think that I like you, or anything like that, but let's deal." Because I didn't trust students to confide in—I mean, I never saw students as an ally. Even then.

Again, most of the students were as old as I was. People like Malson, Pearl Stewart—she used to write for the *Oakland Tribune* here. They were part of the militant student group. Sam Wallace, who's a big-time Republican out here now. These were people who were very, very militant, aggressive, and I understood my role: I'm here to represent the administration. But I was the "spook who sat by the door." I'm giving them a chance to do what they had to do. That's how that year-and-a-half, two years, worked itself out.

06-00:19:19

Wilmot:

Where did you live in DC?

06-00:19:19

Banks:

Silver Spring—

06-00:19:21

Wilmot:

Maryland?

06-00:19:21

Banks:

That's right, yeah. I'm sorry. Some people don't know that. Silver Spring.

06-00:19:31

Wilmot:

And at that time you were supporting a family?

06-00:19:33

Banks:

Oh, yeah. With my family, who lived in Silver Spring. One interesting incident that bears mentioning when you mention Silver Spring. We lived in Silver Spring, a certainly predominantly white community. First, we lived in an apartment. I'll never forget when Martin King was killed. I picked up my family and took them into the city. I had a friend, a friend of my father's. We went because we weren't sure about our safety in this white complex, on Hampshire West, off Rhode Island Avenue. No, Georgia Avenue and Hampshire West. Way out there. Not that far, but anyway, I find that in hindsight kind of interesting, because I was in this white community and I was worried about what they would do to me, rather than vice versa. I just didn't know. That was in the revolutionary days, you know, a race war was about to break out, and I didn't want to be out there with my wife and child in that context. We came in and we stayed for about a week in DC—DC proper, let's say—until things calmed down. I was there doing all the stuff during the rebellions and things that happened after that. In the city. But moving from the suburbs, worried about your safety, to come to the city. That was the deal.

06-00:21:17

Another interesting thing about that, just in terms of structuring space, my wife—we moved to DC. She had a masters in business from Kentucky. She went to apply for a job at high school. She wanted to teach black students, but they bent over backwards to place her at a white high school. The only white high school at the time—well, maybe that's not true. There were two. Western and Wilson. We understood that. “You can't work at—you're too good”—that's the subtext—“to work at Cardozo or Roosevelt. We're going to place this good, highly educated Negro at the white school.” In Georgetown. Western High School. It's now the [Duke] Ellington School of the Arts, but once upon a time it was Western High School. And you understand that. I guess you could have forced it, in a way, but you don't really know. You're coming into the system new. You don't know how much muscle you have, and she loves to work. I understood that: Why at this school?

There's no doubt in my mind that had she gotten a BA from Morgan State University, a historically black school, and come into the system, with the same credential, she would have ended up at a black school. That's the kind of institutional racism that takes place. I call it racism, but other people might—there are probably some cleverer ways of talking about it. “You're too good for these inner-city hardcore people. You can work at this integrated school with us.”

06-00:23:25

Wilmot:

I have another question for you. What is your first daughter's name?

06-00:23:29

Banks:

Tracy.

06-00:23:30

Wilmot:

Tracy. How did you decide to name her Tracy?

06-00:23:32

Banks:

My wife didn't want Tracy. That was my first choice. Why Tracy? It was something like a compromise. The compromise was to let her name her. Her real name is Lynette, which is totally spooky. [laughs] I'm sorry. Okay. I didn't like it, but what did I know? "Tracy"—that just seemed to ring true. It wasn't one of these silly "Monikwe"—Africa hadn't hit the scene at that point. There were these names that were cutesy and stuff like that. Tracy seemed to be kind of in-between. No gender ambiguity. Just "Tracy." That just seemed to ring true.

06-00:24:25

Wilmot:

Okay. I wanted to return to something about your dissertation, and it's this question that I haven't posed yet. What did the horizon look like in terms of: What were people talking about in terms of race and psychology? What was that baseline that you encountered when you went to the University of Kentucky, and where did you position yourself within that? Were there narratives that you were interested in disrupting, or contributing to? I'm asking so many questions, but what was the baseline work that had been done at that point, when you first started writing about race and psychology.

06-00:25:21

Banks:

Race in those days, everything was sort of dominated by the deficit model. Cultural deprivation. Something's wrong with this population, aspects of the population, and they need help. Special programs, you need to listen to Bach. That was how folks thought about blacks when I was in school.

Now, the reaction to that, of course, over time—not so much the immediate years of—certainly by '63, '64, people were saying, "Wait a minute. We're not victims. We're not these powerless cripples and so forth.. There's strength in this part of the culture. There's strength here that isn't being recognized." And that was what I came up against in the institutional critique, as opposed to just the "everybody was psychologically damaged and hostile." The "angry black man," and the "wanton black woman." All that kind of stuff. That was the lay of the land. Nobody at my particular school—well, they just didn't care. There was no dialogue whatsoever. It was just like, "Oh, yeah. Race." So it wasn't the kind of debate that might go on, with people on this side, people on that side. But the larger psychological community "Mark of oppression"—[Abram] Kardiner, [Lionel] Ovesey—one of the standard things he talks about how—the good people were saying, "Racism has really messed up black people." That was as much as we, as blacks, could hope for. Nobody questioned if we were messed up. "Sure there has been racism, terrible, terrible, terrible," and we were just messed up as a result of that. "But by intervening,"—more of this, more of that—"we can uplift." That was the game that was out there.

06-00:27:32

Wilmot:

It's very enduring. It's interesting. It's like fifty years later, it's very enduring in terms of how people imagine policy.

06-00:27:38

Banks:

Yeah.

06-00:27:40

Wilmot:

Fascinating. Were there any influences that helped you kind of imagine your work? Was anything inspirational to you in the way that you constructed your model? In terms of your dissertation.

06-00:28:06

Banks:

Again, I can't overstate this—and I see this with graduate students today; this isn't as obtuse as it might sound—people try to do too much with dissertations. They try to attack too many problems and make too much of it. I tell students all the time: “Get out of school. You've got all your life to do that. Just come up with something that's clean, neat, that you can defend, that's respectable, rigorous.” So when you asked the question about dissertation, per se, I was very, very limited. I mean, I know what I wanted to prove, or wanted to sort of highlight: The fact that black clients were disadvantaged by a therapist population that was overwhelmingly white. Let's say that. Let's prove that. That's what I wanted to do in the dissertation.

As you say, all kinds of things flow from that. The gender stuff: When people would come at me in class—in seminars and so forth, and you talk about your projects and so forth—I was slick, sorry, clever perhaps. I threw that stuff at women, I'd say, “Don't you think there might be something when a woman encounters a male therapist, that gender might make a difference?” Quiet. “Yes, yes! Well—.” “Why? Social experience? Or assumptions?” Well, okay, why do we get all nervous and suggest that race might operate the same?

06-00:29:51

Wilmot:

Interesting.

06-00:29:52

Banks:

You just have to work with that kind of stuff. You can't win the direct confrontation, because they don't—even when you win, who am I? I have no power. But you just try to get them thinking about how—we're talking about ideas. I'm no apologist for black people. I wasn't into non-violence, and et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. That's how I used to play it, in terms of where would it lead? Again, this kind of outlaw just throwing it out there, making sense, not hurting people. I never could get into that, even in intellectual stuff. I always—I take that from my dad. My mother's not like that. My dad could aim intellectually, but he could not pull the trigger. He couldn't hurt people. When my mother started shooting, she was just vicious, or at least pointed, and—she didn't care. She didn't take any prisoners, whereas Dad—

06-00:31:08

Wilmot:

He did care.

06-00:31:08

Banks:

Yeah. You don't want to hurt this person and that person.

06-00:31:12

Wilmot:

When you were talking about "in the classroom," were you speaking as a professor, or are we locating this back in your time as a graduate student?

06-00:31:21

Banks:

Arguably, throughout. Certainly, as a professor I never do.

06-00:31:27

Wilmot:

I guess I was trying to understand your example of when you would pose gender as the operating variable.

06-00:31:35

Banks:

Right.

06-00:31:36

Wilmot:

Was that when you were a student? With your students?

06-00:31:38

Banks:

You muddy the water. No, these were in a seminar. All the graduate students. I'm sorry.

06-00:31:40

Wilmot:

Okay. Gotcha.

06-00:31:41

Banks:

Other graduate students where you, "You know, maybe da, da, da, da, da, da, da." Then you know that there are some women in the audience, even at that early stage, that could recognize, "Maybe I would rather talk to a male about this. Or maybe the fact that this person is a male, maybe that has something to do with therapy. Or interaction." You know?

06-00:32:19

Wilmot:

Hm-mmm.

06-00:32:19

Banks:

And once you do that, you sort of open the door. And it's regional. "Look at all the prejudice against Southerners." "Yeah, that's right, that's right!" So you have them. You've constructed this framework where all kind of things can fit into it. What are we talking about? Social cultural differences, and do they matter. But if you say "race," then they see themselves as being defensive and jumping on me. Which is fine, but when you start breaking it up—intellectually.

Not South vs. North, but, “Haven’t you been around people from the North who’ve looked down on you because of your accent?” And just leave it there.

06-00:33:10

Wilmot:

Hm-mmm. That’s interesting. I wanted to ask you one other question—well, lots of questions, but at this time, I’m wondering had your paths crossed with Reginald Jones? When did your path cross with—when did you become familiar with his work, not even knowing him in person, necessarily?

06-00:33:38

Banks:

Mmm, I think, maybe my last year at Howard or my first year here. I’m not sure. Maybe my first year here. One of the two. He was active in what was called the {Association?} of Black Psychologists, one of the founders, one of the movers in the organization, and I remember him writing to me. He was putting together this book, *Black Psychology*. It was “edited by”—different people, doing different things. Actually, there was another person who was in school with me at Dillard, William Hayes, who also has a chapter in that book. We did one together. But, like I said, he was familiar with my work and he asked me to contribute a chapter to it. I did so. I don’t think we knew each other then. That was to come later. I don’t think I really talked to him until I became chair of the department, because it is one of the insults of my life—I’m skipping some stuff. But to answer—let me just stick with your specific question. I think maybe the first year at Berkeley, or the last year at Howard. One of the two, I’m not sure. But I didn’t meet him. I had no contact with him until a couple of years later.

06-00:35:20

Wilmot:

Okay. At that time, I know that there were very few other African American graduate students in the psychology program at the University of Kentucky, were there other graduate students outside of that program who were doing work that you were excited about, that you knew about?

06-00:35:47

Banks:

Blacks, or anybody?

06-00:35:48

Wilmot:

Anybody, but especially blacks.

06-00:35:51

Banks:

No. Certainly no blacks. Well, I knew one woman who was doing interesting stuff in the law school. She was a law student at the time, and she was into radical politics—SDS stuff [Students for a Democratic Society]. I remember interacting with her. I particularly remember her because she ended up in Oakland. George Jackson, the Soledad Brother. She was part of that stuff. She was interesting, but I just don’t remember any—not in terms of intellectual, political things.

06-00:36:41

Wilmot:

All right. During this time, in the sixties, the time that you were at the University of Kentucky, as you mentioned, there were all these kinds of political shifts happening. First the civil rights movement, and then the emergence of the black power movement, and some time near the tail end of that the emergence of the Black Panthers. First, how were you hearing and learning about these things? And second, how were they striking you?

06-00:37:20

Banks:

As I mentioned earlier, I was always a crazy reader. I read a lot. My dad, from age nine, eight or nine, would just make me read the paper every morning, the *Atlanta Constitution*. His adage would be, "Well, let's see what the white man did last night." Become informed about the world that you live in. So a lot of the knowledge—and you're in Kentucky, well, the graduate school, that's so far from anything you just pick this up by reading and writing. You read books that were recommended by people, not so much individuals, but you a review by so-and-so that mentions Blauner, well, okay, let me read Blauner. It was that kind of undirected learning experience. That's at Kentucky.

Now, that just changed dramatically, of course, in DC when I went to Howard, because, hey, everything, everybody was there. An overstatement, but it was a city with a fine newspaper that talked about things. Black political leadership—the first black mayor. Just all kinds of ferment. Vietnam was happening. I just carefully picked my shots as to different kinds of involvement. I remember after King was killed, I was active in the Poor People's Campaign. I was something like—what was it called? Education director, designed to support people who brought kids to the march. We set up little things for them, and so forth. So I was doing that kind of direct involvement. Also with a number of other community groups in the Adams Morgan area. I was on the board at Adams Morgan with Ken Haskins, who was a veteran of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville riots in New York. Community control. I was doing things like that. And a lot of other, just simple, liberal, do-gooder things. Glenn Seaborg Chairman of Atomic Energy Commission, I got in contact with him and his family through one of these things. So. Like I say, I was all over the map. It was good and bad. It was interesting. I was growing up.

06-00:40:00

That's the other thing, too. I was maturing. I was beginning to think other thoughts, having kids, and so forth. All that. It was a good place to grow up. I had to decide, though, at the end whether I wanted to become wealthy and—I mean, I was making so much money as a consultant. I had a rap: Labor Department at 9 o'clock; HUD at 6 o'clock. All kind of human relations stuff that I didn't believe in. I didn't think I was making any difference. I'd talk with these employee groups about diversity, or what was equivalent to diversity back in the day, and I didn't think it was making a bit of difference, but I was earning a crazy amount of money for those times, doing that kind of stuff. I had to just say, "Wait a minute. Where is this going? Where's your life going? Are you going to spend your life just doing this stuff and end up overweight, drinking too much, all that kind of stuff?" I just asked the hard questions, and I thought, I really don't want to do this.

Plus I was getting into the—the contradictions had caught up with me at Howard. Like I say, I was this mover, but at some point the administration said, “Well, we think we need to do something else.” And I understood that. I knew that my time was limited.

06-00:41:40

Wilmot:

What do you mean when you say that the administration said, “We need to do something else.”?

06-00:41:48

Banks:

They replaced the dean of students with a long-time Howard supporter, a Howard graduate. Somebody who had come up through the system, that was good. I didn’t want to stay around. It just happened to be at a time when my marriage was—we had difficulty there, that last year. I just determined that I needed to go some place else. So I did that.

06-00:42:23

Wilmot:

You weren’t fundamentally disagreeing with their strategy with their students?

06-00:42:27

Banks:

Oh, yeah. There were fundamental disagreements. In other words, you can push the bar as far as you can, then you know that you’re not going to push it any further. I wasn’t a nihilist. I wasn’t a yeller or a screamer. I thought I’d reached that point in terms of the institution, how far it was ready to go.

They changed administrations. They changed Howard a great deal during those years, and I was a small part of that. In terms of curriculum, the academic—that was the most important stuff. But even there, I was a player. Because I would sit in meetings with faculty and you’d get a chance to deal with the academic intellectual stuff. They respected me because I was credentialed and I could talk that talk, so you—again, this duality.

06-00:43:49

Wilmot:

So those were administrators?

06-00:43:52

Banks:

Yes, these were administrators and senior faculty people. I was a great friend of the dean of the graduate school, Carroll Miller, who was different from me as night and day, but he always thought that there was something to me. A gracious man, who really gave me a respect. The kind of person that can disagree with you, but is never condescending. Obviously, you end up in different places, but I just always was impressed with that kind of grace. And nobody could understand it, because people hated him because he was very prim and proper. Again, I learned early just don’t pay attention to that. I put it aside. The main thing is, just the life I was leading. Making all this money, an administrator. That’s fulltime kind of stuff. You can forget about writing any extended stuff, and that’s just not what I wanted to do.

06-00:45:08

Wilmot:

You didn't want to abandon your intellectual life.

06-00:45:11

Banks:

Not ever. It's one of these things where, "Oh, I'll do this for a year." You see graduate students who do it. "Well, I'll do this. I'll take off and get this job here." I say, "If you have to, fine. But it can draw you in." Particularly when you're doing so well at this other stuff. It's so easy to give two talks a day and make \$250 a rap. You're just riding over to Southwest, then over to Northwest. Your name's in the paper, and all that kind of stuff. It's seductive.

06-00:45:43

Wilmot:

Interesting, interesting. I want to ask you a question, and I'm not sure this is a fair question, but in terms of a continuum of politics between—I'm not sure this is a fair continuum that people have established long before I am, but if you were to look at a continuum of politics between Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, how were those ideologies making sense to you at that time?

06-00:46:17

Banks:

I never, since Emmett Till, I never related to nonviolence as a philosophy. As a tactic, cool; I don't have any quarrel with that. But I was not a King supporter. I thought he was a bit timid. Even on more substantive issues, I thought he was a bit timid. Malcolm X, the Muslim thing was—that's just not something I could get into. But the manhood idea, the assertiveness, the wit, the calling it like he saw it, that was strictly me. I just, "God, I wish I had had the courage to say what he said in the settings where he said them. I wish—he's bad. The brother's bad." You have to sort of suspend, quote, the intellectual formulation—I did. Because you can sit back and critique Malcolm, Martin Luther King forever and end up with a paralysis of analysis. You end up doing nothing. I understood that. But I knew I couldn't do it. Other people might be able to do it, but I couldn't do it. I had to walk that tightrope between that world of—that social world, that political world, and the world of the scholar that has to step back: "Wait a minute, this is inconsistent with this." The idea of white people as degenerate and devils. You have to sort of make accommodations there. Fortunately, I learned to accept that early on. I have lots of friends that just never—they came to it later on. You have to decide what you are. If you're just being political, if you're looking at Malcolm X as a political figure, there are certain things I can say. But another part of me says, "Mmmm, that's not right. I don't {agree} with that."

06-00:48:27

The student movement. Crazy stuff people were asking for. I'd think, That makes no sense.

06-00:48:32

Wilmot:

Like what?

06-00:48:33

Banks:

For instance, at Howard—well, more contemporary: Black mathematics. Remember, we talked about it before. What do you say to that? Do you yell and scream, “That doesn’t make any sense!”

06-00:48:49

Wilmot:

This was at Howard?

06-00:48:49

Banks:

No, I’m sorry, this was at Berkeley. I was trying to be contemporary. Oh, Howard, some of the issues like soul food in the restaurant—some of these things that are phhhh. In the cafeteria. A range of corny things. Oh, yeah, everybody wanted red, black, and green rooms, all the dorms totally adorned, totally red—I mean, things like that.

You just say, okay, and figure out ways to do it. Walk that tightrope between being an intellectual and a politician. Sometimes the world will shift; sometimes you have to hear that and spend time doing that.

Other times you just step back. It’s just that dance, that kind of tightrope that you walk, that I walked. I know where the students were coming from. I understood, I think, their pain and frustration and so forth, but you don’t throw out the baby of intellectual life, academic life, with the bath. [pause] Are we distracted?

06-00:50:05

Wilmot:

Hmm. Yeah. Well, I have one more question for you. No, I keep saying I have one more, but then I always have, like, six more. Upon completing your dissertation and graduating with your PhD, were there networks at your school, social networks, that helped position you in terms of jobs in the future?

06-00:50:39

Banks:

Yeah.

06-00:50:39

Wilmot:

How did you come to Howard? How did that happen?

06-00:50:43

Banks:

My last year at graduate school, some students had a demonstration and shouted down {Louis Hersey}, who was the director of Selective Service at the time. Militancy. Stokely Carmichael. These were names, and everybody, everything seemed to be happening there. It was no contest between there and UMass. And, some of the same reasons that pushed me to Howard, pushed me to Berkeley. I thought this was a place I could kind of better integrate this blackness, this militant, this social consciousness, and academic work. You couldn’t do that—I didn’t think you could do that—at UMass, Amherst. But I went there for an interview, and the lady came at night,

fluffed up my bed, and gave me this goddamned hat to wear. Sleeping cap. Like Santa Claus. [laughs] This isn't me! Maple syrup. No disrespect, but it just wasn't me. I just didn't see myself—a little something like that. When I saw that hat, "Is this a joke?" I started to feel insulted, because—I just didn't know. I just didn't know that culture, that way of life, that way of doing things.

06-00:52:12

Wilmot:

You didn't see potential for doing your thing?

06-00:52:15

Banks:

Right, right. Unless I just wanted to totally commit to the academic. I guess if I had wanted to do that, that would have been a great place. It's isolated. You don't have to worry about the hurly-burly of streets and all that kind of stuff. No {evictions?} [laughs]

06-00:52:31

Wilmot:

Hm-mmm. Hm-mmm. Hm-mmm. All right. That's interesting. I guess the question I'm trying to get at is the mechanics of your job search. Were any faculty helpful to you in doing that?

06-00:52:48

Banks:

No. None. None. I mean, they wrote and supported me, but that's not a world that they were connected to. They just had no connections. I think they would have, had they known about this or this or this. I'm sure I could have gotten a job as a fellow in some research part of something, but I just didn't want to do that. I wanted to do something else.

06-00:53:19

Wilmot:

At Howard, did you have tenure?

06-00:53:21

Banks:

No. No, I didn't have tenure. Ladder. But I was just there two or three years. In fact, I probably hadn't made—when I moved into administration-like stuff, then that—I guess the clock stops there. Obviously, I could have—I think I could have—got tenure there, but I did leave. I didn't have tenure. I didn't have tenure when I came to Berkeley.

06-00:53:53

Wilmot:

You mentioned that your fraternity assisted in your housing for that first year—the first two months, actually—when you were at the University of Kentucky. During this time, did your fraternity have any other—were you connected to your fraternity at all?

06-00:54:15

Banks:

No.

06-00:54:16

Wilmot:

Were they assisting you in any way? Or were you socially connected?

06-00:54:19

Banks:

No. When I left college, except for that connection, I think I might have gone to the grad chapter in Lexington, “I’m going here to graduate school and I need some help in this, and I’ve got a letter and been given an address,” and that happened. But not since then.

I remember being asked to speak at a fraternity thing at Howard, and I chastised or was very critical of their interest in social activities—when all this political stuff was going on. I never did invited back. I just haven’t connected much since then. I give money. In fact, I’ll probably—I give money to the local graduate chapter. I’m a Kappa, and a lot of notables—well, John is a Kappa. John Burrows, Oliver, Elihu Harris, George. There are a lot of people who are Kappas, but I don’t think they’re much more active than I am.

Wilmot:

You’ve described this time in Indianapolis. I know we’re going—this is a little out of order—

06-00:55:39

Banks:

That’s all right.

06-00:55:40

Wilmot:

You described this time in Indianapolis where you were asked to kind of preach against black power and black consciousness to the Job Corps population. I wanted to ask you about—

06-00:56:02

Banks:

Actually it was an assembly. It wasn’t just to proselytize. It was a formal assembly. “We’re going to hear from him. He’s going to show us some limitations of this, this, this, this, this.” It wasn’t a general kind of an assembly. I’m sorry.

06-00:56:18

Wilmot:

I wanted to ask—I don’t have this history—how did Howard’s administration begin, how did they witness black awareness, black consciousness, black power on campus in the student population? How did the administration handle it?

06-00:56:42

Banks:

Too many of them wanted to throw out the baby with the bath. These are people who had been tremendous in the civil rights years of *Brown v. Board of Education*. The president at the time, James Nabrit, was one of the fine minds working on *Brown v. Board of Education*. He’d worked with Thurgood Marshall, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. They saw these young people as undoing much of the goodwill that they themselves had tried to put together in the past. “You’re making things harder for us.” The stress. Robin Gregory—you may or may not remember. I mean, think about this today in retrospect. She was elected homecoming queen in 1968. You have an

election, homecoming queen, and she won. But she was militant, political, with a big Afro. The president refuses to crown her. I mean, symbolic stuff like that. Phhhh. I mean, you take a deep breath.

06-00:57:50

Another issue at Howard that was complicated, that people didn't understand: the law school. Or dental school in particular. A guy came in, Joe Henry, Dean of the Dental School, wanted to upgrade Howard. What does upgrade the Dental School mean? By getting higher test-scoring people into the freshman class, which then means fewer black students. This is a black dental school. White people can't get into the other places because of the special obligation of Howard to provide black dentists. Same thing in law school. Emphasis on test scores and grades, and so forth. What is the idea? To improve the dent school. To establish a better reputation. Another group of people saying, "Hey, look. Service has always been a primary function of black colleges. If people want to do research in supernatural cavities, they let them go to Georgetown dent school." [laughs] You know, it's this kind of—I think, legitimate—. People can reasonably—should be able to reasonably—debate these thing, but the administration just tended to take a hard line.

All deans weren't like that. There were some who were more nuanced. But that was the kind of stuff that, you know, you work it as much as you can. And the administration—Howard is run by the federal government, and overseeing everything is the specter of Richard Nixon at the time. Yeah, Nixon. If you go too far this way, this is going to happen; go too far this way, this is going to happen—in terms of funding. I think something like 56 percent of its money came from the federal government. So just think about that. All the contradictions embedded in that. Not just the government but the district committee was dominated by white, conservative suburban—people representing suburban districts that had a keen sense of what they wanted Howard not to be. If I had been president, tensions would have—they come to rest, and it's just a matter of that shell game. Just do it as long as you can. So, that was some of the issues in how these things came to rest.

06-01:00:12

Wilmot:

Let's stop there today, okay? Great.

[End Audio File 6]

Interview 4: March 3, 2004

[Begin Audi File 7]

07-00:01:24

Wilmot:

March 9, 2004. Professor Bil Banks. Interview four.

There was an experience that you recounted about coming to Howard as a young person—still growing up, as you said—in your early twenties, heading a family, and I wanted to ask you if there was a tension for you in learning about radical thought and action in terms of politics, at the same time that you were already occupying in some ways a kind of position of institutional authority that situated you against the struggles that were unfolding around you.

07-00:02:16

Banks:

Quite a bit, quite a bit. Simply put, the students—probably a majority, a large majority of the things that students were asking for, I personally supported. I thought it was good. I thought that the dental school—and that was a big issue at the time—I think I was talking about how it should accept a special obligation to prepare dentists who would function in the black community. Given Howard's tradition, the underserved character of black populations, and so forth—I could relate to that. I was not seduced by the whole meritocracy game that they had better dental aptitude scores or such and so on. I understood that. I was sympathetic to that argument. There were others as well, but that was certainly one. The law school, the focus of the law school should be on constitutional, race, urban kinds of things. I thought those were legitimate, as opposed to being a pale duplicate of Georgetown Law School, or George Washington Law School. I just felt a particularistic sense of things at an institution like Howard, and the students were pushing for that. Strident, often silly, but at its core, I agreed with that.

Now, here I am as a dean—a fairly highly placed dean involved in the play. How to frame issues, how to talk to students, or encourage them to—“Well, maybe you should ask this way,” or “Maybe you should ask that way.” “Is this what you're saying?” Subtly trying to craft something that was palatable to them. Again, as the middle man. I'm the broker. I'm trying to get you, you, so forth, to work in within my own agenda.

07-00:04:38

Wilmot:

Hm-mmm.

07-00:04:41

Banks:

That was a skill that—why was I able to do this? I've thought about that, because I had struggled so much—part of it, I had this comfort zone, growing up as a kid. There was never any question that I was, quote, “competent,” that I could do a lot of things. There was never any, “Let me prove myself” to anybody. So this allowed me a certain kind of psychological freedom to lean over here, lean over there. That was reinforced, I think I mentioned, by Bob Carkuhff, this solitary soul who, in spite of all these people who were doing things differently and disparaging me and putting me down—not to my face, but I knew I was the odd person out. But here was this

giant that was saying, “Hey, you’re the man. You have what it takes. You’ll go much further.” I was getting this. I got this at key points in my life. So by the time I got to Howard, people could yell and scream at me about being black, “You’re not black da, da, da,” or “You’re this and this,” or “You’re paying too much attention to those students; you ought to just tell them to—.” I could handle that pretty well. I never got ego involved with that in any kind of defensive way. It served me well there and, as it turns out, it was to serve me well later on. But you’re right. From the outsider to the insider. You realize that the people who are storming the barricades are legitimate, and so forth, but you’re inside and you’re eating cake with Marie Antoinette [laughs] and you’ve got to figure out the deal politically.

07-00:06:34

Wilmot:

Did you ever want to be storming the gates? Did you want to be out there storming the gates?

07-00:06:39

Banks:

Oh, sure. I’d stormed that—I’d been there. Oh, yeah, I did. There’s no question. But that’s where you have to dig down deep and say, “Well, okay. A lot of people can storm the gates, but there aren’t a lot of people can do what I’m doing.” Very pragmatic, cold-blooded analysis. Division of labor, in a theoretical sense.

07-00:07:17

Wilmot:

How did you learn of the opportunity at UC Berkeley?

07-00:07:28

Banks:

Two connections. The chairman of the department at the time, Ron Lewis, was a friend of my best friend in Washington. They had grown up in Pittsburgh together. This is a guy that I’d known since high school. We’d moved to Indianapolis together—he had his family, I had my family. We sort of moved to a couple of different places. I’d get a job and soon as I could, hire him.

07-00:08:07

Wilmot:

What was his name?

07-00:08:09

Banks:

My friend?

07-00:08:09

Wilmot:

Hm-mmm.

07-00:08:10

Banks:

Robert Antoinin. Roberto Don José Antoinin, aka Pineapple. Anyway, Ron Lewis, who was then the chair—coordinator, as it was called—of the Afro American Studies Program came to DC for a conference or something. They got together and we were introduced, just socially. He talked

about how he was recruiting people and they were trying to get {Andy Billingsley?}, who was then at Howard, and so forth. So we talked, and I guess Ron was impressed with my, quote, “blackness” and the fact that I was writing a bit. I had done some things. I mean, no great American novel, but I was in that game. I think he saw me as a person who could provide some academic legitimacy to black studies during that period. We’re talking about 1969. The program was established, I think earlier that year. {Chaos?}. There wasn’t another person in the department with a doctorate.

07-00:09:43

Wilmot:

Other than?

07-00:09:43

Banks:

There were none before I got here. There were people who were teaching a course, Ken Johnson and some other people, but they had no full-time people in the department at that time. So he makes this pitch, “Would you be interested in coming to Berkeley?” I was worldly enough. I understood the academic milieu enough to know that Berkeley was a major public institution in the world. I knew the tradition. I’d done a graduate paper, for instance, on the Free Speech Movement. I knew the issues. Politics. That was—where do you want to be? You want to be in places politically active that respects and rewards scholarship. That was one of the reasons that I had thought of Howard, but there were some other things there. But anyway, he made this pitch, and I wasn’t particularly interested. But around the same time, I met Glenn and Helen Seaborg. Glenn Seaborg, at the time, was the chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission. His wife, Helen—extremely gracious woman; lifelong friend since then—was interested in getting some soccer programs. They lived in upper Northwest Washington. [Alice] Deal Junior High, in particular. They had a kid there, {Dianne?}. They kind of bring the kids from inner city Southeast to meet these kids. I was dean of students at the time, and I helped her put some things together like that, and I was subsequently invited over to talk. We got to talk a bit, and I did some other things like that.

07-00:11:49

Eventually I met Glenn and learned that he was chancellor—I think he was probably on leave, I’m sure, at the time. I never will forget. This point was the high point of my life. He got me a ride, or a trip around the Potomac, on the presidential yacht *Tricia*. Nixon’s *Tricia*, that’s the name of the yacht. I thought, just the contradictions of here is this person who’s for the violent overthrow of the American state, riding around the Potomac [laughs] being served by these Filipino waiters with 1933, stuff like that. Like I said, I don’t take myself seriously. So, just like I said before, it doesn’t go to your head, but you just sort of, for a minute, “Aaaaaaah!” Lifestyles of the rich and famous, you know? Upstairs, downstairs: you’re upstairs. Again, he probably did this to a million people. There was nothing special like that. Maybe every month the department heads got a chance to throw out a perk, and that was his. Here again, a poor black kid from Georgia, “Wow! Nixon probably sits over there. I wonder has Kissinger been here?” That’s how it was [laughs] for a split second.

But anyway, I continued to call or stay in some kind of touch, and Helen put me in touch with David Blackwell, whom they knew from the sciences and so forth, who was at Berkeley. They said, “You know, you should talk to him because he’s been involved in black developments

there, —he'd be a good wise head," and so forth. At some point around that time, I did have a conversation with David and he was his usual judicious self, supporting the big picture thing. He just said, if I decided to do, he'd help in any way he could. And I knew Blackwell via Howard, because he was a legend—and I think he'd spent a year or two at Howard.

07-00:14:10

Wilmot:

Ten years.

07-00:14:11

Banks:

Ten years? Yeah, so he was, like I say, he was already a legend. So, boomp, boomp, boomp. I'm researching him; I'm careful. Who's this Blackwell guy? I'm not into sciences, but I knew he was the man. And the other part of my life was in disarray. My marriage was breaking up. I had a daughter who was going into the sixth grade, and I decided to leave DC and come to Berkeley. The marriage had broken up before then. It wasn't like, "I'm leaving." We were living apart for about six months before any of this happened. So those are the circumstances.

I'm trying to think of other things—well, one of the things that was attractive, and this will take on additional significance maybe later on. My first salary at Berkeley, I think, was something like nineteen thousand dollars, which was a heck of a lot of money. As a lecturer, nineteen thousand dollars, and—as all lecturers—a year-to-year appointment. But, I'm young. That's it. So, bottom line, I took it, and came out in December of 1970. I'm fairly sure about that.

07-00:15:58

Wilmot:

What did Ron Lewis offer you, exactly?

07-00:16:00

Banks:

He says, "Look, you come in as a lecturer. You get this money. We need you to help build the department. You have these credentials here. You can teach pretty much wherever you want to teach. And we need people like you to build the department." He mentioned all these other people he was trying to get. Alex, for instance, was in conversation with Ron, and I got to know him—Alex Haley. He was throwing out So-and-so, Sarah [Webster] Fabio, the writer, was around. Ishmael Reed. All these names. And I said, "Well, hmmm. Think about this, Bil Banks. Here's Berkeley, a premier institution for black studies, certainly they would take black studies seriously." As opposed to Kansas State. If you're looking at: Where can black studies work? Hmmm—a place like Berkeley. Political tradition. Diverse community—Oakland, Berkeley,. Ron Dellums and so forth. Antiwar. This, at least on the surface, seems to be the place where you can make it happen. Not personally, but it can be happening, and I would want to play a part in that. And that was the formulation.

07-00:17:29

The second relationship person and I drove out—I took the job and drove out to Berkeley, and the rest is the stuff of history.

07-00:17:46

Wilmot:

Those are the mechanics of how you go there. But at that time, what were you hearing about Berkeley? What were you hearing about what was unfolding on campus?

07-00:18:02

Banks:

Nothing. I'm in DC. Chocolate City. I mean, I knew about Berkeley, the school, but particulars of the department—most of what I knew, I heard from Ron. And of course, that was all his spin. I didn't have any contacts. There were so few black people. I didn't know anybody here, so I could not have talked to somebody to say, "Well, wait a minute, man. You need to look at this. You should do this, or you should do that." And the decision was made. Obviously naive, but you've got to remember, this is 1970 and there just was not the kind of network, or I was not a part of a network that could have cautioned me, at the very least, against—"Be sure to get this kind of assurance, get this kind of assurance." And I had a kind of arrogance that: I'll make it. I had enjoyed a certain degree of success every place I'd been. I guess I was maybe—1970—twenty-seven, maybe twenty-eight. Something like that. So I'm still—you know, I have game left. So that's the way it was.

07-00:19:29

Wilmot:

Okay. I guess what I'm wondering is: Had you heard about the Third World [Liberation Front] strike unfolded in January and February of 1969?

07-00:19:37

Banks:

Oh, yeah.

07-00:19:39

Wilmot:

Had you heard?

07-00:19:41

Banks:

Well, I heard something about the Third World strike, but of course the strike at San Francisco State [University] was much more volatile. That was the key thing. Berkeley was just an imitation. At San Francisco State you had working-class third world peoples, struggling—Danny Glover, people like that, just raising all kind of hell, and politically sophisticated. Berkeley just came—the Third World strike here, was sort of a mild wannabe strike, with middle-class kids wanting to do what they did over at State. I'd heard about it, and I knew that the program was born out of that strike, conceptually, but the particulars, the details, I'm sure I heard some of that from Ron. He may have said something, but we didn't have the Internet and all that kind of stuff.

07-00:20:49

Wilmot:

Did you hear about the Eldridge Cleaver course sponsored by Troy Duster?

07-00:20:54

Banks:

Yeah, yeah. I heard about that. That was in—it made the national headlines, and I said, “Wow! This is an exciting campus.” You gotta remember, this is what I wanted to do. I’ve been the spook who sits by the door with a tie, and “Hullo, how are you sir?” And here there was all this action in an academically high-powered milieu. “Aaaah. I could get into this.”

07-00:21:26

Wilmot:

Hm-mmm. So when they offered you nineteen thousand on a year-to-year basis, were you thinking about tenure at that time?

07-00:21:39

Banks:

No. I knew what it was, but I just—I didn’t have that kind of sophistication. I knew what it was, and I knew it could be important, but that was not a period where security meant as much to me as it perhaps should have. The action, you know.

07-00:22:09

Wilmot:

When you came here, where did you settle? Where did you live?

07-00:22:11

Banks:

It’s fascinating. I remember Arnicia, the woman—I guess this is okay—Arnicia and I drove across the country and got into Berkeley one Sunday night. I had Ron’s number to call. “Call when you get in.” It was maybe seven or eight that night, and I called him. He came and somehow—I said, “I’m at the corner of Ashby.” I remember Ashby, thirteen something. Anyway, we took—immediately—think about this, now. He says, “Okay, just follow me.” So we followed him. He’d said, “I know you’re hungry,” so we stopped at a restaurant. The Lamppost. Huey Newton’s brother’s place, on the corner of Telegraph and, what’s that—about 30th Street. There’s a whole bunch of Panthers in the place, and I said, “Wow! This is like a rabbit in the briar patch.” I mean, this is the first experience—the first people I’ve met in Berkeley was this whole Black Panther thing. You know, “That’s Melvin Newton, he owns the place.” So this was heady stuff to a simple kid. And after that, we found the usual apartment things and banks and ended up renting a condominium on East 22nd Street, over in what’s called China Hill now. It wasn’t China Hill then. A two-bedroom spot. That was it. That’s how I settled in.

The first semester—I started teaching in January. Second semester. Second quarter. Maybe it was a quarter system. I taught two courses, and I was very disappointed in the quality of the students. Even more so at the kind of academic expectations of the students in the class. Again, this is the first quarter, and I’d taught a class or two at Howard in between, all that kind of stuff, and I had my own college experience, and I had some sense of that.

And, very importantly, I grew up around my father, of course, and he was a college professor—everybody loved my dad, but everybody acknowledged that he was a task master in the classroom. He was legendary. He’d play pinochle with students and all this kind of stuff, but if students didn’t do the work, they would fail. There was no contradiction between camaraderie and academic demands. It’s: “We can be friends, and I can fail you.” That was so instilled—I

saw him operate like that. And it worked for him, and he was respected for that. “Don’t think just because you’re playing cards or he’s friendly and speaks that somehow you’re going to get over.” That’s how I operated. That’s how I operated. Soon, you get a reputation: “He’s tough.” But I had the personality, I had the—I hesitate to call it charisma—but I was reasonably well-liked, because I was cool. A couple of people in that first class, one woman, Diane Milner, who went on to Boalt and practices law in Oakland now. Another woman, Marsha Douglas, eventually got a Ph.D. from University of Chicago. There are a couple of other people in that first class that—there were good students there, but by and large, I gradually had to—what’s the word?—dumb it down. In some ways. It didn’t become pap, but you know, you just try to get the lay of the land, and so forth and so on. That was the first experience.

07-00:26:49

Also, this is significant too—I made a note of that. One of the scariest things that made me start wondering, “What is going on?” even before the class thing: That December—I came in in December; school was about to be out—they were negotiating about summer school. The department wanted to teach seven courses, offer seven courses in summer school. Summer school said, “No. Given enrollments, you can only offer five.” Now, the second day I physically get on campus, Arnicia and I go up—I’m showing her the campus—and they say, “Look, we’d like you to go over there with us to the summer school office.” “About what?” “Oh, just come on.” And her. I mean, here’s my woman and about seven other guys—big dudes. I mean, they were teachers or something like that. We march into the summer school office. Fred Morrissey, who was the dean, director of summer school—I’m pretty sure, at the time; I’m fairly sure about that—and this cat was scared to death. Here are these guys walking in in jackets, and I was a part of that. I didn’t know what was going on, but it was sheer intimidation. Just the idea that they walk in on this director of summer school—and they got what they wanted. That bothered the heck out of me, because that was just bully, Bogart stuff. That was over the top, as far as my own values were concerned.

07-00:28:37

Wilmot:

Was that more of a reflection on the strategy that was employed by the group that you were with, or was it kind of a reflection on the ways that this person had been conditioned to look at a group of black men? Which way was it?

07-00:29:05

Banks:

Well, it was strategic in that Ron took over these six or seven guys—all men, incidentally. Well, Arnicia was there, but she was with me. Force, a show of force—let’s put it like that.

07-00:29:26

Wilmot:

Hm-mmm. So that was the tactic?

07-00:29:28

Banks:

That was the tactic. And a guy, a mild-mannered administrator in the school of business, accustomed to arguing fine points, and so forth, all of a sudden, you’re faced with this raw power, physically. Just the drama of the situation, that he was obviously not accustomed to dealing with. That’s just not how it works at Berkeley. You write memos and so on. So, what are

we talking about? We're talking about a culture clash. You could spin that in different directions, but Ron understood that. And later I got on that. At crunch time, he used numbers—that kind of force—to get things done. Later on, it was turned against me, but that's another story.

07-00:30:33

Wilmot:

What was his background?

07-00:30:35

Banks:

He'd been a supervisor in the school of social welfare at Berkeley. Basically, you go out to do the field work, he'd come around and supervise you and make sure you were doing all right, blah, blah, blah. And apparently he'd been active in that strike that earlier semester, and had been named the coordinator of the Afro-American studies program. So his background was social work; not academic at all. He had a community-service sense of things.

07-00:31:18

Wilmot:

What was his personal culture in terms of, if that was the strategy that made sense to him, where did he situate himself politically?

07-00:31:25

Banks:

He saw himself strictly as an adversary. "We fought for this. We have a right to demand anything we want. How do we get what we want? By intimidating these people. We're always in their face." Race. The race card was conscious. I'd be the last person to suggest that race wasn't implicated in this kind of stuff, but you don't do the issue racist: "We're just gonna have to deal with you." That was Panther language. "Deal with you. Sister, we're gonna deal with you." What does that mean? If you aren't accustomed to that language, you can conjure up all kinds of, you know. And it had worked. Not just with Morrissey, but other sectors of the university. I'd seen that. Like I said, that was—I said to myself, that's just not anything I personally could ever be a part of. But there's a broader dynamic, so you just kind of take notes, and, "Okay, okay."

07-00:32:45

Wilmot:

You mentioned that your first night in town, you stopped at the Lamppost, and presumably that was your first encounter, or social situation, in which Panthers were around, and I want to ask you: What did you make of the kind of social and political movements that were unfolding in the Bay Area, specifically the ones that were unfolding around Third World Marxism? What kind of sense did it make to you? How did you relate to that?

07-00:33:29

Banks:

Okay now. This is where I have to put my intellectual hat on. I think I understood Marxism, and I thought the Panthers were deeply flawed in terms of their thinking. The energy, yes. The bravado, yes. But, you know, you listen carefully—I was a little more sophisticated than that. To buy into it as a way of my own, of moving around, myself.

07-00:34:00

Wilmot:

That attitude as a social group, or as a political group, or to buy into the actual politics of the movement?

07-00:34:06

Banks:

Well, you pick your shots, politically. Something like the breakfast program—that was cool. I sent my daughter to Elaine Brown's Panther camp up in the mountains, and so forth. Hustled a thing through the City of Oakland. I had no problem about being a part of things like that, but the ideas of intellectually, or committing to the program in any way, that just wasn't my schtick. Not that I've ever been a joiner in particular. But I was close enough to, let's just say, some Panther activities—they had no sense of humor. I was always uncomfortable with that. I came from this other kind of background. And they weren't like that. It was very hierarchical. You couldn't laugh. You couldn't criticize each other. I know myself well enough to know I don't function well in that kind of circumstance, so why play at that?

But, interestingly, at least as far as the Berkeley campus was concerned, the prime moving black political group was not the Panthers, but the Black Muslims. Nation of Islam. The president of the black student union—they dominated campus life, and I found that strange. Because I came from Howard where Muslims were in the city, but the notion of a Black Muslim presence on Howard's campus—I was shocked, frankly. The key people—I'm talking about your leaders—were Muslims.

07-00:36:06

One other sidelight before I forget it. Again, that first month—we're talking about the transition; my coming of age in Berkeley—I went to a party for recent graduates of Boalt, or maybe they passed the bar or something. I met a friend—now a lifelong friend—and Arnica and I went and people were talking about astrology. "You're Virgo. So you're like this or that." And I thought they were kidding. I thought they were actually kidding. And I'm not just talking about one person over in a corner. You finally realize that these people are serious. I remember saying something, cracking some off-beat humor about Sagittarius and rising, and I barely knew my sign. I left soon after that. Okay, this is what they're about. I mean, intellectually I just need to know what they are. But they believed in this stuff. They were talking about making decisions based on astrology, and who should date who. Oh, boy! I knew why we weren't getting along, and I'm saying, "A university? These are law school students? These are Berkeley? The best and the brightest? This is madness. This is madness." I just remember much time spent just drinking wine, being high, trying to sort all of this out, because it just seemed like Oz.

07-00:37:55

Wilmot:

As a culture.

07-00:37:55

Banks:

Right. And on the other hand, there were these brilliant white people, most of the ones I came in contact with, very, very helpful in terms of the academic things. That was there, and there are people I can talk about later but I don't want to jump ahead. All this stuff is my first semester.

07-00:38:15

Wilmot:

Well, it's amazing to kind of imagine a social and intellectual environment in which, in order to be viable and competent, you have to study astrology.

07-00:38:29

Banks:

Yeah. I mean, just the fact that people took it seriously. Just the fact that you make a decision in your life that had something to do with that you were a water sign. Something as fundamental as that.

07-00:38:44

Wilmot:

How did you know? What sign are you?

07-00:38:48

Banks:

[laughs] I'm a Virgo. At the cusp.

07-00:38:51

Wilmot:

Oh, great!

07-00:38:52

Banks:

Virgo-Libra. I can rattle it off, now. I mean, that's cognitive. You learn that. I can quote, "Yeah, I get along with this. I know what my personality is supposed to be like." I can babble for days about it—I remember going out in the car to the grocery store, buying a book, astrology book, one of those little paperbacks, about twenty pages, and just reading it. Okay, this is this, this is what a so-and-so is like. This is what a so-and-so is like.

07-00:39:20

Wilmot:

Do you stay up to date on your horoscope?

07-00:39:20

Banks:

Oh, absolutely not.

07-00:39:22

Wilmot:

Really? You don't read it in the newspaper?

07-00:39:25

Banks:

No. *Boondocks* and move on. [laughs]

07-00:39:28

Wilmot:

Right. *Boondocks* is a very wonderful comic strip.

07-00:39:31

Banks:

Yes. I'll take *Boondocks*, you take—who's that lady? Ellen Goodman.

07-00:39:38

Wilmot:

Okay. I want to return to something that you mentioned. I asked you a question about the role of Marxism and we kind of—you answered in terms of what was the social scene surrounding the political movements, and I wanted to ask the question more in terms of the politics that people articulated, or the framework that people were using, and not limit it to just the Panthers, because there were a lot of other groups out there who were kind of using Marxism as their basis for analyzing U.S. imperialism, and internal colonization versus external presence outside in the world. So I guess I want to ask you what sense did you make of that framework as a political framework?

07-00:40:27

Banks:

Yeah, I supported it as a broad political framework. I understood colonialism. Bob Blauner, who did one of the early important pieces on internal colonization was here, and I got to know him early on. You could just go to his office and, "Wow! That's Blauner." You'd sit, and he was a nice guy. We talked. There were many other people around who shared that kind of vision, who could talk. Could talk that talk. And some students around who understood that pretty well. But they weren't movement people. They were, like me, on the fringes. But the movement stuff, it was, like so much of our thinking, in those day, just inchoate. Nationalism, the black stuff, how do you reconcile that with third world-ism? How do Asians and Mexicans fit into that, to say nothing of feminism?

I mean, that was just like—that was much later, with due respect. But it's tough under the best of circumstances, and you have this overlay, which few people talk about, this resource that's now available: the distribution of goods and services via things like African American studies, ethnic studies. So that this is a place where you can go and get jobs. You can distribute resources to this group, to that group, that group. So these people who had been historically dispossessed, in an institutional sense, all of a sudden could lay claim to goods and services. You don't have to—one case I know—you don't have to pump gas; you can teach in black studies. Then, the scene changes: It becomes classic pork barrel. And if I'm the Big Man, I can manage, control, and—here again, what is the politics?

07-00:42:52

"I'm for black people." Now how do you break that down? Which black people? Where? What circumstances? See, I was accustomed to immediately going into some analysis, or attempts at analysis, but at that level, that gets clumsy, because you end up asking hard questions. People weren't doing that, in the main. Individuals, yes. But the—as you say, the broader social movement, no. The relationship between the Panthers and the Nation of Islam: deep contradictions. Deep contradictions. Asian Americans: deep contradictions. But, you know, "people of color"—that's everything. So you don't have to face these things. You just talk about people of color, and just gloss over the differences, and hope they go away, and they don't. They come back to haunt you. The movement gets eroded. Not a lot of things surprised me, sadly, over

my thirty years at Berkeley, in terms of any kind of analytical shift, or paradigm shift. I saw the things, “Hmmm, hmmm.”

07-00:44:12

Wilmot:

I understand. So, if that wasn't what was working for you as a political framework, what was the political framework that you found the most useful and relevant in those early seventies?

07-00:44:29

Banks:

The book that influenced me most, that's somewhat of a framework—although I—well, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, Harold Cruse. Because it kind of reinforced my notion that you could be a political critic, a radical, a nationalist, and be critical of parts of the black movement. I didn't have to just say, yes, and yes, and yes to everything that was, quote, “black.” If things were silly, I could say that without worrying about—or, I shouldn't be worried about how I was perceived by the black student union or this group or that group. The kind of independent intellect—there's a role for the independent intellectual in the black community if I want to be it. I guess that's a way to put it. Up until then, you just had a lot of brilliant people just going along with students. Students would say, “You're not black. If you were black, you'd be doing this and doing that.” Cruse clearly pointed out historically, for a whole lot of reasons, these people—on the surface [Marcus] Garvey was this, this, this, but at its core it was a version of capitalism that he was talking about. And I'm saying, “Wow! This guy can say that? It seems true. I can do this.”

07-00:46:01

Wilmot:

What did you think of his critique of the relationships that had happened between black intellectuals who had been situated within the Communist Party?

07-00:46:21

Banks:

I knew a little bit about that, and it just rang true. I learned much, because he gave a lot of anecdotes and stories—again, I'm Southern. This idea of black and white unity in the South and so forth, that just wasn't a part of my experiential—my lens. I just had never seen that happen. You can envision it, but you just saw the contradictions. I knew enough about Left-black interaction via Scottsboro, via Populism, the Populist Party, Reconstruction. I knew that history and I concluded early on that whites across the board had a vested interest in racial subordination. White people benefited through the subordination of African Americans. Now, how do you change the dynamic so that whites do not lose? And I don't know of anybody that's figured that out, in a global or a national political sense.

07-00:47:37

Wilmot:

So that whites do not lose in a struggle? Or in terms of reshaping that dynamic?

07-00:47:47

Banks:

White people benefit, or have benefited, through racial subordination, period. You can point to that; there's no getting around it. And I think whites realize that a level playing field does not

work to their advantage. Once I look that reality in the eye, then you have to take a deep breath. You can juggle things, tactically, here and there at different institutions, different parts of the country. Or, how do you merge your interests with the interests of the working class, of women? Unity Black Women, White Women United. But here again, in the women's movement there were these tensions. Middle-class white women; poor black working-class women. At every point the literature is there. Now, it's easy to resolve theoretically, but, again, I'm Southern, I live on the ground, I like to see what's happening around me and look it in the eye. Not just stay in the ivory tower. Some of that stuff came out later, in the Third World—you know, when I was attacked about—that's later. But, the Third World stuff. Ethnic Studies vs. Black Studies tension that comes later.

07-00:49:33

Wilmot:

I notice there was some work, some consulting work in these early seventies, that you had taken up in the early years, when you first came to Berkeley. It seemed like you were consulting with different school districts—

07-00:49:53

Banks:

Yes.

07-00:49:55

Wilmot:

—Vallejo Unified School District, and I wanted to ask you about this project, "Follow Through." Is that something that you recall?

07-00:50:02

Banks:

Well, yes. This was a federal program. There's Head Start, and people said, "Well, up to this point it's successful, but it doesn't go further." At some point—the years, the numbers speak for themselves—but I did get involved with a person I knew who hired me to go out from time to time and measure, evaluate, help community groups build upon the educational, academic success of Follow Through, this other new program. The idea would be to keep building, rather than just cut it off there. So I did that. The school district, we took a group of people from—teachers from Vallejo, in fact. We put together a group and basically, I guess, what would it be called now? Cultural awareness or racial awareness. All that kind of stuff. It might have been a different title, but that's what we were hired to do. I knew that game from DC.

You remember, I talked about how I was consulting for the government, this agency. The whole race thing was "all get together," that kind of stuff. I knew how to design programs that made sense, and I knew people who could do certain things, so we did that for the Vallejo school district. We went up on a retreat for two days and did our dance, and came back and no it doubt made little difference, but that was the game.

07-00:51:52

Wilmot:

I'm thinking maybe we could take a quick break. Let me take a look and see where we're at in terms of time. Yeah, let's take a break.

07-00:52:09

Banks:
Okay.

[End Audio File 7]

[Begin Audio File 8]

08-00:01:05

Wilmot:

When you came to Berkeley, what was going on in the Afro-American Studies Department? Actually, was Afro-American Studies then, or was it Black Studies?

08-00:01:13

Banks:

It was the African American Studies Program. It was part of a unit, Ethnic Studies, with the four units: Chicano Studies, Asian American Studies, and Native American Studies. And Black Studies. It was one of the four units under that overall rubric.

As it happened, the rubric was just a front. There was no cooperation between the four units at all. There was a chair of Ethnic Studies, Carl Mack, African American, long-time family in Oakland. At the time, he was working on his Ph.D. at Berkeley, and he was named to head Ethnic Studies. His job was basically to stay out of everybody's way, as I saw it. There was no attempt to forge any kind of cooperation or to make real that Third World promise that I had heard about. I just assumed there was something there, but quickly learned that that was just a front thing. Each unit did their own negotiations with the administration, and he had no power to speak of. But that was the structure of African American Studies.

The faculty was overwhelmingly part-time. People came in to teach a course, one semester. One course each semester, half-time. Most of them had jobs in other places. They were people who were public school teachers, and would have to have a class at four o'clock to give them time to get out of school. There were about four people there who were graduate students at Berkeley—at least two of them, I think, were quite good. Certainly, smart. One went on to earn his PhD and went to University of Texas, Don Davis, who was at some point head of the Berkeley Black Caucus. People pretty much taught anything they wanted to. They had one person there—I mean, stupid stuff. Like all the black kids got A's; all the white kids got F's. Here again, that was the spirit of the contest that was presumably going on.

08-00:04:02

There was no design in particular to the curriculum. There were three divisions—I think I get this right—there was “Pervista” Division, which was performing and visual arts. Another one—what was the one that I was in? Something like Community Studies. And the third one was something having to do with science and so forth. But it wasn't real, because nobody had taken time to say, “Okay, this is what the curriculum is like. This is where we want it to go, and we need people to do this or that.”

And later, it became apparent to me that Ron actually was resisting bringing in scholars. I mean, independent scholars, I would say. He himself was not a scholar—had no pretenses of being a scholar—and he had set up this dichotomy: community orientation as opposed to scholarship—

which is bogus. They were just hiring people full-time. The one-year appointment. If you have a one-year appointment at Berkeley, you serve at the pleasure of the chair. Every year, he says, “Yes” or “No.” It’s an independent event, every time. After that first semester, I understood that and I began to, “Hmmm, okay. Georgia.” Everybody was part-time. No, I’m sorry. Everybody was a lecturer. There were no people who had commitments beyond that year. Ron didn’t, either, as chair. He served at the pleasure of the chancellor.

08-00:05:58

So you have all these people with no permanent appointment or institutional permanence or any expectation of permanence other than what they thought they should be doing. And that lends itself to a great deal of control, social control. You have a family, you’re relying on feeding your kids, you’re likely to say “Yes.” Or if somebody says, “Jump!,” you ask, “How high?”

Now, as it turns out, there was conflict over a number of things, led in the main by a guy named Joe Brooks and Don Davis. Joe was a graduate student in economics. Don Davis was a PhD student in political science, who objected to the kind of ramrodding, the kind of autocratic system that was in place. They had good instincts about that. The first month or so I got here, I saw this tension between that group and Ron Lewis. So here’s Don Davis, Joe Brooks—there were some others. Joe Howard, James McGuinness, Sarah Fabio, Sid Walton. That was one group. And there was Don Davis and some other people. And interestingly enough, there was me. Now, because Ron had hired me, I was seen as an ally of Ron. As Ron’s boy from back East. That was another thing that was really strange to me. I was an outsider because I was from back East. Everybody there was local. Berkeley, Oakland, UC. So that kind of incestuous, everybody knew everybody. But here I was from back East. “Grrrr. Evil Empire.”

08-00:08:00

Wilmot:

Do you meant that’s how people perceived you?

08-00:08:03

Banks:

Yeah. Because I had no history, as far as they were concerned, other than that you could read he did this, he did that. But nobody knew my movement. Nobody was in a position to say, He did this or he did that or he’s like this or he’s like that. I’ve never been a glad-hander. A big party animal. I’ve never done that, but because Ron had hired me, brought me out, I was Ron’s—to the dissident group—I was seen as a confidante of Ron. And as things evolved, it became clear that I agreed more with what the opposition was saying than with Ron. Again, the middle man.

08-00:08:50

Wilmot:

What was the opposition saying?

08-00:08:51

Banks:

They were talking about the rights of the faculty. That people should vote on who’s hired. The faculty should have a voice in the people who were being hired. That this person should not be teaching this course. Just legitimate kinds of faculty concerns. Nothing was particularly revolutionary. But Ron just ran everything with an iron hand. Even down to the level of secretaries. There were people who ended up being thought of as being related to the other

group; you were fired. Probably not fired, but whatever administratively you do to get rid of somebody. Again, these are sort of quasi-academic, I thought, legitimate concerns about the management of the department, how things should be decided.

And here was Ron, who was a complete autocrat, who surrounded himself with people who basically served at the pleasure of Ron, and they knew it. They were making a lot of money—more than they could make in the outside world. I understood that. Bil Banks comes into the picture, hired by Ron, hired by this autocrat, and the autocrat expects me to operate on behalf of him. That's where I was. That's where I was. It was tough, but it wasn't something I was unaccustomed to. But that's what the department was like.

08-00:10:31

The courses, I thought very little of them. Largely pap.

08-00:10:43

Wilmot:

What does that mean to you? Pap.

08-00:10:45

Banks:

Soft. Not demanding. Say the right things. I remember one class [laughs] required reading was *Jet*. I remember somehow they arranged to subscribe to ten issues of *Jet* every week, and I guess current events or something. Stuff like that. Like I said, I'm not your most erudite or ivory tower kind of person, but there's a lot more to black life and culture than can be gleaned by *Jet*.

08-00:11:28

Wilmot:

What courses did you teach that first semester?

08-00:11:30

Banks:

“Attitudes and Values in the Black Community,” which was a good course, if I do say so myself. I just talked about the development of attitudes about various issues, and the range of opinions and thinking about things like class, integration—here are some attitudes that black people share, some black people share in the black community. Where do they come from? How is there a difference in the black community about these attitudes? Where do these differences come from? That was the scheme, and that's what I did. I taught that course for maybe two or three years. I enjoyed teaching it, and it came to be a popular course because I was lively and in-your-face-ish, and they thought that was sort of cool.

08-00:12:28

Wilmot:

Did you create that class?

08-00:12:29

Banks:

Yeah.

08-00:12:30

Wilmot:

Okay. Did you have any trouble getting it approved by the program?

08-00:12:38

Banks:

By the program? No. I mean, I was the man. I was Ron's boy: "That's what you want to do? Good."

08-00:12:47

Wilmot:

Were you dealing with the College of Letters and Science, in terms of getting approval for courses?

08-00:13:06

Banks:

It went directly from the chair to the Committee on Courses. The Committee on Courses, by statute, has the authority to approve—only the Committee on Courses—all courses offered in the Berkeley division. That's the way it is. This is checks and balances, which is a pretty good idea. So it went from Ron to the Committee on Courses. And the Committee on Courses then passed judgment over what was being offered and so forth. Very political times. At that time, you had a pretty tame committee that did not want to create any shit. The history and the aftermath of Eldridge Cleaver—anything that went there, by and large, was approved. There was some, "What about this? What about this?" It was ridiculous. But that's liberalism—a kind of liberalism.

08-00:14:08

Wilmot:

Do you recall who was on that Committee on Courses?

08-00:14:13

Banks:

Ah, yeah.

08-00:14:14

Wilmot:

It's academic?

08-00:14:15

Banks:

Yeah. Academic Senate. It's the number one. I could name some names, but I don't want to disparage—I'm trying to think of the chair that first year—Len Duhl.

But the key figures, this next chair and the chair after—Chuck Decker, a biochemistry professor. He was smart. He was good. He taught me a great deal. He helped me a great deal. Later on, Herb Strauss, who's now in chemistry—he's a dean. He was a member of that group, and he helped me learn the university. Let me go back a bit. And I'll get back to it, so make sure I cover what you want me to cover about that committee.

08-00:15:21

After that first year, I began to understand my situation and my place. “Hmmm, what do I need to do to protect myself?” Because I saw it was just a matter of time. I’d made a very good friend, Winthrop Jordan, who is an eminent historian in the History Department. He did a book, *White Over Black*—as far as I’m concerned, the definitive thing about the development of racial attitudes in America. We became good friends, personal friends, and he was a source of helping me think through academic, intellectual questions and politics, in terms of helping me connect here. Sandy Ellberg, who was in the graduate school, was another person who was very helpful. Win said, “Hey, look. You serve from year to year. All Ron Lewis has to do is to say you’re terminated. You have no recourse, no grievances. What you should do is try to get on the tenure track, assistant professor.” Okay. Two issues. One political, the other personal. How do you get Ron Lewis to recommend me for a ladder-track appointment? How do you frame it in a way so that he believes it’s in his interest—and the department’s interests; certainly his interest—to recommend me for a ladder track position? Certainly I had what it took. Assistant professor, at some level. How do you frame it to him, so that he thinks that’s in his interests? Okay, that’s the first problem. The other one was more personal. I took a salary cut of, like, six thousand dollars from one year to the other. If I had said, “Okay, I want a ladder appointment,” my salary would have dropped by six thousand dollars. That was a lot of bread in those days. You could pay lecturers more than I’m sure the case is now. Temporary lecturers, you could pay them more than.

08-00:17:55

Wilmot:

Ladder-rank, tenure track?

08-00:17:56

Banks:

Yeah. Certainly, the assistant professor level, yeah. Okay, what do you do? Chuck Decker, biochemistry, Dave Blackwell, and a number of other people—Sandy Muir. A big-time conservative, speechwriter for George Bush. These people taught me a great deal about how the university worked. I had determined—I said, “Well, if you’re going to be here, you might as well understand the environment that you’re in,” and I couldn’t get it from Ron, because he just didn’t know anything about how the place worked. Different committees, here and here, who were the real power brokers and so forth. His was a straight-ahead bully-Bogart; if that didn’t work, boom. I just had more silk in my game. Again, Georgia. These people were just invaluable in helping me, “This is wrong, you shouldn’t do this. You should do it this way.” Later, Troy Duster—oh, yeah, Stanley, Stan Berger, chair of Committee on Courses; Chuck Decker was chair of Committee on Courses. They were starting to have some problems getting courses approved, and Ron reasoned that, well, by—in order to be on the Committee on Courses, you have to be ladder faculty. Hmmm. Okay, we’ll make you a ladder faculty—recommend your appointment as ladder; assistant professor—and hope that you can get appointed to the Committee on Courses. Once I’m on the Committee on Courses, that would grease things for the department, he thought. Okay. He did that. He recommended me and I was approved—it was no big deal—took the salary cut.

08-00:20:05

Wilmot:

And became an assistant professor.

08-00:20:08

Banks:

Became assistant professor. The only assistant professor in the department. The only one. The only ladder professor in the department. And, significantly, the only person to whom the university had more than a one-year commitment. You were appointed for two years, period. You know, you can reappoint and so forth. And I was named to the Committee on Courses. That was part of the background. Now you're on the Committee on Courses. The Committee on Committees appointed me to the Committee on Courses, but again that's all the hook-up. So now I'm a member of the Committee on Courses. I get to sit while these people from all across the campus talk about the university and the courses, and all that kind of stuff. And I just sat there like a sponge, just learning everything I can. For the people that were forthcoming, I'd ask questions, "What about this; what about that," and so forth. Like I said, that was—you never want to say, "Never could have done it"—I like to think of myself as more resourceful than that—but still that was a key experience. Sitting on that committee, boring as it was in so many instances, but you learn how this works. You learn the language. You learn what's important to your colleagues. You learn how issues can be finessed in different ways and so forth.

08-00:21:40

So, at some point, Ron sent over some courses. Some mumbo jumbo. And the chair called me aside. I'm the expert on ethnicity, you know, that deal. I said, "Well, it doesn't make a lot of sense to me." He was sensitive to my position. I'm on the committee. Anything goes—that's why I'm there, to make sure everything gets approved. I said, "Well, these questions are legitimate questions that can be raised. Write back and say this, this, this and this." And Chuck was tough. He was the first person to ever raise a substantive question about this.

08-00:22:32

Wilmot:

Do you remember what course it was that was sent over?

08-00:22:35

Banks:

I have it around. It's in my papers. If it's important, I could dig it up. I saw it recently. He raised a couple of questions, and Ron sent back this angry letter accusing him of racism and trying to manage the affairs of black people, colonialism—

08-00:22:49

Wilmot:

What kind of questions did Chuck raise?

08-00:22:51

Banks:

Who was this person? What experience justified the qualifications of such-and-such. If the person wanted to teach math, have they got a BA in math, or GED, or something? Very rudimentary stuff. Okay, so, one, here's this guy for the first time—here's this committee, university committee, university-wide committee, saying, "Are you sure about this?" Any kind of resistance. And Ron went on the warpath at that point. He went on the warpath to the committee, that was the first target. Of course, "I thought you were supposed to be handling this for us?" I said, "Well, you know. That's just not how I can operate effectively there, man." I told

him that. I said, “I’ll lose my both credibility and effectiveness if I am seen as approving anything that comes through.” I tried to just kind of suggest that to him.

But he went on the warpath and just started going off, letters, exchange of letters back and forth. And the committee, I mean, they were cool. They understood that I was on this tightrope tightrope. I was expected to do the bidding of Ron, and I could not do that bidding. So we had subcommittee review stuff. In fact, long story short, at some point, it got so hot and heavy that the committee decided, “Look. As long as Ron is there we’re not going to approve any courses offered by the department.” Now, that’s the bottom. And if you aren’t offering courses—

Now, this set in motion—and I don’t want to be disingenuous about that. The administration had a lot of complaints. It was a laughing stock, and they knew that, but as long as it was contained, as long as it was over here, and pretty much—I mean, that’s where the kind of liberal racism kicks in. Little else was demanded. But when the committee said, “We’re not going to approve any courses,” then you have to do something. So the chancellor—

08-00:25:38

Wilmot:

[Alfred] Bowker.

08-00:25:39

Banks:

Bowker, yeah, had some discussions. He had some discussions with me. I’ll step back in a minute, but while all of this was happening—yeah, right after this problem with the Committee on Courses. I was on the committee and he didn’t get what he wanted; I got a letter saying I was fired, effectively.

08-00:26:06

Wilmot:

From whom?

08-00:26:07

Banks:

From that department.

08-00:26:08

Wilmot:

From Ron Lewis?

08-00:26:09

Banks:

From Ron Lewis, yeah. I was living on E. 22nd. I get home, this letter saying I’d be gone effective such-and-such a date. A couple of days later I got one, “We realize this would be a hardship. You can stay until the spring, but at that point, you’re fired.”

08-00:26:26

Wilmot:

What year was this? When was this?

08-00:26:26

Banks:

Nineteen seventy-two, I believe.

08-00:26:31

Wilmot:

So this was your third year at Berkeley?

08-00:26:35

Banks:

I think maybe it was in my second year at Berkeley. I came in '71. Yeah, '72, second year at Berkeley. I could nail it down there, or you could, as easily. I got this letter saying I was fired. So. I'm a senate member now. I have the formal protections of the Privilege of Tenure Committee. You can't fire a professor, except for cause. So I went over to Mel Eisenberg, who was the chair of the Committee on Privilege and Tenure at the time, and says, "Look. This is what's happened." I wrote up the case, and the funny thing is, they didn't believe what was happening. I mean, "what was going on in Afro-American Studies" was so—I mean, it was like a different world to them. To be vulgar, it was like a population of heathens: "How could they do this?" I said, "Look. It happens all the time." I'm not into drama like that, but I said, "This kind of stuff happens. Here's the letter." "But you have a two-year appointment and they have to do—" I said, "I understand that, sir. But I don't want to argue with these people. It's up to you to say, 'you can do this,' or 'you can't do that.'" And they klutzed around. They were just afraid to take a stand.

And that makes me angry as well, but around that time, or concurrent with all this, I said, "Hey man. Your time is limited. Even if you're there for another year, is this really what you want to do, given all this other kind of stuff?" So I started looking around at other possibilities, to leave Berkeley. One place I interviewed was [University of California] Riverside. Reginald Jones was at Riverside. I interviewed at Riverside, and I interviewed at Brown. The finalists, in terms of going out—there were other people I was in contact with, but these were the two schools. I sort of wanted to stay in California, so I went out and interviewed at Riverside. I don't know if it was the chair of Black Studies, or in Black Studies. No, it was just a faculty member. They were looking for a faculty member in Black Studies. And I went out to Brown University, and had good discussions with a woman, Jacqueline Mattfeld, who was a provost at the time. The conversations went well. I thought I was—you know, I did my thing. I would have preferred to go to Riverside, and I didn't get it. I didn't get it. I mean, it was just—it was the first time I'd ever—overstatement probably. I didn't get the job, let's put it like this. Somebody else got the job. And that's the insult clicking in from remember when I was talking about Reggie. I did meet Reggie and so forth, and later on I learned a little bit about the politics of that. But Brown started their motions. So I ended up with a tenured offer from Brown. The word got out to the administration: Bil's unhappy. Now, they'd had no conversations, to speak of, with me. I was not in touch with Al Bowker at that time. It wasn't like we were friends, or any of the other deans, Jack Raleigh and so forth.

I'm just quietly packing my bags to head to the East. But word got out. I remember, he called over and said, "Well, you know. We understand—" He'd heard about me. He knew my position and so forth. I was cool. I said, "Yeah, it's been difficult, but we do what we have to do." That's where he says, "Well, I think I'm going to have to make some moves." Al is very, very cagey.

We have lunch every semester, thereabouts, to this day. We stay in touch. He's very cool. Very unassuming. But he's from New York, and he understood political dimensions of stuff in ways that a lot of the people didn't out here. We'll get to that later.

08-00:31:33

But, to push it ahead, he started talking to me about taking over. He thought he was going to have to get rid of Ron and start all over, rebuilding the department. Because we'd lost the confidence of the faculty, and basically Berkeley can't survive unless the faculty has confidence. That's really true. People have to have some degree of respect for you, otherwise you just get marginalized and marginalized and end up fighting crazy battles. He asked, would I be interested in taking over the job as coordinator. I says, "Well, no. I know the people there," and so forth. He said, "Well, give it some thought, and talk about whatever conditions you might have vis-à-vis the department, where you want to go and what's important." I talked to him about, "Look, I believe in building a department just as strong in sociology. If anything, that's where I would be. Either you have to buy into that vision, or I'm not the man." That was the thing.

So he said, "Go think about it some more." So I consulted with a couple of my friends, people like Leon Litwack—again, doing all this confidentially—Win Jordan, of course, Dave Blackwell, Bill Shack, who was here at the time. There were some other people I had some confidence in, and I told them about the problems in the department, what was there. There's just nothing to build on. Well, "you can do it, you can do it." And I says, "Shit." They were all encouraging, but I knew full well that once I went into that, all hell was going to break loose, and I couldn't expect them to do a lot for me on the ground. So, thinking politically I came up with a demand that—you know, these were my friends. I remember, over bourbon late one night, I said, "Look, this is what I'm going to do. My core demand is you're going to have to fire everybody in the department. Everybody. Secretaries, everybody."

08-00:34:08

Wilmot:

This is you speaking to—?

08-00:34:10

Banks:

I'm telling my friends I'm going to do this. It's like, "Nadine, this is what I'm going to tell Al Bowker. I want you, as chancellor—however you do it, that's not my problem. You do it. You're going to have to fire everybody in the department effective June 30. I want to bring my own staff in. I want to slowly build courses. In my first year, I'm not going to have many courses, because that's—I'll risk that. Whatever people are brought back, I want to choose. So there's nobody there that I don't want to be there. Office staff, everybody." "He's not going to do that. You can't do that." "Too bad. I have a letter from Brown saying come tenure joint appointment, Black Studies or African American Studies and Psychology. Let's roll the dice."

I had a conversation, and of course the university doesn't like to do anything like that because they understood the upheaval that would take place. I was clear. I tried to explain. At this point I appreciated Bowker's political sensitivity. Rod Park, a different story. Mike Heyman was the vice chancellor, but Rod Park, I think, was the dean of L&S [College of Letters and Science]. He didn't have any—I'll say some positive things about him later, but he had no sense of the politics that were involved, whereas Bowker did. I told him, I said, "Look, people are going to come

after me from all sorts of—that’s all right. But I’m not going to fight on both sides. Basically, I’m going to make recommendations that make sense, that I don’t mind personally defending, but I don’t want to get sabotaged, or get caught up into a lot of bull. In other words, you’re going to have to grease the wheels throughout, during the emergency. It’s a critical situation; you’ve got to treat it like a crisis. Extreme problems demand extreme solutions.” [phone rings]

08-00:36:49

Wilmot:

Chancellor Bowker, at that time, did he understand that the administration would need to have your back if they were going to pursue this path with you?

08-00:37:01

Banks:

He understood. He understood. I suggested some groundwork that he might be prepared to lay, because I knew what would be coming up, in terms of community and so forth. I said, “Now, these are actors out there. You might want to figure out some ways of communicating, touching bases.” He picks up that; he understood completely. Again, the more substantive demands apart from the personal stuff, I said, “I want no budget cuts for” I think I said a five-year period, or something like. I’m pretty sure I said five years. “I don’t want any budget cuts. I don’t want to have to rush out and hire people, just to be hiring them to meet some arbitrary time thing. I want to get the best people, and begin to build,” and so forth and so on. “I don’t want to come back every fall begging for an FTE. I want to do this.” He agreed to that. There were no budget cuts, no temporary this. He went along with the program. The other substantive things: He didn’t necessarily match the offer that I—well, it certainly wasn’t a tenured offer. He said, “You’ll be assistant professor, step such-and-such, with a stipend for being the chair,” and so forth. It came close to the dollar amount at Brown.

08-00:38:40

Wilmot:

They didn’t offer you tenure at that point?

08-00:38:42

Banks:

No. In fact, he said in his letter—and I’ll show it to you. I’ve got to remember to bring some of this stuff down. He said, “Look, we realize that you’re going to be busy doing this, and you ultimately want to get tenure. You will be evaluated primarily because of your work in putting this together.” That was the letter that went out, and this is kind of interesting—and I’ll tell you how I responded to that. So, Jack [John Henry] Raleigh, bless his soul, was the vice chancellor. Jack Raleigh sent this letter of appointment to me, in Afro-American Studies. In my office. The AA promptly intercepted it and Xeroxed it.

The next day there were a hundred copies of my letter of appointment on campus. I mean, I eventually got the original, but it had been copied and distributed. But how could the Vice Chancellor be so naive to do this? I think the administrative assistant saw “Personal and Confidential,” and I’m the rebel, so you know. Xeroxed it, put it back in. And the rest is history.

08-00:40:07

Wilmot:

How did you find out it had been distributed throughout the campus?

08-00:40:11

Banks:

You could walk across the campus. There were people out there, “Traitor Banks! Traitor Banks!” “Bil\$” That kicked it off.

08-00:40:23

Wilmot:

So, enclosed in this letter were the terms?

08-00:40:24

Banks:

Yeah.

08-00:40:26

Wilmot:

The actual financial terms?

08-00:40:27

Banks:

Yes.

08-00:40:28

Wilmot:

And the response to the demands that you had made?

08-00:40:30

Banks:

The letter represented both. There was another letter that I’d sent, but they didn’t have that, because I—make sure I’m answering your question. In discussions, I’d made some demands, and this letter agreed to all of the demands. Also the Institute for Race and Community—what’s now the Institute for the Study of Social Change—that was in trouble, and I demanded that that be sustained as well. I wasn’t the chair, but it was an institution. I’m a big believer in institutions. I said, “I don’t want you cutting that, either.” Gene Stovall, Carl Mack were all there. All of these demands were contained in the letter. If you want, I can find it easily enough—

08-00:41:23

Wilmot:

That would be great.

08-00:41:23

Banks:

—to keep from having—next week do this, if you want.

08-00:41:26

Wilmot:

That’s okay. I’d like to look at it after our interview, but I guess what I’m trying to determine is: Did that letter then disclose the extent to which you were in negotiations with the administration?

08-00:41:35

Banks:

Oh, yeah.

08-00:41:37

Wilmot:

There was no more, kind of, curtain around the kind of communications you'd been having with the administration. That's what I'm trying to understand.

08-00:41:46

Banks:

Right. There was no curtain. It was like, on the substance, everything was out there. Some things I didn't have to say—the contact with this person and that person—but the structural, the institutional demands, everything was down there. Salary.

“Choose your own staff.” I mean, the administrative assistant in your department sees that. You can imagine! Five-year commitment. No budget cuts. And, of course, that's when people started—when I became “Bil Bank\$” The legend. Oh, God! But of course, that set off a firestorm. The other thing that's kind of important at this point. I wrote him back—and this was not public—that I agree to the terms, there were a couple of little things, but I said I don't want to be evaluated strictly on the basis of what I do in the department, because scholarship is not going to go out of my life, and I don't want an asterisk by my name at any point. He agreed to that. That's when it kicked off.

08-00:43:32

Wilmot:

Did you have a sense that Chancellor Bowker brought some of his experience with understanding nuanced political situations from his work with the—I believe he worked with the CUNY [City University of New York] system.

08-00:43:54

Banks:

Sure. New York? Of course. Well, you have these blocs, these constituencies, and so forth. Unions. He was accustomed to that roly-poly world of academics and politics and he understood it full well. He had no substantive knowledge of African American studies, but he was smart enough—or some would say, stupid enough—to trust me. He says, “Okay, you do it. You do what you have to do.” There were a couple of things he cautioned me against. He says, “Be leery of crossing”—I don't know if he said “Jews in general,” or “Jewish faculty members.” He said, “Kind of watch for that, because that can set all kind of unfortunate balls rolling that are totally besides the point.” I said, “Okay, that's cool.” That's not something I would do anyway, but I remember that because, other than that—now, one thing that happened too, during this period. Okay, everybody's fired. So I said, “Okay, I want to rehire two people: Roy Thomas and, there was another person, Hassan,” who was—it doesn't matter.

08-00:45:14

Wilmot:

Hassan?

08-00:45:15

Banks:

Yeah, Mohammed Hassan.

08-00:45:20

Wilmot:

Why did you want to rehire them?

08-00:45:22

Banks:

Roy Thomas was an office mate, we were very good friends, but Roy was the titular leader of the anti-Bil Banks campaign. All the “Bil Banks is scum,” and so forth, all of that. Roy and I were in communications all the while. I guess you’d say “double agent,” or something like that. He was my first office-mate when I came here, and we were—because he was so popular with students, Roy can’t say no. He was just that kind of personality, and so forth. People pushed him out there, because Roy had a kind of affect and credibility that some of these other clowns didn’t have. Everybody liked Roy. “If Roy is against Bil Banks, it must be cool.” So Rod Park, when I sent over this person I’d like to hire, he wrote back a thing saying, “No, because he’s this, he’s this, this, and this.” The next day, I sent a letter of resignation to Bowker. I says, “Look. I’m not going to fight from both ends. I quit, and I suggest the next person you get—.” I forget exactly what I said, but said, “I’m quitting. You know, I already told you I’m not going to fight and play games with Park. I know what I’m doing.” And he, of course, took care of it. Roy was appointed.

08-00:46:54

Wilmot:

And Roy agreed to come back on?

08-00:46:56

Banks:

Oh, yeah.

08-00:47:01

Wilmot:

Hmmm. Hmmm.

08-00:47:04

Banks:

Hmmm. [laughs] Anyway that’s the story.

08-00:47:11

Wilmot:

Did Mohammed Hassan come on?

08-00:47:12

Banks:

Yeah, he came back for a year. He taught Swahili courses, and so forth. There was an angle there. Student boycott, and so forth and so on.

08-00:47:31

Wilmot:

We can get into that next time, but what did—you mentioned that Dave Blackwell and other people really helped you learn about the lay of the land, and this institution as an institution. I wanted to ask you, do you remember any kind of advice that you got from Dave Blackwell, or Bill Shack, in particular.

08-00:47:59

Banks:

It's hard to think, particularly. At this point. Later on, I can—one of the things that I did during the first year, second year, third year, whenever I'd bring people to campus to interview, I made it a point to have them meet and talk with David Blackwell, Shack, or whoever was closest to the discipline. Even if they weren't—I mean, we didn't hire anybody in math or stat. Dave went around, "I'd like you to meet so-and-so. Here's Al Raboteau." Just made a point, just to let them know what we're doing in an advisory capacity. We often met at the Faculty Club, black faculty, where I just, "What do you think about this?" "No." There were debates, lively debates among black faculty members. What am I doing? I'm drawing them into, trying to get some ownership.

Before, it was—they thought we were crazy. Slowly, I was trying to, by asking them—I'm not asking them to do a lot, teach a course or Mau Mau or anything like that, but basically to see, "Look, I'm listening. I'll do this if you say this is the person, I'm likely to hear that. If I want to argue, I'll argue on the legitimate intellectual terms." I think it worked quite well, I think it worked quite well, because these are people I know I could count on for advice, pretty much without exception. A lot of them I didn't agree with. Bill Shack and I disagreed about a lot of stuff, but so what? I think we remained friends forever because he's, in that courtly English way, he could accept that. It was no BS. I wasn't trying to—I believed in what I was doing. The Africa emphasis. Some people said you should do more on Africa, and I said no, and explained why.

That's what a university is supposed to be like—to have these kind of discussions, these kind of debates. And certainly black faculty as a group, I saw them as a key component. Again, all these people didn't know much about the content. Ray Collins in Botany, Harry Morrison in Physics, Jonas Richmond in Nutritional Sciences, Pete Bragg in Mechanical Engineering, Ollie Wilson in Music. But here again they all had a desire, I think, to see Afro-American Studies become strong and viable on campus. It just so happens that they understood what I was doing. And that's the way it worked out.

08-00:50:48

Wilmot:

Pursuant to this, was there ever a time when your relationships with your colleagues, other black faculty, were affected by the position that you took in the kind of shift that you engineered?

08-00:51:03

Banks:

See, I was political too. I was careful, I never put them in a situation where they would have to take sides. I knew they had my back, and that was enough. They supported me. "I didn't like how the chancellor did that," and so forth. I criticized the chancellor, publicly. Said, "Yeah, maybe this should have been done differently." But, "This happened and I assure you that this won't—," and Bowker understood that. I couldn't afford to be seen as some lackey of his. One of the big charges was that this was just a scheme to get the department into L&S, because it was outside of L&S, and people saw this as "autonomy." One, the argument didn't make any sense, but I said, "That decision should best be made by the department. If the department recommends it, that's one thing, but I would strongly disagree that the chancellor should decide where it should be placed." That's how it evolved. When the issue came down, the faculty decided this is what we want to do, and it was approved by Bowker, as opposed to anything downhanded. But that was a big thing: that I was just a lackey of the administration.

What else can you say? They understood that, and after a couple of years when things settled down, and they saw the people were coming in—Barbara Christian, Reggie, later Al Raboteau. “Maybe this is going to be okay.” I was very careful not to put them on the spot, as a faculty. But to a person I can’t think of anybody who was hostile to me, and what I was trying to do. There were differences here and there about stuff, but nobody thought I was a puppet, which was kind of reassuring. Because everybody else did—the students. Not all students, but certainly the majority of students who didn’t know me.

08-00:53:28

Wilmot:

Did you get the sense that Al Bowker believed in the project of having a Black Studies Department?

08-00:53:32

Banks:

Oh, yeah. It’s California, it was happening all around the country, and so forth. If you’re going to have one, let’s do it right. I think that’s what his vision was. He didn’t know how to do it himself. There were other people around in the administration that were close to that. Rod Park; Mike Heyman, the vice chancellor, law background, law school; Rod Park, botanist. And that was a big problem, because there was no dean that could take intellectual charge of what was happening over there. Not that Ron would have responded any differently, but a couple of years later in my last year over there, Bob Middlekauff in history—who, again, is a lifelong friend from those days—who disagreed with the idea of Black Studies, but he was the dean of L&S, and I could count on him for critical advice, support. He didn’t try to ruin it, he just said, “Hey, look, maybe this or this or this.” Particularly when we got in solid historians, Al Raboteau, and later Earl Lewis, he’d say, “Wow, Bill—,” and he’ll say today, “I didn’t think it was going to work, but goddammit, you did it.” If he’d had a decision at the beginning, yea or nay, he probably would have said nay. But he came to just understand that the field is legitimate. This is a way of organizing knowledge that need not be crazy like in those early days. You could go beyond that.

08-00:55:13

Wilmot:

In the salary that you negotiated—this may be too personal, but in the salary that you negotiated with the chancellor, did it come back up to at least the same level as when you were a lecturer?

08-00:55:27

Banks:

I think it might have, with summer—they could probably sweeten the package. I think it was something like twenty-something thousand. It was something like that, as I recall, but it’s in that letter.

08-00:55:45

Wilmot:

Oh, I see. So it’s all public?

08-00:55:45

Banks:

Oh, yeah. Not personal. There are students on campus who remember that.

08-00:55:54

Wilmot:

If you were to succinctly say, what was the difference between your vision for the academic kind of framework of the department and Ron Lewis's, how would you describe that?

08-00:56:11

Banks:

I'd push for more challenging—well, let me just, I think that Ron probably saw the department as a kind of—I don't think Ron every understood or came to grips with what an academic department could and could not do within the context of the campus. He never bothered to understand the environment well enough to impose some limits on his vision. If he wanted to have a class in East Oakland, he thought he should be able to do that. I think I had more of an intellectual vision.

I could talk about that, but that's not the biggest contrast between how I operated and Ron. I understood the institution. I understood the academic, intellectual life, how the place was organized. By six months to a year, I understood that well enough to know, "This is possible." And I reasoned, frankly, that if I could build a department that had the same perks as, say, political science, that's enough.

08-00:57:27

Wilmot:

When you say "perks," what do you mean?

08-00:57:29

Banks:

Appoint people full-time. Appoint people to tenure. Offer courses. Develop a graduate program. That's what other departments do. If I could do that, that would be a hallmark kind of contribution to the Berkeley campus. Now, other things can happen, but that was my goal.

08-00:57:55

Wilmot:

Okay. One of the things that I understand came out of that social moment was this idea of academics in service to a community.

08-00:58:03

Banks:

Right.

08-00:58:06

Wilmot:

Which I understand was one of the underpinnings of the way that Ron Lewis configured his department, or his program. How did you take that idea, how did you understand that idea, how did you react to it? What did it mean to you?

08-00:58:30

Banks:

There's an idea and there's the implementation. The idea, I could embrace a little bit, never wholeheartedly. I looked at black students, all the kind of stuff they had to do, how hard it was for so many of them to keep up with what they were doing here, and to put them in another

situation talking about providing services, and so forth—here, again, I started these things maybe overly intellectual. What do kids know? The drug problem: “We need to deal with the drug problem in East Oakland.” “Oh? How?” You’re a sophomore in college, I’m going to send you out there. To do what? To do what? I mean, you could tutor in school, things like that, but heck!” The School of Education was doing that.

Homelessness on a large scale had not occurred yet, but there was violence, all kind of serious problems, and these things aren’t amenable to college students. At best, you can learn about them. But even there, it can get analytical, because in those days you had a lot of kids who knew that, who were from South Central, who were from East Oakland, who had gone to Fremont, who had gone to Castlemont. They knew that. They’d come to university, I would argue, to learn a deeper understanding of these problems, and if they want to go on to professional school, maybe they can learn how to deal with them. As opposed to, for instance, the Asian American kids, or white kids who didn’t know about it. Another teenage pregnancy? Sure, they might benefit through this kind of 101 exposure: This is the person, she got pregnant and she had children by two different people, and how welfare affects her life. These kids already knew about that.

And I had a much more, I think, progressive view. Rather than pretend to help with these kind of liberal, band-aid, sightseeing in the community, if you will, let’s dig a little deeper and target a couple of things. The community had so many needs, I think—it still does. Kind of target some things that might work, that might work well, and go with that, rather than this rhetoric about the community. That’s how I dealt with that. I’m still less sympathetic to that idea, even, to say nothing about Ron Lewis, what they were doing. One guy took funds from the department and bought equipment to build a playground in his back yard. A private playground where he charged people to come, just like a daycare center. Under the guise of what? “Community.” His wife ran the playground. I mean—evidently, I don’t understand.

08-01:01:35

Wilmot:

How were students involved in that endeavor?

08-01:01:37

Banks:

They worked there. Got credit for working; you work four hours in the daytime, you got an A for 199, or whatever it is. And all the profits—I come, I pay to have my kid there all day, and the money goes somewhere. Just all kind of shenanigans. That’s just the surface. I could go on for days, but let’s just say there was a lot of corruption, a lot of finagling going on, and the university knew this. That’s another story.

08-01:02:09

Wilmot:

That’s actually a question I wanted to ask you. You’ve answered in part, but how did the university administration perceive the African American studies department under the leadership of Ron Lewis?

08-01:02:34

Banks:

They didn't take it seriously. Even people who worked in the field, the people in African American history, the people like Ken Stamp, or others. The idea, they related to, but they knew enough about what was in fact happening, so they never developed any real respect for what was happening there. The people there. You know about people, the work that people do. If you said "the department," they didn't see any people whose work they recognized. There weren't any meetings with anybody, "Hmmm, he's kinda sharp." It's reputational, in large part, at the university. I know people who think a lot of me that don't know very much about me, but I just maybe made sense on a couple of occasions, and I'm okay. I learned that. Sometimes you can ask for a favor here and a favor there, but if you've established a certain kind of credibility—just, often, conversationally—it can take you far. That was a more polarized world, in terms of race, in those days. There was much more tension, and if they could sit down and talk intelligently with a black person from Black Studies, and they understood them, and so forth, that's cool. [laughs]

08-01:04:02

Wilmot:

All right. One other thing. My last question, because I feel like we're about to close. You mentioned that there was a certain kind of timidity that the white people or the white professors on the privilege and tenure committee, with which they responded to your—

08-01:04:30

Banks:

Grievance.

08-01:04:30

Wilmot:

Your grievance. Can you describe for me a little bit more, what that was like, and where that came from for them. Or what was that about?

08-01:04:38

Banks:

Yeah. It was very frustrating. Because this was a slam dunk. There were no subtleties. "Can I be fired or not? If I can't, would somebody write him a letter telling him that?" You know, it was no evidentiary matter. Here's the letter; here's my contract. It's like they were hoping it would go away, and they had no sense of the kind of stuff I was feeling: "Look, I want this resolved. I don't want to end up—once it's resolved, I'll deal with the hassle. Because there are other jobs. I'm prepared to leave. But assure me of this, by your rules. Not my rules; your rules." And this kind of waffling back and forth and not wanting to deal with it. Eventually a guy, Preble Stolz, stepped in and this was—a law professor. He did a book, was one of Rose Bird's biggest critics, but anyhow, he wrote the letter saying this can't be done, and boomp, boomp, boomp. And Ron had to back off. Concurrent with this, I was looking at other places, but at least—that was one of the things that surprised me most. Here were all these big people, smart, law professors, but this timidity. No heart. No willingness—and people can pick that up. People like Ron Lewis can immediately, [yells] "What?!" You raise your voice a bit. That kind of real street sense of things.

08-01:06:22

Again, all of them weren't like that. Rod Parks, for instance, was not like that. He was tough. He was a fighter. Wrong in many instances. We disagreed about thousands of things, but I respect his ability to be tough, to take a stand, and to not be cowered or intimidated. I can say that, but I could name other people as well, who just, you say something loud to them, they just sort of crumble. But maybe that's in all parts of the world. I don't know that the university is more populated by such people. I guess that's an open question.

08-01:07:13

Wilmot:

Can I ask you one more question?

08-01:07:14

Banks:

Sure.

08-01:07:18

Wilmot:

You've marked this time—the time you spent on the Committee on Courses—as this kind of seminal learning time for you. Learning about the institution. What did you learn about the institution?

08-01:07:31

Banks:

A couple of interesting things. I learned how much—what's the word? I used it a minute ago. How important autonomy is in the minds of—well, I'm putting it clumsily. Let's see. I'm trying to simplify it maybe too much.

08-01:08:11

Wilmot:

No need to simplify.

08-01:08:17

Banks:

The university relies a great deal on credibility. I mean, if you say something, they believe you immediately. Sometimes you come to—so this is what's going on. No, I'm not thinking clearly. [pause] It's easy for people in positions of authority at the university to go a long ways without ever having to demonstrate anything, or to prove it. It's like: "You say so; it's so."

And that surprised me. Certainly I know it now, but you want to say, "How could this be? Don't you know better than that?" But, "Oh, So-and-So said it. We're doing this, we're doing that." People realized that nobody's going to check. No accountability. The systems of accountability are—I don't want to say "non-existent, but if it's at a departmental level, all kinds of crazy stuff could be going on. If I'm the head of it, and I realize there's no accountability, it's free reign. Nobody's going to say, "Well, you said this; did this happen?" That system doesn't exist. Everything is like faith. Faith. Instead of credibility, let's call it faith, good faith. Good-faith environment. And obviously that's all right, but I think the situation can be manipulated quite easily.

08-01:10:10

Wilmot:

What are you thinking of in particular when you think of that?

08-01:10:18

Banks:

I remember being in meetings—now, this was back then, but it’s as current today, I would argue, as back then. People talk about things that are happening in the department, that aren’t happening. Or people talk about things and nobody says, “Well, can we see that?” It’s like, no accountability. “Oh yeah, there’s so-and-so and so-and-so and so-and so.” “Wow! Let’s look at that.” No. It’s just like knowing that you’ll never have to be accountable. You’ll never be called on anything. You can get by with a whole lot of duplicity.

08-01:11:09

Wilmot:

Was there a differential in the way that one would experience if one was housed in the African American Studies department, versus other departments?

08-01:11:17

Banks:

Yeah. Without question. I could easily develop that. I think one of the problems—if I look back retrospectively to those years, and years even further along, and we’ll maybe go into that more naturally, in older, more established departments there’s a culture of academic socialization that takes place. You tell the truth. You respect people. Arguments can be resolved this way. There’s a certain kind of culture established in faculty that doesn’t allow me to say ugly things about you, or personal attacks. You just don’t do that. Again, I’m not suggesting that’s perfect in other places, but there is that culture. That this is not permitted. Or, if I want to criticize you, it’s okay. You’re going to get your raise, regardless. It’s not steeped. But because we had, unfortunately, a lot of younger people who, I think in many instances, recognized how loose the system was in terms of accountability, they that freedom to manipulate that in ways, and it ends up being steeped in petty, personal kinds of things that creates its own stench.

Some of the older people—people like Reggie, who’d been around, been in other universities, departments and so forth—and there were others—weren’t like that. But, by and large, we were dealing with people who were pretty new to the system. And we didn’t have that old guard there to socialize them in the right way, enough people there to say, “Hey, look. No, you can’t do that. That’s not fair.” Or, “Why are we doing this? That’s his opinion. Have a little bit more democracy in there.” That’s something that was typical of African American Studies in those days.

Now, how do you cure that? What could have been done? In theory, you could say, “Well, I could have got older people in.” Maybe that’s so. Plus the fact there was always that pressure of students. A lot of people didn’t feel secure about being black. Students say, “Do this. You should be—,” and their teachers feel, “Oh, I have to placate students.” They want people to like them. That’s something that’s endemic. People in French don’t care whether students like them. To any great degree. Or people in Political Science don’t care whether students like them. They make that separation, but many people in African American Studies, the early days, were much too vulnerable to that charge of, “You’re not relevant. You live in this neighborhood. You’re married

to this guy.” Or whatever these corny things are, and worried about it. That can be—it’s a distraction, and a distraction can become an environment if you let it.

08-01:14:49

Wilmot:

Okay. Well, let’s close for today, okay?

08-01:14:49

Banks:

Okay.

[End Audio File 8]

Interview 5: March 31, 2004

[Begin Audio File 9]

09-00:00:13

Wilmot:

March 30, 2004. Professor Bil Banks, interview five. I want us to start off, actually with a follow-up question to one thing. You shared with me this document, which was Ron Lewis's extended letter to the Committee on Courses, where he just really—in part, he was just saying: You haven't been straight in dealing with us, nor have you been straight in dealing with the Third World College, the other programs, you're having secret meetings, you're immoral, it reflects the racism of this institution. I'm wondering if you could speak a little bit more to that, to the way that the administration was responding to the kinds and types of courses that were being proposed in the different departments. "Administration" is perhaps not the right word.

09-00:01:38

Banks:

The campus. I'll separate them out as we go along. I think up until that time, the department suffered from an attitude—in the administration, certainly—of benign neglect. I mean, it was like a sandbox: "Well, we'll let them do whatever they want to do." Afro-American Studies was born out of a political struggle. Very often when you do that you say, "Okay, here's some money, you guys go play with it. Teach your courses. Do this or that. We won't take it seriously." In other words, you sort of build in failure. You hire people without the training, without the academic power to earn respect within the university. All these things, I think, the administration at Berkeley could certainly be criticized for. They just didn't care. As long as they stayed out of the way of the mainstream of campus life.

Now, when you have that dynamic going on, it gives the department—the department has no accountability. Whatever they wanted to do, they wanted to dismiss people, they could dismiss them, and there was nobody looking over, nobody questioning, nobody nudging the department towards greater academic credibility, better teaching, and so forth, because they were afraid. Because there'd been a strike, and violence, and all that kind of stuff, and just the specter of protest made the administration quite gun-shy. So, Ron Lewis understood this. He understood this, and as a result of that he did not hesitate to—as young people say—sell wolf tickets whenever he had to. The language and so forth. "You do it this way because you don't understand." And there's enough validity in that. Of course the university did not understand much about what Afro-American studies and Afro-American culture was like. There's always that little hint of truth. But that wasn't Ron's strategy; it was strictly a bully kind of thing, and the administration acquiesced to that. The vice chancellors, the assistant vice chancellors, all the people with line authority simply said, "Well, let's not do anything to provoke the natives."

09-00:04:11

Wilmot:

Wow. Was there clear communication about the ways that a proper department might kind of comport itself and/or create courses? Was there communication like that?

09-00:04:33

Banks:

“That’s the white man’s way.” If that had been said to Ron—“Look, that’s the way you do it. This is black studies. This institution has historically oppressed black people, ignored black people. Now, what do you look like coming and telling me how our courses should be designed? What our curriculum should be like. Who’s qualified to teach.” That’s the rap. That’s the rap. And you either go for that or challenge it head on. It wasn’t until much later—a bit later—that that got challenged, and when it did, of course, the rest is history.

09-00:05:10

Wilmot:

You mentioned that there were faculty on campus, white faculty, who you knew of, who didn’t think the idea of black studies was a good idea.

09-00:05:26

Banks:

Hm-mmm.

09-00:05:27

Wilmot:

And these were people who were colleagues, some of them friends. Can you share with me what kind of perspective they were bringing, where they were coming from, as far as you knew?

09-00:05:40

Banks:

Again, there’s a range. Let me talk about some of the more notable people, and a couple by name. Robert Middlekauff, who I consider a good friend of mine—

09-00:05:52

Wilmot:

Yeah, you mentioned him last time.

09-00:05:53

Banks:

Yeah. Bob is a historian, colonial historian, I think a very good historian. Trained in history, and his world view or academic world view had to do with disciplines. That’s the name of the game: History, psychology, sociology. The idea of a field of study geared around or oriented around an area, a problem. Latin American Studies: “Well, what’s the real discipline? What’s the methodology?” These are traditional arguments, and I understand them, but I always argued they were a-historical. Departments didn’t start out like that. Sociology, where did sociology come from? At one point, there were economics departments, but more and more people started pointing to the social dimension of economic life, and out of that grew something called a discipline. It took time, and so forth, and so on. So, there was nothing sacrosanct in my mind about the way knowledge had to be organized. I just didn’t think that it could be so neatly parceled out into these things in ways that would go on forever. He didn’t agree with that.

09-00:07:18

So, what do you do with a person like that. You make the arguments—see, here again, my thinking was that if I come to Bob Middlekauff and say, “Look at the work of this person.” Well, I can give you some examples, and other historians too. “Look at the work of this person. Is it

good work?” In the case of Al Raboteau, Thomas Holt—another person that was part of the same pool. “What does he say? We’re bringing in these kind of people.” When you’re doing that, it helps—you might quibble about whether it’s a department or not, but ultimately the academic quality is there, and you get some slack there, as opposed to sitting around arguing about, in the abstract, black studies and—

09-00:08:14

Wilmot:

“Does it deserve to exist?”

09-00:08:16

Banks:

Yeah. I knew it was going to—well, it was about to be closed, but that’s another story. So, that’s the way it goes. You move it away from the abstract to: “Here’s Reginald Jones. Here’s Albert Raboteau. Here’s Barbara Christian. Now, let’s talk about their work.” That’s the strategy; that was my strategic move. To sell the department based on the people that were hired, rather than on any grand design or vision. I had a vision, but I’m not into rhetoric. I’ve never liked that.

09-00:08:59

Wilmot:

You started off by staying there was a range, and one of them you could start off with—

09-00:09:05

Banks:

Some of them were stupid.

09-00:09:07

Wilmot:

Is there another part of the range that you want to flesh out for me?

09-00:09:10

Banks:

Well, yeah. There were some people who just are silly. Saying only black people can study black people. The kind of racialist approach that there will only be black people there, that kind of thing that’s inherently racist, and we’re trying to move away from that. Why have a separate black studies program?

The history department is a good example. You had premier historians: Larry [Lawrence] Levine, Leon Litwack, Kenneth Stamp, Winthrop Jordan. Isn’t that enough? Here, okay fine. History department’s doing a great job, but let’s move to political science, let’s move to economics. Even to sociology at that time. People weren’t there. You sort of craft the arguments. It depends on the sensitivity of people. And, see, I think that’s one of the important things about black studies as I envisioned it. And history has sort of borne it out, that women’s studies, Latin American studies, gay studies, peace and conflict—all these, quote, “disciplines” or “departments” or “programs” are organized around issues or problems, and that was the wave of the future for a long time in American higher education. It’s not going to go back. It’s never going to get narrow in these little precincts like it was back in whenever I was around, the 1970s and so forth: neat and clean. Interdisciplinary departments, that’s the name of the game. Where

did that start? In the main, politically. Ethnic Afro-American studies. That put the conversation on the table.

The idea that there was nothing privileged about departmental divisions—where was the demarcation between sociology and psychology and anthropology? There’s so much overlap. It’s a push to define this person as only this, only that. If people are doing good work, and so forth, you don’t worry about that. Take a field like psychology, where you have people working in areas—there’s psychopathology, sensory deprivation. The fields are so broad, it’s silly to think that there is some common language beyond very rudimentary words and concepts that makes it a whole. It’s just tradition. It’s just the way it’s been done.

09-00:11:49

“What is a good education?” “How I was trained.” That’s the typical Berkeley faculty thing. If you were trained a certain way, this is what you get, boom, that’s it. “What’s a good education?” “Well, the kind they get at Head-Royce [School].” “Okay. Maybe. But let’s open that up a bit.” And how do you open it up? By pointing to this person that went to Tech [Oakland Technical High School], Nell Painter, who’s gone on to do good things. Well, maybe there are other ways of becoming a good scholar, doing good teaching, and so forth. That’s what I tried to get into play.

09-00:12:31

Wilmot:

I understand it was also during the early seventies, that there was this whole conversation at the level of the Academic Senate about mainstreaming. What did you experience around this conversation or debate, and what was your perspective on it in terms of the potential for mainstreaming to succeed in its project?

09-00:12:57

Banks:

Let me talk about my sense of mainstreaming, and if you have a different one, I can maybe respond to that. One of the ideas coming out of Afro-American studies, and the movement in general, was the notion of autonomy. Black studies should be free to develop its own way. It should not have to look outside of itself for direction, mainstreaming and so forth. We should be able to be different. That was an idea. As a result of that, you get the other things: “Who are these people to tell us what to do? How can the oppressor give directions to the oppressed?” There’s something very odd about that formulation.

09-00:13:41

Wilmot:

It’s really confusing, yeah.

09-00:13:43

Banks:

Yeah. So, “mainstream,” what does that mean? Becoming like sociology, becoming like psychology? That’s a piece of the pie. The other “mainstream” notion that was operating, was “What should be the relationship of Afro-American studies to the other departments on campus? What does it mean?” I took the position—very conservative; well, I didn’t think it was conservative, I still don’t—that if I could build a department that had all of the formal powers, privileges of other departments in L&S, it was probably as much as I could do at Berkeley. This

was in opposition to a majority of people at the time. It was the Third World College. All ethnic studies units. I mean, you know—well, maybe you don't know, but that was the whole thing. It came out of the Third World [Liberation Front] strike, which was just bogus itself, but that's another issue. As I assessed the state of affairs at that time, the other departments were going in very different directions. There was almost no communication. And I tried. I understood my limitations. I was coming here from DC, from Chocolate City; it's black and white, that's the world. The whole idea of Asians and Chicanos—Puerto Ricans, I knew in New York, so I had some feel for that, but basically my paradigm was black and white. That's the dynamic.

09-00:15:52

But I was open to learning, and I spent a lot of time talking about some things to really make Ethnic Studies work. Build some connections. There just wasn't the receptivity to that. For some interesting reasons. Asian Studies, which was the largest other unit, had a different strategy. Their thing was, "Okay, who are the Asian students at Cal?" The Asian students at Cal are those people who—those students who are very, very smart, a lot of them were first-generation immigrants. A lot of difficulty with language, writing and so forth. How does the department best serve the Asian student population? A lot of Subject A courses, English 1A courses, to enable your physics majors, your chemistry majors, and so forth to pass and go on. It was a service department. A service department. That's a legitimate way to look at it; that wasn't my way. But that's what it was all about.

If you look at the curriculum of Asian American Studies say before 1976, it was overwhelmingly reading and composition courses. Why? Because these students had problems passing standard English courses in the English Department or the Rhetoric Department, and so forth. So here was a way they could go and then pass those courses and go on out and do great things.

And community service was a big part of their orientation. You have a lot of Asian American activists there that wanted to serve the Asian American community, different places, and so forth. And that was a big battle that Asian American Studies had to go through. When they hired Ron Takaki and some other, quote, "traditional" scholars, where people wanted to talk about history, wanted to talk about Filipino history, the sociology of Japanese—substantive stuff. And it was a big battle within the Asian American Studies between the community-oriented people and the academic people, the traditional.

09-00:18:11

Our battle had been fought at that time. It was very clear where African American studies was going. I made no apologies for that. They hated the idea of going into L&S. That was a big issue. We'll get to that later, but probably the criticism of me, earlier on, when I was named was: This was just a deal to mainstream, or bring Afro-American Studies into L&S., and how can you integrate a fly into buttermilk? The rhetoric was there. It was colorful. My thing was, look, if you're going to be at the university, you might as well get everything the university has to offer. I understood academic life well enough to know what tenure meant, the kind of privileges that went along with the tenured faculty, regularized courses, a major that was credible, and so forth. It was sort of a long-term game plan on my end, and it didn't have anything to do with—a Third World College, I didn't think Asian American students wanted that. I didn't see any connection between Asian Americans and blacks then. Some now, but certainly not then. Native Americans

were, again, small and—Moses had the impetus. Black people. That’s why everyone was looking over their shoulder at African Americans. I understood that.

So that’s my mainstream thing: get everything that Political Science has. A lot of that’s intangible. I can’t claim that, quote, “respect” and all that stuff. This is a racist society, and a racist university. I can’t claim, that all things being equal, they’re the same. That’s not ever going to happen, but there are certain kinds of formula. We want to make an appointment in Afro-American Studies; we could do that. Mainstream—those are my takes on that idea. If there are others, I can respond more specifically.

09-00:20:15

Wilmot:

The one that I was thinking about has to do with this idea that maybe there shouldn’t be an African American Studies department per se, maybe we can handle those issues—the issues that you might focus on in African American Studies—we can handle those in Political Science. We can start to create a focus where there hasn’t been one before. We could start to create classes and a body of work in history, political science, anthropology, sociology, economics, what have you. This idea that there was work to be done, which in these departments, or departments like these, they could begin to have a complement of courses and scholars that actually looked at these issues. My question is, what did you see in terms of the actual potential for that to happen, for the institution to transform in that way?

09-00:21:16

Banks:

I encouraged it. Every time that argument came up, I said “You’re right, that’s a great idea.”

I think there should be more people in the political science department specializing and concentrating on African American politics. There’s no reason why everything has to happen here. Who can do it? I think it’s a great idea. Economics? Sure. The more that is happening out there, the less responsibility—I have twelve FTE [full time equivalent] to work with. Limited. I can’t possibly cover the world. Go ahead and do that! When you put it like that, you don’t argue the abstracts. See, they love to get you into these, “Are you against white people teaching?” That kind of stuff. Or, “Why can’t you have a course in political science?” I say, “Well, A course? We’re talking about this varied history and political north and south. What’s the deal?” And of course, they come in, but you don’t argue the ideology. You have your own ideology. Know where you want to go. But you don’t win that just sheer talking. Just say, “Sure, you want to offer some courses in English? Okay, fine. Who’s going to teach them?” Good example. Who could do courses in African American Literature in 1975 in the English Department?

Now let’s work together. If we want to hire people, joint appointments, and I think that’s an important part of my thinking about that. In other words, encourage the campus, be a catalyst for stuff on campus, rather than this kind of provincial “all the black stuff has to be here.” My thing was go out, kick butt. Any time, if you need any help, I’ll be happy to meet them.

09-00:23:24

Wilmot:

How well did these departments actually go about the real work of transforming their canons, essentially? My question is really about the potential for this to actually take place.

09-00:23:49

Banks:

Right. I think it's a mixed record. Take, for instance, Sociology did a very good job. They have a lot of courses that deal with power and conflict, race. Not "black this, black that" but interethnic. Why? Because you have people there that can do that. And that's another important thing. You don't have to label everything "black" to be in the mix. You can approach it all sorts of ways. Political science, on the other hand, I don't know of a course—and I'm sure I'm wrong. Well, I wouldn't bet that I'm wrong, but I don't know of any two courses that they've had in twenty years that specialize in African Americans in politics. Ever. Now, so when they say, "Well, it should be here," fine. How can they move in that direction? They have to tell the administration, "Hey, we'd like to hire somebody that can do this." And have these one, two, three people build up courses and an emphasis in this area, and live happily ever after. They didn't do it.

Another crazy example of academic imperialism: Berkeley History Department. At one time, it had fifty-some-odd faculty members. There was only person specializing in Africa: Ray Kent, whose specialty was Madagascar. How does this come about? "Well, they do African Studies at UCLA." That was the logic, and these are friends of mine. They didn't agree with it; the people I knew didn't agree with it. But here's a continent. What does this mean? A big department at Berkeley, all of these resources and so forth, and you're not turning out any Africanist scholars. So that, if you're interested in East Africa, West Africa, and so forth, you don't come to Berkeley. You go to UCLA. They're just dividing the world. "We'll deal with it." Japanese history? "Yeah, we've got six Japanese historians." Let's not even get into the Renaissance and Medieval.

So, I mean, you deal with it intellectually. You make the argument, "Sure, we'd love to see you do Africa, but if it's not happening on campus, don't you think students should have an opportunity to learn a little about the slave trade?" You have room. You don't get covetous. "Oh, everything black." But again, the sheer color thing was something I dealt with honestly, but I think there was a certain strategy in my head to counter that.

09-00:26:58

Wilmot:

What do you mean when you say "the sheer color thing"?

09-00:27:01

Banks:

Who can teach in Black Studies? Can a white person teach Black Studies? That's something that was out there. Sure, you can make the theoretical arguments, but I didn't do that. I hired a white guy, a ladder faculty member.

09-00:27:18

Wilmot:

Who's that?

09-00:27:17

Banks:

Gregg Thomson, who's now director of Office of Student Research. He's the first blue chip candidate, *Harvard Educational Review* editor teaching full-time in African American Studies.

09-00:27:36

Wilmot:

When did you hire him?

09-00:27:40

Banks:

Seventy-four, five. Something like that.

09-00:27:45

Wilmot:

It was early. Those first two years.

09-00:27:45

Banks:

No, not the first two years. I think maybe a year or so after that. Of course, all hell broke loose, but I understood what I was doing. One, I thought he was good. It was no gimmick appointment.

09-00:27:57

Wilmot:

What was his area of expertise?

09-00:28:00

Banks:

Psychology. He taught the course in black psychology. Here you are, a little braid-wearing woman from East Oakland walking into a Black Psychology course and here's this white guy with long hair, teaching the class. I understood the tension there, and I just thought that he was very, very good. But anyway. So, you don't have to deal with that any more.

09-00:28:45

Wilmot:

Hm-mmm. When you say "the response," there was a response to that, from what quarters did that response come?

09-00:28:53

Banks:

Black students: "How could you hire a white boy to teach in black studies?" That was the—not all.

09-00:29:03

Wilmot:

And from other faculty? Was there ever any response? White or black?

09-00:29:08

Banks:

Oh, yeah. White faculty didn't understand. "He's good." "Oh, okay." They wanted to do the symbolic game. Hey, you do that; that's your language. You talk about that; I'm talking about trying to get the best people we can to teach in Afro-American Studies. They're teaching black students, they're teaching white students. He was an excellent teacher. In time, he became, quote, "very well accepted." There was no—I don't want to say there was no race thing; I'm not silly, but there were no boycotts of classes. His classes were among the largest in the department. Psychology. He was well-versed politically, in the right place, and so forth. Mainstream? It was

more integrated than Poli Sci—again, I’m picking on Poli Sci. I could just as easily—the English department.

09-00:30:21

Wilmot:

I’ve heard they’re easy to pick on.

09-00:30:23

Banks:

Yeah. Or Economics. Never a black face over there. Their reputations have been around for a long time. They’re much larger. I always say, the percentage of whites on our faculty is larger than the percentage of blacks in the History Department.

09-00:30:50

Wilmot:

When it comes to that, you’ve really discussed this and taken it in an interesting direction, but I just to close out that question: As far as the potential for these established departments like History and Sociology and Anthropology, as far as the potential, the ability, and the interest of these departments in actually bringing the substance of African American studies—the major topic areas—into their environs and doing it well, at that time in the early seventies did you see that there was potential for that?

09-00:31:39

Banks:

No.

09-00:31:39

Wilmot:

Or interest, really?

09-00:31:42

Banks:

Not as units. That came a little later, but at that point—again, you have to look at this developmentally. They weren’t going to embrace—“Oh yeah, there’s something to ‘black,’ there’s something to ‘race’.” They could understand that. In their ideal world, I think many of the liberals would just as soon see Black Studies do all of that. They didn’t want to, you know, can a man condemn himself? They weren’t ready to talk about changing their priorities internally. Like I said, “We have a opening for a person in methodology, or do we go after a person to teach race?” They didn’t want to say, “Let’s go with the person who teaches race.” They weren’t that, you know, “You guys do that.”

09-00:32:38

Wilmot:

That’s so interesting, because from this perspective in 2004, of course, any department that didn’t do that would be remedial, at best.

09-00:32:45

Banks:

Yeah.

09-00:32:46

Wilmot:

It wouldn't be a competent kind of unit in the university. That's why it's so interesting for me to explore these topics.

09-00:32:54

Banks:

Sure. It's a legitimate question, but I only ask that you look at it in context. We're talking about 1974, not 2004, and a lot has happened in the interim. In all sorts of ways. One of the other things that I did, and again, I'm just—I think about this at night; how to get from point A to point B. Like, when we were recruiting in the early stage, after the strike and all this, we're building the faculty, any time we brought a person in, say from political science, we made sure that that person interviewed, had conversations with the people in Political Science that were closest to race. Nadine is being interviewed by African American Studies, but she's had some contact with the people in Political Science. Again, just to say, "Hey, this lady's good. Think about it." And I'd ask them, "What do you think? You met with them, would you read the dissertation?"

That always got great responses. Never failed. Even the most backwoods people—because you're saying, "Hey, look. I'm with you. I'm just a new kid on the block. This is going to help me put this all together." I didn't have the insecurities about being—I was the man, I knew what I could do. I wasn't worried about criticism. Like I said, I was able to do that and I did that. Somebody comes to campus, you can invite them over, have lunch. Again, trying to get faculty to—I encourage that with faculty members because it was sort of uneven there. A lot of people didn't want to do that. They just wanted to sit in Afro-American Studies, this kind of incestuous intellectual dialogue, and I didn't see that as going—not very much fun. I loved the conflict. You know, I'm from Georgia. I'm accustomed to the Brer Rabbit, the powerless having to figure out ways of mastering the powerful. To me that's always been a challenge.

09-00:35:37

Wilmot:

Well.

09-00:35:42

Banks:

Crazy stuff, huh.

09-00:35:43

Wilmot:

It's a lot going on, definitely. I want to continue to explore this question of building Black Studies. In 1974, after you came on board as Coordinator, after all of the drama began to die down, in your first moves, you hired back two people, Mohammad Hassan and Roy Thomas. What was your next step? You've spoken a little bit to strategy, but what were your next steps then? What did you do strategically as you began to think about Black Studies going forward?

09-00:36:32

Banks:

The first step was to revise the curriculum. In recruiting, you wanted to have a template, something like a template, in place so that if I'm trying to recruit you to teach at Berkeley, this is how the curriculum is organized. I thought that one of the problems—and this is a legitimate

problem of African American studies, or area studies—you don't want it so broad that a person finishing in African American studies doesn't have a realistic chance of going on to graduate school. You want, not just breadth—English courses and others, all equivalent of just introductory courses. Ten introductory courses. You don't want that. You want to force some students to go deep. So that was a first strategy, so I sort of revised the curriculum.

How do we do that? A couple of conceptual, political decisions: for a lack of a better word, social sciences, humanities. Now, obviously it could be anything else, but basically that means if you're in humanities, when you graduate, there are certain expectations there with respect to literature and art, culture, things like that. You have to take some on the other side. I think, maybe two courses in the other area, but you couldn't just pick and chose this kind of scattergun approach. That was the strategy. This was to signal to students that you could do something with that. If you were a humanities major, with a humanities concentration, you could be expected to go and study literature or cultural arts and know something about it going into the game. Similarly with social sciences. You had to take maybe six courses over here and two courses in the humanities. So that was the design.

And, in recruiting people, you could kind of look at folks, how they might fit in to this or this, and give people the room to push the curriculum in ways that fit their circumstances. Al Raboteau, I mean, religion. Okay, well maybe that's not—you could argue whether it's core or not, but certainly there is the potential of "The Black Church in American Life." Of course, that's a tremendous institution. You want to give people room to do that in addition to the core courses that you have to offer. Other departments do the same thing. You have to have American History before the Civil War. You have to have American History after the Civil War. Those are staples of a coherent curriculum in the field. Same thing is true in African American studies.

So in bringing people in, you say, "Okay, I want you to teach this and we want you to develop some other things that fit this way." And those are different area courses, courses that were not neatly put in either camp. I want to have this flexibility there, not to get caught in the bureaucratic kind of thing. That was the direction. The other thing that was controversial—this was like everything was controversial—a conscious decision not to include Africa in African American studies. Basically New World. Why? Let History do that. We only have twelve positions.

If you're going to take African studies seriously, you have to devote resources and people in such a way that we could not do with twelve people here, unless you have just one person that's all things, all people in Africa. That's where a whole lot of departments make a mistake. It's a sentimental notion. How can you not have Africa? Pretty easily. I concentrated on courses, "West African Slave Trade," what Africa was like at the time of the slave trade, but it was a self-conscious, self-conscious, self-conscious focus on basically the New World, and that eliminated a lot of hires in the early years. People who were Africanist, but that's great. History, this school, that school, and so forth. You can't do it all with twelve positions, eight positions. I don't think that lesson has ever sunk in, but that was a conscious strategy.

09-00:41:08

Wilmot:

When you say there was controversy around that decision, where did that come from?

09-00:41:15

Banks:

This was at the beginning of the Pan-African stage. The dress, the “ruts”—as they say. [laughs] That’s not fair. “Roots.” People changing their names, and so forth. I was going in a different direction.

09-00:41:34

Wilmot:

So would this be students or colleagues?

09-00:41:37

Banks:

Students, colleagues. Some colleagues, Well, to be candid colleagues that had their finger in the wind. They couldn’t stomach the idea of telling students things were stupid. I’m exaggerating; they just wanted to be liked and popular.

09-00:42:04

Wilmot:

Interesting. Here’s another question then. Was there ever a sense from your colleagues, or the administration that they felt that African American Studies should be home to African studies, or Africanist scholars?

09-00:42:30

Banks:

No, there was never any push—no, I never experienced that, myself. Later on, people just sort of—some leaders, some chairs—just sort of succumbed to the notion, “Oh, Africa.” And what happens? You end up getting one person that’s expected to do all of these things, and they’re overworked. There’s not a cohort there. It’s a mistake. No, there was never any press for me from the administration to do that.

09-00:43:01

Wilmot:

Is there someone you’re thinking of in particular?

09-00:43:03

Banks:

Well, I’d rather not say. I never remember any pressure to do Africa, because I had that argument together: “Okay. Fine. Can we get six more positions or three more positions, and we can see what we can do. Everybody here is teaching a full load, and I just don’t see where we have the room to do that.”

I don’t know anything about Africa. I mean, that wasn’t my subject area. I have a *New York Times* knowledge of Africa. A little bit more. I teach courses and I talk about Africa, the slave trade, but I couldn’t begin to talk about the kingdoms of Ghana and Mali seriously. Not at a level of teaching.

09-00:43:53

Wilmot:

What about when it came to issues of defining a curriculum or the scope of study in terms of diaspora studies? How did that work?

09-00:44:05

Banks:

That came much, much, much later. That came in the early nineties, I think. The word diaspora, the notion of connectedness and so forth, that came much later. I mean, I can talk about it now, but that wasn't on the charts.

09-00:44:20

Wilmot:

But for the purposes of the African American Studies department curriculum—was it still a program, or did it become a department?

09-00:44:33

Banks:

It became a department after about 1976.

09-00:44:36

Wilmot:

So at that time, the scope of study was New World, including Caribbean, including Latin America.

09-00:44:46

Banks:

Right. Michel Laguerre, Percy Hintzen. These are names of people who were recruited to address just what you talked about. The connections between the Caribbean and America, and so forth. Barbara Christian taught a course, "West Indian Writers." Something like that. I'm searching for names. Yan Sane, and African who had done a PhD in African American studies at Stanford, was hired, too. But in all of this, let's not confuse: the focus is African America, broadly defined, New World. That's the New World. I felt no need to be rigid, but when you start getting into, "Oh, we need somebody, a specialist in East Africa," or "We don't have anybody to teach Francophone literature, so we have to hire someone." Then you end up mile-wide, inch-deep.

09-00:46:08

Wilmot:

Within that field then, of African American studies, what were the primary themes or topic areas that you felt essentially comprised African American studies, defined African American studies and African American experience? Big question!

09-00:46:28

Banks:

Frankly, conflict. I just always loved fights. That's sort of my intellectual approach to things and institutions. That is, How and why did the black Church develop? Black political institutions. Family life. What are the particular factors that shape family formation of the black family in American society? How have these factors changed over time? Which of the factors come from within, are intrinsic in terms of—maybe—culture. What factors are imposed?

A famous great quote by, I think, Ralph Ellison: "The black people are more than just the sum of oppression." That kind of stuff, but you've got to be careful because, after all, these are—I mean, if you get good people, good talented people, you can't press your vision on them. We want to make sure there's general compatibility. There are people who disagreed with me about many

things, and I don't think anybody can—I don't want to overstate it. I wasn't coercive, but you have to start off with a vision, and you try to accommodate. People make the case, "This is good." "Okay. Fine. Let's not argue about that. Let's go ahead."

09-00:47:57

Wilmot:

As far as the scope of African American Studies, were there times when people disagreed with what your scope was?

09-00:48:07

Banks:

Well, yeah. I think that on certain issues—for instance, the L&S issue was widely debated within the faculty.

09-00:48:16

Wilmot:

You mean becoming part of the College of Letters and Science?

09-00:48:20

Banks:

Many people on the faculty who saw that as a betrayal.

09-00:48:23

Wilmot:

We should get to that—

09-00:48:26

Banks:

Okay. Sorry.

09-00:48:26

Wilmot:

No, no. I just realized that that's a discrete area. We can head into that now, but it's like a whole area.

09-00:48:34

Banks:

Yeah, it's up to you. Other areas—I mean, the scope. Nobody was an Africanist, so there wasn't a lot of push for Africa. People understood the logic of not spreading ourselves too thin. Or pretending to offer all these courses. There were, like, thirty courses that never got taught, and so forth. Let's streamline this. Let's consolidate this. Let's get people talking to each other.

The Africa push—I'm trying to think of some of the other disagreements we had as a faculty. Major. The community thing. A lot of people wanted to do more courses—prisons. The prisons were—the young people say "hot"—during that time. It was fascinating, because—before your time possibly, but you've heard of the Symbionese Liberation Army?

09-00:49:36

Wilmot:

Hm-mmm.

09-00:49:39

Banks:

Okay. That came out of African American Studies. The people—Cinque himself and the Prison Project. The people who were killed. Don de Freeze, Cinque, Colston Westbrook. That was an African American Studies community service project.

09-00:50:02

Wilmot:

Yeah.

09-00:50:02

Banks:

Yeah. [laughs] And there were other things too, that people were doing. I always tried to see this as, “That’s okay.” If people volunteer to do that kind of stuff, that’s all right, but I didn’t confuse that with four academic units for rapping and stuff like that.

09-00:50:29

Wilmot:

Were there other areas for discussion or debate or conflict around what the vision or scope of African American Studies should be from inside the department?

09-00:50:42

Banks:

Earlier on—again, we’re talking about the first two or three years I was here.

09-00:50:50

Wilmot:

Before you were coordinator, then?

09-00:50:50

Banks:

No, after I became coordinator. We made a number of early hires in that transition period. We had to get some people to teach, and there were one, two, maybe three people during that time who I’d hired as let’s say short-termers. People who were good but I didn’t see them as part of the long-term thing. And, of course, once they got in, they immediately wanted me—you know, here’s Bil Banks, who’s this miracle worker, this Svengali, this evil genius—to put them up for tenure because I could do anything I wanted to. The white man would do anything I would say, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

09-00:51:43

Wilmot:

Wow, that’s a lot of exciting adjectives for you!

09-00:51:44

Banks:

Hey, you just—you know, that’s other people. I’m being candid. That’s how they saw it. I’d gotten a lot of stuff done and people saying, “Hey, put me up for tenure.” And I says, “Well, you know, I’m looking at your stuff and I’m not sure the timing is right. I don’t know that there’s enough here to merit it.” One of the arguments—the most repeated argument—is, “Well, let them turn me down.” In other words, “Bil, you sign off and let the administration turn me down. Black people should not screen each other out.”

09-00:52:44

Wilmot:

I imagine in a place like Berkeley, there would actually be an added pressure for African American faculty to make sure that their recommendations represented very much the highest standards in the academy, because you would be watched so closely. I would imagine.

09-00:53:10

Banks:

Well, it works two ways. The other side of that dynamic would be, “Look, there’s so few black people here, why should we contribute to the lack of numbers?” On one hand, as you say, you have that holier-than-thou: The black has to be the superblack, as Troy puts it. The Jackie Robinson of sociology. Everybody has to be the cream of the crop. That’s not true. The other side is saying, “Hey, look. The only way we can get some black people here, is just put up everybody and see what happens.” Some might sneak through, get tenure, and so forth and so on. I didn’t see it that way.

I don’t think I was particularly namby-pamby about, quote, “standards” and so forth, but I didn’t think that was the way to build long-term credibility, by recommending people that I didn’t believe were able to go where I wanted to go. I cut things off at the department, rather than just sending everything up, letting them make decisions. If you do that, what does that mean? They’re shaping your faculty, as opposed to you making the tough decisions—shaping means saying yes and saying no. If you can’t say yes, and no, then you’re just pushing the responsibility some place else.

That was a philosophical debate. I know people whom I had some respect for, who put pressure on the man to make these tough decisions. “All that stuff you’ve been through, man. Hey, just send it up.” I just didn’t think that was quite right.

09-00:55:09

Wilmot:

Interesting. I wanted to ask you a bit about, in pulling together this curriculum and deciding what Black Studies would be comprised of, what the scope and breadth of Black Studies would be, who did you consult with? On campus, or in another part of the country, or in the department, or outside the department, other departments?

09-00:55:52

Banks:

I had some early conversations—John Blassingame at Yale. John Blassingame was a student of my father’s as an undergraduate, and I knew him from when he was in college, and he was the first chair, professor of History and African American Studies at Yale. Frederick Douglass papers, the whole bit. We talked often. Like I said, there was a personal contact. It wasn’t particularly useful, because he had quite different takes on it. He was sort of a program person. That’s the important thing.

I insisted on the autonomy and getting autonomy for African American Studies to appoint people full-time in African American Studies. This is the person we want; he or she is going to be full-time in African American Studies. That’s it. We don’t have to worry about compatibility with English. Joint appointment, half in English, half in—I wanted all your resources, all your time. I

wanted all of your energy. I didn't want you to have to serve two masters. Particularly for young faculty members. You know, to try to meet one set of standards over here, another over there. It just seemed to be a complicated thing for a young faculty member, and I just insisted on the right to do that. Reggie Jones was the first person, I think, with initially a joint appointment. The logic there was that much of what he was doing in graduate studies—he was in special education, and he needed graduate students to do research in that area. He was that senior. It made sense. But he was the first one.

My thinking was that later on, once people got tenure, if people wanted to work out arrangements, or wanted to have a joint appointment, that could be considered. But fundamentally, I wanted core faculty in African American Studies, people I could count on and make demands of. That's not what existed in those places with split appointments. I guess that's a way of proceeding, and that's what Yale did. I think it still does that. I'm not super sure.

09-00:58:26

Wilmot:

Yale would foster those kind of joint appointments or pursue those joint appointments?

09-00:58:30

Banks:

Yeah.

09-00:58:33

Wilmot:

Interesting. Were there a lot of other people that you consulted?

09-00:58:40

Banks:

No. I'd go to these conferences. That was the era of conferences. Every time you turned around there was a damned conference about something. I'd go and listen, because I love to listen, but I didn't find a lot that was particularly useful. I made contacts. I could get to meet people and so forth. That helped later on in some areas, but not as far as ideas. Nothing was happening. Nothing was happening in California. Harvard. Ewart Guinier was the chair for the first year or so. Lani Guinier's dad. Harvard was struggling. They weren't doing what they could be doing. It improved dramatically after Nathan Huggins became chair, but he didn't last long. He passed and so forth. Another era. There just weren't any model departments, where I could say, "Look, let's see what's happening here, and what's happening there. This is something I should consider." It was a lonely time, believe me. Plus the size of Berkeley, the academic reputation. It's hard to talk about what I should be doing with somebody who's at Swarthmore. Very different student bodies. Very different size. It's apples and oranges.

09-01:00:21

Wilmot:

Were there people on campus who were good to talk to?

09-01:00:24

Banks:

Oh, yeah.

09-01:00:25

Wilmot:

For instance, you mentioned your group of people.

09-01:00:27

Banks:

Black faculty members were typically good about political judgments—they knew about the committees. They knew people on the committees and they could steer me: “Go to him with this. The way you need to frame this with such-and-such a person is like this.” It’s not just black faculty members, but a lot of people I’d met on the Committee on Courses—that was really a training ground. I got to make connections and understand how the system worked, who some key players were. Subject matter: certainly, Bill [William] Shack, Winthrop Jordan, Larry Levine, Alan Dundes, Troy Duster, of course. I’m trying to think of the old dinosaurs. These are people who were around. Olly Wilson, I could always count on for: “I wouldn’t do that if I were you.” Just informally.

09-01:01:46

Wilmot:

This is in terms of curriculum or in terms of ways to move things through the institution?

09-01:01:51

Banks:

Both. Some were more connected with curriculum than others. You get the curriculum in place, and that has to come from—the faculty members have to be involved, because I can’t tell you what to teach. You want to try to just have a framework, and as people come in, let them put the meat on the bones, and so forth. That can work pretty well, as long as you don’t have anybody really going off. Well. That’s how I did it.

09-01:02:39

Wilmot:

Any memories that stick in your mind about those kinds of conversations?

09-01:02:48

Banks:

Not really. Most people trusted me, or at least I tried to make sense to them, and they either thought what I said made sense, or they didn’t want to hurt my feelings. I don’t know.

09-01:03:05

Wilmot:

[laughs] That’s good. All right. Let’s stop for a minute.

[End Audio File 9]

[Begin Audio File 10]

10-00:00:14

Wilmot:

You mentioned that the whole issue of separating from the Third World College and joining into the College of Letters and Science was a big area of conflict when you first became coordinator of the African American Studies program.

10-00:00:39

Banks:

As I said, we were a program, as all the other Ethnic Studies units were programs. Not really a part of the academic structure of the university. Everybody reported to the chancellor. Some people viewed that as more autonomy. I thought it was less autonomy. In other words, there was a vice chancellor making all the decisions and so forth and so on. So you have all the other academic departments over here, and here's Ethnic Studies over here, reporting to, in this case, Jack Raleigh, who is a wonderful gentleman but didn't know much about—I mean, he's not going to say. This was a whole different language to him. He just didn't know how to deal with that.

After some early efforts at seeing to what extent the other units shared my vision as far as moving ahead, strengthening academic stuff and so forth, it became clear that their hearts just weren't in it. They were just listening to the students: Whatever students wanted, or the community. They didn't want to move in that direction. It was not the popular thing to do. Okay.

My third year as chair, there was an Academic Senate review of Ethnic Studies. The Collins Report. The famous Collins Report, where a group of faculty members—Bill Shack, O'Neill Collins, Chuck Decker, Len Duhl; about six faculty members—reviewed all Ethnic Studies departments and made recommendations as to their progress. As a part of that, they said nice things about the progress of African American Studies and so forth, and recommended that African American Studies was ready to become a full-fledged department.

10-00:03:10

Okay. African American Studies then had to make a decision whether we wanted to become a department in L&S. There were some pragmatic arguments for that. First of all, most of the students taking our courses were in the College of Letters and Science. History majors, Sociology majors, so forth and so on. There were limitations to the number of units that people could take outside of the college if you were majoring in a field in the college. That's a structural limitation.

As importantly, I didn't fear mainstreaming, meaning, I thought the department could hold its own. I didn't have any problem about conforming to whatever rules and regulations the other departments required. There aren't that many. It's not as if there's a big heck of a difference. You get good people, they do honest things, hard work, get things in on time. And you fight for resources. That's the name of that game. It didn't bother me, but there were some people who were into the powerful, romantic notion of a Third World College. That has a good ring to it. But there was no doubt in my mind that's not what students wanted. I mean, I don't think that that's anything like—probably 15 percent of the students in the different divisions, ethnic students, would have majored in something if it had been a Third World College. I just don't think that was on the cards. So, it was a good and vigorous debate. People talked about the notion of unity. If Afro American Studies leaves, it's the most important and the most impressive and so forth, then there'll never be a Third World College, and that as part of the original dream. You don't let go of your dream. You hang onto your dream.

In any case, eventually the faculty in Afro-American Studies voted to go into the college, and it went through the typical university review. The campus, system-wide, and budgetary things, and

boom! The next year, I think, we were in the College of Letters and Science, and the other units were hostile. [interview interruption]

The dialogue went like this: “Afro-American Studies is breaking up Third World unity. Divisive. If we leave as the strongest department, that means that the dream is gone, and you have to deal with that issue.” Bottom line, as I said, we decided to go and that’s what happened. I don’t know. I look back—all the other units are in L&S now and all of them followed the same direction as Afro-American Studies in terms of strengthening their curriculum and getting more academic and so forth, but somebody had to move first. We took the heat, and the rest is history. All Ethnic Studies is in the College of Letters and Science, and I think everybody is better served for that.

10-00:06:49

Wilmot:

Interesting. The Collins Report.

10-00:06:55

Banks:

Academic Senate Committee. O’Neill Ray Collins, a Professor of Botany.

10-00:06:56

Wilmot:

And who initiated that report? Who put that in motion?

10-00:07:05

Banks:

Academic Senate and Administration.

10-00:07:16

Wilmot:

Okay. When you speak of the moving of African American Studies into the College of L&S, there’s this whole political analysis that was the underpinnings of this whole idea of having a Third World College and everybody being together. What sense did you make of that?

10-00:07:51

Banks:

I had no vision problem with that, but it wasn’t happening. It wasn’t happening. All these people that were talking that talk, there were no cooperative programs, there was no shared anything. It was just like these people out there, when pressed, waving the flag of Third World unity. It was sort of illusory unity, and life is too short for that.

Again, after making some initial efforts to bring that off, or to try to talk to people about doing it—and maybe part of it was me. I was such a persona non grata. Maybe if it had been somebody else they could have done some things together, but who wanted to be associated with anything that Bil Banks was presumably behind. That’s just speculation. I don’t know. But I saw no advantages to being outside of the College of Letters and Science. Let’s put it like that. I couldn’t think of a single one, and nobody else did. The handwriting was on the wall as far as where our students were, where they were going, and trends at the university. I could see things happening there, and my thing was, “Let’s get into L&S, get all the formal security we can.” Because if you’re outside, you can just be dissed, just like that. It’s hard to eliminate a department in a

college. It's just bureaucracy: once you're there, you're there. But if you just operate as sort of an appendage—

10-00:09:47

Wilmot:

I think I was confused about something, which is that in some ways I had put in the same timeframe your becoming coordinator and the program moving into L&S, and I'm realizing now that there's actually—

10-00:10:01

Banks:

About three years' difference.

10-00:10:01

Wilmot:

—three years' difference.

10-00:10:06

Banks:

Yeah. In theory, they looked at it and looked at the progress that had been made since I was appointed chair, okay? Not just—it was all Ethnic Studies units. It's available. They gave reports on each one. The Committee on Educational Policy was another assessment. Those are things that you can look at, because they talk about in detail what we had done and why. The Committee on Educational Policy and the Collins Committee Report. Both are available through the Academic Senate. The L&S move, that was much later. Well, not much later—two years later.

10-00:10:55

Wilmot:

When you say you were making efforts to be part of that group that was the College of Ethnic Studies.

10-00:11:09

Banks:

Ethnic Studies Department.

10-00:11:11

Wilmot:

The Ethnic Studies Department. What kind of effort were you making in order to be in collaboration with those programs?

10-00:11:18

Banks:

We were having conversations about team teaching courses. The film studies thing. Alfred Johnson, a really talented film scholar, was around. Again, just trying to talk about ways of cooperating without pushing hard. There was always this, "Okay, but...", "Okay, but...". Like I said, in those days I was not the most patient person around. I just at some point said, "Well, okay. I'm not going to do anything against them, but I'm not going to let their inertia affect where I think the department should go." And the faculty agreed with that. You've got to remember, by this time we had maybe three or four experienced academics. Not particularly

senior, but they were people who were secure, ladder faculty people who were independent and could speak with their own voice. It was a very different faculty than the one that I inherited. Again, the issues were debated, and that's the way it turned out.

10-00:12:44

Wilmot:

Did you see a possibility for tying together with the other three parts of the Ethnic Studies Department, and pulling that forward, politically?

10-00:12:57

Banks:

No. Sure, in theory. But I knew the actors and I knew the problems that were involved in each department. Given what I'd been through, I just did not want a penny. I didn't want to spend a lot of energy trying to make something out of nothing. That's harsh, but I just didn't want to take on that—no. I said, "This is what we can do. I'm sure about this. I know a way it can work." I'd put the groundwork in place for all of this stuff and I didn't want to waste that. I didn't want to waste that capital that I'd expended.

There was a lot of energy that went into smoothing the way. So when it happened, at every point, I was confident how it was going to turn out. I just didn't want to waste that for a reason that had more to do with romantic illusions of Third World unity than any joint program development.

10-00:14:06

Wilmot:

Was there any possibility of bringing the whole department into L&S at that time?

10-00:14:12

Banks:

If there had been interest, that's something I think would have been feasible. In theory. See, the question of autonomy—and that's always the thing when you're dealing with oppressed people. What am I willing to give up? Am I willing to give up my perks? I'm the chair of African American Studies. If we come into L&S, it would be as a department. Who's going to chair the department? Where are the positions going to be split up? You have to come in as something, and that means that Afro-American Studies is going to have to give up something, Chicano Studies is going to have to give up something, and so forth and so on. Like I said, I just, "Phew. I don't want to go through this. It should have happened a long time ago." There's no reason why it can't happen.

But, in fact, it's hard to find a place where it has worked successfully. I think Ethnic Studies now at Berkeley is as successful as at any place I've seen it. Not Afro-American Studies; I mean Chicano, Asian American Studies. They rotate chairs and positions. They fight those battles, and they seem to show a certain kind of seriousness, and I would have loved to have had that attitude around when I was back in the day. But it wasn't there, I assure you. Do you wait another two or three years in the hope that it turns out? No.

10-00:16:05

Wilmot:

You mentioned faculty. At that time, by 1974, you had several faculty on board. Could you talk to me a little bit about the process of recruiting faculty to African-American Studies? Maybe you

could start by telling me who were the four or five ladder rank faculty who were on board at that time.

10-00:16:22

Banks:

Let's start with the people I know were here. Reginald Jones, Barbara Christian, Gregg Thomson, Henry Jackson, who was an interesting scholar, political scientist. Those are the people I believe were here at that point.

How do you recruit? Well, Barbara was already here and working as a lecturer or something in the English department. I don't think her chances were that good of getting regularized or becoming a ladder person in English.

10-00:17:14

Wilmot:

Even given her brilliant scholarship?

10-00:17:17

Banks:

Yeah, I mean, like I said—but I recognized her scholarship, her teaching, her energy. Barbara was a very energetic person, a great teacher, more than just a narrow—that's the kind of person that I thought should be in African American Studies, so she was one of the early recruits. As it turns out, she was the first black woman ever appointed to a senate position at Berkeley. Again, this is seventy-something, so that says something. That was met with some opposition because, you know, misogyny, a woman emasculated the men—that kind of garbage. But you just move on behind that.

10-00:18:05

Wilmot:

It was met by opposition?

10-00:18:06

Banks:

Oh yeah.

10-00:18:07

Wilmot:

From whom?

10-00:18:14

Banks:

Certainly some people in the community thought that it wasn't—the first ladder appointment and so forth should be a male. Of course, we didn't take that seriously. She was one of the early appointments. I don't remember the sequence, but Henry Jackson came in as an assistant professor.

10-00:18:46

Wilmot:

What was his area of work?

10-00:18:47

Banks:

Political science. He was from Columbia. A phenomenal scholar. Reginald Jones, around that time—he was at UC Riverside. And Gregg Thomson was from Harvard in psychology. I think that's when recruiting really began, after you get this core of people, but let me just tell you how. There was discussion in the faculty: We want to go fill a position in such-and-such an area. I was very active in the conferences and so forth, and I had some credibility from other arenas. I knew a lot of people, let's just say. I could go to a person in the Psychology Department at Berkeley and say, "Look, we're looking for somebody in this area. Anybody at Yale, or anybody you've heard about?" This old boys' network. You utilize that. A lot of them knew that certainly I was interested in African Americans and people to do exactly that. We did the usual ads and so forth, but by and large a lot of the contacts came through our own old boys' network. "Hey, John. You got any good people in History?" Earl Lewis was another example. That was later on, but a guy who was at National Humanities Center with him said, "Hey, we got a person coming out in a couple of years, you might want to—". "Okay. Good." Like I said, many of them turned out okay. So that's how it worked as opposed to the normal formal channel of ads and applications and so forth.

One thing that was important, that I think is one of the problems of the department now. We made a special effort to get people outside of the UC system. In other words, if you got your PhD from Berkeley, you didn't have much of a chance. The idea was to get a mix of different visions, different so forth. This was not a family; this was a group of people who were working on something, who brought different stuff to the table. No cliques. I think that was a good part of the early days. It just changed dramatically over the past four years where the last six people have been UC people. Everybody knows everybody. That's a dead end street, as far as I'm concerned—or usually is.

10-00:22:10

You identify a person, you bring them to campus. Before coming, you know the kind of work that he or she is doing. You arrange for them to meet with people across campus, not just in Afro-American Studies, but Sociology, Psychology, English. Wherever. You do that. You talk to them. You ask people in those fields to read their written work, not just a coffee conversation but: "You're a serious scholar; this essay, this dissertation, these chapters, take a look at this." What's being done here? You're building credibility, so that when an appointment comes through, somebody over in English knows about this person. So these discussions that go on in this informal network, preparing the way, there's somebody that can raise their hand and say, "Yeah, I met so-and-so. They're good." Or if you need people to review, "Take a look at this. How is this? Compare these two good people." You develop this information.

I was always confident. The final decision was the chair's; you could do that. You're not intimidated by contrary advice—somebody says, "That's your opinion. That's good. Thanks a lot, that was very useful." But we did something else. And that's how it worked. That's how it worked. The search committee was usually two people in the department. We always had somebody outside of the department on the search committee. Always. Just to build bridges. Just to keep it in the mix. Rather than just isolated here and there. Just keep it in the mix.

10-00:24:06

Wilmot:

Who used to serve on the search committee, outside of the—

10-00:24:10

Banks:

Who? Oh, Bill Shack was on a committee. Troy Duster was on a committee. Larry Levine was on another committee. Phil Cowan in Psychology was on a committee. You just get friends of the department. People that you knew or had some confidence in and you trusted their judgment. The other thing, too, when the appointment goes up—“Here’s a candidate recommended by African American Studies, a search committee that includes Lawrence Levine.” Well, you know, you may think Bil Banks is stupid, lightweight, whatever, but you can’t easily dismiss their own colleague. These are subtleties, but they’re often pivotal.

10-00:25:12

Wilmot:

Hm-mmm. So at this time, around 1974, you had a mix of ladder rank—about four ladder-rank positions.

10-00:25:28

Banks:

About that number in the early years, yeah.

10-00:25:32

Wilmot:

And then probably a couple of lecturers as well.

10-00:25:33

Banks:

Right. A couple of lecturers. Some of them were half-time. Specialized courses, like film—Albert Johnson taught film. At that point, maybe a year or two later, Roy Thomas worked half-time in PDP, the Professional Development Program. So he was doing that. Again, 50 percent time African American Studies; 50 percent time over there. And for people who teach specialized courses, like in art, we couldn’t really hire a person. We didn’t have any studio space. It would have been stupid to hire a person full-time in art, because we just don’t have the support. Again, studios, equipment and all that kind of stuff. So you get a person to teach History of African American Art, or something like that, once a year. Dramatic Arts, for instance, was another thing that for which, in those early days, we just hired specialist lecturers. We’d call Margaret Wilkerson: “Here’s a course.” That’s how we did that.

10-00:26:37

Wilmot:

Who did you find to do art history?

10-00:26:41

Banks:

Claude Clarke taught Art History for maybe two or three years. There was some other person, too. I can’t remember—the name escapes me now. Some of the other part-time people—a number of people in the literature area, English 1A types. Daphne Muse, who’s around now. My

senility is kicking in, but I mean there were a number of individual courses once a year offering this—a little spice—and it worked pretty well.

10-00:27:35

Wilmot:

As I understand, when Margaret Wilkerson came, because of her directorship of the Women's Center, she had a half-FTE that was attached to her. How did you approach the idea of bringing her on as a faculty person with that FTE?

10-00:27:59

Banks:

I wasn't chair when Margaret came, but I imagine the conversation went something like, "Okay, you want to teach these two courses and do the Women's Center," as it was called at the time. It wasn't called an academic department at the time. It was a service. We worked it out that you had Dramatic Arts here, Women's Literature or Plays here. That's how that usually gets worked out, but I wasn't personally involved in that decision.

10-00:28:34

Wilmot:

Hm-mmm. Sure.

10-00:28:38

Banks:

Probably Reginald Jones.

10-00:28:39

Wilmot:

Just going back to this transition from African American Studies joining the College of L&S, do you remember the nature of the debates that occurred among the faculty? The faculty in that conversation, would that include the lecturers as well?

10-00:29:00

Banks:

Yeah. The final decision couldn't be made by lecturers, but we were small enough so that we could do that. We knew that when things went forward there had to be ladder faculty. There's a distinction. For better or for worse, ladder faculty might have less of a self-interest. If we're arguing about whether we want to hire a person for Dramatic Arts, you're part-time in Dramatic Arts, you know, what are you going to say? What you're expected to say. So that could be a problem, but I don't remember it ever being a problem. We just fought the battles and argued and often disagreed.

10-00:29:51

Wilmot:

Was Barbara Christian on board with moving into L&S?

10-00:29:52

Banks:

Yeah. Everybody was. Eventually. I can't remember if—sometimes people started here and came here. That's what debate is about. Sometimes you change; sometimes you don't. But I mean, it wasn't a 5-4 vote or anything like that. We were unanimous. In fact, the literature

probably says that. I think I wrote a letter of transmission and it was a unanimous decision by the ladder faculty.

10-00:30:25

Wilmot:

So going forward, by that time in 1974 you had—did you have an additional five FTE that you could work with?

10-00:30:34

Banks:

Well, yeah. It started out with twelve, and I got assurances from the administration there would be no budget cuts for three years.

10-00:30:45

Wilmot:

So you had five by then, including yourself.

10-00:30:48

Banks:

Right. And maybe six others, or something like that. Give or take. I think it was twelve. I was determined not to use them up at once. That was my argument to the administration: “Look, don’t force me to go out and hire people all the same year. We’re not big enough. We don’t have the horses to review people. We can only handle one search a year. We want to get some good people. But in order to do that, we’re going to have to stretch it out—one person here, one person—to put the real energy that’s necessary into getting the best people.” And of course that made sense to them. That’s how we did it. Some of them worked out; some of them did not. We hired people who did not work out. That happens, for various reasons. But the idea was to get a cross-section of people from across the country and give them the room, and let them do what they needed to do.

10-00:32:05

I’m trying to think of other recruiting issues. That’s basically how it worked. A lot of interaction with other, quote, “discipline” departments. Always, always a member of some other department on the search committee. Using individuals, the old buddy network, to generate applicants. I guess I was a salesman of sorts. I’d talk about the vision and opportunity. And I knew universities in ways that some of the others didn’t know, with the possible exception of Reggie. I’d been in the business for a long time, going back to my dad and stuff. I knew the culture of academic life. You get somebody and you say, “Okay, let me figure out what’s important to Nadine.” And when you come to campus, everything is in place. Housing, or whatever concerns that individual.

10-00:33:08

Wilmot:

That’s how you woo people into the department.

10-00:33:10

Banks:

Yeah. It’s just not an office.

10-00:33:16

Wilmot:

Were there any times that you wanted people who just wouldn't come? Anybody you remember that you just really wanted to bring them on, and they just would not come on board, or they were wooed away by someone else, another institution?

10-00:33:29

Banks:

No.

10-00:33:33

Wilmot:

Whoa!

10-00:33:34

Banks:

That same hiring year, there was Thomas Holt, who is now at the University of Chicago, chair of the department there, former chair; Albert Raboteau in History and dean of the Graduate School at Princeton; Douglas Daniels, who's a professor of history at Santa Barbara; and Vincent Franklin, who's a professor of history at Columbia. All candidates, and I'm sure we could have gotten any one of them. We ended up with Al Raboteau. I would have loved to hire two of those people, I thought they were that good.

Oh yeah, one other thing that bears mentioning. I had a different strategy. I didn't want superstars. I wanted to get junior people and let them come up through the ranks, as opposed to going after the high-priced superstar scholar. That was a conscious decision, because it can get gamey. My thing is, you bring up people, you nurture them, then see what happens. That happened in many instances. Now, sometimes they like it. Earl Lewis. You stay for a certain time; you leave. You can't stop people from doing that. But there's something to be said for getting some young people before they get to be prima donnas, and bringing them along. But all of those people, with the exception of Reginald Jones, we didn't hire a single person with tenure. They earned tenure here at Berkeley. I'm pretty sure that's correct. Not one person.

10-00:35:48

Wilmot:

Hmmm.

10-00:35:49

Banks:

There was one person who never came out, that I would have liked to have hired: A guy, Cedric Robinson, who's now at Santa Barbara, but it didn't get to the courting stage. We just wrote letters and I was impressed with his work, but it never did get—like I said—to the courting stage. I'm sure I'm missing somebody, but I don't remember.

10-00:36:19

Wilmot:

You were chair when Barbara Christian gained tenure. Do you remember how that process went for her?

10-00:36:34

Banks:

Oh, I think it went well. Barbara had published *Black Women Novelists*, her first book. Extraordinary record as a teacher. I think she had gotten the Distinguished Teaching Award. She had made contact with and was well-known by people in the English Department. Or she had certain supporters there. The women's movement—you know, it was the sensitivity to writing gender. As I said, I have a sense of how to put these things together in a package. It worked okay.

10-00:37:27

Wilmot:

I'm kind of winding down now—

10-00:37:28

Banks:

Same here.

10-00:37:30

Wilmot:

—and I wanted to ask you one more question going back, and we'll be done for the day. When you first came to Berkeley, when African American Studies was a program—1970, late 1969—the first class you taught. You did tell me. I believe it was Ethics.

10-00:38:02

Banks:

“Attitudes and Values in the Black Community.”

10-00:38:05

Wilmot:

What did you use as your bibliography? In your syllabus at that time, what kind of things were you drawing from?

10-00:38:10

Banks:

That's a good question.

10-00:38:14

Wilmot:

Harold Cruse was somebody who was very important.

10-00:38:15

Banks:

Yeah, but I didn't use him. That's a good question. I do not remember. Yes I do. *Perspectives on Black America*. That was an edited reader that I remember using. I don't remember the others. That's embarrassing, but it's a good question. I'll make a point to find out.

10-00:38:45

Wilmot:

I'm also wondering if, in those early seventies, your syllabus evolved. Do you recall it shifting?

10-00:38:50

Banks:

Oh, yeah.

10-00:38:51

Wilmot:

What kind of things were you teaching, say, in 1974?

10-00:38:54

Banks:

The field was just exploding. Many things were being published. There were pieces on the black family. Books. In 1970, you had to search to find things but six or seven years later you don't have just two books about slavery; you have ten books. This one emphasizes this; this one emphasizes that. And you can make intellectual, professional judgments about which ones work best. But, yeah, that's the great thing about the field in those days. Things were exploding and you just had to read to stay on top of things. I was the chair, I had to make sure I knew a little bit about what was happening. Even in the years after I was no longer the chair. In literature—well, that's not my field, but if somebody is writing about the black arts movement, you want to be conversant with that. You want to be able to understand what people are saying. What the issues are. Who are the important people in this field? It's fun to me, because I love to learn. I'm sure that was reflected in the curriculum and how I changed books and articles and stuff from time to time.

10-00:40:15

Wilmot:

We'll spend more time with this later on, because this is an evolving question of teaching and scholarship in the field. I wanted to ask you also this last question about when you described the kind of environment that was within—the environment, the political environment, the social climate—in the African American Studies program, I wanted to ask you about the exchange, the social-political exchange that happened between people. Between the practices and politics in the academy and then outside of the academy. How people were relating to each other. This was brought to mind because at one time you characterized one of the ways that Ron Lewis interacted with Panthers, speaking Panther-talk. I wanted to check in with you on that.

10-00:41:18

Banks:

Those were very confrontational times. The Panthers, of course, that was just one group. They were not the most influential outside group on campus, by no means. It was overwhelmingly the Nation of Islam. But the way this affected me in those days, as this controversy that I was involved in—the first one, at least—was at our community meetings. The students took it upon themselves to mobilize the black community, the political leaders, the ministers and so forth, against me. There were always these meetings in the community, in churches. The Rainbow Sign. This was a place on Martin Luther King—Grove Street at the time—that was run by Ruth Beckford and I forget the other lady's name, it escapes me. These were community meeting-places. The Berkeley Black Caucus was very, very active in those years. They'd have these meetings to discuss the situation of African American studies at Berkeley, and I would always go. I would always go. I was advised not to go, and this would happen and that would happen.

10-00:42:35

Wilmot:

When you say “advised not to go,” what do you mean? Are people telling you not to go?

10-00:42:40

Banks:

Yeah. Physically. “This will happen; that will happen. Nobody’s going to be there. All of them are going to be after you.” And so forth. I understood that, but that’s—you know, I felt an obligation. I thought I had a case and I thought I could make it.

I mean, I was not intimidated by black people, angry black people. I was not a vice chancellor type; I could get angry, too. And I could fight back. I just remember meeting after meeting. It got to the point where I think they were hoping I would not come. It’s easy to talk about somebody when you’re not there. Sure enough, I can’t say that I turned things around but I turned out not to be the demon, the outsider, the ivory tower kind of intellectual—you know, you create this caricature: “Oh, this person’s an academic. He want’s this. He’s not concerned about a community. He’s not black.”

But I came and—actually, most of this time I was seeing a woman who had good credentials in the militant black community. I was living in West Oakland. You know? That, in sort of symbolic ways—I didn’t do all this on purpose, but that’s who I was. People began to at least be open to what I was saying. Ron and company had done so many crazy things that even if people didn’t like me, they knew that change had to occur. They’d just say that’s something had to occur. But it was typical, the kind of “We’re going to have to deal with this,” that kind of rhetoric, but you just have to come with it. As your president would say, “Bring it on.” That was how that language—it worked on campus, like I said, with the faculty, some of the faculty. Until they pushed them in a corner.

Frankly, at certain points, I started to embarrass white faculty: “You know better than this. Why are you approving this? You know this is garbage.” In other words, appeal to their sense of self. “Why are you letting this go? That’s just a kind of racism.” I never would make it that explicit, but I was pointing out, “You know that doesn’t make any sense. If it wasn’t in on time, it wasn’t in on time.” That kind of angle. Sure enough, that pushed people to the point where they got enough confidence to critique things, and to say, “No. We’re not taking any more courses.” It got to that point, but they had to be nudged along. They had to be nudged along. It helped to be nudged along by somebody who was black. Those were the times of soft-headed liberalism. The confrontation stuff, that was the community. The in-your-face politics, that was anti-war. It was in the air.

10-00:46:11

Wilmot:

Okay. Well, let’s close for today.

[End Audio File 10]

Interview 6: April 6, 2004

[Begin Audio File 11]

11-00:00:02

Wilmot:

Professor William Banks. Interview six, April 6, 2004. Can you say a few words?

11-00:00:14

Banks:

Just to make sure that the sound is great.

11-00:00:20

Wilmot:

Thank you. Good morning.

11-00:00:27

Banks:

Good morning.

11-00:00:28

Wilmot:

I wanted to start by focusing on some of your course work, and asking you about what you thought it was important to convey to your students and what were important readings that you wanted to share with your students. I was wondering if we could start with Male and Ethnic in American Life. How did you design that course? Actually, I just want to say your syllabus in 1972—that's the year on your bio-bibliography, in 1972 it says "very innovative creation of curriculum in African American Studies." That was one of your departmental efforts, and I just wanted to check in with you, did you create Male and Ethnic in American Life?

11-00:01:37

Banks:

Yes, I did. I think the actual course came a bit later. I'm terrible about the exact years. Basically, it was part of the American Cultures initiative. The idea was to look at the experience of different ethnic male groups in the context of American society. I selected Latino Americans, Italian Americans, and African Americans for a—for lack of a better word—comparative approach. Basically, I start with the big question: To what extent does being male and being ethnic shape the experience of these three groups? Black males, Chicano males, and so forth. Naturally, at least in my own head, interdisciplinary in that you have to pay attention to the history. How did these groups—what was the entry point? What was the entry point of Latinos, for instance? New York? Puerto Rico? California? Then we begin to see that it's different. Different times, different places, and so forth. Economic factors that led to migration experiences of males. Family traditions. Ideas about family in Latino culture, Italian American culture. Transition.

What difference did it make when people came to America? How did that affect ideas about family? Child rearing? Maleness, itself? That's basically the model I used looking at these three groups historically. Towards that end, I played around with some comparisons of interactions between the groups—certainly, Italians and blacks. There's a lot of history there. And Puerto Ricans and blacks as well. There's a lot of—or some interplay. Maybe more now than back when

I began teaching it. There's more scholarship and media stuff about that. That's what I wanted to do. Boy-girl, male-female relationships and so forth. Machismo. The wave of interest in Italian American culture via *The Godfather* and stuff like that.

11-00:04:30

Wilmot:

So it looks like the first time you taught that class was in 1992, 1992-1993 academic year. Just after, in your biobib, it says that you went to some different American Cultures workshops and summer institutes. Can you tell me about your involvement in American Cultures as a requirement?

11-00:04:52

Banks:

The American Cultures initiative started out very political, as you can imagine. Particularly as a requirement. The idea of requiring a course in which students had to deal with cultural material apart from the tried and true was itself controversial. My early opinion was, I pushed for cultural groups, so that a student could take a course in one cultural group—African Americans or Latinos, so and so, and so forth. My notion was that if you make it too broad you lose a lot of depth. You lose a lot of political import when you have to compare this, this, this, this, this. It becomes just a surface kind of treatment.

However, different opinions prevailed, and of course after about three or four years of back-and-forth negotiation and shaping and so forth, a very talented committee came up with the American Cultures requirement, that again required attention to three groups, rather than just a single group. Comparative American cultural groups as opposed to Irish and so forth in other countries. Okay, I imagine that was a good compromise. The workshops were designed to familiarize faculty who had shown some interest in teaching the courses, developing courses, with material about the three groups, strategies that might be taken, media sources. Are there films about Italian Americans? Are there films about Puerto Ricans? What about different models of teaching? Conflict. Gender relations. There were people who were more expert than others in certain areas who presented papers, and we argued and so forth. So it was an intellectual and pedagogical emphasis. Not so much pedagogy, because at Berkeley people do what they want to do. You can't sit and imitate Leon Litwack or imitate Ron Takaki. It doesn't happen. You just have to listen and try to do what they do, pick bits and pieces of other people, and shape it to your own sensibilities, and so forth. And I did that. And I did that. It was good. I got a chance to meet people that I would not have normally met. Jon Gjerde, for instance, I met him there and stayed in touch with him. He's chairman of history now. He was a young assistant professor at the time. And a number of other people. David Kirp. Again, people who over the years I've managed to stay in touch with and who made important contributions.

11-00:08:11

Wilmot:

Who did you see as the primary architects of the American Cultures requirement?

11-00:08:16

Banks:

Names?

11-00:08:16

Wilmot:
Sure.

11-00:08:18

Banks:

Probably Ron Takaki was a key figure in that movement. Larry Levine in some interesting ways. Abdul Jan Mohammed in the English Department. Barbara Christian and Charles Henry to some extent in my department. It was an American Cultures committee. Waldo Martin was also another player. These are the people that I somehow—I can't remember exactly why—associated with that push.

11-00:09:03

Wilmot:

Would you call yourself someone who was centrally involved?

11-00:09:10

Banks:

No. Not at all. I supported the end product, but I wasn't a mover in that movement. No.

11-00:09:26

Wilmot:

What were the implications of that requirement for Ethnic Studies and African American Studies?

11-00:09:32

Banks:

I think it had some important practical implications to the extent to which the people within African American Studies could design courses that met the requirement. Three groups, and so forth. That meant that enrollment could be affected. A lot of students across the campus—everybody has to take a course. Departments and programs that were having enrollment problems could enhance their enrollments by offering American Cultures courses. And many departments were able to construct courses, and enrollments came in, and enrollments are often tied to resources. So that's a very practical kind of consideration. Obviously, intellectually, the chance to expose students to different cultures, and force people to look outside of themselves. If you're Italian—or better still, it certainly happened with me that you get Asian students who have to read and study and think about Italian Americans at the turn of the century. Immigration. Now, what was Chinese immigration like. East Coast. West Coast. Point of entry. Turn-of-the-century Italians, and so forth. Don Corleone. The American progression of assimilation versus ethnic cohesion. There's just a lot of material there. And I must admit that I'm glad that I was forced to think in this kind of integrated fashion looking at other groups. I could have just done the black thing, of course, but by paying attention to the experience—particularly of Italian Americans. I've always been long-time fascinated with Italian Americans. To draw parallels and look at it from then through Spike Lee and on. Snoop Doggy Dogg. All these people have fairly interesting kind of references to Italian culture. Not fully, but nevertheless it's there, and you kind of, "Hm-mmm. This is it."

11-00:12:03

Wilmot:

It is interesting, because then—it is real interesting, because there's different kinds of models of masculinity that have held sway, and people so often reference black masculinity in a certain way, and it's so interesting that here we are referencing Italian masculinity.

11-00:12:28

Banks:

And Latinos. You play off that. Urban versus rural. Machismo. Visions of women. How that's perceived by women then and now. You really problematize that. You make it very complicated. It's fun. In recent years, it was a drag because I've never gotten any black—well, very few black students, for some reason. That was always a drag.

11-00:12:55

Wilmot:

They might have thought that they knew already.

11-00:12:57

Banks:

Oh, yeah. "How can I learn anything about the black family? I'm from a black family." What can you say?

11-00:13:10

Wilmot:

Or, "I am a black man, what do I need to learn about male and ethnic—?"

11-00:13:11

Banks:

Sure. Let's listen to Tupac Shakur or Snoop. As you say, that's that insane snapshot of black masculinity that pervades so much of the popular culture, at least, these days.

11-00:13:31

Wilmot:

Was that something you spent time with? The extent to which people are consuming images of themselves in lieu of themselves?

11-00:13:39

Banks:

You have to address it, always critically. Here is an image. Here is another image: the Minstrel. Similarities. Hip Hop. Minstrel. Bamboozle-like. What's this tradition? Are there counterparts at other points in history? The aggressive. The gangster. All of these things aren't new. The idea, the icon, wasn't invented in the late nineties, as many people think. What's similar, what's different? What's similar, what's different? How did the white world react to this? How did they react to that? You play with it, and it can be fun. And I think it was. Students, in the main, really enjoyed it.

11-00:14:38

Wilmot:

I'm not certain about this, but my sense is that the theories of whiteness and masculinity came in a little bit later than other cultural theory. They're kind of late in the cultural theory explosion. Where did you go to learn about masculinity? In terms of theory, in terms of intellectual

framework, where did you draw from? Where did you draw from in terms of teaching a theory of masculinity?

11-00:15:25

Banks:

I started reading the general kinds of theoretical works, the semi-theoretical works. I'm probably not as convinced as others about theories. In some ways it's a bit too constraining a term for me, but nevertheless in reading, certainly the work of {Kimmel?}, and I drew a lot from the humanities: novels, fiction, and so forth. Sort of put together my own—if somebody asked me right now who is the most important male theorist about black males, I have no idea. I couldn't answer that. I mean, there are people who call themselves theorists, but it's too easy to label yourself as a theorist. Maybe I've come out of the sciences; I was a biology major so "theory" to me means something pretty rigid, pretty boom, boom, boom, pretty empirical. Right now, every idea, every notion gets to be a theory. Nevertheless, I drew from a lot of sources. I read certainly the early stuff of Robert Staples back in the day. Clyde Franklin. And a lot of stuff by women theorists. Because we talked about men—it's an interactive effect. What you think about me has a lot to do with what I think about you. Something comes from that. Men just don't sit back—

11-00:17:10

Wilmot:

In isolation.

11-00:17:10

Banks:

Yeah. So you recognize the complexity of it, and you just—at least in my case, in a very measured way moved in that direction. But I don't think anybody could say that from taking classes with me that they came out of it with a theory of masculinity. Leon Litwack told me some time ago when I was wondering about these kinds of things, "Look, just tell the story." I'll leave it up to the smarter people to put it all together and write the grand book of theories of black masculinity or femininity and so forth. Barbara Christian has a good essay on theory and literature. We live in that period of cultural studies, and freshmen come in: "What's your theory about black revolution?" "I really don't know, man." "I thought you were in Black Studies." "You tell me. Let's start with something."

11-00:18:23

Wilmot:

Let me ask you something else, then. What did that whole explosion of cultural theory, which I may be mistakenly locating with people like Paul Gilroy—I'm really just showing my intersection with that work.

11-00:18:36

Banks:

That's much later. I was into Foucault and some of the European people much earlier. In the early eighties. Some of it, I understood. I would probably say most of it, I did not. The key ideas of social construction and the impact of the social world on where ideas come from, and so forth. Edward Said was a major influence on my life. I remember getting turned on to him back in the early eighties at the National Humanities Center. I don't know, I guess some would call him a theorist, but he certainly wasn't a Judith Butler. He was pretty grounded and I could stay with him. But some of the other things—you know. Skip Gates, to some extent. But that's literary

theory. He doesn't have interesting things to say about the social condition of black people, I think, but no doubt he's an accomplished scholar in literature, and certainly well listened to. Articulate, a major player in American intellectual life.

11-00:20:15

Wilmot:

To what extent did you bring those ideas—the kind of frameworks that you've just mentioned—to your work in creating the black studies canon? Maybe “canon” is too strong a word.

11-00:20:42

Banks:

Again, with undergraduates and teaching undergraduates, if you can start with a very simple idea of how and why ideas change and notions about things change over time based upon circumstances, to me that's key. If you can get people to look at something like a term like “violence” or a term like “the family” and look at how these ideas have changed, that's the beginnings of what the more sophisticated people might push or describe as leading in the direction of theory. If you can just start with that. That's what I try to do, and I guess if I had to describe that theoretically, you talk about the interconnectivity of knowledge and da, da, da, da. I know how to talk that talk, but it's more important for me to see on the ground, to help students understand on the ground how this relates to that. Why people talked about this in a certain way. Agency. The notion that people have a lot to do with what they think, how they think, and that particularly so in the case of women, black people, black women in particular, are not just passive actors.

Ralph Ellison, for instance, said it very well: black people are not just reactions to racism. There's more to black culture than just reacting to white people. That's a powerful statement. It just says that there is something there that has a weight of its own—a heft of its own—and you don't have to just think in this reactive mode, just reacting to what's around you. You can act upon that, and so forth. The broader society does that. The broader society certainly reacts to black assertions.

11-00:22:57

Wilmot:

Interesting. What parts of Said are the parts that stay with you? Theories—I know theory is not the word—we don't have to stay with that word. It's just a word that I thought was useful, but it might not be. So let's leave that.

11-00:23:12

Banks:

Well, not for me. Most people are more in love with the term than I am. We had a hot date, but I moved on. [laughs]

11-00:23:23

Wilmot:

Well, all right! Go ahead with the metaphor.

11-00:23:27

Banks:

Said's—I think his key things for me came from *The World, the Text, and the Critic* and *Orientalism*, the books where he just looked at the history of how the West talked about folks of color, basically in the East. Orientals and so forth. What that meant. The implications of that definition, the adjectives that got transposed, how it shaped scholarship. It was a masterful work, idea piece. You stand back and you start, “Well, how does this—how might this kind of analysis be woven into black culture?” Not just black culture. In my case, I was thinking of it in those terms, but let's start from scratch. Don't take it as a given, this canon generated by colonial powers and erudite scholars from Oxford and so forth. So, I mean, I think that was a key kind of text for me as far as the connection between theory and some of the early reading, that kind of thinking and where I ended up.

11-00:24:53

Wilmot:

How did that wave of black British theorists, cultural theorists—that was kind of an early nineties thing, I think; it really was when I was an undergrad—how did that affect the black studies department at Berkeley, the African American Studies Department at Berkeley?

11-00:25:15

Banks:

The scholars and the first couple of waves of graduate students—I mean, you had people who were black British. Anglo African American. Barbara Christian, to some extent. She was less guilty than—not “guilty” but less that way than other people. Percy Hintzen, to some extent Stephen Small, pushed in that direction. So you did have people there who were Caribbeanists, in terms of their own intellectual origins, and fascinated by the work of Gilroy—certainly he's the name there. Hazel Carby, the Black Brit, the notion of the Atlantic community. That carried a lot of weight for reasons, some intellectual, some sociological. But it certainly had an impact and a number of scholars have come through in the last two or three years in that tradition. I don't think—well, that's pretty much the case, yeah.

11-00:26:51

Wilmot:

Was that a new direction for the black studies department?

11-00:26:55

Banks:

No, it was just a new direction for people. I don't think it ever had any impact personally on students. And that's the thing that I have to, we have to remember. When you say “had an impact” there were people who moved in different directions themselves, studying different things, thinking about different things. To what extent does that shape or nudge the department in one direction or another direction? I think that it's tied clearly to the idea of diaspora. Once you hoist that flag “diaspora” then the black Atlantic is a natural. Blacks in Asia. Hey, it opens up a can of escargot or worms. Depends on your take.

11-00:27:51

Wilmot:

I want to ask you a follow-up question about the American Cultures. How was that movement or initiative, how was that received by the broader campus community? How was it perceived? What did people think? I understand that it was a controversial kind of initiative.

11-00:28:08

Banks:

Hm-mmm. I think a majority of people accepted the final document. People were concerned about the separateness that was implied by people like me. But when they opened it up politically, so that you could have a course on Poles and Swedes or Russians or Jews and so forth, when they opened it up like that, looking at ethnicity as a common denominator rather than race, it made it much more palatable. People would rather talk about African Americans than black people. Some people objected to it. They thought this was just a way of political correctness, that whole critique. That “Da, da, da, da, you can learn everything you need to learn in Poli Sci 5 or in History da, da, da. We’re already doing that.” That’s how it was greeted. But the administration was supportive. I think it pushed it through. It was helpful in pushing it through. The leadership of the Academic Senate was important in guiding its way through the senate apparatus, because the senate had to eventually pass it. This was something that the administration couldn’t impose. So the politics were in place, and it ended up happening.

I think it has enjoyed—I’m sure it’s enjoyed—a great deal of success by exposing people to various cultural perspectives. You do get the kind of kids who don’t see why it’s important. “Why should I learn about Latinos?” That kind of thing. “I could be studying elementary particles. I could be studying physics.” Some faculty members—I mean, people in Engineering. Some people. I qualify that. I remember great discussions about the need for engineers to take things outside of Engineering. You had faculty members in engineering who would have you believe that the student could come in and they could do all their coursework there, become an expert in engineering, and to heck with Shakespeare and Derek Walcott. That’s for other people. That sort of narrowness, but that’s a university debate that will always be with us. The whole specialist as opposed to liberal arts: broad liberal learning or just professional school? Do you just come in as an engineer, learn what engineering is and you go out into the field? Of course, two years later the field has changed and you don’t know anything, but that’s the way it goes.

11-00:31:09

Wilmot:

I just want to return to this question and talk a bit about that black British cultural studies movement in the academy. I’m going back and forth between these two things, and I’m aware they’re not the same thing; it’s just we’re in the same time space.

11-00:31:41

Banks:

Hm-mmm. Sure.

11-00:31:42

Wilmot:

Do you recall any kind of debates or discussions in the department around this? Was there ever any kind of heated debates or conversations about—was it ever thought that perhaps that kind of

perspective, which was diasporic, was somehow a betrayal or a direction away from the core of African American studies?

11-00:32:15

Banks:

Personally, I raised that question a number of times but again, we get into timing. I was away, and when I came back—I can't remember at what point—it was sort of more or less in place. Everybody was on that bandwagon. I'm not a rearguard—I'm not a whiner. If that's the way it is, that's the way it is. I don't fight that. I wish there could have been more of a vigorous debate, but there wasn't. We started seeing courses that purported to do this, purported to do that. Two students. Four students. That kind of thing. Scholars would come in. Spend two thousand dollars flying in from London to have a seminar with six students. But like I said, that's the way it was.

11-00:33:15

Wilmot:

That kind of happened.

11-00:33:15

Banks:

That kind of happened. Again, I don't want to suggest that if I'd been there it would have been different—maybe not. But the debate certainly would have been there. That's the way it goes. It's a spin-off in the graduate program too. If you have African Diaspora Studies as the hook, then the graduate students that you get are eighty percent West Indian, African immigrants. Haitian Americans. Jamaican Americans. A lot of them are in the country—I don't want to suggest that they're from Jamaica. First generation. That's their experience, that's what they know, and that's all right, but just recognize that that's going to happen. And that has happened, if you will. See, you open up a program, you say your emphasis is going to be on Women's Studies, don't you think you're going to get women? A preponderance of women applicants and so forth? You know, that's all right.

11-00:34:29

Wilmot:

And those themes that you've kind of discussed with me as the core of—in some ways; I don't want to put words in your mouth—as kind of the cores of African American Studies, such as conflict, power relations, dynamics, did you not see a place for those themes to be trans-Atlantic and diasporic?

11-00:34:50

Banks:

Just to push the argument, I would say they were certainly less. I don't want to say that in diasporic studies there's no potential for political sensibility there, but most of the stuff that I read that proclaims politics—the difference between talking about political language and political action. To talk about “transgressive” and so forth. I'm looking for that link that would move it along in ways that, again, us Old School—conflict, change, co-optation. It's a different ball game.

I'm writing a review now of a book that is clearly diasporic. A book called *Race War! White Supremacy and the Japanese Attack on the British* by Gerald Horne, in which he looks at the Japanese in British Asia in the 1940s. Clearly diasporic, but he's making connections. He's

showing how Japanese sort of converted the racist argument about color and so forth to mobilize people of color—yellow people, brown people—in Asia, against the Europeans. It's a masterful book, but it's grounded. You're quoting people, referring to things that actually happened. That's impressive. But I've just found that far too many of the cultural studies people don't bother to take the next step to link it with—it's like the classic thing of spending a lot of time laughing about the Iraqi invasion as—I'm forgetting already. Real things are happening. Real people are dying and struggling and so forth. I think the movement clearly coincides with the de-politicalization of much of American life. Once you get into the individualistic trend and so forth, people don't connect in ways that they did back in the day. The last few student initiatives and so forth—the ethnic studies strike, a couple of years ago, the hunger strike for more resources and so forth. But the kind of political—well, affirmative action, that's true, but there's nothing diasporic about affirmative action. The cause that mobilized people. But the diasporic people were supportive of it, I'm sure. They just didn't do anything. Didn't initiate anything. That I'm aware of.

11-00:38:02

Wilmot:

Okay. Interesting. I wanted to turn now to this other class.

11-00:38:13

Banks:

Hm-mmm. Sure.

11-00:38:15

Wilmot:

There's several classes I want to talk to you about. "Black Life and Culture in the U.S." is one of your longstanding, longest-running courses, and in some ways it's one of the bedrock courses of the African American Studies Department. Do you want to talk a little bit about how you framed that, or how you pulled that together, and what your thoughts were?

11-00:38:37

Banks:

As you say, I've done it for a long time and it's my baby, if you will. I enjoy it. The intellectual origins. Back in the day, when we talked about providing some coherence to the curriculum—a concentration if you will: social science, humanities. An old friend, Roy Thomas, and I came up with this notion of a survey course. A general education course, one concentrated in the humanities—theatre, the arts, literature, music. Another one looking closely at what we could gain from sociology, political science, psychology and so forth. "That was Black Life and Culture in the U.S.," 5B and 5A. I did 5B.

I'm a passionate believer in African American Studies lower division education. I could talk about that later. But the first year, people coming in from McClymonds, Lowell, Head-Royce high schools—I mean, they've come with these misconceptions, far too many people, about Black Studies. From Left to Right. "It's no good." "We're there to make revolution," and so forth. Here's a chance for me to take my time and come up with a way of shaping, framing, passing on what I believe is important. Some key issues and so forth in African American life. It's not a history course, so I'm not bound by a kind of historical narrative: This, then this, then this, then this. I ended up doing some of that, simply in the interest of coherence, but still, it's not

a history course. I don't teach about court decisions as court decisions. I don't pay a lot of attention to white people. Black life: what did black people do with their lives? You can't just ignore white people, racism and all. But it's not about that. It's just, given realities and so forth, how did people respond to this?

11-00:41:21

Let me just go further. Because I'm not constrained by the narrative, you can just pick things that you believe to be important. Now, reasonable people can disagree, and I picked usually four or five themes, if you will, and that way you can just draw the best of the writing and thinking about a particular issue and bring it to bear in the course. Take something like nationalism. Nationalism. At all points in African American history, there's been a nationalist impulse, and you can pull books, articles, film and so forth, just looking at that impulse to draw—for black people, for group solidarity, group cohesion. The different forms it has taken, from Back to Africa movements, to the Nation of Islam, to Panthers. Just how has that idea, why does it surface at certain times and other times goes away? You can just do so much with that.

The other issue is class. The emergence of class as a phenomenon of African American life. What does class mean in a slave context? How can you talk about stratification on a plantation? Does it make any sense? Who stratified? Stratified according to masters or black people? Who did black people consider to be the top of the ladder? I mean, you could go on and on and on, but that's what I did in the course.

11-00:43:07

Wilmot:

Class and nationalism as themes. Were there other themes that you developed?

11-00:43:11

Banks:

Families. Family life. I always had clever titles. I used to have a smart girlfriend who was very good at titles. She could label. She could read a paragraph and give it a great title. I'm straight as an arrow, but the idea was little catchy kinds of things.

11-00:43:32

Wilmot:

There was a time when there was a lot of humor involved, kind of imbued into these titles. There was a real renaissance there.

11-00:43:40

Banks:

Oh, yeah.

11-00:43:43

Wilmot:

How did you talk about issues of sexism? As distinct from masculinity, but just sexism within the black community, some misogyny, to some extent.

11-00:43:54

Banks:

You started with your family. The slave family. I'd always look at that as a starting point. Ideas about males. Ideas about family coming from Africa. Nathan Huggins' *Harlem Renaissance*, a

key text that I've used forever. What ideas about family life could be woven into the American, the plantation slavery experience? Which could not? Adaptations. How did women adapt? How did men adapt? To the role, to each other. Again, there's a superstructure here. People weren't free to replicate African family forms and beliefs and so forth. There was this intervention, of course. But nevertheless, people had to come up with something, so that's where you get—and just basic American patriarchy. Black men were as patriarchal, as misogynist as any other men during that historical period. That's just a fact. You look at that over time. The exclusion of women from schools. Some of the standard kinds of things that you can work with. The civil rights movement. The role of women there and so forth. The connection between, quote, “white women's movement” and black women. The kind of issues that many black scholars—women scholars in particular—wrote about in the eighties. How the issues often were different, and just how to connect them or not to connect them.

Most recently, this past semester—my last semester—and even before. I think last year I did a section on identities that looked at, over time, things like Caribbean identities, the immigrant experience. As more and more groups come into the country and have an impact and so forth, I think it's important to talk about what's the same, what's different, how do these groups see themselves vis-a-vis African American, the traditional black American kind of thing. Gays. It's another source of identity. You know: What's more important to me, my gayness or my blackness? Stuff like that. You just try to push it out there. Urban, rural, class. Is Bill Cosby black? You use stuff like that to get at the complexities of shaping identities. How does it hold and how do you predict what will happen?

11-00:46:48

One of the interesting exam questions that I crafted this year—I can't remember it, but basically asking black students, Given social attitudes blah, blah, blah, what would you predict to be the status of gay and lesbian black men fifteen, twenty years from now, and why? So they have to look at what society is now and the attitudes, and project into the future. Where is this going? And how does race and sexual identity, gender identity, what will be the outcome of that? Ten years from now will my gayness be more important to me than my blackness? What's the evidence for that? That's what I'd be looking for in answers.

11-00:47:41

Wilmot:

And is there the ability to actually make that distinction?

11-00:47:44

Banks:

Yeah. Yeah.

11-00:47:45

Wilmot:

I want to ask you, in light of both of your classes that we just talked about—two of the many classes you taught and created—were there any kind of lively discussions around someone like Eminem? This man who's been adopted by one of the leading figures in hip-hop and has become the face of hip-hop, essentially. What do you think about that?

11-00:48:11

Banks:

Frankly, I'm a big supporter of Eminem. I've done a paper on Eminem, lectured on Eminem. For a different reason. I think that the question is: How does this happen? Is he the face, as you say, the face of hip-hop and so forth, and why? That has a lot to do with marketing and the business part. That's very vulgar and it's hard for me to kind of, you know. We know who buys records and so forth and blah, blah, blah, but I don't think Eminem himself is exploitive. I think Eminem does what he does very, very well. I think he's a very clever lyricist. I enjoy—I mean, my kids now have "My Band." They have his latest tune and so forth that they downloaded. It's a clever kind of thing. I think there is that spot.

Yeah, we talked about it in class, and of course all the black students say he's exploiting black people. He's ripping off black people. He's not as good as this person or that person. I don't listen to a whole whole lot of rap music. I take my kid to school and she makes me listen to Chuy Gomez and KMEL.

See, I don't have that kind of guide now, and I'm sort of stuck with mainstream Clear Channel [Communications] dumb stuff—that's what I hear. I'm sure there are better people out there, but I think there's an important cultural role for someone like Eminem. As long as Eminem is disruptive to the establishment, to mainstream American culture. "My enemy's enemy is my friend," or something like that.

11-00:50:29

Wilmot:

Interesting. What do you think about him in terms of the construction of his masculinity?

11-00:50:35

Banks:

He questions it. He plays around with it. When you say "his," I think he looks at things like homosexuality. He plays around with that. He doesn't resolve that. I don't think he can, but he suggests his own insecurities, the violence, the misogyny. He's reflecting a lot of stuff as opposed to moving people in this direction. I'd argue with people who expect too much from him. Why should I think that a 26-year-old white boy has a lot to say about my future? I don't think he does. I think it's silly for people to imagine that, you know? But if he wants to talk about high school in Orinda or Acalanes, what might be happening there, or in trailer communities and lower—you know, you look at that and it's clever, and blah, blah, blah, blah.

We made a mistake with Miles and Coltrane. I remember just trying to extract the political, clear coherent meaning from these giants of serious music—jazz. You finally come to rest: "Wait a minute, you can't do it all." But as long as Eminem can be outrageous and be disruptive and so forth, I'm not going to burden him with solving the crack problem in East Oakland.

11-00:52:14

Wilmot:

If you were teaching a class called African American Masculinity, would he be someone you would teach as part of it?

11-00:52:23

Banks:

No. I could mention him as “this is how it’s been appropriated.”

11-00:52:30

Wilmot:

Are there any other lyricists that you enjoy?

11-00:52:36

Banks:

That I credit? Tupac. I taught a course—

11-00:52:38

Wilmot:

Just that you feel are important.

11-00:52:42

Banks:

Lyricists that I think are important.

11-00:52:47

Wilmot:

Tupac is one to start with.

11-00:52:48

Banks:

Important.

11-00:52:49

Wilmot:

Or talented, hey!

11-00:52:51

Banks:

I like Luther Vandross. I like Biggie. [phone interruption] Biggie Smalls. I think he’s better than Tupac.

[End Audio File 11]

[Begin Audio File 12]

12-00:00:04

Wilmot:

Were there any other themes from your “Black Life and Culture in the U.S?” I know there were many, but were there any other dominant themes that you wanted to talk about from that time?

[phone rings]

12-00:00:29

Banks:

Yeah, I think that the movement of African Americans to the cities from the rural population to an urban population—this sort of transformation—is a key development in looking at where black culture is today. At the turn of the century, something like 85 percent of the black people

lived in the rural South. By 1945, only about 20 percent lived in the rural South. The movement, all kinds of implications economically, culturally. Moving from agrarian life—a slow-paced life characterized by primary relationships; people knew each other, family, institutions that worked, like churches and so forth—to cities that were much more impersonal. A whole different way of thinking about life and so forth. To me that's key. It's been key in a lot of places, not just blacks in America. If you look at London, India, the movement into the metropol, as the sophisticates would say, how do people make that accommodation? Artistically, language-wise. All kinds of rich stuff there, and we always have a unit looking at that.

Books like *Black Metropolis*, St. Clair Drake. Richard Wright's *Twelve Million Black Voices*, and a number of other things. Richard Wright's novels that look at what happens to the human spirit, to a people, moving from one location to another in the American context. There was a big debate earlier, in the late fifties, early sixties, about: What most characterizes black culture? Is it the rural South, the blues, or is it the urban scene? That's an interesting kind of debate, because back in the sixties, the urban thing dominated. The music, the fast pace, not hip-hop but R&B, Motown, and blues. It goes back and forth, about: What's really black? The blues or Marvin Gaye?

12-00:03:21

Wilmot:

When you're teaching "families" or thinking about black families, what kind of sense do you make of this theory—what kind of sense do you make of like Cornel West's idea of nihilism? Is that Cornel West?

12-00:03:38

Banks:

Hm-mmm. I think he certainly regrets the word, but basically Cornel West wanted to point to a lot of dysfunctional practices and habits and values and so forth in the black community. He certainly understands the source of many of these, in terms of economic exploitation. That the usual kinds of suspects are implicated in that. And I think it was easy for many people to seize upon that term and make it appear as if he had somehow written off the black community. That they're just so destructive, you need this transformation, this kind of religious-like revelation in order to move ahead. I give him the benefit of the doubt in that regard, because I certainly think he understands that. And who can not look at crime rates and so forth and just see that happening? You can't deny that, but you do understand it, and if you give it a label—I mean, it's just like "the underclass." Once you give it a label, it takes a life of its own that's not particularly warranted, given history. These things can change and interventions can work, et cetera. I talk about that.

You can't talk to a contemporary student body and not have most of the people—most of the people there would recognize or understand that there are a lot of social dysfunctions in the African American community. You can't just pretend that—hip-hop itself, the music that many of them listen to, somehow these things are popularized. You can criticize them and so forth, but you can't deny that they don't exist. If you talk about dope and violence and all that kind of stuff. That's one of my big beefs about hip-hop music. I just think it's round and around. It's not pushing people forward to any other different vision. Very few hip-hop artists do that, I think, that I listen to.

12-00:06:22

Wilmot:

Well, I wanted to turn now to ask about this course “Jazz: Jazz Musicians in American Culture.” When did that emerge? When was that a class? When did that class emerge and that area of interest—research interest—emerge for you?

12-00:06:35

Banks:

It started off as a class, Jazz: Jazz Musicians in American Culture, and it was a disaster. The first time I taught it, there were about 85, 90 students. Probably more than that. I think I limited it. I had hoped for a class where people knew something about jazz, so that you don’t start with: “There was a person by the name of Duke Ellington; there is something called the blues.” This was clearly a mistake on my part. You got people in there who didn’t know what jazz was. “Jazz” to them meant—I won’t even say Grover Washington. They just had no knowledge whatsoever, but they thought this was something that they might know. And you had people there who were very sophisticated, who came hoping for something—so you have this diverse class. And it didn’t work. Because if you don’t—I’m just not interested in teaching about jazz history. This person is this; the blues is this; the blues is that. I’d planned for a much different course, and like I said, it was just a disaster. And people just took it as a “Mick” course—all they’d have to do was come in and listen. They didn’t want to read biographies of jazz musicians. They just thought we’d listen and talk and they could exchange stories and be hip. That was the probably at the top of the bottom of the classes that I taught. And I love jazz!

12-00:08:32

Wilmot:

Did it change?

12-00:08:33

Banks:

I changed it a little bit. I was very selective the next time around. But it didn’t work, because people lied. They said, “Oh yeah, I know this. I know that.” But they really didn’t. I talk about it with a friend of mine now who teaches a jazz history course at UC Santa Barbara. I just swore that I’d never do a course on jazz again, and I haven’t. Especially jazz. I do a course on music. Jazz is a part of that, but I can manage that. The expectations aren’t the same. But I love it too much to just muddle through it.

12-00:09:12

Wilmot:

What was your aim and how did you imagine this class? What did you want to happen?

12-00:09:18

Banks:

Okay. The framework was this—

12-00:09:23

Wilmot:

It looks like it was 1982 and ’83. That’s when it came along.

12-00:09:27

Banks:

I look at it like this: Here is an art form. A very important art form, I believe. Here are these people who produce this art. Jazz, the art. Jazz musicians are the people who are the creators, the innovators and so forth. They do this within the framework of American culture. Okay. The music, the musicians. Who are these people? How do they come to play this kind of music? What other music existed with them? How did the music get shaped? What were the social, the economic, the cultural forces that created the music, the musicians, the artists? If you just substitute the word “art.” The classic tribulations of an artist. Billie Holiday. The tortured artist. There are all kinds of riffs that I could have played with, and I probably tried to. But if you don’t know who Billie Holiday was, if you’re hearing that word for the first time, if you’re sitting here and you’re hearing that word for the first time, and somebody else is very familiar with her body of work and can talk about “Strange Fruit,” it’s kind of hard to make these things fit. My key role as a teacher is to connect with students and if I’m not connecting it becomes flat. I’m not one to just ignore the naive, the elementary-level people. And how do you create this class of people who are at least sophisticated enough to know the difference between Miles Davis and Dave Brubeck. Or the music of Miles Davis and blues. Like I said, it was just a disaster. I love the music too much to do it again.

12-00:11:36

Wilmot:

Okay. Did you work with those themes also of metropolis and migration again?

12-00:11:40

Banks:

Oh, sure.

12-00:11:41

Wilmot:

Within the context of this course?

12-00:11:43

Banks:

Sure. There’s a thing—the blues. People coming up from the rural South to Chicago. Chicago blues. Bessie Smith. Here’s a black Southern woman. What could black women do in the South? They could be maids, prostitutes, or singers and so forth.

12-00:12:04

Wilmot:

Teachers.

12-00:12:06

Banks:

If you were super-lucky. Very proper in the South. Urbanization takes place. She confronts the black middle class. People are wanting to get away from these blues traditions, and are more sophisticated and so forth. Class. Urbanization. Rural. “Blues? That’s that old slavery music. I don’t want to hear that.” You ask students if—well, they know Robert Cray came and gave a concert at Zellerbach [Hall], would there be any black people there? No. Why? Boomp, boomp, boomp. Well, you know, black people don’t have any money. C’mon! It costs much more to go to a Beyoncé concert than Robert Cray or BB King or any other blues person who might be still

operating and so forth. So that's the kind of stuff I do. And it's all there in jazz. Urbanization. Economics. The exploitation of record companies, you can weave that in. That's what I like: to take a theme, an idea, and just sort of play off "American culture" broadly defined, and critique the culture. This is how this ends up being such and such. Even diaspora. You can talk about the dancehalls. You can talk about the Afro-Caribbean stuff of Dizzy Gillespie. You can do that if you work at it.

Most of the time that I work hard as a teacher, I try to do it like that. That's why I like courses like that, as opposed to having to get students to understand the causes of the Civil War. Or *Brown v. Board of Education* did this, this, this, this. That's cool and it has to happen, but it's not the only way to learn. It's not the only thing to learn.

12-00:14:15

Wilmot:

That brings me to another question about teaching. What has teaching taught you? You can answer that question later if you like.

12-00:14:25

Banks:

Yeah, let me be more reflective about that.

12-00:14:30

Wilmot:

And then the other thing was, what were the biggest lessons that you learned about teaching?

12-00:14:42

Banks:

Lessons that I've learned. How important it is to introduce charisma to the class. That's not a popular thing to say, but in my classes I give students somebody—a real person—to interact with, as opposed to just ideas. I work hard at having students believe I believe everything I say. I know that sounds crazy. Again, you can't do it in everything, but I don't just give dry discussions of this and this and this. I employ irony, and just sort of bring myself into the situation to give people something to react to other than just the material. It's one thing to, "so-and-so said this." "I believe" kind of joins the thing. It's a part of black culture, that kind of expressive culture that argues back and forth as opposed to the mere presentation of material. I try to make it come alive, and it does work. That's one of the things that I've learned to do.

Once upon a time, I was very didactic: These are the facts; I'll talk about this, then talk about this, then talk about this. But I'd just get this dull kind of "oh yeah, yeah, yeah." I found that when I argued with the material—"How could Richard Wright think this? Wait a minute. Isn't this stupid, given this, this, this"—then they immediately: "Oh! I have a voice. I can make my way into this dialogue." You encourage students to do that. Maybe it's just better for me. It's more fun. Not as boring. I confess to that.

12-00:16:48

Wilmot:

At what point in your career do you locate your biggest learning curve as a teacher?

12-00:16:55

Banks:

I'd say the late seventies. That was the point at which I took off. The myth of Berkeley had worn off, Berkeley students, "everybody's a genius." Yeah, right. I had a kind of confidence in myself as a teacher. I was making connections with people and they were going on, and I was helping people. I just sort of got mature at that point. Like I said, somewhere in the late seventies I managed to do that. Since then, certainly, I've always been confident going into a class. I usually over-prepare, but it works out because I don't—there's nothing worse than not being able to meet the intellectual needs of students. Not just facts and so forth, but to be able to engage them in ways that they haven't been engaged before. If you can't be different, why should I just be what other people can be?

12-00:18:14

Wilmot:

When you reflect on students from whom you've learned a great deal—graduate students, probably, and possibly undergraduates—are there any experiences you want to share? People from whom you've learned a lot, either intellectually in terms of their area of work, or just in terms of the process of working with them.

12-00:18:39

Banks:

No. No single students stand out that I've learned a lot from. Shared experiences—I have a student now, last semester, we still are in touch, an Iranian student, an Iranian American who grew up in Alabama. Southern, Iranian, pre-med major. His gestalt as he approaches life and so forth, and me—I mean we have lunch every couple of weeks and we talk about things, and just to see how this student filters stuff. It's very interesting to me. And I think I'm interesting to him, too. I mean, here's this guy, he talks about being from Alabama. What is our connection? We're Southern. Think about that. We're Southern. Here's this guy, Alabama, Iran, and he's not political. I'd say he was moderately conservative, but we can connect around sports or something. Alabama and Georgia—that's the link. We can talk about restaurants in Georgia. I do it deliberately. He recognizes that I'm just messing with him, as they say. Dixie Chicks. And it's kind of interesting to move from there—he's a 3.8 student. Superstar. Had a little brother plays soccer and my girls play soccer. It's just to see how, in the context of—you can't say America, but certainly the Berkeley campus teaching, and he was a student of mine. I had to chase him away from office hours. He would have hogged up all of my time. But it was fun. That keeps me alive, keeps me sharp. There's a lot there.

12-00:20:50

Wilmot:

Is he considering pursuing a career in academia now, or is he still pre-med?

12-00:20:53

Banks:

Pre-med. He'll be a super—he's into sports medicine, orthopedic stuff like that. He'll do well, and I'll work with him on things like—so many students: "If I don't get into UCSF med school, Harvard, or Yale, I'm a failure" and all that kind of stuff. I say, "C'mon, how stupid can you get?" I can talk to him like that, because I know him very well. Again, helping him get through that—I don't want to use words, labels. I'm no "mentor." I'm too crazy for that, but I'm just there to challenge and to help in ways that I can, and it's great. I learned a lot from him.

12-00:21:45

Wilmot:

There's something that I want to raise in relation to this that has to do with the African American Studies Department. That is, that the African American Studies Department has a reputation on campus for not only being an academic home but also a place of real support for many students—not exclusively African American students, and not exclusively African American studies majors—and I wanted to ask you about that. Is that something that you've thought about and tried to put in place? Does that sound familiar to you, actually?

12-00:22:28

Banks:

It certainly sounds familiar. I think that for better or for worse, whether you agree or disagree with it, there's a certain set of expectations that get visited upon black professors—certainly in African American Studies—that other people don't have to deal with. That's just the name of the game. I've had to do that too, and it doesn't bother me. In fact, I always tell students, "You've got to use me. I get paid a lot of money." I tell them, "Look, I earn—" anybody in my classes will tell you, on the first day of class I say, "Look, I earn \$13 an hour. I get paid by the hour and that includes office hours and so forth." I say, "You folks pay a lot of tuition, so you might as well use me." I try to translate into a capitalist mode. "Come by during office hours. Ask me about this, ask me about that. As long as I'm getting paid, I'll answer you." They say [whispers], "He earns \$14 an hour?" They go through that. But the idea is to see me—

12-00:23:38

Wilmot:

Thirteen dollars an hour?

12-00:23:39

Banks:

Thirteen dollars an hour. That's what I tell them. One, most of them don't believe it. But what am I trying to do? I'm trying to say, "Value this. Put a value on it. I'm a resource. You're paying to have me do whatever it is that you want to do. I have an obligation. As long as I'm getting paid, I'll do this." It doesn't work as well as it should, because students—particularly black students—don't come by nearly as much as they should, just to, "What about...? What about...? What about...?" Most of them that do, come back and so forth. It's just one of those things. Many of them aren't comfortable with professors. I don't know, but I certainly accept the role of being something other than just an academic. I think the department should do more in that regard, but you can't tell faculty members what to do. The system doesn't reward the kind of thing that I'm talking about. In many ways, it punishes it, because you spend time doing things that don't translate into career mobility, and that's real to a lot of people.

12-00:24:59

Wilmot:

Was this one of the primary themes that you were exploring in your book *Black Intellectuals*?

12-00:25:04

Banks:

Well, yeah. A sense of responsibility.

12-00:25:05

Wilmot:

Kind of the multiple burdens and/or obligations and/or joyous burden. I don't know how to say it. You want to say it, put it in a positive light.

12-00:25:17

Banks:

Yeah, I think that was one of the things that set me flowing.

12-00:25:25

Wilmot:

To quote Farrah Griffin.

12-00:25:26

Banks:

Hey, I was going to steal that. [laughs] What's the appropriate mix? Can I do both, or should I just abandon that and do what my colleagues would do in psychology? They don't have to be worried about identity crises, or the racism on campus. Unless they politically choose to, they don't have to deal with that at a personal level. Why should I have to do it? That means I'm not going to publish as much, I'm not going to do this or that as much, I'm not going to give as many lectures. You know, these are the compromises. Some people do too much of this; some people do too much of that. And who am I to say what too much is? I look at my Dad, who made decisions—well, he was constrained to a certain set of decisions—and his life turned out a certain way, and that's the way it was. It didn't have anything to do with research or scholarship in a traditional sense. It was teaching, involved in the community. He has lived a very fulfilled life. But, yeah, that's key to moving in the direction of the black intellectual. Finding a place for that in intellectual life, for race in intellectual life.

12-00:26:59

Wilmot:

I want to move into talking about that book. Does that seem like a good idea to you?

12-00:27:01

Banks:

Maybe next time. Maybe this is a good place to stop.

12-00:27:07

Wilmot:

Okay. Well, I have a different question, then, about teaching, if that's okay.

12-00:27:08

Banks:

Okay, sure.

12-00:27:12

Wilmot:

Do you want to talk about this class, "Jews and Blacks: Convergence and Divergence in American Society?"

12-00:27:18

Banks:

Yeah. I taught the class twice. About three or four years ago, I taught it for the first time as a freshman seminar. Here again, I prepared myself and read and thought and the whole business. Small class. A seminar, where people would talk and interact and so forth.

12-00:27:42

Wilmot:

Undergraduate or graduate level?

12-00:27:43

Banks:

Undergraduate. Freshmen. Not just undergraduate, but freshmen. It was a disaster. All the students in the class, with two exceptions, were Jewish. The other two were, for lack of a better word, white Gentiles. No blacks. Immediately, you can't get around the idea that for them you speak for every black. I mean, I was [Louis] Farrakhan, Jesse Jackson, I was all of this stuff, symbolically. Students wanted that, too—they thought there'd be some black students in the class. They'd get a chance to debate things, and it didn't happen.

This year I taught it—well, there's a history there. A student came to me, who'd heard that I taught the course before, and said, "Look, I heard you taught a course four years ago. I'm active in Hillel"—a Jewish student, Dave from Philly. I explained to him, "Look, I don't want to do that any more." I explained what had happened, "It was terrible. It was just a bad dynamic, which I'm sure you understand." It was very impressive, he said, "Well, I'd like to have some meetings with students and see if I can generate some people who are interested in it, who'll agree to take the course." I said, "No, I don't want to do that, because I just don't want to sit and talk to a group of, in this case, Jewish students because, again, I start representing 'black people' and that's not the best dynamic for this, because you're not going to argue, and so forth. I'm not just a black person, I'm a professor." You know, obvious reasons.

But he had meetings and did a lot of solicitation and so forth, and assured me that a lot of people were interested in taking the course. Well, that was true. But, as it turns out, there were two black students, about fifteen Jewish students. The two black students dropped after the first couple of weeks. The Jewish students didn't want to learn anything. They just wanted to talk about blacks and Jews. I'm not very good at just talking: "Let's look at some event, some historical happenings, and so forth. Some kind of intellectual substance." They didn't want that. They just wanted the kind of sensitivity: "What do you think about Farrakhan? What do you think about Spike?" Spike Lee, anti-Semitic. They didn't want to talk about Leo Frank. They didn't want to talk about Hollywood, the history of Hollywood. They didn't want to read anything. They had one book, a big book, that I asked that they read.

12-00:31:09

Wilmot:

Which one was this?

12-00:31:10

Banks:

Strangers and Neighbors. Excellent book. Anthology. Blacks, Jews, and so forth. I had all kinds of talented people. Ishmael Reed came to class. Dan Perlstein. People who've worked in this

area, and all of them were uniformly disappointed with the fact that this generation of students, in this case Jewish students—they didn't even know about Jewish history. It was pathetic, I think. But that's the way it went. They resented the idea of doing any work. They just came. A sort of a rap session. They thought it would be that. That's not—I earn too much money to do that. I'd be shortchanging students, I think. If they want to do that, do that in the dorms and at Hillel, because they have student sessions.

12-00:32:04

Wilmot:

What was the impetus for teaching this class?

12-00:32:12

Banks:

The guy asking. Well, I mean, I think it's important. Originally, it was something I was interested in—doing research on black intellectuals. The relationship between black and Jewish intellectuals was something that was fascinating at different points and so forth. I could easily convert it to a class. It's not like the topic can't be managed. And maybe, if I'd turned that into a traditional class rather than a seminar, it could have worked. But come on! "Can't we talk to each other instead of 'Read this, read this, read this?'" But again, in retrospect, maybe if I wanted to do it, then maybe that's how I should have done it.

Dan Perlstein, a friend of mine, a professor, says, "Look, black students just aren't interested in Jews. Jews are interested in blacks, but blacks aren't interested in Jews." And it makes a lot of sense, particularly in California. New York, Philly, Connecticut, there's much more of a Jewishness, coherent Jewishness and blah, blah, blah, that people can sink their teeth into and argue, debate it. But black students here don't know anything about a Jewish community. It's sort of a very diverse—they just happen to be Jews. Back East, it's much more a part of—and again these are generalizations.

12-00:33:44

Wilmot:

I think it has something to do with the fact there's segregation on the West Coast, too. There's a level at which segregation is so extreme here, that there's a level where these communities don't actually intersect. That's my thought.

12-00:34:01

Banks:

I dare say that possibly I've heard mention of—there is not a Jewish section of town in San Francisco. But there are Jewish sections of town in New York, and that's historical. Certainly the segregation part, that's true, but you just don't have the big organized Jewish presence here that you do back East. And I was from that. That was my frame of reference. I've talked to some leaders of American Jewish Congress. I've worked and taught in this area before, and these kids are just—they just happened to be Jews. There were a few there that could really get into it, but most of them were interested in just very surface kind of stuff, and that's a drag.

12-00:34:59

Wilmot:

Okay. Well listen, I have a thought question. Was there anything else you wanted to say about that class, though?

12-00:35:03

Banks:

No.

12-00:35:04

Wilmot:

I have a thought question to leave you with, which is the same one I posed to you earlier: What has teaching taught you? So let's close on that. We can save it for next time, if you want to.

12-00:35:16

Banks:

Yeah. Let's save it for next time.

12-00:35:17

Wilmot:

You said you wanted to reflect on it, and I just wanted to put it on the agenda.

12-00:35:20

Banks:

Don't you forget, and I won't forget.

12-00:35:23

Wilmot:

Okay. Great.

[End Audio File 12]

Interview 7: April 13, 2004

[Begin Audio File 13]

13-00:00:08

Wilmot:

Interview seven. Professor Bil Banks. April 13, 2004. I posed this question to you, Professor Banks, about what do you feel that you've learned from teaching, and I just wanted to revisit that as we open up this interview session. What has teaching taught you?

13-00:00:39

Banks:

Teaching has taught me the value of trying—the importance, rather, of learning as much as I can about things, if you will. I'll put some meat onto that. The classroom situation, as a matter of course, as I am speaking or talking about one thing or another, you have fifty, sixty students in the class who are hearing very different things, who are bringing very different sensibilities to the question, to the issue. Things that I may have never thought of. What this forces me to do—when people ask a question that might seem off-base, I have to dig deep and say, “Wait. Given a particular frame of reference or a lack of knowledge and so forth, this is a sensible question, and I should have thought about that.” It raises the bar higher and higher.

Now, the downside, perhaps, is that you try too hard to become all things to all people, to relate to everybody, fifty students in the class, and you can't do that. But it certainly gets me away from a kind of narrowness that many professors fall into: This is the body, this is the canon, if you will, and once I learn the canon, that's it. Students force you, if you pay attention to students, to sort of interrogate received wisdom, what you believe to be true about this issue, that issue. I think it has helped me intellectually, because I just have to work to understand how Asian women, for instance, view Don Corleone. What connections do they see, don't they see, in terms of men in their own culture? Questions like that. And that wouldn't occur to me just normally, teaching—more than any other intellectual activity—has helped me in that regard.

13-00:03:24

Wilmot:

That's very interesting. Are there any examples that are in your mind in addition to that Don Corleone example? Or are there any other actual examples that have caused you to stretch your intellectual framework?

13-00:03:37

Banks:

Sure. Just a couple of others. I had a brilliant student in my class a couple of semesters ago. She's still around. A Chicano student who's as sharp as can be. I was teaching a course on—part of the course dealt with Latino males, and a part of that, not the main thing, was the machismo concept. The value, and so forth. And why is this so important to—in Chicano culture, why is it so important? I had the stock arguments: It's oppressive, misogynist, blah, blah, blah. I was a little more nuanced, but the class was just overwhelmingly dominated by, I guess, whites. A few Asian students. And she gave this eloquent defense or qualification of machismo in a way that very few people in the class had thought of. It was a very solo kind of venture; she was on her own. I had her back, because just as a person I don't let students get picked on, but she clearly

had the courage to say, “Look, this is how it works in the culture. And given the circumstances of a peasant culture...” She talked about that, she talked about the transition of Chicanos into the city and why that ideal was still very important. She made a connection between that and the “bad nigga” idea in African American culture. It was masterful, and she was a damn sophomore! I’m looking at the class—it was one of those exciting moments when everybody got it. She wasn’t talking about neo-structuralist da, da, da, but “This works this way, this works—I’m not sure about it but—I look at this, I look at that,” and so forth.

How did that happen? What was exciting to me? Because she had taken this sort of hackneyed, feminist, machismo-oppresses-women rhetoric and I won’t say turned it around, but certainly complicated that in a way that the idea, while negative to others, might be quite serviceable within the Chicano community, and how, as a woman—I mean, she talked about the excitement she felt when her uncle—she was raised by an uncle, I guess—when they went out.

Another point that she made, in some Latino cultures—I’m not sure which ones, or all of them—your kid turns sixteen, you take him out and buy him a whore. We had read a short story about that, and the students were saying, “Oh, that’s just terrible, that’s just terrible.” And I’m asking them, “Is there any social value in that? Let’s talk about this. Rites of passage. Physicality. Maleness. Is there any advantage to this ritual?” I was going to gradually work into tough questions, but she said, “If it were my first time, I would want the person I slept with to have slept with somebody else.” Okay. Well, that just blows apart the whole romantic love—it just complicates things tremendously. And you only get—well, I imagine you get it in other places, but I get it a lot in teaching, this kind of, “Huh, huh. What about...?” I get forced to think. Academic as I am, “Is there a research base for that? Are there theory studies?” That’s an interesting dance, but the powerful questions start there.

13-00:07:52

Wilmot:

That’s very interesting. That’s one of the things that I think is—well, you mentioned another example. You said there were two examples you were also thinking of. Is there another one that you wanted to share?

13-00:08:05

Banks:

I could, but these are the ones that are very contemporary. Somebody said it years ago and I stole it, and I’ve used it often in my class. I have this story about, we were talking about values and situational ethics. How people change, values aren’t concrete, lower-class values—you know, all that values stuff. I always give this example that, again, a student put on me some time ago. It’s a long time ago and I can steal it with impunity.

13-00:08:50

Wilmot:

And you’re also, of course, citing it at this point. I mean you’re actually saying it’s not yours

Banks:

Oh, yeah. I’m kidding. I don’t need to steal. Too old. I was in Lucky’s on College Avenue and I saw a person stealing some apples and putting them in his jacket. I’m a Christian, I was raised “Thou shalt not steal.” I know that.

13-00:09:41

Wilmot:

This is you or the student speaking?

13-00:09:43

Banks:

By this time, it's me. But give him credit. So I said, "Thou shalt not steal, that's very clear. So what's my obligation?" I said, "Look, I'm kind of nervous about police departments but I did feel it necessary to go and tell the manager of the store that Nadine is stealing apples." Did I do the right thing? "Oh, God. Oh, you're a snitch."

13-00:10:24

Wilmot:

This is what your student said?

13-00:10:24

Banks:

Yeah. Then you break it down. Those are my values. Shouldn't I actualize—shouldn't I live on the basis of my values? Suppose everybody did that. Suppose I saw somebody, bringing it home, taking a stereo out of your car. What should I do? "Was the person poor?" It brings up all these kinds of things in the situation. I said, "What difference would it have made? Is it okay for poor people to steal?" "Hmm." "Were they black?" I mean, you can see how you can just escalate this to get at the real things.

13-00:11:13

Wilmot:

Did they look hungry?

13-00:11:14

Banks:

Yeah, do they look hungry? And if they look hungry, it's okay to steal? How do you "look" hungry? You get this kind of discomfort. People go where they want to with it. I don't think I changed anybody, but that's not my job. My job is to just intellectually look at the idea that everybody decides their own ethics or values. And values can be stretched. That's the whole idea we're getting at—value-stretching. A concept that, sure you shouldn't have sex before marriage, but under certain conditions—everybody agrees on the basic values and that's the way it is, but there's so many situations in which people rationalize that. That's fine. Society works like that. The ideal of marriage: husband, wife, two kids, that's everybody in America. Black, poor, white, everybody believes that, but people know they can't attain it, so they accommodate in other kinds of ways, which is perfectly cool. You go to West Oakland and ask the kids what you want your ideal to be like, the ideal versus the expected, you get the same thing you get in Piedmont. Variations about money. They don't have as much money, but husband, wife, intact family, kids, raising kids, working. That's what you hear. In spite of all the social science garbage to the contrary. There's a lot you can do with that, but all of that comes from students reflecting on their own experiences.

13-00:13:02

Wilmot:

Hmmm. That's very interesting. I wonder, in your class in which you teach about the black family, what did you and your students—this may be a very dated question—but what did you and your students make of [Daniel] Moynihan's theory about black women head of households?

13-00:13:29

Banks:

I usually discuss that—okay, two parts of your question: What do I make of it, and I guess this has something to do with what the students eventually made of it. I talk about what's meant by power in the household. What's meant by domination. "Head of household"—what does that mean? And you break it down economically. You do a little history about a big part from the Reconstruction on, how it was easier for black women to get jobs—low-paying jobs, mind you—than black men. That's just a fact. Now, to what extent do these facts get woven into or appropriated as a cultural reality, as opposed to just situational—you just do what you have to do? That's how I talk about it, but when we get up to, "What is it now?" I make it really complicated. I talk about the idea came at the time of the Black Power movement, which was heavy-duty macho: "I'm the man! You're my woman." The whole male superiority, male dominated, the leader is Martin King, Malcolm X, JJ, Eddie Cleaver—all of these were men. A few exceptions. Angela Davis, Ruby Robinson. There were people there, but the names that go down in history, sadly, are the names of men. A macho black militant nationalist movement. So, at a time when men are asserting themselves as African men, changing their names to Kwame and Toure and so forth and so on, here are these women coming up, challenging that kind of image. That created a great deal of stress in militant circles.

13-00:15:35

Wilmot:

Within those movements?

13-00:15:36

Banks:

Oh, indeed. Again, there are exceptions, but by and large they were male-dominated movements and many men, this was their time of glory and all of a sudden: "I have to share that with you. You have to speak at the rally, not me. Instead of you just holding me, looking pretty, and wearing your big African earrings, and your robe and stuff." Women were pushing: "I have some ideas. I have some thoughts about this. I can do something other than Xerox and sell bean pies or sweet potato pies, or whatever."

13-00:16:12

Wilmot:

Did you actually—I'm sorry, I'll let you finish that thought and then ask you more questions about that.

13-00:16:18

Banks:

No, go ahead.

13-00:16:22

Wilmot:

This idea of women being silent signifiers of black nationalism and black masculinity and then transitioning into being active participants with voice, thought, action within these movements, did you witness this firsthand?

13-00:16:47

Banks:

Oh, sure. Sure. I was coming of age, certainly during the time. Yeah. Around me, in militant circles, or circles of protests and so forth. That's the way it was. And Moynihan—getting back to your central other question—what was Moynihan saying? Let the males stand up. Let men stand up and speak for the family. Let the male get his voice. And here you're saying "You want a voice. You're just following Moynihan." I know that was said. Castrating. You're just one of those castrating women emasculating men. Hell, yeah. That was the game. That was a game that was played in those circles. No question about it. "Don't ask me any questions. Give me peace. Don't challenge me. I'm dealing with the man. I don't have time to deal with the man out here and you at home, sister."

13-00:17:58

Wilmot:

Hmmm.

13-00:17:59

Banks:

Now, what are you going to do as a supportive black woman? There's that kernel of truth. Men were out there on the front lines and so forth, doing crazy kind of stuff. And there was that kind of paternalistic protectionist thing. Women go inside, stay away. I never will forget. After Martin King was assassinated, I was running the streets of Washington DC, and I never will forget up at the New School for African American Thought, I was standing no more than three feet from Stokely Carmichael. A crowd was gathering, "We're going to do..." It was very interesting. He pulled out a gun and said, "Brothers, make sure your women home. Take your women and the children home and come back." It was like: women and children over here; the men are going to come out and fight this revolution, protest, or whatever the action was called. I remember that so distinctly. This idea of "Women over there. Protect her." And that's Western. That's Davy Crockett, you know? [laughs] Henry Adams.

13-00:19:44

Wilmot:

When you moved to the Bay Area, did you witness that dynamic as well?

13-00:19:49

Banks:

Even more so here. Yeah. Even more so, I would think. I thought black women back East were smarter. They had a longer black tradition, let's put it like that. They had a deeper well to drink from.

13-00:20:10

Wilmot:

Hmmm!

13-00:20:10

Banks:

[laughs] Okay, I'll clean it up as I go along. Don't slow my roll. Here, a lot of it was so steeped in Islam. The militants back '70 through '76, I dare say, were very highly influenced by the Nation of Islam, and they had a very proscribed place for women within the public movement.

13-00:20:41

Wilmot:

I'm thinking of a woman whom many have called the mother of black women in the Black Panthers, and I believe she taught at UC Berkeley for a short time. She was a poet.

13-00:20:56

Banks:

Sarah [Webster] Fabio?

13-00:20:57

Wilmot:

Yes. How did you witness her articulation of feminism? How does she articulate feminism within the Black Power movement, and what do her circles look like?

13-00:21:12

Banks:

She was on the faculty with me for at least a year, and I got to talk to her a lot. She was very—she had been messed over by men quite a bit. Maybe in her personal life, although I don't like to talk about that. But certainly in terms of her stature. The kind of fame that she didn't get, and she attributed a lot of this to less-talented men who resented the fact that she did push women to the forefront in her poetry and so forth. She was clearly a militant. Clearly an angry woman. Very, very angry, a very bitter woman.

13-00:21:54

Wilmot:

As a woman, or as a black woman?

13-00:21:57

Banks:

As a black woman.

13-00:22:00

Wilmot:

I'm trying to understand if you're articulating that as anger within Black Power, or which way.

13-00:22:10

Banks:

Probably both. She certainly was angry at white people, and she was angry at, I'd say the sexism—or what she perceived to be the lack of attention given to women, women's issues and so forth. The lack of respect—that's even a better word—given to women within the Black Power black nationalist movement. That's certainly the case. They got rid of her, I do remember that.

13-00:22:44

Wilmot:

At Berkeley?

13-00:22:45

Banks:

At Berkeley. She was in Afro-American Studies when I got here. In those first purges, she was one of the people that was not asked to come back. Everybody was part-time. And she was a published poet then. Had a daughter that went on to do some stuff in the arts. I'm not too sure. But this is centuries ago.

I had a very good friend of many years, Mari Evans, who is a poet and we worked on the same job for a year in Indianapolis in 1966, I remember it well. She was my favorite black woman poet. She combined it all. She had a delicate, I think, feminine sensibility. She was a craftsperson. She knew how to write poetry. It wasn't just the—no disrespect, but the Sonia Sanchez, Nikki Giovanni kind of stuff. She was a serious poet, and I certainly learned a lot from her. In my papers at the Bancroft Library are exchanges of letters with her about after Berkeley and where she ended up and stuff like that.

13-00:24:31

Wilmot:

While you raise this issue of people leaving, or being asked to leave Afro-American Studies program in 1970-71, early years, I just wanted to ask you were there any other notables that you recall just not being asked back, who actually constituted a loss to the faculty?

13-00:24:56

Banks:

Yeah. Notables are Ken Johnson, who was a very sweet guy. He was a professor in education. I don't think he had a joint appointment. He was really interested in black stuff, in language, black English, and stuff. He was published, and the whole business. They just essentially ran him away because he insisted on certain kind of standards and people didn't want that.

There was another guy, Robert Coleman, who was in literature, I thought was a great teacher. Was seen by many as effeminate and that was certainly a no-no in those days. He was not re-hired, and wrote angry letters. Ended up at Sonoma State, teaching at Sonoma State, and was there for many years. He may still be there, I don't really know.

13-00:25:52

Wilmot:

To what do you attribute him not being re-hired? Was that because he was perceived as being effeminate?

13-00:25:55

Banks:

He was effeminate and he was oppositional. He opposed the regime of Ron Lewis. He was very well-educated. He was an intellectual, and somehow that didn't fit in, and he was seen as a little too "like that."

I'm trying to think of some other people. Henry just moved away on his own. Henry Ramsey, who later on went to teach at Boalt [School of Law] and became a judge locally. He taught in the department for a couple of years and moved on. They wouldn't have confronted him, but he just: "Nah, I'll do something else." There were a number of other people. They weren't famous per se, but they were people of integrity who just said, "Enough is enough!" and moved on. People like J. Don Davis, I think of. There's Joe Brooks, another.

13-00:27:12

Wilmot:

You mentioned him. Is he a policy wonk in Oakland, working with Angela Glover?

13-00:27:20

Banks:

Right. Very well could be, because he was into policy stuff, yeah.

13-00:27:22

Wilmot:

He used to work at the San Francisco Foundation?

13-00:27:27

Banks:

Probably. There's a Steven Brooks too. So ferret that out. But that's his field: economics, social policy. Another guy, Joe Howard, who killed himself. Another guy, Sid Walton, who once upon a time was very prominent in militant circles.

13-00:27:52

Wilmot:

Joe Howard, did he kill himself in that era or was it later on?

13-00:27:54

Banks:

Yeah, in that era. They found him up in Tilden Park. Sid Walton is another person who had a reputation as a militant and wrote a couple of small books during his day. Didn't get along with Ron Lewis. Ended up being a school administrator in, I think, San Ramon or San Anselmo, one of these strangely white suburban school districts. I don't know how all that stuff works out.

13-00:28:36

Wilmot:

I wanted to return to this question. I hadn't intended to go down this road today, but in talking about feminism, I wanted to ask you about was there ever a way in which these kind of feminist movements that were happening, a) in the academy in transforming the canon—or maybe that was later, not the early seventies—and b) kind of sociopolitically out in the world. Did those ever come home to you in terms of your life? Did that emergent feminist consciousness come home to you?

13-00:29:21

Banks:

Yeah, I think, as a person, like everybody else—well, we have to start with who I am, and I'm from Georgia. I'm a Southern gentleman.

13-00:29:32

Wilmot:

Right. We've established that. [laughs]

13-00:29:34

Banks:

[laughs] We've established that. That's the baseline. That said, I bring a certain kind of sensibility with me—I don't think it's patronizing, but I don't run from the description. You're nice, you open doors, that kind of thing. Now. What happens when things change, women are less comfortable with my gallantry and stuff? You adjust. You adjust. You accept the validity of women wanting to be seen and treated differently. I don't think that I've ever been accused, in all my ragged history, of being anti-women, but I can't say that, just in terms of the stuff that I think is superficial—a lot of times people say, "He's from the South." You do that. You say, "Yes, ma'am." That's what I do, and it bothers some people. Friends of mine, Bill Lester just goes up the wall. He just gets furious. He's a friend, a personal friend as I speak, but when I say, "Yes, ma'am," he says, "Look man. My mother told me never to say 'Yes, ma'am.' Just say, 'Yes' and 'No.'" I understand that. But that's a different thing.

More importantly, I try to move on the political front. That is, pushing ahead with courses, bringing black women in—Barbara Christian; later {Eleanor DiAlmedia?} in sociology, a black woman from Duke—to teach courses specific to black women, black family. Daphne Muse, who was around and so forth. I brought her into the department. VèVè Clark. I think Margaret Wilkerson had done some stuff beforehand in the department as a graduate student or something. You don't talk it; you just do it. You just bring people in and give them room and hope that they kind of move in that direction. Sheila Walker, another person who was around at that time, actually planned an anthology of black women's literature. In fact, all that stuff was in my papers. Again, we were planning to do an anthology of writing of black women, but we were a little naïve thinking that anybody would read something by a man. Anyway, the project didn't pan out, but that certainly was something that—

13-00:32:45

Wilmot:

It didn't pan out? How did that happen?

13-00:32:47

Banks:

A couple of things. I think Sheila went on leave. You get this kind of distance and things putter out.

13-00:32:55

Wilmot:

Had you proceeded to the stage of actually getting an agent or a publisher?

13-00:32:57

Banks:

We'd written to some publishers, and there was interest.

13-00:33:02

Wilmot:

So they didn't express that concern about a man writing about black women?

13-00:33:06

Banks:

No, they did not express—it doesn't get done, it doesn't get said like that.

13-00:33:12

Wilmot:

Okay.

13-00:33:15

Banks:

There's no sexism in the world. [laughs]

13-00:33:16

Wilmot:

Okay. Interesting, interesting. Well, just to return to Moynihan, one of the things that was kind of interesting and a little dismaying about Moynihan's work was that he really saw that some of these assumptions about the black family were feeding into the policy realm.

13-00:34:04

Banks:

Well, I'm not sure—and again this gets into interpretation. I agree that the absence of a male, a father, in the home is a negative. Why do I think that's so? I think that two wage earners can provide more choices for children than one wage earner. Economics. I mean, it's just a matter of two incomes versus one income. Now, the problem occurs when you take that kind of economic interpretation and it gets translated into psychological stuff. What's the word that you used? Emasculation. That happens as well. It's not either/or.

If you read Richard Wright, here are all these men that just feel beset by black women, who lash out and do all kinds of crazy stuff. Frustration, frustration-aggression syndrome. That occurs too. But I think that Moynihan came along at a time when many people—extremists on the other side—wanted to say that no such problems existed; all these problems were the result of contemporary white this, this, this. And that's only part true. And of course the right-wing people were saying, “Hey look. No matter what we do, no matter what programs we have, no matter what training opportunity is there, these people are so messed up internally—the culture is such they aren't going to be able to take advantage of these.” So you get a job—but if you've never worked, there's a problem, and so forth. So the government has no role. Benign neglect. “So we just step back and let it unfold. It's not our fault.” Blaming the victim.

Moynihan recognized the history of oppression, racism, and joblessness, he understood all that, but the government didn't want to take that next step in addressing those things. Instead, it seized upon the fact of, “Well, if they're as messed up as you say, Pat, then there's very little we can do. Why have these programs and so forth?” And of course at a macro level there were other things. Were there resources and money available for stuff? Those are academic questions, but as it related to the African American community, I think that it's that half-full/half-empty, and people just jumped all over Moynihan. “Terrible black family.” Women—you got blamed for emasculating me and I got blamed for being trifling. You know, we both are dogs. That just opens up the whole Pandora's box of the whole anti-poor movement that we have certainly seen since that time.

13-00:37:28

Wilmot:

You said when we first started talking about this that at some point this meant something to your class, to your students as well. I was asking you what did this mean to your students, how did they take this? You started by saying, Well, what it means to me and then what it means to them. It was a two-part question.

13-00:37:51

Banks:

A two-part question. It's difficult going and teaching that kind of stuff because a lot of kids, a lot of African American kids in 5B, which is maybe 50-60 percent African American—freshmen, largely—they know broken homes. They've been around people who come from broken homes, or they themselves come from broken homes. They know poverty. They know this, this, this. Abandonment, that kind of stuff. How do you talk about that in mixed company? How do you—

13-00:38:29

Wilmot:

Racially mixed company?

13-00:38:30

Banks:

Class. Class as well. I have middle-class black kids who are just as bourgie as anyone—let's face it. The most obvious are Asians and whites. That's another way I can make it complicated, too, by bringing in other ethnic groups. Because I don't want people to see black people as just poverty-defined. Being poor, that's not everything. There are other groups who manage to do this, this, this, and what are the differences?

But back to the Moynihan report. The idea of black women, it's sensitive because black women still—still, in spite of what the progressives among us say—are kind of nervous with this idea of black male underachievement. They're not pleased with the rates of college attendance, academic success. Black women are steadily moving ahead of black men. How do you explain that? I mean, there are explanations for that. But again, how would Moynihan explain that were he alive? Again, class confounds much of this. I don't want to make it too analytical—I can do that at times, and I don't want to do it here—but these are the hook questions that a teacher would ask, to bring students in. How do you explain this, class? The fact that over the past seven or eight years, the trends are just like this? At Berkeley. Look at the number of freshman admits, women/men. How do you explain this? You get the usual bullshit: “Well, men are in prison.” “Please! That many? It wouldn't account for this kind of difference. I thought the not-so-bright people go to prison.” You know, you just challenge them at every step of the way. I don't believe that's the reason for that big a difference. One percent, maybe, or two percent. But not this big a gap.

13-00:41:11

Wilmot:

I mentioned Moynihan, not because he's the only voice theorizing and researching and talking about black family, but just as a good starting-off, jumping-off point. A clearly controversial, perhaps outdated, starting-off point for talking about issues of gender in the black family, economics. I didn't mean to sidetrack our whole conversation into Patrick Moynihan, but I do think it's been useful.

13-00:41:46

Banks:

Sure.

13-00:41:50

Wilmot:

Goodness. Really interesting. Let's take a minute. I'm going to stop. [tape interruption]

In our last interview you had recommended that we talk about your time with the National Center for the Humanities in the early eighties, I believe it was in. National Humanities Center at Research Triangle Park in North Carolina. That was in 1981-1982 you were in residence there. How did that opportunity come to be?

13-00:42:51

Banks:

Actually, I had spent some time that prior year in New Haven, at Yale, interviewing Skip [Henry Louis] Gates [Jr.], Charles Davis, and spending some time with John Blassingame, who's an old friend of mine. Somehow Davis mentioned it and mentioned a person here, Bill [William J.] Bouwsma, who was in the history department, who had some connections with them, and they thought I would be a reasonable candidate for a fellowship there. I applied and received a year-long fellowship to spend time there. Karen and I went in August, I think, and stayed the whole year, "in residence" as you say. Lived in Durham, the city of Durham, and it was a very interesting place.

13-00:44:05

Wilmot:

I look forward to asking about it. And Karen was your wife at that time?

13-00:44:08

Banks:

Yeah.

13-00:44:10

Wilmot:

Okay. Because I don't know, what is the meaning of that fellowship? What does it mean to have that fellowship? What do you do?

13-00:44:27

Banks:

Okay, sure. It's basically a think tank. They brought in maybe thirty people. Each person had an office. It was before the computer era, so they provided staff support, people to type for you. You had lunch every day together. And you were pretty much on your own. Some time during the course of the year you had to present your work, or part of your work, to the rest of the group. These were scholars from all across the country in the humanities, broadly defined. The director at the time was William Bennett, who later rose to glory as head of the Department of Education, drug czar, gambling czar—no, he didn't do that, but went on to greatness. So that was the context. Most of the people there were in kind of "straight" humanities areas, but I did get a chance to establish an important and lasting relationship with John Hope Franklin who was there the whole time. As it happens, we lived less than five minutes from each other. We rode to and

from work every day, had lunch every day for a year. I knew his wonderful wife, got to know her real well. Got letters speaking of me as her second son. We became very close.

13-00:46:15

Some other people, other notables were pretty much in the straight humanities. Steven Marcus. Vincent Franklin was there as well, I should certainly mention him. Another African American who was there in residence. Rayford Logan was there for a while, but he became ill and had to leave after the first month or so. Bill Chafe, who's now the vice president of Duke University, was there. And a group of people. I think that the political climate was pretty conservative. Well it was conservative, but there were a number of people there who—most of the people there were open and, quote, “tolerant.” It was a good place to get a lot of work done. Not a lot of interaction. Most of the people were into different things, but I enjoyed it. And through John Hope I got a chance to make some connections with other scholars in the area, black scholars, particularly at black colleges there. North Carolina Central, A & T [North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University]. John Hope knows everybody, and every couple of weeks about six of us would get together and have lunch. Not at the Center. We'd meet at this little shopping center, Piccadilly's, that served black food. It was really nice just to sit and listen, and hear these older guys talk about the life of a black scholar back in the fifties, and stuff like that.

13-00:48:20

Wilmot:

Who was generally at that lunch? Was it the same group or did it change?

13-00:48:22

Banks:

Same group, but every now and then somebody else would come in. It wasn't so formal.

13-00:48:28

Wilmot:

So would it be, like, Rayford Logan—

13-00:48:30

Banks:

No, not Rayford Logan. He was much too sididdy for this. This was John Hope. There was another guy, Charlie Ray. I think Blyden Jackson during the second semester was around doing that. David Bishop of North Carolina Central University. George—just guys. I emphasize “guys,” too, because they're all men. Just BS-ing about black stuff, particularly in academic intellectual life. Just doing that. That was really fun. I hadn't been around in that setting since I'd left high school, so it was kind of hip for me. I got to know Nell [Irvin] Painter, who was a professor there. She was living with David Garrow the person that did the biography of King. We entertained, hosted each other, different stuff. Thadious [M.] Davis was another person. She did the biography of Nella Larsen.

13-00:49:56

Wilmot:

What kind of things, when you had those weekly lunches, what kind of topics were people talking about?

13-00:50:04

Banks:

Racism.

13-00:50:05

Wilmot:

Hm-mmm.

13-00:50:06

Banks:

Racism. The hypocrisy of some of the scholarship that was coming out. This person was so much better than this person, and just sort of in-house gossip. I mean, it would be hard to pinpoint, but just the overratedness of white scholarship in the field. At the time white schools were recruiting blacks for these jobs, and how so-and-so wasn't worth it. Just basically barbershop. The equivalent of black intellectual barbershop, you know, where people are talking about people and ragging other people. All, I think, in good spirit.

13-00:50:59

Wilmot:

What did you learn about the climate in which they came of age as intellectuals, and the climate in which you came of age as an intellectual?

13-00:51:05

Banks:

Good question. I think it kind of indicated constraints and opportunity. I got a good sense of growing up in a time when they were very limited in terms of places they could work. Black colleges. That was the scene. You work in a black college, you're teaching four courses a day. Normally you don't have graduate students. Most of them didn't have graduate programs. So the research, the publication, the kind of intellectual rewards in the system, and so forth that I confronted at a place like Berkeley, or other people confronted at Duke or North Carolina University and so forth, that was distant. Your academic, your intellectual life, you just didn't have the time, the resources, the reward system wasn't geared towards that. So these people were teachers. They're very, very smart, but it was just very difficult for them to be productive scholars in the sense that it could happen in other places. Sabbaticals? John Hope used to tell me how he was teaching four classes and his idea of negotiating with the chair was to get him to allow him two hours before classes so he could do some research. Two hours! And here I'm looking at myself teaching two courses a semester, and you say, "Gee, how did these people do it?" But they persisted. They were smart and so forth. Here again, constraints, institutional constraints; me, opportunities.

Now, it's not as clean as that because all of them will tell you that you're a black person working at Stanford now, you still get—black students want their pound of flesh. It's not as if people don't come and say, "Hey look, would you help us with this. We're putting together this black film festival, you got any ideas?" Which whites don't normally get that. It's very narrow. If I'm in Elizabethan Literature, that's it. But I don't do that. I speak to black engineering groups. Why? Because that's what I'm supposed to do, I think. It's not a burden, but it is. This is the kind of stuff we talked about. Gossip. Who's going with who, and who drinks too much. The best places to fish, just moving along

13-00:54:09

Wilmot:

In your foreword or your preface to your book *Black Intellectuals*, you really thanked John Hope Franklin and Aurelia Franklin, his wife, and I wanted to ask you to flesh out a little bit more. You lived five minutes away from them, you had lunch with John Hope Franklin every day and drove to work with him. Can you just flesh out for me a little bit more what your interactions were like with the Franklins, the Hope Franklins?

13-00:54:40

Banks:

Well, you know, you walk into a place and see John Hope Franklin. He comes over to my carrel, he says, “Hi. I’m John Hope.” “I’m Bil Banks.” We talked for a minute about my work, and he obviously could connect with that. I was able to mention a piece that he had done, “The Dilemma of the American Scholar.” We hit it off very well because he’s very—he’s Southern. Very up South, but nevertheless Southern.

13-00:55:23

Wilmot:

What’s it mean to be “up South” versus—?

13-00:55:25

Banks:

Oklahoma.

13-00:55:26

Wilmot:

And what’s that mean in terms of your identity?

13-00:55:27

Banks:

Well, you got “down South” and “up South.” People from Tennessee, Maryland, that’s kinda—they’re smoother. Oklahoma, they’re smoother, more sophisticated. Less beaten down by the system than those of us in Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama. [laughs]

But we just hit it off. I think he really liked the idea of a—I’ll say this carefully—a culturally black person that he could connect with. We talked about all manner—like I said, we’d see each other all the time. Just somebody he could relate to. He’s such a public figure, and much of his life is very organized but he used to like the idea of loosening up—he taught me how to cook rice. I’ll never forget him for that. Just to have a couple of drinks and talk about black figures in history. People who knew Du Bois. He just has these stories and he just loved—I’m a great listener. I just listen for days. “Man, you’re lying.” We got to be close like that as friends. It was nothing—and I was going through, struggling with the marriage at the time, and I’m sure that fit in with it. Particularly with Aurelia. Like I said, we just happened to connect as people, and the rest is history.

13-00:57:29

Wilmot:

I want to backtrack a minute and just ask you, what were you working on academically when you went to the Center?

13-00:57:33

Banks:

I had all my interviews done. I'd completed all my interviews.

13-00:57:38

Wilmot:

For *Black Intellectuals*?

13-00:57:37

Banks:

Yeah, for *Black Intellectuals*. So it was a matter of putting them together.

13-00:57:40

Wilmot:

So you were working on that book in the early eighties.

13-00:57:44

Banks:

I had the interviews. I worked on it the early eighties. I came back and got drawn into administration for about four or five years, or something like that.

13-00:57:54

Wilmot:

At Berkeley?

13-00:57:54

Banks:

Yeah, I'm sorry. At Berkeley. Is that right? Yeah. That's it, because when Brooks came by—yeah, I think that's the sequence. I might be wrong by a year or two.

13-00:58:10

Wilmot:

So this work was under way, and the purpose of this fellowship was to continue to hone—

13-00:58:18

Banks:

Right.

13-00:58:20

Wilmot:

And actually to write the work? Were you seeing the time as a time to write the work?

13-00:58:27

Banks:

I started out that way, but I didn't have—I had a highly flawed design for the book, and it took me a long time for somebody to say, "No. Don't do it like this. You're not a good enough writer to deal with this stuff thematically. Why don't you reorganize it, in terms of some chronology." And that's how it ended up.

13-00:58:56

Wilmot:

Is that what you're referring to when you say in the preface that—

13-00:59:03

Banks:

I didn't say that. [laughs]

13-00:59:05

Wilmot:

No, you didn't, but in the preface you did say that "the year at the first-rate facilities of the National Center for the Humanities gave me the time to shape the book."

13-00:59:27

Banks:

Yeah.

13-00:59:28

Wilmot:

Then you said, "Dialogue with such scholars as John Hope Franklin, William Chafe, William Bennett, Mary Clark, David Garrow, Vincent Franklin, Massou Avezedah, and Nell Painter, George Reed and many others led me to discard some of my flightier notions." I'm wondering about that discarding the flightier notions. What was that?

13-00:59:48

Banks:

Basically, I had hoped to write a book just dealing with themes, drawing from different periods and so forth. That's very hard to do, and I don't write well enough to do that. Just take a theme like "childhood." So I would write about the childhood of Frederick Douglass, his developing childhood, vis-a-vis intellectual development, and switch to Henry Louis Gates, his childhood.

13-01:00:17

Wilmot:

So it was like a composite biography of black intellectuals?

13-01:00:20

Banks:

Yeah, that's a very good, clever way of putting it. But that takes a level of skill in writing that I don't have. It took a long time to—it's a drag, because you have these notions. It works in your head, but that's one place. When it comes down to putting it down, like I said, I just didn't have the right stuff. Every man has to know his limitations.

13-01:00:54

Wilmot:

So you reframed that work, that book, in terms of eras, in terms of historical eras of the black intellectual in this country.

13-01:01:08

Banks:

Right. Eras, as well meaning—there's a theme attached to an era. So there's an idea and a time. This was an idea that shaped the time. So they're not completely 1920 to 19-dah, dah, dah, dah. Not that dry.

13-01:01:26

Wilmot:

This was the era of this social movement.

13-01:01:27

Banks:

Right. The Black Power movement.

13-01:01:31

Wilmot:

And this is how it was reflected on.

13-01:01:34

Banks:

Precisely.

13-01:01:35

Wilmot:

The work of black intellectuals. Okay, let's stop for a minute and change tape and check in on time.

[End Audio File 13]

[Begin Audio File 14]

14-00:00:10

Wilmot:

Okay. At our last session, when you suggested that we move on to this time, this important year in your life, I wanted to ask you: What was important about this year for you? Why was it a pivotal year? Why did you urge me to get to it?

14-00:00:29

Banks:

Pivotal year. I was sort of merging—and maybe you had planned—the interviews themselves, which covered things that occurred before this year, for the most part. I think maybe some even covered years after this one. They were important, too. Well, let's just go back to why this year was important. Again, this was a setting that was not particularly supportive, other than a few individuals. Colin Palmer was another person.

14-00:01:01

Wilmot:

Colin Palmer?

14-00:01:01

Banks:

Right. He was a professor at University of North Carolina. He's currently at NYU now, maybe Columbia. It wasn't a particularly supportive environment. There were people studying Cicero and stuff, and it was in many ways lonely. And I'd never been in that kind of lonely situation since—well, it hadn't been that long ago, I guess, but certainly since graduate school. And I was expected to just write all day. That's all you had to do. I had no duties, no classes. You'd just go to your place and just write all day. I didn't really take to that. Many of my colleagues would

say, “What a great opportunity. Just to do nothing but write.” I couldn’t do that. I found myself drifting mentally. “Okay, I’ll write for six hours.” And then, “I’ll write for nine hours a day,” and all that kind of stuff. It began to tell me something about myself. You have to know what you can’t do and what you can do. It wasn’t as if I was not interested in the material; it was just one of those things. That taught me something important about myself and where my life would likely go from there. Things were happening in the streets and so forth, and it was terribly detached from the real world. Not me, but everybody else was. I lived in the city, had my usual cohort of friends. But it was really a mixed bag. I toyed with the idea of maybe staying and taking a job at Duke, but the thing that discouraged that—at least in my own head, apart from what alternate decisions might have been made—was that the religiosity of the place was a little heavy-handed for me. I’d never been in a place like that. And I’m Southern. I’m not anti-religion, or I’m not unfamiliar with strong religious beliefs, but I’d never seen as much of that at a place—even like Duke. I mean, you’d think that would be a pretty—and it was very sophisticated in some ways. And this isn’t everybody, but it was just—even more than racism. I understood the race part, but the constant sort of Protestant thing, praying, and God. I just didn’t want to embarrass myself and my family so I, “Well, maybe I’ll—.” I just didn’t want to have to make the kind of mistakes and—I don’t know. It just felt uncomfortable to me. Let’s leave it like that.

14-00:04:30

Wilmot:

When you say “religiosity of the place” are you speaking of the institution Duke, or are you speaking of the area?

14-00:04:37

Banks:

The culture. The area. Certainly the area. Certainly the town. Certainly those. Duke less so, but still it was more than I was accustomed to. But I could have adjusted to that. But see, I live in the total environment, and it was kind of odd.

14-00:05:07

Wilmot:

When you first started speaking about this experience you said it was an interesting and strange place. I may be using the wrong words. Is that what you were referring to? Was there more to the cultural encounter in this culture and this area that you want to speak about?

14-00:05:24

Banks:

Those are the things that stand out. I did make some connections there that helped later on. Bill Bennett thought a lot of me. I’m sure through him I was able to get a grant to do a program here at Berkeley, The Individual In Society, where we studied Dos Passos. I’m sure that he had something to do with that. He named me to serve on this famous panel “To Reclaim a Legacy: Review of Humanities in Colleges and Universities.” I was a member of that panel. I ended up being a dissenting voice, but that’s life.

14-00:06:11

Wilmot:

I’m going to have to ask you about that more later. So when you talk about this time as a very important time for you, was it—this is what I’m hearing and I want to make sure I understand

you correctly. One, is that you knew what you couldn't do and what you couldn't do as an academic and an intellectual. Second, I'm hearing you talk about the kinds of personal connections and network that you developed with other black scholars.

14-00:06:39

Banks:

Hm-mmm. Yeah.

14-00:06:41

Wilmot:

Is that right?

14-00:06:42

Banks:

Southern black scholars. Some Southern black scholars, yeah. And white scholars too, yeah. That's true.

14-00:06:48

Wilmot:

I just don't want to—I'm not trying to put words in your mouth, but I'm also trying to really get what was the meat of what was important about this time for you.

14-00:07:02

Banks:

That's accurate enough. I won't try to improve on what you said.

14-00:07:09

Wilmot:

Okay. Well, I think we should close.

14-00:07:16

Banks:

Fine.

14-00:07:17

Wilmot:

And then start with the next time, when we'll really talk about your work. Your first book, *Black Intellectuals*.

14-00:07:28

Banks:

Right. Good deal.

[End Audio File 14]

Interview 8: April 20, 2004

[Begin Audio File 15

15-00:00:17

Wilmot:

Professor Bil Banks. Interview number 8, April 20, 2004. I wanted to start off by asking you about your book, *Black Intellectuals*, which you published in 1996. What was the central problematic, what was the essential theme that you were exploring?

15-00:00:59

Banks:

I guess I would start with the question: Is there a tension in American society—starting with America, or the United States—between being black and intellectual, given the social history of black Americans, the cultural history and so forth, and the more conceptual frames of what it means to be an intellectual? That’s where it starts. What’s special or distinctive or unique about being black and intellectual in American society? That’s where it begins. It began that way, to a large extent, through me. Sort of biographical. My own history of some involvement in social movements, activism, and so forth, and some aspirations—maybe pretenses—of intellectuality. How do you sort that out? How have other people sorted that out at different times, different places, different conditions. As you can see it sort of bubbled. It bubbled for me.

15-00:02:25

Wilmot:

Did you struggle with the definition of “intellectual?”

15-00:02:30

Banks:

That was the most difficult—well, a very difficult part of it. I had my personal aversions to something that was grounded in, quote, “academic” work. It’s ridiculous to think that only college graduates or PhD’s and scholars could be intellectuals. Yet, I had difficulty in accepting some of the social science definition: anybody that finished college was an intellectual. So that was a big part of the problems. Particularly, looking at African Americans, when black people couldn’t go to school for years and years and years. You take a person like Frederick Douglass, who had very little, quote, “formal” training, but a great mind at work. But to complicate it further, literacy itself. Can you be an intellectual without writing? These were issues that you have to grapple with and resolve for yourself. Not for everybody, because people, when it was done, people disagreed with my conclusions, and that’s fair game, but you have to operationalize: This is what I’m talking about. As long as you’re consistent within that, people can throw rocks at you, and that’s all right. I don’t quarrel with that, but at least you tell your story. If they want to come up with another definition or a set of critiques of that and posit something else, that’s fine too.

15-00:04:08

Wilmot:

Did you end up arriving at a definition of “public thinker?”

15-00:04:16

Banks:

That expression came up a little later. “Public thinker.” I didn’t use that word. I think that black people—that the word, around that time, three or four years ago, “the public intellectual”—

“thinker” maybe. But I’ve argued in talks and some short papers that I’ve given, that black scholars, black intellectuals, were perhaps at the forefront of what we now think about as public intellectuals. Because, unlike white intellectuals, they could not come to rest in universities and ivory towers. People like E. Franklin Frazier, Du Bois, Langston Hughes, or Hurston were dealing with a public that was not an ivory tower public. They couldn’t get published in the rarified journals, books, and so forth, so they had to ground their thinking in the magazines, periodicals, crisis, opportunity, the things that were available to them. *Pittsburgh Courier*, the black press, and so forth. These were organs of the people, and they had to write for that public, not for the English department colleagues at University of California, or Harvard and so forth. They couldn’t work in those places. Theirs was not an erudite intellectualism—and I think that’s all to the good.

People come along later, like Russell Jacoby, talking about the white “public intellectuals” of the twenties and thirties—Thorstein Veblen, C. Wright Mills—who were concerned about big problems. Edmund Wilson and so forth. But they were not the kind of ivory-tower people you see today, who get tenure by playing their parts in the whole process of academization of intellect. How do you become an intellectual? You go to graduate school, you get a PhD from a leading institution, and you write a certain way, you serve a certain master, the canons of your scholarship, the methodology. That’s what you do, you impress others with that, and you become part of the academy—I’ve seen the enemy and he is us. It’s a kind of reproduction, just a kind of status, cultural reproduction. We reproduce ourselves. I want my students to think like me or at least go through the process. That’s what has happened. I think it’s sad but that’s the way it goes in the university.

15-00:07:16

Wilmot:

At our last session, we were talking about the work that you did in 1981, when you were at Duke at the—

15-00:07:33

Banks:

National Humanities Center.

15-00:07:35

Wilmot:

Sorry, National Humanities Center. I wanted to ask you, at what point do you remember starting to conceptualize this book?

15-00:07:47

Banks:

In terms of how it came out, shortly after that. Shortly after that. I did a draft and I was unhappy with it, because I tried at that point to organize it thematically. I just didn’t have the writing skills to bring that off. I think I might have had it in my head, but it’s a big difference between late at night thinking about how something should go and sitting down and putting it all together, integrating all this information that I had. All this reading.

At the center, I got a chance to read and talk to people about intellectuals in other countries. That was very good for me. A sort of cross-cultural perspective, looking at Peter the Great,

Mannheim, Foucault. Just a number of people, what they had written about intellectuals. And the critiques were starting to surface and bubble up, in, I guess, what later came to be called deconstruction. Not heavy-duty though. I was never smart enough to understand a great deal of that, but it certainly raised questions, and it was a matter of what's peculiar about these questions for black people, black intellectuals in America?

The other thing that helped push me along during those days was, going beyond black intellectuals, just looking at groups of intellectuals. Women, for example. To what extent do women scholars, intellectuals face similar problems? How do I respond to a woman who wants to specialize in Mark Twain? "Well, why aren't you writing about Eudora Welty? Or why aren't you writing about Flannery O'Connor? Why aren't you writing about Alice Walker? Why are you writing about another white male?" Do women have a special responsibility, a special insight into the, quote, "women's condition" and so forth. Some of these issues parallel issues faced by group intellectuals across the board.

15-00:10:04

Jewish intellectuals. That was very interesting. I got the chance to do a lot of reading and talking with people there. And to look at the trajectory of Jewish intellectuals in America at one point in the fifties, just running as fast as they could away from Jewishness. Toward universalism. Norman Mailer—I could name names, but people just didn't want any parts of anything, quote, "Jewish." They wanted to be Americans. That assimilationist impulse. Later on, it becomes very different, perhaps in reaction to the black movement. That's something I argue in the book, that a lot of the women's movement groups arose from that idea that came to be accepted that there's something special about your social experience, your social condition. There we have it.

15-00:10:59

But that was one of the things I got to do there. There weren't that many black people there that I could talk with. And that was okay. You just try to look around and see who's here: Well, there's Stanley Marcus, there's Bill Chafe, and people from other groups, ethnic backgrounds and so forth. Southerners.

15-00:11:22

Wilmot:

Oh, I see. You mean at the Center.

15-00:11:25

Banks:

At the Center, yes. Of the fellows who were there. You're with these people, maybe thirty people, the whole year. You do everything together. You eat lunch together. You have your own rooms, but you're based at the same facility. It's just like a conference center every day. You go in, 8 to 5, as long as you want to. It was a think tank, basically.

15-00:11:48

Wilmot:

So you start to think about who they were and their realms and how they operate within their realms?

15-00:11:53

Banks:

As group members, how do they think about being? Their ethnicity or their gender. Mary Hill was working in women's studies, women's history. A woman from Bucknell, and I got to talk to her about the problem she had doing research and thinking about what she eventually wanted to do, and reactions of her colleagues, and questions that she had, and her own perceived sources of bias in looking at her subject matter. You know, you sit and listen. Or I did. I sat and listened and tried to integrate that in, fit that into what I was doing. I thought that was good. I probably couldn't have done that were it not for that sort of compressed environment, where these people were around. You could see them every day. Clearly I could have done it at Berkeley, but I'm much too shy to go up and talk to somebody about somebody who's Chicano or Portuguese and just—

15-00:13:04

Wilmot:

You would not have asked those kinds of questions in this realm?

15-00:13:06

Banks:

No. I just don't have that kind of personality. The institution is sadly not geared for that kind of mix.

15-00:13:17

Wilmot:

You said the institution is not geared?

15-00:13:18

Banks:

Is not geared to this kind of interaction. I mean, there but there are no arenas to speak of. Now, I think American Cultures perhaps comes closest to that. But certainly in those days, if you were interested in these kind of things who do you, quote, "hook up" with? Who do you talk to? What settings are there? And it's my experience it doesn't exist at Berkeley. Even people you think you might agree with or like to get to know. Again, maybe it's just my personality. I don't want to excuse my basic shyness.

15-00:13:53

Wilmot:

Are you speaking specifically of approaching people and asking them about their experience as a member of a particular ethnic group and how they interpret their role at the university?

15-00:14:10

Banks:

Exactly.

15-00:14:10

Wilmot:

Or are you talking more generally about—?

15-00:14:13

Banks:

People?

15-00:14:13

Wilmot:
Yeah.

15-00:14:14

Banks:

Primarily the former. “You grew up Jewish in New York.” Larry Levine. “You grew up Jewish in New York in the fifties. What was it like, man?” Again, there’s some people that I can do that with, and I have done that with, but not in any large scale. They almost have to be friends first before I can ask them about their personal experience. I’m a gentleman.

15-00:14:44

Wilmot:

Right. Well, you had already decided to do this book before you went away to the Center for the Humanities in the early eighties. I’m trying to ask the question, how did you come to this idea. Or when did you? What was the specific moment? Were there experiences in your life at that point that brought you to—this would be the late seventies that your experiences—?

15-00:15:12

Banks:

Yeah, the experiences, the craziness of my experience at Berkeley in Black Studies in the early years. Part of my self-definition was black consciousness, black identity, however that gets described. That’s very, very important to me. But also being an intellectual had come to be important to me, too. That was part of my personal tradition as well, from my family and so forth. There were so many occasions when my idea of a commitment—I was asked to make a commitment to things that I thought were very stupid and silly. I could not, as an intellectual, commit to a course of action or a style of politics that ostensibly was black, but I knew was bogus. Or some of the actors were bogus. That whole question of: What is black? Can I define that for myself? The other side of the coin is: do you just sit in the corner and analyze? The paralysis of analysis, as they used to say. You sit and think and think. The Dostoyevsky type that just ruminates and refuses to act because he or she thinks that life is so complicated. That was a turn-off to me. At some point you have to act, and life is not all clear-cut, rational, and so forth. It’s that process, those tensions that drew me, that made the subject come alive for me back in those days.

15-00:17:04

I’d never been called a moderate or an Uncle Tom. I’d never been called that in my life. I was always, wherever the rhetorical or the cutting edge of stuff happened to be, I was always there. For the first time in my life, I had eighteen- and nineteen-year-old people, black people, criticizing me for my lack of relevance and militancy and so forth and so on. I had to look at that and ask, “What’s being said here?” I could never fall back on the age thing: “Well, you’re older.” That was bogus. So you try to understand clearly what’s being said, and come to rest with something. You want to stay consistent, as I tried to do, with being black. There were many things that blacks needed on the Berkeley campus. You try to do that, all the time doing things that you believed in, rather than just going along with the crowd.

15-00:18:40

Wilmot:

That's very interesting. How did the idea come into being of using interviews with your peers as a source material?

15-00:19:10

Banks:

At the time there were two motivations. First of all, very little attention had been given to, at that time, black intellectuals as intellectuals. There was a lot of stuff about stars and so forth, movie stars, sports heroes and all of that. I wanted to, if nothing else, highlight people who were thinking, who lived fairly active lives of the mind and so forth, to talk about their lives. Nobody ever had done anything like that before. Of course, there were biographies: Richard Wright, Zora Hurston. There were biographies out there, and that was another very good source. But nothing to me is better than sitting down and—as I got a chance to do—arguing with Janice Willis at Wesleyan about Lichtenstein, late into the night. Or to press Harold Cruse in ways the biographer never got a chance to do. Interact with people. I thought I was respectful enough, and I respected them a lot, and I could do that. I had some skills, in terms of conversation. I don't have any ego, so I could get a lot out of people.

And the other thing was the sort of sentimental notion that a lot of these people—particularly the older people—they were getting old. And if I didn't do it, who was going to make sure that the world had some record of a person like Joseph Himes, Chester Himes' brother who was blinded by Chester Himes. That experience started a whole trajectory. Ended up a PhD in sociology at Ohio State. Here was a blind guy, who goes through that back in the Fifties, and ends up a very bitter man. Bright. I mean, he was probably the most interesting person I interviewed. I took to him just like that. And talked about being blind and black and how he had changed, how he'd evolved and so forth. Benjamin Quarles, another person I interviewed about how he had to develop his interest in Afro-American scholarship stuff on the side. His advisors pushed him away from that because he was too close to the subject. To hear people talk about that in a very real way was great for me. Very great for me.

15-00:22:06

Wilmot:

How did you choose who to speak to?

15-00:22:08

Banks:

I wrote to a sample. I wrote to a lot of people I knew and said, "Who do you think are some important intellectuals that need to be heard from?" I was particularly interested in not getting all, quote, "name" intellectuals. Everybody knows the big names and so forth: William Julius Wilson, John Hope Franklin. That's cool. But what about those assistant professors, who are very, very smart. Doing great things. What about speaking to people at the beginnings of their career, rather than at the end? What do they anticipate happening to them as they move along in the scheme of things. People in black colleges. A whole different institutional environment. How do you make sense out of that, given the different institutional demands and so forth. Those are stories that I thought needed to be told, as well.

So anyway, going back to your very cogent question, I asked people to suggest individuals, and when I got a list of people together, I wrote to them and asked would they agree to an interview. I'd say that I could come to Middletown, Connecticut, and would you have time to spend a couple of hours to talk with me. I told them about the project and so forth. And before that, actually, I'd sent out a questionnaire to a lot of scholars, and I eventually published a paper about that. "Ethnicity and Intellectual Life." I looked at the role of ethnicity in their intellectual life. So I had all that data, hard data, but I'm trying to make it rich. I don't want to just report numbers. So when I got enough people to say "Yes," I just came up with a travel schedule—"Okay, I'll be here these days, and spend five days in Atlanta, I'll talk to Benny Mays—president of Morehouse for twenty-five years—I'll talk to him. I'll go to North Carolina. I'll spend time with Nell Painter, Joe Himes, Earl Thorpe, then I'll go to Connecticut and I'll go to Storrs—there's Ronald Taylor there. Wesleyan. There's some people, Clarence Walker and so forth, some people there." So that's how I did it. Again, limited funds. I didn't have the kind of big money that scholars today might have, so I had to sort of round up—it was sort of ad hoc-ish, but that's the way it goes.

15-00:24:49

Wilmot:

I want just to back up, because I realize you mentioned Joseph Himes, and I don't know very much about him. I'm wondering if you could tell me a little bit more about him and what was amazing about that interview.

15-00:25:01

Banks:

Sure. Joseph Himes was the younger brother of the writer Chester Himes. They were living in Ohio, I think, Columbus, Ohio, and in a lab experiment or something, Chester Himes did something that, at least in his mind, blinded his brother. Chester wrote about this incident in his autobiography and so forth. He has a lot of stuff about that incident. Joe talked about the guilt that his brother felt. He felt that that was a big part of his drifting into crime and a lot of underworld stuff when he was much younger. He just had this big burden about having blinded his brother. Middle-class parents who were pushing the academic route, and so forth, and how Joe Himes just plugged along. Went to Ohio State. He was a contemporary of my father. They knew each other. They had to know each other at some point.

15-00:26:17

Wilmot:

Because the world was that small.

15-00:26:17

Banks:

Yeah, the world was that small. And after he finished—he did a very good paper, "Functions of Racial Conflict," where he talked about how conflict serves a purpose in society, racial conflict serves a purpose. Very good stuff. But where could he get a job but at a black college? And blind at a black college in the nineteen-fifties. It boggles my mind to think about it. The kind of work and stuff that he had to do. But he retained a kind of intellectual commitment—he was a genuine intellectual. He didn't resort to just going through the motions of teaching and so forth. He was writing and publishing.

He stayed in contact with his brother Chester. They had this, I think, love-hate relationship that probably never did get resolved. I don't know the psychological stuff, but Joseph Himes felt in many ways overshadowed by John Hope Franklin. John Hope was a much more gregarious, outgoing kind of person. They're in the same generation. Whereas Joe was kind of low-key. Being blind, you can't drift into circles and so forth. There is that kind of thing, and I think he at some level resented John Hope. Not at a personal level. I have pictures taken with them. They're cool, they wouldn't get into any spats and so forth, but I did get the sense that Joseph Himes, there was a little resentment there, which is understandable. Baldwin, Wright, you name it. And just to hear him talk—he ended up at a white college, University of North Carolina, Greensboro. When I interviewed him, he was there in the sociology department. And he talked about how his colleagues treated him, and how he felt patronized at places in the town, and banks and so forth. He said clearly he's more radical and bitter now in the last decade of his life than he was. It was interesting to trace this evolution, how this guy, gracious as he could be, developed over time—I just thought he was delightful. I mean, I think I have problems, but then I talk to this man.

15-00:29:17

Wilmot:

Wow. That's really interesting. Very interesting. This is not a name that I'm very familiar with; that's why I asked.

15-00:29:31

Banks:

Again, this is a guy that came out of an elite university at the time. No place to go but a black college. Essentially. And that's where he ended up. Well, he didn't end up there, there was the integration thing and the civil rights movement: "Oh, we want to cherry pick, we want to get the best of the people at black colleges and bring them into places like University of North Carolina, Greensboro." J. Saunders Redding from Hampton, okay. Now he can come to George Washington. On and on and on. Sam Cook went to Duke—that was the thing. You look around at black colleges and you select the ones you think are very, very good. C. Eric Lincoln, he leaves Clark in Atlanta and goes to the University of Virginia. He understood that. He understood that full well. Ben Quarles, on the other hand, could have done that, but he chose to stay at Morgan State in Baltimore. He just thought, "Well, I'm happy here. I'm doing what I want to do, and I have to work too hard." He didn't even complain, he was so gracious: "I'll stay here. I won't get drawn into white universities." That itself was an interesting thing to talk about, given all this interest and fascination with black studies and all that kind of stuff. The desire to get a person to leave this institution to come to that institution. How does that play out?

15-00:31:14

Wilmot:

You mentioned to me that you had an interview schedule. Do you still have that?

15-00:31:19

Banks:

I'm sure. Yeah, I can—

15-00:31:20

Wilmot:

Was there a method to the—when you say "interview schedule" I hear "chronology" and then I hear also that there was groupings according to themes that you were exploring.

15-00:31:34

Banks:

Right. Now, do keep in mind—I do have it; I’m sure—I wanted to talk to this pool of thirty people about more or less the same thing. Life as a kid. Were you thought of as smart when you were a kid? Did you have that kind of self-conception? Your parents, how were they educated, how did they view your being a bright kid? I start with that. I had a series of questions, ideas—not so much questions, because you can’t go in there reading from a set list of questions. These are bright people—and that approach would slow their roll. But you had it in your head. I practiced it so you’d talk about this and you’d move to that. The school experience. “Who were the kids in the school? Were you the smartest kid in the school?” Like that.

And I did that with everybody, or I tried to. Some of them were more forthcoming than others, and I was lucky because I got to hone it with locals, people that I knew. Troy Duster was very good at helping me to hone my technique. I got him talking: “This happened, I went to DuSable, my parents were this, I had this traditional grandmother.” He didn’t fall right into that, I had to establish a rhythm, and that gave me a chance to get it down, so when I went on the road, I’d have a sheet like this and just kind of flow. At any point, if I wanted to press hard, I could do that. It was not like I was taking notes where they had to fill out something. But when I sat and looked at the transcripts, I could talk about the “smartest kid in school” complex. Or how other students felt about them as being smart. I mean, you hear this thing about the anti-achievement syndrome in black schools and so forth. We’re talking about people who went to school in the forties. Was it there then? Were you seen as different, and how did you handle that? Did you feel lonely? Ishmael Reed—I mean, he said some good stuff about being an oddball. How do you make sense out of that kind of role when you are young?

15-00:33:48

Wilmot:

When you first approached people with your project, what kind of responses did you get from people? Were they glad that this kind of thing was happening?

15-00:34:06

Banks:

Certainly the older people. It’s like you recognize that I’ve been doing this kind of stuff for a long time. A guy Thurman O’Daniels, who was—this is very important, I think—the first editor of the College Language Association *Journal*. Now, for years, this was the only place where black scholars in literature could get published, the *CLA Journal*. And he did that with no money—the budget, you can imagine, just pennies. At one black college or another, I think Virginia State and Fort Valley State and so forth. But just the idea that, “Gee, I didn’t know you knew about the journal.” I’m saying, “What do you mean?” All that stuff, the people who are writing in English as it was called then. That’s where they published black stuff. And how he talked about fighting about whether “Black” should be in the title. No, it’s the College Language Association. It was the black counterpart to the MLA [Modern Language Association]. You’ve got the MLA and you’ve got the CLA—College Language Association and Modern Language Association. This is interesting stuff. And how there were these battles on the board about whether to include material about Chaucer, or should it be particular to scholarship in black stuff. That’s good stuff. I mean, I just think those are important issues

15-00:35:48

Wilmot:

And these are all archived at the John Hope Franklin Center at Duke University, is that correct?

15-00:35:54

Banks:

Yes. Not at Bancroft.

15-00:35:56

Wilmot:

Can you tell me a little bit about that?

15-00:36:00

Banks:

I have all the tapes, the audiotapes, and I initially came to Bancroft Library and said, “Look, my name is Bil Banks and I’ve done this book, and I still have the tapes and so forth, and would Bancroft have any interest in archiving the tapes?” I talked to someone, a man; I don’t remember a name, actually. And I didn’t get the sense that he was familiar with the subject, and certainly not with me, and when I talked about it, I just—you know, I’m not a bubbly kind of person. I was very disappointed that he didn’t seem to get the significance of it. I went so far as to drop names of some of the people that I’d talked to. I said, “Sure, you might not know Joseph Himes, but there’s John Hope Franklin, there’s Henry Louis Gates, there’s Harold Cruse and there’s Gwendolyn Brooks.” But, like I said, I was just annoyed at the fact that they weren’t interested. And this is my home institution. I’d been here for twenty years. Maybe not twenty, but I’d been here for some time. Well, maybe—

15-00:37:30

Wilmot:

Twenty years.

15-00:37:29

Banks:

Yeah, maybe twenty years at that point. Again, forget about Bil Banks, but—

15-00:37:34

Wilmot:

Twenty-five years.

15-00:37:35

Banks:

—here’s stuff of these people talking. And what are we talking about? We’re just talking about having them available there, cataloging them, and doing whatever research libraries do with material.

15-00:37:44

Wilmot:

So there was no interest from the Bancroft Library in taking on the interviews, in archiving the interviews?

15-00:37:53

Banks:

Right, no interest in just taking them from me and doing whatever made sense. I had some ideas about what should be done, but to me, having gathered the material, it seemed important to make it available for scholars. Somebody's doing a paper on Henry Louis Gates, there's stuff in our interview that I know has not appeared anywhere else. I mean, it's happening now that I put the material in another institution. But, you know, that's the way it goes. I'm a big boy.

15-00:38:29

Wilmot:

That's really unfortunate, because those interviews were so valuable. It's really kind of sad to hear that there was no one at the Bancroft who knew their value. Are the interviews that are now archived at Duke University on-line?

15-00:38:53

Banks:

I'm not sure of the actual status. There are transcripts there, because they gave me the money to transcribe. They were all audios initially, but they gave me the money to—

15-00:39:03

Wilmot:

Duke gave you the money to do that in preparation for archiving?

15-00:39:05

Banks:

For archiving them, yeah. They gave me the money. I had a person here transcribe them. I did editing, and sent them there. All of them aren't there. I still have some, but the bulk of them are at Duke.

15-00:39:25

Wilmot:

Did you keep the audio tapes?

15-00:39:27

Banks:

Yeah. I have them here. I have them, yeah. I don't give them up. I'm not stupid. They're copies. We did all that.

15-00:39:39

Wilmot:

Okay. Hmm. Were there certain interviews that really resonated for you in terms of your own experience? Were there people that you talked to whose experience was very familiar or somehow resonated for you, and vice versa?

15-00:40:12

Banks:

Let's see. A couple. A woman, Janice Willis, who was in the philosophy department at Wesleyan. Grew up in Alabama. Working-class family. Bright kid. Embarrassed to some extent. Had to sort of walk that middle-of-the-road thing. Being a very bright kid and wanting to be regular. I went through that myself. She was younger, too, than her classmates, as I had been. She went along through college, and eventually got a PhD at Cornell. There was this dramatic

part of the interview where she talked about when the black students—and this is part of lore, long before your time—took over a building, Strait Hall, with guns on the college campus. She talked about her feeling about guns.

So here's a mild-mannered philosophy major from Alabama, studying Wittgenstein at Cornell, having to sort of integrate in her head the fact of these militant black students coming out of a building, taking over an administration building, coming out with guns. Of course, the guns were unloaded. It was all drama. But, I mean, it wasn't drama at the time. The visuals tell it all. Later on, the cynics all said, "Oh, they weren't loaded." Yeah. Okay. That was one of those sparky kind of things, because I remember settings like that where I was very close to craziness, and wondering how to step back. If I should step back. And if I did step back—I mean, all of these things, I will always force myself to be reflective about. I've always felt I have to reflect on myself in situations. That was one of the highs, and I could certainly identify with that.

And Harold Cruse was a cynic, and there's perhaps that side of me, and we'd talk along into the night over extremely cheap bourbon. He was embarrassed. The next night, I started bringing my own bourbon. You know, that's the way it goes. We talked about life in New York, and Paul Robeson. He had a lot of contact with Paul Robeson and the left movement in Harlem in the forties and fifties. And his take on the contemporary black movement, black studies and all that kind of stuff. He was at Bowdoin College. He was in Maine at the time. It's like sixty-five degrees below zero—I'm exaggerating, but as cold as hell, and we were sitting up late at night, interviewing and so forth. Have a drink, fine. That was good, and he had a kind of very independent streak about him in assessing people. He was very self-critical a lot of times. I liked him.

15-00:44:02

Those were the highlights. I mean, I probably should think about it. I'm sure there were others, but I'm just not—they're not coming up.

15-00:44:07

Wilmot:

There's certainly time to think about it. Were there people for whom it was striking to you that their lives were so different? Or their experiences or perspectives were so different?

15-00:44:32

Banks:

Oh yeah. Let's talk about someone who was very different. Al Raboteau, who was at Berkeley for a long time and eventually left Berkeley and went to Princeton, was dean of the graduate school there for a while. Al's background was very different. He started off as a priest in training, ended up at Marquette University. Very upright, Catholic family from New Orleans, or New Orleans background and so forth, who did everything the right way. There were no pimples. I mean, obviously—he participated in civil rights movements on campus: Whatever the issues were at Marquette, he'd support the just cause. But in a very mild-mannered, responsible way. He did everything right, and I was impressed with that. For him. I just thought, "Wow! This guy's done everything right."

15-00:45:47

Wilmot:

His sense of responsibility or his sense of—?

15-00:45:50

Banks:

Propriety.

15-00:45:51

Wilmot:

Propriety. Interesting.

15-00:45:57

Banks:

That was quite different. Skip Gates and I had a lot in common. Mind you, this was long before—what’s that big word?

15-00:46:09

Wilmot:

Public persona?

15-00:46:10

Banks:

Yeah, long before that. He could talk freely about Yale in the days, about getting high, and what this meant or what that meant, in ways that he couldn’t talk about now. He has a broader public now, which is cool. That’s life. But he talked candidly about his experiences coming to Yale and just wondering whether or not he was really black and how he tried to resolve that through reading. Like he said, “I read books. All you had to do was tell me, ‘Read Ellison.’” And he’d go out and read it. This kind of tremendously intellectual approach to these issues of identity and his role and ideas, aesthetics and so forth. He talked about his confrontation with Amiri Baraka in New Haven, which was really kind of hip. Part of that’s in the book, where he went to one of these rallies and had to deal with this kind of extreme black nationalist thought. He thought that’s what he was: “I’m black. I’m black. I’m black.” And he went, “Man, is that black? How do I work that out?” That was interesting, that’s a path I had traveled. And that was cool.

15-00:47:41

I was very different from Nell Painter too. I thought that I was very different from her. She had a certain self-consciousness about herself as a thinker and so forth. She took herself in a public way very seriously, and I didn’t. I never have. A little straight for me. At that time. I mean, we’re friends. We’ve since got to be pretty good friends. Then again it’s just a matter of how people react to interviews. Some people are just: “Here it is.” Others are: Very scripted. Who am I to say?

15-00:48:29

Wilmot:

What did you learn about yourself as an interviewer?

15-00:48:32

Banks:

I learned that I’m good. I like to listen. I hear pretty good. I don’t bring a lot of baggage, but I don’t bring a lot of—I fight easily in interviews. I mean, I can say: “Wait a minute! C’mon!”

And I do it in ways that, again, fit within a certain cultural framework. It might not work in that, but you know, that's part of interviewing. You have to know who you're talking to. And you have to say, "C'mon! What..." This happened several times with Skip. "That's bullshit, man."

15-00:49:22

Wilmot:

What did you tell him was bullshit?

15-00:49:23

Banks:

Oh, there was several times in the course of an interview, you say this. I can't remember specifically, but it was just that, "Give me the real deal. Tell me what you're really thinking." And he responded in kind. There wasn't any kind of, "How dare you!" Because at that point we had the rapport. When it's going good, you know it's going good and you can kind of take liberties that—if you'd never met him before or you'd come in there like that, but that was not the case. Again, one of the funniest things. This woman Janice Willis, the same deal. I was talking to her at night. I think we might have met twice, but one of them was at night, and she said, "Would you like some water?" "Okay." "That's all I have. I don't have anything in the refrigerator but water and books." That just blew my mind, that here is a person so—however you'd describe that—that talked about themselves as having books in the refrigerator. That space.

15-00:50:51

Wilmot:

Sustenance, food.

15-00:50:55

Banks:

I didn't make that—that's a little deep for me, that connection, but to me it's just like the person is so immersed in the world of the mind that that's what you do with space—you put books in it. Cool.

15-00:51:14

Wilmot:

There was one question that I let drop, which was around people's response, and you mentioned the older people had a response that went, "Yes, this is my life and my history. It's high time someone paid attention to it." That's what transpired here specifically in response to your inquiry. My question was: What about people in your age group, what about people in your peer group or who are slightly older, how did they respond to the inquiry? Did they see it as a valid and relevant inquiry?

15-00:51:52

Banks:

Oh, yeah. I think they all did.

15-00:51:57

Wilmot:

They got it.

15-00:51:57

Banks:

It's a heady kind of thing in those days to become identified as intellectual. It's like, "Hi, you're a black intellectual and I'd like to talk to you." That's a heck of an entrée. "Well, of course I am. So I have to talk to you." You get, you know, you get the political stuff: "What do you mean by intellectual? I'm just an ordinary dude." You have to work through that, because these are political times when you're aware of the idea of being separate from the community, the relationship to the community, and all the responsibilities of the community. All these things were sort of trendy questions: "What is your responsibility to the black community?" I didn't say anything as stupid as that, but I just tried to talk about that idea in different ways and people got nervous and, "Well, I give to the NAACP." Or, "I can't be bothered with all of that."

At Wesleyan, Clarence Walker talked about how he can't be concerned with every "Runetta" and "Sally Mae" that comes to him for advice. He has to deal with his work. That's a point of view. That's a valid point of view and it needed to be said. There are people who don't accept that idea of a special responsibility for black scholars, or black professors in this case, at a university. That's part of the story.

15-00:53:24

I didn't get anybody—there were a couple of people who—I'm trying to think of anybody who said absolutely No. I can't remember anybody saying—a couple of people said, "Well, gee, I don't see myself as an intellectual and I don't want to do it." And I'd push a little bit. But bottom line, I didn't want to push too hard. It was one of those things. And you had to worry about the difficulties in doing it. A lot of people were, again, self-absorbed. We talk for a living. That's what we do. So you push a button and you get this standard script. And I got that from a number of people, that this perfect person, and this and that and so forth. Well, they're around now, but yeah, I talked to a person at a California university.

15-00:54:32

Wilmot:

Why don't you keep it vague and non-specific?

15-00:54:34

Banks:

California. We were talking about Jews as intellectuals and blacks and Jews and so forth. Had a kind of interesting discussion, not penetrating, it didn't go—but anyway, long story short, later on when I selected a passage to put in the book he, "No, I've changed my mind. I don't think like that any more."

15-00:55:13

Wilmot:

Who was it? Sorry.

15-00:55:14

Banks:

Anyway. He's now a tenured professor in the UC system and he doesn't think like that any more. So, I could tell—I'm not sure he felt like that then, but nevertheless so what? All of us change and who am I to scrutinize people. I was sort of annoyed because—I made it very clear: "This is what you said." I have tapes, so I'm like Bob Woodward. It's not like it's just my recollection.

“Here it is. You want to run it, you want to play it?” I didn’t get confrontational. I think I just excised the whole thing. Look, I’m not going to accept that kind of censorship. But, you know, people have careers, and maybe didn’t want to become associated with certain ideas that they might have had ten years ago.

15-00:56:15

Wilmot:

That’s interesting. That brings up this whole other question of what was that process like, that process of okaying the excerpts for the book? Was there more than one instance of someone pulling out of the book?

15-00:56:27

Banks:

No, not pulling out. There was a section in my interview with—well, an eminent scholar at Harvard, head of African American Studies at Harvard now—where he talked about his reflections coming back from Paris. He was a reporter in Paris at the time. This was, of course, Henry Gates. He was talking about the power of an idea, of the intellectual in social movements, and we were talking about Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran, the whole Iranian revolution and so forth. And he said, “You know, I was fascinated by that. Here is a guy that conquered this giant, conquered a country through the force of an idea.” And he said something to the effect—I’m paraphrasing this—“I thought Khomeini was a pig, but nevertheless he has done this.” Now, around that time, or shortly thereafter, when I was putting stuff together, Salman Rushdie—remember, who was accused of blasphemy, was put on a hit list by—

15-00:57:40

Wilmot:

Ayatollah Khomeini.

15-00:57:40

Banks:

Right. And I remember writing Skip with the excerpt: “Are you sure you want to say this?” Because it was a safety thing. It was very real. I didn’t want him to—he was being down-to-earth, and I know what he meant by “pig” but pig with Islam, that has a different connotation. By this time, Gates was much bigger public figure than he had been. Again, I said, “Okay, last chance.” Finally, he gave me four numbers where I could reach him on this particular day between eight and nine, ten and twelve, and so forth. So, okay, I found him and explained the situation. He said, “Hey, thanks a lot.” I didn’t have any problems with that, but there was another excision or change that I had felt somewhat guilty about over the years. When he was talking about deciding to be an intellectual and coming to Yale, he said he read Du Bois and he figured he was smarter than Du Bois, so he might as well do this. I allowed him to make a slight change, so he was not saying he was smarter than, but “as smart as; I wanted to be like him.” Something that didn’t suggest that he thought he was smarter than. I knew at that point in his public life, it wouldn’t do to have him project that kind of arrogance. In a technical sense, there has to be somebody in the world at some point who is smarter than, but for him to say, “Well, I was smarter than Du Bois” Should I have allowed that slight change? I’ve had reservations about that. Ethical and moral, whatever.

15-00:59:58

Wilmot:

About excising that?

15-01:00:00

Banks:

Allowing that, rather than printing it as it was actually said. To allow him to modify that to say he was “as smart” as—I’m not sure how it ended up exactly.

15-01:00:22

Wilmot:

It’s very different. Like laying claim to a tradition, an intellectual tradition, it’s quite different to do that versus just saying, “I’m smarter than he is.”

15-01:00:33

Banks:

Yeah, it was a personal—

15-01:00:35

Wilmot:

That’s quite different. And then you have this whole process in the course of putting together your book, of determining what part of what you’ve learned actually illuminates the story that you’re telling.

15-01:00:55

Banks:

I could argue the point. It did illuminate it. If I say I’m smarter than, that illuminates something. My self-perception. You know, that’s not like a throwaway line. [laughs] I mean, as I see the world.

15-01:01:10

Wilmot:

That’s very funny. That’s very humorous. That’s interesting. Let’s stop and take a break and then I’ll come back and ask you a question of what did this work teach you about yourself and how you located yourself in intellectual tradition.

[End Audio File 15]

[Begin Audio File 16]

16-00:00:37

Wilmot:

In doing this research and writing this book, *Black Intellectuals*, did it help you kind of locate yourself, help you think about what your role was?

16-00:00:53

Banks:

It helped me, it sort of validated the tension that I experienced, knowing that other people had experienced something like that. That I was not particularly odd or unique or original. There were other people who agonized over the same things that I’d agonized over. And in some ways that’s personally reassuring. You say, “Ah, this has happened before.” And the interesting part

was to see how the ways they resolved it were grounded in the social realities of the time. The options that were available to them, as opposed to the options that were available to me. I tried to stay out of that. I was more reflective after the book was written. After I was done with it, I could sit back and look at it like that. But I don't like to do that as I go along, because it tends to shape too much of what I'm doing. Being narcissistic. "This happened to you? Didn't you feel this?" You know, "Hey, you tell your story. Later on, if it rings a bell, that's my icing on the cake. But let me not guide you into my little paradigm or a perceived paradigm."

16-00:02:29

Wilmot:

And then that would be my other question, which is: What kind of hypotheses did you start off with, and then at the end of your work, how was that different from your initial hypothesis?

16-00:02:41

Banks:

I started off assuming that the fact of race in American society has been a powerful impact on the intellectual trajectory of black Americans. Well, black intellectuals, let's say. And I ended up drifting to a sense that it was affecting the lives of black Americans in a less salient way than was the case even when I was growing up. At a surface level—this is complicated, because people said things to me that they would not say publicly, and I think they said it because they had a certain rapport with me. They expressed a certain bitterness and concern about race and racism and so forth, or anger, that is not a part of their public persona. So there's this kind of underground thing. But these same people talk in high-minded rhetoric about "People are people, and dah, dah, dah, dah, and we're beyond that," and so forth. That was a particular concern. That, rather than the Richard Wright kind of in-your-face "Boom, this is wrong," there was this—and how do you interpret that? Is this a desire to speak the language of the realm to talk about these things in high-sounding ways, or to universalize issues and so forth? Is that genuine or is that just entrée into the intellectual community?

16-00:04:46

It's unsettling to many intellectual communities to go hard on race stuff. Even the language of race. I had a great conversation with a friend who's Jewish who was saying how he was saddened by the fact that people stopped saying "black," and now say "African Americans," and how he felt that just emasculated the power—the political, cultural power—black people might represent in American society. So you just become like Irish Americans.

16-00:05:26

Wilmot:

Did he use that language?

16-00:05:28

Banks:

I'm sure that was his meaning because I know him well, and I know he thinks that way. I do too, but that's what he said. He just said, "You're just another ethnic group." And the history of race in America is much deeper than the stories of assimilation, the Irish at the turn of the century, or Italian Americans, hyphenated Americans, and by seizing on "African American," it just sort of puts you in that big mush, and makes you just another *Roots* story. And that was a sentiment that I'd picked up towards the end and I'd recognize. Again, not all. It was a theme that I heard a number of times, and in talking with people since the book about it. Because you write a book,

people ask you, you speak about it, and people say that. These kind of questions. I'd just listen and that's something that I heard here.

16-00:06:32

Wilmot:

Are you saying that race had less bearing then on people's roles as intellectuals, as your timeline evolved? As you spoke to people later?

16-00:06:44

Banks:

A lot of people went out of their way to convince me they were interested in things other than race.

16-00:06:49

Wilmot:

Oh, okay. I understand.

16-00:06:51

Banks:

That's a way of saying that—I could say it some different ways, but I think that was true. It was like, it's important to be universal. I just happened—or as Skip Gates put it in a corny context—how did he put it? Is James Baldwin a black writer or a writer who happens to be black? That kind of weird proposition.

16-00:07:20

Wilmot:

Simple. I would call it a simple proposition.

16-00:07:30

Banks:

I'm only saying those are the words.

16-00:07:38

Wilmot:

Interesting.

16-00:07:34

Banks:

Let's see. What else was towards the end, when I put all this stuff together. There was this odd kind of wanting—many of them wanted to be seen as outsiders in the academy. As oppositional. But they really weren't. Their behavior, their manner, the things that they believed, it's like there's this long tradition of the black as the outsider. And that had a certain sort of cachet to it, a certain sexiness about being the outsider, the outlaw. Clint Eastwood—well, not that, but the outsider. But they weren't. They had adopted the three-piece suits, the black dresses with single strands of pearls, and it was like that. Maybe that's inevitable. I don't particularly criticize that, but there's always that—I picked up that sense that, "Well, I'm really not a part of this."

16-00:08:58

Wilmot:

Are you saying people felt like they weren't part of the academy or they were trying to profess that they weren't part of it?

16-00:09:07

Banks:

Yeah. They were trying to profess that they weren't a part of the academy. At least in my judgment in many instances, they were part and parcel of it. There were some exceptions. A very consistent person—Clay Carson at Stanford, of the Martin Luther King papers. Clay seemed to be a very consistent person. He is who he is, he's been that way a long time and he seems very comfortable doing what he's doing. He makes no apologies. He makes no pretences about being anything other than that. He can talk about black issues. He intellectually understands much in black life and stuff. Not so much the culture, but just the politics, and he understands that stuff. I was impressed with that. He could talk about growing up in Los Alamos, New Mexico, just like it was yesterday. How race worked in, or didn't. Los Angeles. Stanford. That's the way he is.

16-00:10:17

Wilmot:

Did your father read this book?

16-00:10:19

Banks:

Yeah.

16-00:10:22

Wilmot:

What was his feedback? What was his response?

16-00:10:24

Banks:

He said something about, "Well, you got it right, Sluggo." That was my nickname. We talked about pieces of it. He was pleased—I think I talked about Benjamin Mays, who was a very big figure in the South, among all black intellectuals in the South—he was president of Morehouse for like thirty years during the very difficult times—the civil rights movement—and he was a very good scholar. He did a classic book on the black church in Chicago back in the day. Morehouse has a reputation, at one point, as the Harvard of black higher education—if you were bright and black and certainly male in the South—well, obviously, male—you went to Morehouse. It had a long tradition of doctors and some lawyers. Probably more doctors and PhD's and so forth—the "Morehouse Man." That kind of image that pervaded black academic life in the forties and fifties. It changed with integration. Black kids could trickle into Harvard and Cornell and places like that. This was the guy that put it all together. He ended up as president of the board of education of Atlanta. Sort of this transitional figure that nobody knows about—well, that's not true, but he needed more exposure. He still needs more exposure. Since then, two books have been written about the guy, and one guy talked to me a lot about it, because I have an interview with him in the tapes that are at Duke. Very good stuff.

16-00:12:12

Wilmot:

And your father was impressed that you had—

16-00:12:13

Banks:

Yeah, talked to people like that. "Somebody mentioned so-and-so." He liked that part of it. We didn't disagree about very much, at least in detail. I know he read it carefully, and he likes it, but

he doesn't like to toot his horn a lot. Just like I don't toot my horn. It's just not done in the family.

16-00:12:54

Wilmot:

I want to ask you a question about how you interviewed men and women. What, if anything, did you notice about how gender impacted the way that people understood their role as black intellectuals? Where did they experience support or inclusion into the academy?

16-00:13:23

Banks:

The men, overwhelmingly, were respondents. I think I interviewed probably three or four women. Not by choice, but that's just the population—that was the population then. That's changing a lot now, just in terms of women in the college, let alone in professional ranks. The thing would be different if I did the same pooling. But you get names from people. There were women, and I can talk about some specifically, but differences in the interviews? Of course, I made a point of talking about gender: "As a smart girl, how did you . . ." The girls were the academic ones; the boys were in the streets hanging out. In talking with women, I made that an issue and people responded in different ways of that. "Papa's child." Janice—that was one big thing. Her dad would sacrifice anything for her. And that's not typical of—again, there's generalizations, but that was said. I was timid in ways that I probably wouldn't be timid now about asking personal questions, like, what's the word, marriage, companion, partners, what role did that play.

16-00:15:10

Wilmot:

Family.

16-00:15:10

Banks:

Yeah, family. Because that could get me sidetracked. I just wasn't prepared to integrate that into what I was doing. And that could be a criticism—it is a criticism. It can be. I can argue why it wouldn't be that necessary. Nobody knows what Wolfowitz's wife is like, what Condoleezza Rice's boyfriend's like, so you can write about people without doing that, but it would have been a richer narrative if I could have included that. But you have to draw the line at some point. It rarely came up. Again, maybe I was avoiding it. I know that some of the guys, I could have. Every now and then I heard guys saying, "People criticized me for dating a white girl." You get that, and people's reaction to that. But is that an intellectual problem, or is that just an identity thing for a black man? A Federal Express worker would maybe get the same kind of hassle.

16-00:16:31

Wilmot:

It seems to me that you were exploring that identity and intellectual intersection.

16-00:16:39

Banks:

But is it important? Or is that just a matter of identity—black, male identity, period? If it is, then what is the connection of that to intellectual work, intellectual placement, choices? Now, I could play with that and say, "Well, you're at Harvard. Is it easier to get a black girl?"—and I asked

these questions—“Is it difficult to get a black girlfriend at Harvard?” Or such and such a school. It was. There just weren’t that many. That is, to some extent real. I asked one woman, for instance, and she said, “All my friends are intellectuals. I just don’t get along with people who are not academics.” Now, if you say that, if you announce that, then that says something about x number of choices. At the time, this woman was living with a white guy who’s very—a Pulitzer prize-winner and so forth. That’s all right, but she defined her social community, personal community as smart people. Not blacks. Most of them were black, as it happens, but the intellectual, academic part was more important than the kind of—

16-00:18:02

Wilmot:

How did that impact on her work? And how she perceived herself as a leader or an intellectual.

16-00:18:10

Banks:

Well, she perceived herself as an American historian. A Southern historian. That’s how she pursued it. She was sensitive to issues of black graduates—it was not like she was apart from black people, but her primary group, if you will, are intellectuals. This is what she said. And that’s all right. Okay.

16-00:18:39

Wilmot:

Did you ask your female respondents about being women? What was it like to be a woman in the academy?

16-00:18:48

Banks:

I probably framed it in ways that suggested: Which was more troublesome? To the extent there were obstacles, how did race and gender mix? I’m not good at these straight-ahead questions. I tend to be silky. But I’m getting at the idea, again, of the interaction effects of race and gender and so forth. If you ask it right, people will start talking and you just follow where they want to go, rather than looking for an answer. I mean, that’s how I did it, I’m sure.

16-00:19:28

Wilmot:

What did people say? You mentioned that some people wanted to distance themselves from issues of race in their work. Did you find the same effect where there were some people who wanted to kind of distance themselves from issues of gender and their work, and wanted to just be universalists in that respect?

16-00:19:50

Banks:

I can’t remember anyone that I interviewed that said that. They asserted a certain specialness about being a woman. They pushed that. And basically they characterized {black men} in the academy as sexist, misogynist. And I think that’s true. They’re right.

16-00:20:17

Wilmot:

That happened over several responses?

16-00:20:17

Banks:

Oh, yeah. I can't imagine. Everybody more or less says that. That's not a—

16-00:20:26

Wilmot:

Men and women, or women?

16-00:20:28

Banks:

Certainly women. Men don't.

16-00:20:33

Wilmot:

Or maybe don't see it. Interesting.

16-00:20:49

Banks:

Class. That was another area that was interesting to me. How do they think of themselves in terms of class, I mean, social class? Identification with the masses. These are professors—in the main. Not all of them were professors, incidentally. There were writers. How do they think and talk about the classes? How do they see themselves as, with, or apart from, the black poor?

This was at a time when William Julius Wilson's book was talked about and so forth. *The Declining Significance of Race*. That idea that class is the real issue now. How did they think about that issue? How did they talk about it? That was one of the things that was interesting, as well as their relationships—again, these are the academics—to black students on predominantly white campuses. Did they feel the need to be particularly helpful or lenient, as some would say? Supportive? Could they fail a black student? In light of, they know this history, they know the history of disadvantage, they know the history, and the black student who comes into the class and does not perform, what do you do? More importantly, between this point and the end, what do you do? Do you do anything special? Are you doing the black community a favor by moving ahead people, rewarding people who don't perform in traditional ways like other students? These are questions that most of the black intellectuals talked about. That's a real dilemma. They had agonized over that. Again, they resolved it in different ways, but that's a perennial. And it's likely to be—well, maybe less so now, I'm not sure McWhorter worries about that but, again, things might be changing.

16-00:23:04

Wilmot:

How do they identify themselves with their class positionalities?

16-00:23:15

Banks:

They blew a kiss at their—well, some. Some of them were second-generation middle class. As I am. But others grew up poor and sort of blew a kiss at that background, but they recognized that they were doing something else now. They would go back to their home towns and maybe look up: “Well, hi, Nadine. How're you doing? Where you working at? The nail shop? Oh, that's great. That's all right.” You know, they want to identify down—I forget the language, the phrase

at the time. The brothers on the block, that was a big deal back then. But they knew that they weren't going back to that. They weren't really into that culture. It just wasn't like that.

16-00:24:08

Wilmot:

I think that issue of class gets highlighted so much in the late sixties and early seventies around black power issues on campus. Of course, you had your own experience to draw from, but I'm wondering if other people kind of weighed in on their experience. I know in the book that they did weigh in around that experience of being on campus and the kind of tensions around political—essentially, political identity.

16-00:24:44

Banks:

Political identity, political identification with the black poor, political identification with an emerging black middle class. They were often to different things. What's that phrase that the linguists use—code switch. There are times when you can talk this way, act this way, and so forth. A lot of people thought they were doing that. Sometimes they weren't, but they thought they were. I'm an academic and they thought they could represent themselves as being street around me. Knowing about this, but they really didn't know. Again, that's America. We all are mixed and torn, and black people aren't any exception in that regard.

16-00:25:40

Wilmot:

You said that many of the black women you interviewed or surveyed said that they felt that black men in the academy had not been supportive. I'm paraphrasing you, but was there any kind of further reflection on the academy, being black women in the academy? Or did they share with you in what ways they felt like they hadn't been supported, or was there any kind of further elaboration?

16-00:26:15

Banks:

There was nothing in my sample, there was nothing particularly unique. A lot of them expressed the feeling that it was easier for them than black men. They knew their departments, for instance, would rather hire a black woman than a black male, and that's understandable. I know of maybe three instances of that being the case. Another black woman, who was at Howard back in the fifties in the sciences, talked about how some famous black scientists at Howard were just terribly sexist. Back then. This was pre-feminism. We're talking about just hardcore: "You just work in the lab." That kind of stuff. That was going on. Most of them sort of conceded, well, said that they believed that black men, the representation, the persona, cultural symbolism of black men—again, apart from all this kind of stuff—was different. More comfortable talking—that's the thing. More comfortable talking to black men. Yeah, that was the word: "I know they're more comfortable talking to me." That's gendered.

16-00:27:40

Wilmot:

That's amazing.

16-00:27:42

Banks:

Is it?

16-00:27:51

Wilmot:

If you were to do an addendum for this book, or to expand it, or kind of do it again at this time, what would you do differently?

16-00:28:00

Banks:

Good question. Out of intellectual curiosity, I'd probably figure out a way to frame that question of family more. Think of some questions I could ask that could get some responses over a number of people that talk about the importance of that. Is my career furthered by just a solitary, in-the-library kind of thing? My kids? Lack of kids? On and on and on. Again, that's—and the challenge would be to maybe relate that to ideas and to—it's easy to do it occupationally. It's just like women are disadvantaged because they—or some women—have kids and all that kind of stuff. It delays their career. That's empirical. That's just a fact. That's easy. But to what extent—I mean, a very good example: I met Gerald Early recently, who's, I think, a very important African American intellectual, at Washington University. He's written a book about his daughters. Name of his daughters, incidentally. He talks about his experiences of growing up black—I mean, being a black professor having two daughters growing up in St. Louis. And his wife, who's middle class and educated and so forth. How he helps them sort out their blackness in this overwhelmingly white suburban community. He clearly is bringing to bear his sensibility about African American life and culture in thinking about his class position, and race position within that framework. And there are others that touch upon that. I've seen Gates say some things about his kids, maybe. But you don't see much of that. Maybe it's an intellectual thing. Maybe intellectuals just don't see themselves as family people. I'm trying to think about people who write about, in biographies—well, a biography, of course, you have to say: I met So-and-so, I married them, and so forth. But usually there's a little thing in the foreword and then you go on to the important stuff.

16-00:30:38

Wilmot:

That strikes me as something where it's a definition of terms. How people define themselves. It sounds to me like a very subjective definition that is open to interpretation, how people want to understand themselves. And I think it's been cast a certain way and can very easily be recast.

16-00:30:58

Banks:

That would be the challenge, as I said earlier, to think of a way to talk about that in a way that sort of raises the bar, nudges it, reshapes it, as you put it. I'd want to do something like that. I probably would want to hear people say more about the other groups that have since surfaced, both within the black community, immigrant communities, West Indian immigrants, African immigrants, as well as Hispanic groups, and has that made any difference in how they think about themselves. Back then, I think, the battle lines had been drawn—there were Puerto Ricans back East, that was a viable thing, but that was it. Now, it's changed quite dramatically.

16-00:32:03

Wilmot:

You started to say the battle lines had been drawn.

16-00:32:05

Banks:

Had been drawn: it was basically blacks and whites. You read the stuff of the period, and even at Berkeley, if you know the history of the Third World strike, that it was a black movement that piggy-backed onto that. That's cool. When "Mose" roared, that's when people listened (smiling!).

16-00:32:29

Wilmot:

Would that be what you imagine would be where you would modify or expand your book at this time?

16-00:32:42

Banks:

If I were talking to people now, those are questions I would want to try to think about and raise. The key to it is getting some comparability. Not just a regional thing. California is so atypical and is in some ways Disneyland vis-a-vis these issues. I'm much more concerned about what's happening on the East Coast than in California, because blacks are just such a small part of the pie out here. I mean, there are just so few black people as compared to other places, and very little political clout compared to back then. Just symbolically, the Panthers, the strikes, all this kind of stuff was going down. But now, black California? What are talking about? There's just nothing to write about, nothing to think about. It's just old dinosaurs like me just drooling over a kind of politicization and impact politics, cultural impact that doesn't seem to exist any more. Other than—I'm sorry—Hollywood. I don't want to ignore Sam Jackson and Tupac.

16-00:33:57

Wilmot:

Yeah, that's pretty huge!

16-00:34:02

Banks:

Yeah, but there again that takes its own turn in terms of commodity. It gets you into other areas that aren't—anyway.

16-00:34:13

Wilmot:

How did your respondents make sense of this idea of being a race man or race woman?

16-00:34:20

Banks:

Most of them felt real uncomfortable with that idea.

16-00:34:24

Wilmot:

Really?

16-00:34:26

Banks:

Oh, yeah.

16-00:34:27

Wilmot:

Why?

16-00:34:28

Banks:

Because it suggested a certain narrowness or a certain exclusionary posture that most of them were not pleased with. That somehow you only had black friends, or that's all you knew. You couldn't talk about Dvorák, or you didn't read George Elliot. You don't know anything about Tolstoy. It suggested that. But you do know about Wright. You can talk about Baldwin or Langston Hughes. That kind of reaction, nervousness, the need to—

16-00:35:06

Wilmot:

Did you introduce that language in your interviews?

16-00:35:09

Banks:

Oh, yeah.

16-00:35:10

Wilmot:

Race man?

16-00:35:11

Banks:

I said, "What people outside of black writers have nudged you along?" I was sort of disappointed. A lot of people in disciplines could talk about people in their fields, but as a broad—I was shooting for an intellectual as being something more than a scholar. I make a difference.

16-00:35:35

Wilmot:

A scholar and a—?

16-00:35:36

Banks:

An intellectual, are different things in my vocabulary. Intellectual: broad questions, social, political, cultural issues. A scholar could be very, very good at linguistics or film, languages—fine. You know everything there is to know about Turkey in the sixteenth century: true scholar. But is that person an intellectual? Can that person talk about Islam, the development of Islam. The broader kind of things, that's what I personally admire.

16-00:36:15

Wilmot:

It was interesting because one of the things that I picked up from your book is this kind of idea that in some ways, in black history and in American history, there has been a conflation of the

roles of black intellectual and black leader. So when I asked that question about race man and race woman, I'm speaking more in terms of a realm of obligation and commitment, more than intellectual interests.

16-00:36:59

Banks:

A lot of people resented that. There are two things. They saw it changing. Like one person, "When I came here, there were only two blacks." Only two blacks on the campus at Storrs, University of Connecticut. You get called on to do everything. Every committee, every kind of—and what do you do? You have this moral, ethical obligation of responsibility to be a race man. You know more about these issues than anybody else, so you get pimped into being on all these committees and groups and so forth. It can hurt your career, because other people are in the library, reading, writing, and so forth. A lot of people resented that—being used, as they would say, by the institutions to sort of placate the public unrest about black people on this campus. Working in the community and tutoring and on one hand, they had a racial identity. Many of them felt that they should be doing stuff like that, but they understood that they were being used and resented that. And often argued that it was changing as more and more blacks got on campus: "I don't have to serve on committees in the English department, because I don't know anything about English. I can just do sociology." Or "I can just do psychology. Or I can just do something else." But that's the race man. It's the nature of American society.

I write about it in the first chapter or so, where if wisdom or intellectual knowledge is a resource and black people are short of resources, if there's somebody in town that can read when reading was not something a lot of black people were doing—if you could read, what does this mean? Tell me about that. You were the expert. The source of authority. And it just flows from there that the learned people, the people who got the little learning that was available, were seen as people to look up to. Often. Of course, you get the people who use that for different ways, but nevertheless something as simple as, "Should I sign this contract?" "What does this contract mean?" "Read this letter for me." "How do I order this from Sears and Roebuck?" Stuff like that, and you're important if you could do that. And you just kind of develop from there a more sophisticated sense of intellectual worth. That's all right, but that's where these things have their origin. This sensibility.

16-00:39:40

Wilmot:

And then the power dynamics that unfolded around that conception are very important.

16-00:39:46

Banks:

Exactly.

16-00:39:50

Wilmot:

I've just asked a question about your respondents, and now I want to turn that question to you, which is, do you see yourself in that tradition as a race man? If that language makes sense to you.

16-00:40:01

Banks:

Yeah, it makes great sense to me. I've never wavered.

16-00:40:05

Wilmot:

So, to you?

16-00:40:06

Banks:

I can't imagine a life that didn't involve some pondering, some particularistic concern about African Americans—black people, I would again prefer to say. That's not in the cards. I might express it in different ways, and I'm not—at least at this, in my old age—I'm not a groupie. I don't do the kind of group things that I once did, but as far as speaking and fighting and trying to stay near or on the edge—increasingly so since I've retired. I've had a lot more time to do this, and I will be a voice on stuff like this. And very self-conscious.

16-00:41:10

Wilmot:

In your father's memoir, in the last couple of pages, it was like a dedication and an afterword, and one of the things he talked about in relation to you and in relation to his own experience, the idea of being born and then earning back, as I understand it—tell me if this language sounds familiar—paying a debt with your life. Paying your debt to the people who came before you, and paying back that debt. Am I understanding that correctly?

16-00:41:51

Banks:

Yes.

16-00:41:52

Wilmot:

Do you know what I'm referring to?

16-00:41:54

Banks:

Yeah, I do. I know. That's not anything that I can ever forget. My primary value is not to, as he put it, to forget about saying thank you. If someone was helpful to me, well, then I'd go out and help somebody else. Just give something back to help other people. That's the debt. You don't owe him anything. As he puts it, sing no sad songs for me. I heard them flowery words, I heard those too, but by going out and incorporating into your life some of the values and stuff that I taught you, if it's anything as useful. That's how to pay him back. Not the superficials or the claim and all that kind of stuff. That's very fundamental. Sometimes hard, complicated, and I certainly don't—there are slips and so forth, but not because I don't know what I should be doing.

16-00:43:10

Wilmot:

Okay. Let's close for today, okay?

16-00:43:12

Banks:

Okay. Fine.

[End Audio File 16]

Interview 9: 4 May, 2004

[Begin Audio File 17]

Wilmot:

Interview 9, Professor Bil Banks. May 4, 2004. Good morning.

17-00:00:10

Banks:

Good morning.

17-00:00:14

Wilmot:

I wanted to talk to you today about some of the university posts that you've held, and the first one I wanted to ask you about was your work as the Dean of Educational Development, 1987-1989.

17-00:00:50

Banks:

Let's see. That came about faculty largely at the behest of a friend, Russ Ellis, who for a while had served as special faculty Assistant to Mac Laetsch in the Office of Undergraduate Affairs. Russ judged that I had perhaps some ability or, as is often said, "potential" in administration via my work in African American Studies, trying to help put that together. He asked me about it. He knew that I was not interested in administration for administration's sake. So he made his pitch based upon the willingness of the Vice Chancellor at the time, Mac Laetsch. He said, "Look, he will support you. He's smart, he'll let you do what you want to do. He's a good person. You don't have to worry about just pushing papers. He values creativity and energy and aggressiveness and stuff like that."

It was a very good time in my life for that. I said, "Well, what the heck." It was part-time, initially, and I was able to sort of define what it is was that I wanted to do. I've always been interested in lower-division education, freshmen, sophomores. What happens to them? I think those years are critical, particularly in a place like Berkeley. Mac was, as well, interested in lower-division education. How can the curriculum, the program, be improved for Berkeley students at the lower division. Across fields. That was my main push. Now, I did, of course, get involved naturally or by design—I'm sure some of both impulses were there—in issues facing educational achievement in black students. Actually, minority students across the board—at least, black and brown students. To be a little bit more precise, I looked at the units that had special responsibilities in that area, like the Learning Center, the Athletic Studies Center, a number of units that had as a part of their charge the improvement of the educational performance of students. And a significant percent were blacks in those days. This was pre-187 when you could do that. You could target ethnic minority students who had educational needs.

17-00:04:13

Wilmot:

Do you mean 209?

17-00:04:15

Banks:

Yes, 209. It's only '87. I should know that. So I got involved in a number of activities and had admissions as a big issue. I was a part of the debate about the Karabel Report, which took a look at admissions and predicted where the university should go and so forth. I was a part of all of that. Active in some ways. Karabel Report was done by a good friend, a person whose heart is in the right place, Jerry Karabel in sociology. He laid it all out there and it was optimistic in a way, but where he saw some optimism, I didn't see that. I just said I don't think—the consequence of this is going to be what he projected. It was however a reasonable conclusion.

17-00:05:21

Wilmot:

For those who don't know, what is the Karabel Report and what did it say?

17-00:05:24

Banks:

The Karabel Report reviewed admissions at Berkeley historically. How did people get into Berkeley in the 1920s, the thirties, the forties. It was excellent, because it just exposed the pomp and cant associated with the "Good Old Days" at Berkeley. Days when every high school principal could send somebody to Berkeley. And it was not particularly difficult to get into UCB. It examined that, and it talked about the current situation of black and brown students being disadvantaged educationally. There are reasons why the accept rate, the application rate, blah, blah, blah—I mean it was basically a good solid strong liberal assessment of admissions at Berkeley. And it got a lot of scholarly attention, but the political winds had changed by that point. This is kind of an interesting departure, because I had differences with a lot of people on campus, you know, my comrades about this. Grace Massie, Russ, and Andrew—a lot of people. In retrospect, perhaps it was a mistake. Well, let me just say it; history will judge.

One of the early criticisms of admissions policy was the fact that black students weren't performing well. Once they got into Berkeley, they were flunking out left and right. Now that's, of course, not true, but a lot of people believed that. And there was some merit to the fact that the retention rate, as they called it, was less than it should be, or was more than it should be, however that comes out. So I reasoned; "Well, if indeed we can increase the percentage of students graduating, that would put a damper on this anti-affirmative action admissions brouhaha." They were all saying, "We're letting them in, and they're flunking out." What happens if you let the people in and they do indeed graduate? So rather than the prior emphasis on admissions, admissions, admissions, letting more and more people in, I say, let me put my energy over here.

17-00:08:07

Wilmot:

Retention.

17-00:08:08

Banks:

Well, graduation. I don't like the word retention. That sounds kind of weak to me. You come to school to graduate. You don't come to school to be retained. Shoot for gold. I did that. Which meant that I tried all kinds of initiatives trying to push things along. PDPs, rejuvenation there, working with departments seeing what people are willing to do, special things. Geared at

academic success kind of model. Again, the assumption is, Look, if I can show that this kid got in—without super grades getting but through help, support, institutional changes, is doing well. I thought that would buy a lot of time. I was wrong.

The programs worked. If you look at the data over time, there was a pretty dramatic shift in the percentage of black students graduating during this period. That's a fact. But nevertheless, this idea came up against other kinds of realities. There were more and more people trying to get into Berkeley. The number of black students vis-à-vis the rest of the population declining and so forth—"Well, even if they are succeeding, let's go back to admissions." In other words, they were willing to just ignore the success of students once they got in, just to stand at the door making these judgments about grades and test scores and all that kind of stuff. That's a political judgment. There's a moral case that can be made for extending opportunity here, there, that has not been extended before or acknowledged. But, like I said, the Ward Connerlys and the people who preferred a very straight-line approach to it held sway. Hence you get 209 and that kind of legislation that just Boom! Once that gets in place, the rest is history. Nobody cares about how well these black students were doing. They want to keep the numbers down if they get in and they do well, that's fine, but they'd just as soon see thirty black students get in and do well as 150 get in and do well. They'd much rather have thirty because that gives the privileged more slots for their own kind, their own children, their own interests, and that's the name of that game.

And that's exactly how it's played out. If you look at the statistics this year, there it is. I talk to parents often of black kids who are interested in coming to Berkeley. There are reasons to come to Berkeley and there are many reasons not to come to Berkeley for an African American kid. A lot depends on the kid, and I don't discourage anybody from coming to Berkeley, but I can't say that I've encouraged many to come to Berkeley. Very serious limitations.

17-00:11:53

What's not talked about, even today, what's called the yield. Okay, the number of people admitted dropped like 29 percent, and that's the latest figure I've seen. The number of black people admitted to freshman class. But if you look at the yield of that 29 percent—these are the kids that also apply to Yale, Stanford, Princeton, Dartmouth, NYU, and so forth and so on. For many of them, Berkeley was a back-up. So the actual numbers enrolling, people who say in the SIR, statement of intent to register, is going to be even less. It's not as if you're admitted to Berkeley, therefore you're going to come. Not black students. Blacks are a national population. A lot of black students have parents that went to black colleges or come from back East, and they don't have the kind of regional closeness that occurs, say, in the Asian American community, where you have a big pool of students in San Francisco, L.A., Asian communities. Again, this is overstating it, but I don't think there's any question that black families don't have any problem: "Hey, where's your kid?" "He's going to Oberlin." "Oh, yeah." "He's going to do a Morehouse?" "Yeah." There are a lot of choices. When people have these choices they go in other directions. More so—and Chicanos the same thing. There just isn't that history. I can't imagine a Chicano student going to Vanderbilt, it's just—so, the point is the students who get into Berkeley do okay. I have a friend whose daughter was turned down at Berkeley, went to Bryn Mawr, stayed two years, transferred to Stanford and graduated magna cum laude. She laughs. That's the way it goes. Boom. That's the way it goes.

17-00:14:04

I guess the other thing is, what does this do to the quality of life of black students and so forth? I always encourage students to think about that. The university, of course, would like to have the numbers but to what extent is it willing to change institutionally or do anything to make the quality of life better for those students that do manage to make their way in? You try to get students to ask that. Many of them can't get beyond superficial issues, Well, we want a dean of black this. The university can address that kind of garbage for days. But it's a tough call. To say nothing about the other angle about admissions, the athletic area. I did some research about four years ago looking into this, and it's hard to get that data. But 20 percent of the freshmen, when I looked at it, who were black freshmen, were athletes. So that means you see five black students, one of them is an athlete. A male or a female. Let's let the truth be told, that's a very different category of student. But nobody talks about that.

17-00:15:17

Wilmot:

When you said "quality of life on campus," and you say, well, people are pursuing things which are not as relevant, what would you think of as relevant? What do you see that could be relevant for students to pursue when it comes to quality of life while they're here on campus? Black students.

17-00:15:39

Banks:

I'd like to see black students form academic social groups that address issues—academic, intellectual issues—that concern them. I don't want to be too heavy-handed about this, because I'm not a particularly ivory-tower kind of person, but in the old days there were people who—I mean, there's no reason why we can't have the kind of cultural connection and so forth as we examine the prevalence of liquor stores in East Oakland, or whatever the issue is. I'm not one to pronounce what the issues might be. Or even in national affairs. I saw some interesting things, the recent development in Haiti. There are a group of students that sponsored some seminars and so forth. That's good stuff. It draws and it connects the ethnic and the intellectual in a way that can be transforming, even to the institution. If it knows there's somebody out there—clearly, the department should do that, but it doesn't. I think students could be kind of energized by stuff like that.

17-00:17:00

Wilmot:

In terms of supporting? In terms of really—maybe another way to ask this question is: While you were dean of educational development, what were your priorities while you were in that position?

17-00:17:17

Banks:

Let me tell you about some things I did.

17-00:17:18

Wilmot:

Okay.

17-00:17:19

Banks:

That's better to me than a wish list. One of the things, we set up an exchange program with black colleges that's still in effect today. Howard, Morehouse, Fisk. A number of students each year spend a semester or year on a partner campus. That doesn't change the university, but it does give students a chance to get another perspective. And people come back with different ideas about black colleges and about their experience and so forth. That's something that was clearly done.

17-00:17:53

Set up what's called—this is more admissions; I'm trying to think directly. The Learning Center. We made a lot of changes internal to the Learning Center, how it was operating and so forth. Questioned out some of the assumptions about retention as opposed to graduation. A lot was just in-house tightening up and pushing people to be more accountable. That was done.

17-00:18:25

Wilmot:

Over the years I've heard that the Learning Center had gained a reputation. Basically, many African American students stayed away from it because they thought it was a stigma to access its services.

17-00:18:37

Banks:

Yeah.

17-00:18:38

Wilmot:

Whereas Asian American students were really using the services.

17-00:18:44

Banks:

Oh, yeah. That's one of the paradoxes. An Asian American student would go there to move from a B to an A, and a black student who's getting a D says: "I don't want to be seen over there." That's just—I mean, I look at the same thing with office hours. Like in my own classes. It distresses me to see so few black students coming by during office hours, as opposed to other hustling students, who are acculturated that way. You go to certain kind of high schools, you know—or your parents teach you: "Talk to your professor. Make sure that you're doing it well, that you can get a letter of recommendation. Talk to them, dah, dah, dah, dah dah." That's the way the game is played. I bend over backwards to see black students on campus: "Hey, how you doing?" Up to a point. I'm shy. I'm not one to: "Hey, come by and see me." I start feeling corny at that level. I do make superhuman efforts to do that, but it just hasn't been a part of the culture to date—help-seeking behavior. You can look at it, whether it's medicine, psychiatry. It's just an unfortunate Lone Ranger mentality.

17-00:20:03

Black students don't study enough in groups. That was another thing that we tried to initiate. PDP did a study—Roy Thomas and company—and found that, again, typically, Asian students studied in groups. This is math and sciences, primarily. Whereas black students study alone. Now, why is that? What are the implications of that? Educationally. Well, you have a chance of learning from a lot of different sources, being clearer. But if you're just by yourself, you reach a

hurdle, you don't know what to do. I can't figure this out. Whereas, if you're in a group context, the dialogue, the give and take, and so forth, and that's something that PDP certainly tried to change as a program. To have more collective enterprises. Where you have people sharing, feeding from each other in a way. Okay, so you can't get along with Asians, you can't get along with white people, here's some smart black people—just do your thing there and let the institution, let the faculty, let African American Studies, ideally, set up things like this so that you do get this set of academic interests coming forward.

17-00:21:24

Wilmot:

At the Learning Center, what did you do in order to kind of—you said you tightened it up. What did you do there?

17-00:21:31

Banks:

I don't want to get into the administrative—some of it involved personnel. I'd rather not.

17-00:21:39

Wilmot:

Hm-mmm. You mentioned the exchange program with HBCUs, and then you mentioned the Learning Center. Were there other things that you wanted to talk about that you did while you were dean?

17-00:21:53

Banks:

There's a couple of other things. For instance, I set up what I thought was one of the best—one of my better ideas, but it didn't really get off the ground. California needs teachers, fully qualified teachers. There's a shortage of teachers, good qualified Berkeley teachers. I set up a program, it was called the TON—Teacher Opportunity Network—whereby a student could go to Diablo Valley [College], upon entering Diablo Valley make a contract with Berkeley or—not just Berkeley; San Francisco State, Hayward—I'd contacted other state universities. So you'd finish these two years there with a GPA above B or—whatever—you're guaranteed admission to Berkeley in an academic major. That is, you're interested in coming to Berkeley, studying history. Okay, you don't get in. Okay, go to DVC, take these courses the first two years. You get a B average, you're then guaranteed admission to Berkeley as a history major. If you do well there, you're a preferred candidate when you apply to a teacher credential program. That's what people need. Lock steps. To get away from the way people fall off track. All studies have shown that in this day and age, people like to know of specific linkages. It's like an internship. You work for this company, you do this, there's a clear—I was hoping that more minority students who didn't have the money or grades to get into Berkeley would go to DVC or Laney [College], wherever, and do well. You demonstrate merit. You get into a state university—Berkeley, in this case. And you're ready to go off into a teacher credential program. There were people like Arthurlene Towner, who's dean of the school of the education, one of my former PhD students. This is something that can work. Because it's not expensive. There's no cost. It's not like a big layer of bureaucratic stuff. It's just something that's formal, that's in place, and could be done.

17-00:24:32

There are reasons why initiatives like this don't go very far. I wanted to start it out small, as sort of a model. On the other hand, you had pressures from some faculty members at Berkeley, some

black faculty members, who thought it wasn't elitist enough. They were concerned about the test scores of people who might end up applying to the college of education. They might not test as high, and issues like that. So, you run up against this kind of attitude. That's the way it goes.

17-00:25:13

I established the Berkeley Undergraduate Journal. It features the best writing of Berkeley undergraduates. It came out, initially three times a year. It still exists. It's the top undergraduate publication, period. It publishes the writing of undergraduates. Has a board comprised of undergraduates and some of the people like Tom Malinowski who is involved as director of Human Rights Watch, and Gina Dent, a professor at UC Santa Cruz. These kids have gone on to do great things, and it still operates out of L&S now. I'm pleased about that.

17-00:26:03

I'm not very good at "I" things.

17-00:26:05

Wilmot:

Did you encounter challenges as dean, in terms of implementing your vision?

17-00:26:14

Banks:

Oh, yeah. For instance, things like—

17-00:26:19

Wilmot:

You mentioned one just now. You mentioned one, the people who were concerned about test scores. Diluting the quality of the students.

17-00:26:32

Banks:

Yeah, you get that. You get that. That's at the graduate level. But a lot of it was just people's inertia. For instance, I had an idea. Race-specific—okay, people are nervous about that. I said, "Well, I'll put my credibility on the line. I'd like to organize, personally, for lack of a better word, a Paul Robeson Society. People who are interested in African American culture in such and such a department. In political science. Not focused race. You don't have to be black, but you'd have groups of students whose interests—whose academic, intellectual interests would be on something like that." Again, Robeson, he's an example of a quintessential person who's all over the map doing a lot of things. It could be anybody. But the idea was to just organize social academic life more around the academics, as opposed to just the Wall, or Deltas, or stuff like that. And you run up against people who don't believe that it could work. I just happen to know that it can work. I've seen it work in other—smaller places. That might be a problem too. Many of the things that I've seen, looking around, work well in smaller schools, but you get into Berkeley, it's so big, and everybody is so pessimistic—"Nothing can be done!"—so they just suffer in silence. And so it goes

17-00:28:19

Wilmot:

It does seem that part of the challenge, though, would be the culture of Berkeley.

17-00:28:24

Banks:
Yeah.

17-00:28:29

Wilmot:
And not even necessarily the culture of the student body at Berkeley, but the culture of the institution.

17-00:28:33

Banks:
But the student body has no culture. It's chaos. I wish it did, but that's not the case. With some reservations, I pushed for and established the office of Afro-American Student Development. The position went to Grace Massie. Did you know Grace? Anya Booker? Okay. Basically, head of black students organizations and stuff like that. Grace was a very energetic woman. A PhD from Stanford, who was very active in working with black groups and organizations. Again, trying to improve the quality of life for black students there. I got that office established when I was over there. Probably a lot of other stuff.

17-00:29:44

Wilmot:
Had this post existed before you came to it?

17-00:29:49

Banks:
No.

17-00:29:50

Wilmot:
The Dean of Educational Development?

17-00:29:53

Banks:
No.

17-00:29:57

Wilmot:
And what was the purpose of the post from its inception?

17-00:30:04

Banks:
Well, when I came there it was Specialist Assistant, or Faculty Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor.

17-00:30:15

Wilmot:
The Dean of Educational Development?

17-00:30:14

Banks:
Yeah. Okay, let me make sure you understand. There was no such post. Okay? When I came there I was faculty assistant. But I did a few things right, and I guess they wanted to keep me, and they appreciated my interests, so they created this deanship to give me more room. That's

how it went down. The other thing I didn't mention, but I thought I was very successful, is the improvement of language instruction in GSI—GSI instruction broadly, specifically when it comes down to language. A lot of kids were getting wiped out because they couldn't understand their TA's, particularly in fields like sciences and so forth. For obvious reasons. English was a second language. What do you do about that? Do you target foreign students or international students—that's the other thing that I was very successful at, was cutting the phrase "foreign student" out of these discussions. It's "international student." All across campus. How do you do that? You had a very political graduate assembly. Very sensitive, as they should be, about racism and bigotry and targeting international grad students. But you had some undergraduates who could learn physics, but they just couldn't understand their TAs. Faculty members often have a very different priority: research. If these grad students are good researchers, to hell with the teaching part. So how do you craft a program that provides training, support, whatever kinds of resources are necessary with the goal of guaranteeing that whoever's going to end up in Chem. 1A lab is going to be able to just take a student through this, this, this, this, this. That was a very difficult balancing act—just the politics. Some thought I was just picking on international students, on Chinese students. And of course you get letters from parents whose kids aren't doing well and they believe that their kids really could do well if they just could understand the teachers. They can't go to their TAs, and they've tried this, and they've tried that, and professors don't want to, or don't really have the time to get involved in training. So we got a big pool of money and set up a training program, and fought it out, and it's in existence now. It still is operating. We hired a person from Johns Hopkins. Here again: there was nothing; now there's something. It still is there. That's bottom line. That's Georgia.

17-00:33:38

Wilmot:

You said that there was kind of a touchy situation, that people were up in arms. So how did you navigate that? I'm asking for an overview generally of when you initiate strategies, from an administrative stance, that are controversial. How do you arm your allies and disarm your enemies? What is your strategy there? Who were your allies?

17-00:34:19

Banks:

Who were my allies? A little different. A way that I start, I always say, "What do I want to get done?" That's more important than allies. Any student would say, "Their language skills should be improved." I mean, you can't find anybody who'll say, "That's not a problem." But let me think more conceptually in terms of what you asked. One, I try to decide what I think is the right way to go. It's open, but unless you know where you're going, any road will take you there. I don't just ask generally: "What do you think we ought to do about such-and-such?" I don't do that. I always have an idea about something because otherwise you just get sidetracked. I like to tackle the hardest issues first, as opposed to the easy ones first. Politics or whatever. These are the big issues. And you bring people out, and you argue forcefully—I don't pitty-pat about it, because that just wastes a lot of time. You get both sides.

You force people to write. That's one thing that I've found is an administrative skill in a political situation: write down, write a page on exactly why you think this, and so forth. What does that do? It forces you to be disciplined, to be deliberate. It takes away a lot of the bullshit that you want to say—the rhetoric. When you start to get these kinds of things, then you kind of get

together and maybe there's a program some place else that tends to embody this. You want to try to put it in a way so that it's not "I don't win" or "You win." "Here's something that maybe has something in it for both of us." Again, this is sort of strategic. Beyond that, you think on your feet. Don't get ego-involved, that's the other thing, too. I have no ego when it comes to dialogue like that. Faculty: "flattery". Faculty members love to be flattered. I find myself belching sometimes at how easy it is to get faculty members to do things if you flatter them. Even simple stuff like buying them lunch. It's amazing how these people making millions of dollars can be seduced so easily by damned lunch at the Faculty Club. But, you know, you do what you have to do.

17-00:37:56

Wilmot:

In your position as Dean of Educational Development, did you feel like you were supported by the administration?

17-00:38:05

Banks:

Totally. Totally by Mac Laetsch.

17-00:38:05

Wilmot:

Russ Ellis?

17-00:38:08

Banks:

Russ moved on, but Mac was Vice Chancellor of undergraduate affairs and later ended up as Vice Chancellor for Development. I think he was an excellent person to work for. We could fight. We had disagreements. He was smart and secure, and that was very important for me to work with somebody who understands. Every challenge isn't seen as some loyalty thing. He's from Indiana, a preacher's son. Diverse family, married to V. S. Naipaul's cousin. Rich kind of family. But he was smart enough to trust me and to back me. Things he didn't know about, I said, "Well, what do you think?" I always explained. It was never, "Don't worry about it, I'll take care of it." No. "This is why I'm doing this. This is why I'm doing that." And he came to understand and had some confidence in me, and we worked quite well together.

[narrator deleted a portion of the interview here]

17-00:50:56

Wilmot:

Okay. Well, one thing that kind of struck me is that this was kind of your first foray back into administration—as dean of educational development—since you were really involved in developing the African American Studies program. So I wanted to ask you: What was that like for you? Coming back to that, after taking a decade—because, late seventies, early eighties you stepped back from being chair of African American Studies, building the department, and wrote your book. Or substantially. And then here this is, late eighties, and you're returning to a kind of fairly intensive administrative post, which is in some ways going to be impacting your academic research.

17-00:51:47

Banks:
Sure.

17-00:51:48

Wilmot:
So I wanted to ask you, what was that like for you?

17-00:51:49

Banks:
Part of it was good, to step away—I was ready to step away from the book, the academic research, because I'd reached this impasse in terms of organization and stuff, and I was in some ways spinning wheels. This was an opportunity to do something different. And a lot of times, that's what it takes. Different people cure psychic or writing blocks in all sorts of ways. And there's a good tradition at Berkeley—a very good tradition is that people aren't deans for life. I mean, my commitment to Mac was like, "Oh, two or three years." You do that.

17-00:52:33

Wilmot:
And you did it for two years.

17-00:52:34

Banks:
More than that. I think it was maybe three. I think I came in as assistant—yeah, I'm sure it was more than two years, but maybe that first year as faculty assistant, and after that I became dean of educational development, then provost.

17-00:52:52

Wilmot:
Acting provost for a year.

17-00:52:57

Banks:
Yeah, I'm sorry. It's a blur. And you go back to the faculty thing. I never saw myself as an administrator. I do that stuff, I think, well, but that's not how I define myself. I'm like—there's this character in *The Godfather* saga, Frank, who's the consigliere, the godfather. At some point in the story, Michael Corleone—young Michael—tells him, "Well, look, you're going to have to stop being consigliere." "Wait, Mike. I've been with the family—" "You're not a wartime consigliere." You know, you're good when there's peace, when there's quiet, but it's going to take a different stage now. And I always saw myself as a wartime consigliere—I like the conflict, and if there's not conflict—why be in charge of something if there's nothing to do? Just to be running things? But building a department, fighting a battle, moving into L&S, and dealing with all this stuff. You know? I can get into that. But the peace and quiet of a department, just gets boring.

17-00:54:35

Wilmot:
So you were glad to step back into that?

17-00:54:37

Banks:

It was a chance, and I knew what I wanted to do. I saw some of the issues, plus it didn't take a lifelong commitment. It isn't like I had to leave town and get a job some other place and you're stuck there. I just could dabble.

17-00:54:56

Wilmot:

Professor Banks, you keep mentioning an assistant to the vice chancellor, and the only role that I know of is that faculty assistant for affirmative action to the vice chancellor. Is that the one? That's not on your bio-bib.

17-00:55:11

Banks:

I'd remember that. I would never take that. I would never do that.

17-00:55:15

Wilmot:

Why would you never do that?

17-00:55:17

Banks:

I'm just not interested in it. It's pointless. I think.

17-00:55:26

Wilmot:

Whoa!

17-00:55:27

Banks:

There's a category, "faculty assistant." It's sort of a loose thing, like a consultant. Basically, you're hired say half-time. You teach a course and you do that half-time. They could be faculty assistant for this, faculty assistant for that. I'm not sure that there are a lot of them, but you tend to work with a full-time administrator on a special project or a special area that you're interested in. That's what I did. That's what Russ [Ellis] was doing, and I replaced Russ as that.

17-00:56:02

Wilmot:

Okay. I didn't understand. I didn't know the title.

17-00:56:06

Banks:

Yeah. It's not an official title that's in the book. This allows the dean, or whoever, to pick—it's not like you apply for it. You says, "Hey, you'd like to do this?" "Yeah." "Okay. C'mon."

17-00:56:19

Wilmot:

Okay. "Let's do something." I'm just returning one more time to this dean of educational development role. I imagine what that position would give you is kind of a unique vantage point on the support systems in place for students of color—and all students, actually. So, I wanted to ask you your perspectives on the history of—for example, in 1970 when you came there was

EOP. EOP then, under Vice Chancellor Norvel Smith, was kind of dismantled and reconfigured. Then there was the emergence of PDP. I wanted to ask you about what you saw these programs as doing. What their roles were. How relevant? How useful? How their configurations assisted them. This is a big question. I'm asking you basically for a twenty-year span.

17-00:57:22

Banks:

Okay, there was EOP. That was a broad-based program based upon economic opportunity. Mostly kids there were thought to be poor, needy, deserving. Many of them came to Berkeley under non-traditional admissions criteria.

17-00:57:41

Wilmot:

And that was active when you came in 1970?

17-00:57:43

Banks:

Oh yeah. Norvel wasn't here when I came, though.

17-00:57:46

Wilmot:

I know.

17-00:57:47

Banks:

And it was a broad-based program. Very, very broad. Too darn broad. I mean, the purpose of—it was sort of a hand-holding operation. Which maybe was needed; I don't want to be too critical or cynical about that, but people would go there for certainly financial aid. They would help people just with a whole range of things. It didn't encourage enough independence on the part of black students, for me. I remember even then—every little something: "Go to EOP, they'll take care of it for you." And I know that stuff like that is short-sighted. That stuff is not going to last. That was EOP. The academic part was not emphasized. It was more like the social and material needs of students. That was the big push in those days. There was a lot of pressure on the EOP people in African American Studies for grades: "So-and-so's having trouble. Nadine, her boyfriend left her and she has six kids, and so forth." It was just to break that. And again, maybe that's just a transition. Maybe you have to do that for a while, then you move on. Lynn Baranca, Emmett Scales, these were some of the other people who were a part of that early operation. Later, Gloria Burkhalter.

17-00:59:30

Wilmot:

And that's distinct from what you've described. That function is distinct from the function of helping people graduate.

17-00:59:39

Banks:

Obviously, it's not completely distinct from that. If you need money to stay in school—I don't want to be too rigid about that. Let me contrast it by talking about PDP. On the other hand, PDP was a program designed to get people to do well in the sciences. Very sort of research-based: let's see what works, let's try this, let's try that, and so forth and so on. So you'd get a population

of students who are pretty good students, achievers, and you try to put things in place. You create a sort of a group thing with them, and you turn them loose. You give them the academic supports. I'm sure there was maybe aid available. But that was not the purpose of PDP—to help people who were getting Ds to get As, as opposed to staying in school for seven years and graduating. A different program. It was criticized as elitist: “You’re just taking the best and working with the best students.” Obviously, there is some truth to that. I mean, they had a pretty demanding program and they had results. Smaller. Maybe thirty-five people in PDP, whereas EOP you’re talking about maybe five hundred in some form or fashion.

Maybe that’s just my personality. I’m not very good at the kind of social thing with students. Many of them think that I am. I’m a very good listener and I pay attention, but when it comes to programmatic stuff, as in I put myself in the role: “Okay, now, what can I do institutionally to help with this?” I end up, “I really don’t know.” It all comes back to the kind of academic thing. The other thing is important too, but you just have to know what you can do and what you can’t do. I can’t be—like Michele Woods. I mean, Michele can just put herself totally in the area of the social and personal well being. It would drive me nuts. But she can do that well, and she loves to chill with them. She loved it. Very, very good at that. And I respect that. But I know what I can’t do. I’ll just start stammering, and the minute you start talking about personal dilemmas—I’ll just change the subject or something.

17-00:00:00

Wilmot:

You want to take a break?

17-00:00:00

Banks:

Yeah. That’s fine.

[End Audio File 17]

[Begin Audio File 18]

Wilmot:

In this conversation, we’ve kind of identified some different areas of support for students of color. PDP, you were mentioning. In fact, I think what we did was stop in the middle of your tracing a history of these organizations, including delineating that they had different functions. That one was really almost on a sustenance level. That EOP offered a level of sustenance—food, money, financial aid, personal and social support. Whereas PDP was a very different kind of creature. It was much more about academic excellence, especially in the sciences and how that operated.

We’ve also talked a little bit today about admissions. We’ve talked about the efforts that the administration makes at the level of policy in admissions, and then at that level of helping people graduate, which is more supportive. Over your time at Berkeley, how have you watched the university, the administration go through its different regimes, Al Bowker, Heyman, and then Heyman again, and Ron Park—how have you seen the university’s stance towards diversity in the undergraduate and graduate realm, the student realm, how have you seen that proceed?

18-00:02:20

Banks:

Al Bowker as the person who was here when I came—there was genuine administration support for achieving diversity on the Berkeley campus, and UC. There was public support for that. People thought that was a good thing to do. There was a just movement and so forth and so on. People didn't know how to do it, but there was no question that there should be more black and brown faces on campus. Faculty, that's a different issue, and if you can remind to me, I'll return to that.

But let's look at the student level. I think that Al Bowker was not the most energetic person in the world—that's just not his style as a person. Just like I have my personal style, he has his. He's very low-key and laconic. But I think he can be incisive and if he decides something—if you come to him with something that makes sense, he's a statistician by training, I had to understand, "Okay, this is a man who doesn't need the rhetoric."

18-00:03:39

Wilmot:

The numbers.

18-00:03:40

Banks:

Yeah. The numbers, the type, the logic, you know, boom. That's the name of that game.

Mike Heyman, on the other hand, was a bleeding-heart liberal. Heart's in the right place, means well, deep insecurities—why, I don't know. The guy was a clerk for Earl Warren, a superstar in his field. But that's one of the things that you learn at a university—why people carry insecurities and how they carry them, it never fails to surprise me. He wanted to do all the right things, but he didn't want to take on hard issues. Like, he didn't want to get in a position of being critical of black initiatives. He didn't want to say, "That doesn't make any sense." Again, this is exaggeration—a bit—but he was much too uncritical in terms of proposals, initiatives, and so forth that he got behind. My point was always that, "Look, this is a short-term solution. You placate here—you win the battle, but you lose the war."

I've seen him cry, actually cry, about the lack of progress on these issues and so forth. I think he cared deeply. I don't think there was any question about that, but it was not accompanied by a certain kind of rigor to move and push the institution in ways that would make it happen, other than just the typical liberal largesse: Just give them what they want and everything will be okay. That's just the Heyman approach.

Now, the contradictions come up when you get issues like divestment. When Mike Heyman, this great liberal, friend of the people, is called upon to endorse divestment. Politically, you know, he has his finger to the wind and so forth in the state. Things have changed. He doesn't do it. He comes out with all these stock reasons why the university did this—all these legalistic interpretations to keep from doing it. There are demonstrations for divestment: "Heyman, come on, you're a big liberal. You can't do this?" But here again, he's chancellor and he's dealing with this Board of Regents, increasingly conservative and so forth, so he takes a very limp stand on the issue.

What happens? Deukmejian, a right-wing governor, but with a background as an Armenian, becomes governor and supports divestment because of his own experience. Out of his own experience. He said, "Look, this is apartheid, this is wrong." So here you have this right-wing governor taking a position that progressives were urging the liberals to take. Of course, Mike has to change, reverse fields, a la Bush, or a la everybody. That was very embarrassing to many of his friends. I mean, friends in the sense of being on the same side of the political fence. But that's the way that was.

18-00:07:50

Of course, when Tien comes along, I forget exactly when [Chang-Lin] Tien comes in, maybe 1990-1991? Tien is clearly a person who supported affirmative action. He understood what that was about. I think he deeply understood it. He didn't know anything about black culture or anything like that. He'd just say, "All of this is wrong." Which is cool. You don't have to know all the ins and outs and so forth. I didn't have a lot of contact with him. I was out of the administration at that time. I was sort of estranged from administrative stuff, so I didn't have much contact with Tien except a couple of examples when we called for a boycott, that Cal should boycott the Copper Bowl because Arizona didn't approve the Martin Luther King holiday. That was a big thing for him. Because here were two currents: the profitability of post-season football games as opposed to the moral dimension of playing in the state that refused to acknowledge the birthday of Martin Luther King. Many other schools were saying, "We're not going to Arizona because they didn't do this." I had some contact with him about that. Me, John, Troy, a couple of other people. A big meeting. Rallies. We marched and all that kind of stuff.

18-00:09:27

Wilmot:
John?

18-00:09:27

Banks:
Burris. I didn't have a lot of contact with Tien on a day-to-day kind of basis. I knew him, but I couldn't claim to have any insight. [Chancellor Robert M.] Berdahl, people said his heart's in the right place, and they have an excuse now. The people have spoken through Prop 209. So what else can they do except the kind of window-dressing stuff. I get letters saying, "Hey, we're going to bring these black students to campus and we want you to meet them to try to talk them into coming to Berkeley." I did that once. I didn't talk them into coming to Berkeley, but I wanted just to see who these kids were. And there was a kid there that I thought should come to Berkeley. I talked to about six black kids and every one had options that seemed to me to be more attractive than Berkeley. So I don't know. I don't know the Berdahl regime that well. I do know that they are very much into symbolism, public relations. I mean, you read the *Berkeleyan*, you'd think that half the campus was minority. Except when you get to where the real power is. That's just not the case. The Ethnic Studies strike, he got burned pretty good about that. Right-wing faculty felt that he gave the students too much, and Ethnic Studies felt that he didn't give them enough.

18-00:11:21

Wilmot:
This was in 1998?

18-00:11:22

Banks:

Yeah.

18-00:11:25

Wilmot:

And this was the issue of the FTE, getting more FTE into Ethnic Studies and him granting it, and then there was kind of this insurgent group of academics who tried to sanction him.

18-00:11:41

Banks:

Yeah. Ken Jowett, Jack Citrin. A number of people.

18-00:11:49

Wilmot:

Were you close to that at all?

18-00:11:50

Banks:

Yeah.

18-00:11:51

Wilmot:

How so?

18-00:11:55

Banks:

[laughs] “Those who know, do not say. Those who say, do not know.”

18-00:12:02

Wilmot:

Okay.

18-00:12:03

Banks:

I don't mean to be cryptic about it, but things go on and you talk to people and get people to come out and speak about this and try to expose the motives of the opposition, and so forth. But what was most impressive to me, not just at the Academic Senate level, but the fact of activism. The fact that students took it upon themselves to fast and threaten to starve themselves to death. I hadn't seen that in years at Berkeley. I think that was the impetus. Of course, there were people who said, “Let 'em starve! Let 'em eat cake.”

18-00:12:47

Wilmot:

Are you saying that in a kind of unprecedented way—not unprecedented, certainly—the student activism kind of impacted that debate at the senate level?

18-00:12:57

Banks:

Oh, it's no question.

18-00:12:58

Wilmot:

At a level which doesn't usually happen?

18-00:13:00

Banks:

Exactly. And nobody's picked up on the usefulness of that approach. Well, I don't know. Maybe black people don't have anything to protest about, I don't know. But the point is, people who have some grievances, some things they believe to be true and so forth, you press it, you get bureaucratized and "Go here; do this." Like Mario Savio said, "Throw your bodies on the gears of the machine. Bring it to a halt." That kind of rhetoric doesn't exist. Now people just say, "There's nothing we can do."

I harangued my students all last semester. I mean, you know, every now and then someone will say something about black students on campus, or some bull. I say, "Look, shut up. You're not going to do anything. You're not going to do anything but talk. To me. Until you do something about it, just save it for the barbershop." The kids, "Ooooooh!" I don't smile. It's provoking conflict. [laughs]

18-00:14:32

Wilmot:

I want to go back to the anti-apartheid movement. Were you part of that? Were you part of a group of faculty who were kind of—?

18-00:14:44

Banks:

Yeah.

18-00:14:45

Wilmot:

Who was in that group?

18-00:14:45

Banks:

Actually the leader, a leader—Pedro Noguera was a graduate student. Emeka [De La Fourne] was also a very important figure. These were two graduate students, black graduate students, African.

18-00:15:00

Wilmot:

What was the second name you said?

18-00:15:01

Banks:

Emeka Kalu Ezera was the Graduate Assembly President. I can't spell his last name but he was Nigerian, and he was killed in a car accident about two years after he graduated. A really, really sharp guy. But Gerald Berryman, Troy, Laura Nader, Richard Walker in geography, Leon Litwack. There were a lot of people who supported that—

18-00:15:35

Wilmot:

Divestment initiative?

18-00:15:36

Banks:

Oh yeah. Barbara Christian, of course. Yeah. Maybe even Harry Edwards.

18-00:15:53

Wilmot:

As a group, how did you mobilize? What did that look like?

18-00:16:02

Banks:

Basically, it came down to from time to time writing things. Making sure that points of view got put into the *Daily Cal* and stuff like that. Calling meetings to spread the word about the impact of divestment. That this didn't mean the end of the world. Other universities were doing it.

See, that was a big thing in our strategy. You can embarrass Berkeley. For instance, if you say, "Well, gee. Stanford has twice as many black undergraduates as Cal, when Cal has four times as many people in every class. What does that mean? Is Stanford a weak academic institution?" That's the tough one, given Berkeley's self-concept. Why are these other places—Yale, Harvard—why are these people there? And Mike Heyman, you're rambling with all these legalisms about the Public Charter. So that's one thing: You look at the Achilles heel. Public embarrassment. Shame.

18-00:17:21

Wilmot:

And that was a strategy?

18-00:17:21

Banks:

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. You didn't have any real power. And of course, when a powerful person, Deukmejian, gets elected, the whole scene changes. "Let's do it." Then all the Heymans and so forth, all these wishy-washy arguments get exposed.

18-00:17:48

Wilmot:

Are there particular kinds of mobilizations that you recall that this group—and I keep calling it a group, but it might be a—

18-00:17:56

Banks:

It's a little looser than that. There were seminars, teach-ins, and so forth to bring in people who were new to the issue. Because, I mean, divestment that can get into economic arguments, the political, the legal. It's one of those issues, you can just spread yourself so thin nobody's making sense in the room. But it's just a matter of organizing the "dis" kind of implication. What are the precedents for this? A lot of that was done. Education, basically. But I think we knew that it came down to big-time politics. The big embarrassment, nationally. It's like Iraq. We can have sit-ins for days but until you get the pictures, or increasing numbers of body bags, or the

draft—I mean, that’s what should be happening now, as far as I’m concerned. Progressives should be arguing for the draft. Why? To bring it back home. To stop people from being able to ignore it. When you know that your daughter might get drafted, you focus a bit more. It’s long-term, but it works.

18-00:20:01

Wilmot:

As dean, did you have a support staff?

18-00:20:03

Banks:

Yes, I had a kind of executive support staff comprised of a guy named Jim Briggs, who at the time was director of career planning and placement. He’s now the vice president of student affairs at Santa Clara. Donald Billingsley, who was dean of students at the time. Kathy Tassan, who was the head of Tang Center at the time. And Jane Moorman, who was head of counseling and psychological services. That was sort of an executive committee that I consulted as things were developing. These were all manager types and at that level. In terms of support, I had an executive assistant, Lynn Bailiff, who had worked with Mac and inherited him. We worked well together. The basic undergraduate affairs staff in the office was already there, so you basically come into it. I don’t think I hired anybody.

18-00:21:36

Wilmot:

Did you have a budget?

18-00:21:40

Banks:

No. I got what I wanted.

18-00:21:49

Wilmot:

Okay! So you were able to get funds upon request?

18-00:21:54

Banks:

Yeah, basically. But first of all, I’m frugal. I just tapped into the available human labor, human resources. I could get people to do things and so forth. For instance, we wanted to come up with a program for, basically, the freshman and sophomore seminars, that was an idea that came out of my regime. Small classes for freshmen, sophomores. We needed some money to do that, and at the time there was money on campus and you could go through, in this case, Mac, and put that together. It’s gotten bigger now, and people have stolen the idea, claimed it. That’s cool. That’s the way it works. There was money for that, but there were a lot of things, the changes within that didn’t need require a lot of money. I’m always suspicious when students or anyone comes in, and the first thing they ask about is money. And I’d always have to explain that I was from Georgia; I didn’t know about money.

[End Audio File 18]

Interview 10: May 11, 2004

[Begin Audio File 19]]

19-00:00:10

Wilmot:

Professor Bil Banks. Interview 10. May 11, 2004. Today we were going to spend some time turning towards some of the committee work that you have taken on over your tenure at UC Berkeley. I wanted to ask you about, in particular, in 1980-81 when you were chair of the Admissions and Enrollment Committee.

19-00:00:47

Banks:

Right.

19-00:00:48

Wilmot:

How did that come to you? How did that appointment—are people appointed to these committees?

19-00:00:55

Banks:

Yes. By the Academic Senate. Basically, they have a Committee on Committees in the Academic Senate and each year they name people to various committees. That's how that happened. It's interesting. In those days, there was not the controversy that there certainly is today about admissions and enrollment. There was a sort of institutional commitment to the way things had been done. Affirmative action was pretty much accepted as a university practice. That the university should make efforts to have a more inclusive student body. It was not a particularly active committee. The administration—meaning the administrators, director of admissions, and so forth—reported from time to time to the committee, but it wasn't nearly as political and volatile as it is today—I mean, it was pretty much a consensus that we should be doing this, and so forth. I chaired it, I think, for a couple of years. I'm not really sure in terms of the time. But it was, again, a chance for me to get a historical perspective on how admissions had been handled in years past. I tend to be curious about these things. How did we get to where we are today? That's just an instinct that I have. And it was useful in that respect, but I can't say that we took on any controversial issues, made any important decisions, or exerted any particular pressure, because everybody was on the same page, more or less. That's my recollection of those years. It was some time ago.

19-00:03:20

Wilmot:

You also served on the Committee on Courses and Instruction. That was—

19-00:03:24

Banks:

Earlier.

19-00:03:26

Wilmot:

That was much earlier. We talked about that. And then also Special Scholarships. That was in 1984-87. Can you describe to me a little bit of the work of that committee?

19_00:03:37

Banks:

Right. That's the—PDP [Professional Development Program] committee. A committee that was set up to have advisory policy responsibility for the PDP Program. And I think some other programs under that rubric. PDP was a faculty creation. That's a big distinction. A creation of the Academic Senate, as opposed to some of the other units that were carved by the administration. The senate had a special responsibility to shape policy with PDP, to give guidance, political support, fund-raising. A more active role for the faculty. That's the distinction. Most of the impetus came from the faculty in that regard, which was kind of interesting.

19-00:04:47

Wilmot:

When you say S-O-S, you mean—?

19-00:04:52

Banks:

Special scholarships. I'm trying to think of the—Special Opportunities Scholarship. But maybe I'm just senile.

19-00:05:00

Wilmot:

I'm sure it was named that at one point.

19-00:05:03

Banks:

Yeah. Who knows. But anyway, that was the distinction. It was a kind of useful distinction because the administration had its priorities and the faculty had its priorities. There emerged sort of philosophical differences—not particularly dramatic—in the direction of PDP as opposed to the direction of some of the other learning centers: Student Affairs, kind of administrative operations. There was this emphasis on the sciences, first of all. I never saw that explicitly stated, but it was sort of understood that PDP had a special obligation to prepare minority students—disadvantaged minority students—for careers in science. To give them the extra push. Particularly the intro science classes: Calculus, Math—not 1A, but 13. Some of the basic courses, to get them prepared to compete. And it was understood that many of them came from less-advantaged high schools, and study habits. You know, the litany of reasons why poor people don't do well in some of the rigorous and competitive courses. Initially, Berah McSwain and later Uri Treisman, who gained a lot of notoriety, enjoyed some success in getting black and brown kids to perform well in the science courses and to graduate and do well. That's what that committee was about. I didn't chair it. But I was a member.

19-00:06:52

Wilmot:

It doesn't look like you did, but you were there for three or four years. Do you remember who else served with you?

19-00:06:56

Banks:

I'm pretty sure Olly Wilson was a member of the committee. Gabor Basri in Astronomy. Stan Prussin in Nuclear Engineering. Leon Henkin in Math. And Carl Helmholtz in Physics. These were the people who were long-time devotees to the idea of equity and helping students succeed. There were differences among us, often, but they were very active on the committee. Everybody came to all the meetings and we debated things. Argued. Had a good flow there.

19-00:07:52

Wilmot:

How would you describe the dynamics in that committee?

19-00:07:55

Banks:

It was a very protective committee. Many people saw the administration as being grossly political, they just wanted to play the numbers-game.

19-00:08:06

Wilmot:

Ghostly political?

19-00:08:06

Banks:

Grossly.

19-00:08:06

Wilmot:

Oh! I was like, that's a very interesting—I've never heard that before but grossly political. Okay.

19-00:08:10

Banks:

They would say, "How many people do we have in the program?" "Thirteen." "How many did we have last year?" "Ten. Don't pay any attention to that." They were more interested in what kind of education. Were students really getting prepared or was it just a numbers game?

19-00:08:27

Wilmot:

So the committee was more interested in what people were learning.

19-00:08:31

Banks:

Exactly. They were not interested in expanding, becoming a big monolith and so forth. They were admittedly elitist, if we mean by "elitist" just taking kids who had demonstrated a great deal of potential, as opposed to just dealing with anybody. You couldn't just walk in the door and be part of PDP. There had to be some screening. People in the sciences who were identified through summer programs. A lot of people got referred into PDP from high school. Now, a lot of people: "Well, we spent all this money on forty students when you have masses of students out there who are not getting special help. Can't we take money from here, do more? Can't you let more people into PDP?" Here again there's a tension. We'd say, "Look, we only have the ability to serve these forty people well. We don't want to dilute that by just getting ourselves spread too thin." Both positions have some merit. You understand the arguments. You're just working with

the best students, as opposed to just reaching out. Of course the argument on the other side was, “We’re trying to demonstrate what works, and once we demonstrate what works, then if the administration wants to put some money into carving up programs that duplicate our methods or appropriate our methods, fine. But let’s get this right. Let’s do this.” Again, these were science people: Basri, maybe a couple of years later, Prussin, Henkin, Helmholtz. These were people in the sciences. Jonas Richmond, I think, was very active on that committee. So that was their bias—admitted bias—and there you have it.

19-00:10:40

Wilmot:

You’re not so much of a science person. How did you come to be on the committee? Was it just your interest?

19-00:10:45

Banks:

Certainly, interest. Plus the other, sort of, macro-dynamic. In African American Studies you have some interest in black people and minority faculty members tend to get corralled into initiatives like this that are connected with black students, brown students. That’s just the way the world works. Then and now.

19-00:11:10

Wilmot:

So was this committee your idea?

19-00:11:13

Banks:

No, no, no. It existed long before me.

19-00:11:16

Wilmot:

I mean, was your participation actually your idea?

19-00:11:18

Banks:

No. I’ve never volunteered for anything. Ever. But you get identified. I guess I projected a certain kind of persona in the minds of some people.

19-00:11:35

Wilmot:

Plus you were chair of African American Studies for a long time.

19-00:11:39

Banks:

Yeah, if nothing else. We had around twenty-five black professors on campus. It’s not like a big pool of people to draw from for committee services.

19-00:11:55

Wilmot:

As a committee, how did you work on funding issues for these programs?

19-00:12:01

Banks:

They had external grants for a while, quite substantial external grants from corporations and private foundations. And right now, to this day, they do pretty effective solicitations with faculty members.

19-00:12:17

Wilmot:

Hm-mmm. Interesting.

19-00:12:15

Banks:

Yeah. I mean, I contribute, get a letter every year: I pledge through automatic payroll deduction. But supported by faculty members. They have been very insistent on that. I haven't been close to the committee in years, but I assume it's still operating more or less the same way. The Administration gave them some money; it wasn't like they were totally on their own. But they had a very proud independence, and that was good.

19-00:12:52

Wilmot:

Were the committee members actively involved in that fundraising?

19-00:12:56

Banks:

Yeah. These are people who could make the phone calls. Whose calls got returned. You'd call San Francisco Foundation, they'd return the calls. I'm being somewhat simplistic, but these are people who had reputations—I think Karl Pister was also one of the actors, as he was always a big supporter of equity in, particularly, science education.

19-00:13:27

Wilmot:

Okay. From your work with this committee, how did MESA [Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement Program] figure in relation to that?

19-00:13:43

Banks:

I think MESA at the time might have been a subset. I really don't remember exactly, because these things change and reconfigure over time. It wasn't a black group; I know that. But as to how MESA as a unit emerged or how it related, I just don't remember.

19-00:14:04

Wilmot:

Okay. When you say it wasn't a black group, what do you mean?

19-00:14:07

Banks:

The committee probably dealt with both. There was a MESA and a BESA—Black Engineering and Science—

19-00:14:16

Wilmot:

MESA was a high school preparatory program that got people to Berkeley. The reason I started thinking about that is because some of the people's names you mentioned—such as Pister and Uri Treisman—were also mentioned in affiliation with MESA. So that's why I thought of it.

19-00:14:34

Banks:

Yes. I'm sure there was a certain kind of cross-contact.

19-00:14:42

Wilmot:

This may feel like a digression, but you mentioned that you, year after year, gave money for—that faculty were solicited for funds to maintain and operate PDP. You said that was one of the things that you gave too, and generally speaking I wanted to ask you a) if you gave money, where are your priorities in giving, and second, if there's a philosophy you have, associated with that. In terms of a rationale or logic in your giving strategy.

19-00:15:22

Banks:

Sure. This is a program, number one, that I knew about. I had confidence in that approach, that initiative, and when you reach petit bourgeoisie status you, I think, have an obligation to support things like that. That said, the majority of my giving is not at Berkeley. My father and I set up a scholarship fund at Dillard University. My father finished Dillard in New Orleans, I finished Dillard in New Orleans, and we gave a sizeable amount to fund a prize each year for the student who writes the best essay on some topic related to African Americans and so forth. So that, henceforth, if you're a graduating senior—I don't think we stipulated—there has to be specifics upstairs—you write this essay. The faculty decides who gets it and what. The person gets, I think five hundred dollars, and that's sort of self-perpetuating. My logic/rationale is that black colleges need it more than Berkeley. These are institutions that historically haven't been able to draw the kind of resources that Berkeley has drawn on, and what do you do? Fisk—I didn't go to Fisk; my dad did. Bootstraps. I'm old-school like that.

19-00:17:05

Wilmot:

So you make contributions to Fisk?

19-00:17:06

Banks:

Yeah. I'll give a hundred dollars to anybody. The Young Musicians Program. I knew the people involved in that. I do believe in the arts and so forth. I've always been a contributor to that. Stiles Hall. I've made fairly sizable contributions there. Why? Because I know the people, I have confidence in what they were doing and there's a direct payoff for that kind of thing. Again, it's not that I—these are not my kind of programs, in many respects, but anybody that's doing something to maybe make a difference, that's it. I'm independently wealthy, so I can do that. [joking]

19-00:17:56

Wilmot:

That's interesting. So, I'm hearing that {HBCUs in particular, Fisk and Dillard, and the Young Musicians Program has been a priority for you—

19-00:18:09

Banks:

And Stiles. I put Stiles up—I don't rate them, necessarily, but these are institutions that every year I've given to.

19-00:18:19

Wilmot:

And partly it has to do with—I heard what you said about that.

19-00:18:25

Banks:

Until [Proposition] 209, I've looked into the idea, talked to some people about making some contribution at Berkeley, but I would want it targeted. Apparently 209 does not permit that. You can't have something that's specific to black students, or Mexicans. Or at least, there's a lot of hoops. In other words, you can't say, "Hey, I'd like a scholarship for the most deserving black woman student in anthropology." You can't do that. That's discrimination. I simply say, All right.

19-00:19:12

Wilmot:

People have kind of addressed that—some people have—by somehow changing the selection criteria to look at issues of economic disadvantage or that kind of language.

19-00:19:24

Banks:

That's not my style.

19-00:19:26

Wilmot:

Do you feel like that's effective?

19-00:19:28

Banks:

Not for my purposes. It's good. If somebody wants to do something for, again, economically disadvantaged students who do well, that's excellent. Excellent idea. It's not my idea. Even in that context, I think black students, brown students have an additional burden on top of that economic disadvantage. I could argue statistically that there are just so many more people and it would just—there's room for help from all kind of directions. I don't put that down, but if I had to step back, I like to target my efforts, and that's how I think. It's not a critique of the other. I encourage people to do that.

19-00:20:18

Wilmot:

I raise that because I think that was—post-209 there started to be, that was one of the lenses that people tossed around different strategies for how were people going to continue to reach disadvantaged groups.

19-00:20:37

Banks:

And we've seen the results of that, haven't we? Looking just at admissions. When we look at the figures of the numbers of people who are black, how they've declined each year, every year, since then. At some point you say, Well, isn't it okay to be somewhat—I won't say "nationalistic"—but pointed and targeted, if that's what you really want to do. If you think race matters, you might as well treat it like it matters, by just building assumptions in that reflect that belief. That's okay. Without criticizing what Armenians would do, or Moors do. That's fine. It was fascinating, the other day I wrote a letter of recommendation for an identifiable black student. I know her, she was in my class. She needed a letter of recommendation and it was for an Italian American scholarship. Hmm. I thought that was interesting. There might have been a parental link, that could be, but that's not my business. I don't inquire. I wrote the letter. I made reference to—you know, just to help her. I know a little about Italians; I've taught a course dealing with Italian men. So I threw out some things like that. But I thought that was kind of interesting, that she'd applied for this Italian American student fellowship. I hope she gets it. And that's cool.

19-00:22:24

Wilmot:

One of the committees that wasn't on your major university service was this committee—I think it was in 1978—Committee on Athletics and Advising. Was that important?

19-00:22:34

Banks:

No. It rarely met. And that's a broader—I think it's worth mentioning, a lot of the committees at the university come to public attention in crisis situations. Like, when an issue comes up, all of a sudden this committee becomes important. But normally some of them rarely meet—maybe two or three times a year—and many of the committees are overrated in terms of their significance. I think that was one of them, in those days. I'm on the Chancellor's Advisory Athletic Committee now—or at least I was until December. I have to resign because I haven't been to the last two meetings. I don't know if they expect me to come. [William] Bill Lester chaired, and Horace Mitchell are the leaders of that. There's more attention to athletics now, so that's committee is a little more prominent, but it's sort of an ebb and flow. It depends on what the campus politics and so forth.

19-00:23:48

Wilmot:

Do you remember when that Alex Saragoza event took place?

19-00:23:52

Banks:

I was not on it then, no. That was the year before. I was appointed the next year.

19-00:24:01

Wilmot:

Was there any kind of fallout that was felt in that committee as a result of that event?

19-00:24:05

Banks:

Oh, yeah. Many of the members just used the occasion to just castigate Alex. Again, this was after the decision had been rendered. I think at the time he was teaching part-time on campus and was the vice chancellor system-wide. I was in University Hall when all of that stuff broke. Maybe the prior year, or maybe he was doing part-time, I can't remember, but he was sort of put out there to dry as a poster child for what was wrong with ethnic faculty and athletes. And these were black athletes, the athletes in question. I do remember those conversations. It happened the year before, but people still said, "We don't to be like this," as if it didn't happen anywhere else, which was garbage.

19-00:25:19

Wilmot:

Were there any specific kind of instances in which the committee had to negotiate the residue of that event? Residue's the wrong word.

19-00:25:33

Banks:

Just last year and to some extent this year, the issue—

19-00:25:34

Wilmot:

Navigate. Navigate is the right word. Navigate the memory of that event.

19-00:25:39

Banks:

Yeah. In a sort of, not super-diffuse but—"Okay, this happened and how do we more closely monitor the progress of students? What is the nature of communication between the athletic advising center and faculty members?" There was a lot of attention given to that. There was some attention given to special courses at the university that there were only athletes in them. There were special courses and you look at twenty students and all of them are athletes. What does this say about the university? What does this say about liberal arts education? Who are these people teaching these courses? If they're assistant coaches, are they qualified? All of this is just sort of a way of Berkeley seeking to distinguish itself in this area. That we're so much more rigorous and so forth than other places, and I don't think that's particularly true. They are more rigorous than some places, but I would certainly not hold up the athletic department as a model for how these things should be handled. There are lots of criticisms that I did make. I was on the committee last year, so I can speak with some authority post-Alex, but that's the way it goes.

19-00:27:13

Wilmot:

Okay. Well, you introduced this way of thinking where you said many of the committees don't become important until they—and committee service is not as important except in specific instances. I'm paraphrasing and also saying what you said differently, sorry. The question I have for you is, in your experience, what were the salient experiences around committee work? What are the committees that you recall as being very important? We spent a lot of time talking about Courses and Instruction.

19-00:27:53

Banks:

“Important” meaning taking on issues, I’d probably say Divisional Council. The Divisional Council was created, I guess, about six or seven years ago: The chairs of four major senate committees and people who are elected at large from the Berkeley faculty to that. So we’re talking about maybe eight or nine people. It might have been more; I’m guessing about the numbers. But what do we have here. The Budget Committee, which deals with personnel cases and budgetary stuff. Educational Policy. Chairman of Educational Policy. The Senate—major committees. This was sort of the super committee. That first year, I was asked to run at-large on campus, where all the senate, everybody votes on it.

19-00:28:46

Wilmot:

First year you were on—?

19-00:28:48

Banks:

No, the first year. After it was established.

19-00:28:51

Wilmot:

In 1998?

19-00:28:52

Banks:

Yeah. I thought it was earlier than that.

19-00:28:57

Wilmot:

I have 1989-91 you served on it. And then I have also 1998-present.

19-00:29:02

Banks:

Well, ’89, I think that was the first year. Do check my numbers on this.

19-00:29:08

Wilmot:

I need to do some more research myself.

19-00:29:12

Banks:

Like I said, that was the first year it was established. Or maybe the second year. But anyway, that’s the nature of that committee. All of the major university policy things end up discussed by that committee. Not so much for decisions but for recommendation. The review of findings of other committees, lower-level committees and so forth. Big issues that concern the broad purposes of the university, like admissions. Like the Novartis deal of outside, private funding to—these kind of things came there and were debated and discussed and so forth. There you get a chance to see the heavy-hitters. People who are major players in the university. To see how power gets handled, and the willingness of people to take on controversy, and so forth. That was very interesting to me, because that was as close to senate power as you can get. I was struck by the unwillingness of the faculty members to use the power that they had. It was a horribly timid

group of people. It was like they were just so proud to be there. Again, these are very senior people. These aren't assistant professors. These are heavyweights, but the inertia, the status quoism of everybody. I never expect people on committees to agree with me, but the unwillingness to say anything clear, to speak clearly about things, that was sad in a way.

19-00:31:14

Wilmot:

Were there particular issues where people's inertia or vague language or unwillingness to talk really cropped up?

19-00:31:22

Banks:

I think the Novartis deal. The role of private corporations in funding departments, and so forth. That was an issue that was talked about. Again, they came out with a very kind of mild, meek, proposal/recommendation and so forth. Admissions, the same thing is true. Nothing clear, blah, blah. Many all-things-to-all-people statements, and leave the hard decisions someplace else. Well, you know, you could argue that that's the role of administration to make the tough decisions. The faculty is sort of advise and consent. But I have a yen for being decisive. These are very, very smart people. It's not like these are people who aren't smart. I just didn't get the sense that many or the most of them cared deeply about some of the things that were coming along the pipe. Admissions, that was an issue. I was there when a lot of the admissions—I think that was my second term. You serve two years. And Bob Brentano talked me into running again when he was chair.

19-00:32:45

Wilmot:

When you say "admissions" generally, what does that mean to you? When you say it generally, I'm not sure what specific issue you're speaking of.

19-00:32:52

Banks:

Oh, 209. The ramifications of 209. What can the university do? What should it do? High school admissions requirements. I remember being involved in that, both on the Divisional Council and the Representative Assembly. What does it mean to have a fine arts requirement for the university, and how would this affect different populations? I just remember being just furious at the low level of intellectual seriousness of people. It's like they'd made up their minds: Yeah, we require everybody to take a fine arts course. Well, given the budgetary constraints, are you sure all schools are able to offer such a course? Most schools have bands. Duh! I mean, is that what we're talking about? Your marching band, your majorettes—well, sexist. You're a member of a marching band. There's just no substance there. It's a good idea, but how does this affect different school populations differentially within the state? I think that a governing body has an obligation to do that. It's a good thing if everybody had a great drama program, or music, or jazz opportunity and so forth. If the opportunity is there for everybody, then okay let's talk about it. But when it's so clear—another one was requiring a fourth year of mathematics. Well, you can't staff, at a school like McClymond's [High School], you can hardly get two years of math in. So if you go to McClymond's, just structurally, you can't get in [to UC Berkeley] because you'll not have that third year. No matter how bright you are. There were these kinds of things, that you point out clearly, empirically. That's not a point-of-view issue. You can't take a course that's not

offered at your high school. “Well, maybe they could exchange—go across town.” Please! Please! But anyway, that kind of blindness, that kind of let’s just not deal with these tough issues. That was kind of frustrating. But then you kind of get a sense of that’s how university committees—maybe they’re designed to be that way. Very conservative.

19-00:35:26

Wilmot:

Did you ever see people, or yourself, find ways to raise issues in ways that they did get heard and engaged? Was there a strategy for that?

19-00:35:36

Banks:

Oh yeah. They were always engaged. You engage them, but you don’t get the vigorous debate. It’s like, “Thank you. Now let’s—”. It’s that great metaphor from [W.E.B.] Du Bois, how he talked about having to beat on windows, and the louder you beat then people look at you like you’re crazy. It’s maybe kind of wacky.

19-00:36:05

Wilmot:

That’s why I posed the question is there a strategy or a strategic way that people—or do you find someone else to voice the issues?

19-00:36:13

Banks:

Always. There were fellow travelers, normally. Because I don’t like the—you know, you get stereotyped. I think there was maybe one other black person. On the Representative Assembly of maybe fifty people, there might have been two other black professors.

19-00:36:29

Wilmot:

Who were they?

19-00:36:34

Banks:

At one point, Claudia Mitchell Kern from UCLA was a member of that, through something. And there was a black guy from Riverside, [Beauvell]. I somehow remember his name. There were a few black people here and there. There were people there who I thought were aware of these issues, but it’s that sense of, “Well, there’s nothing we can do about it.” Maybe they’re right. They certainly were right, because it’s in the rules and regulations that are in place now. Just to ignore evidence, to ignore the research base. “Do we have evidence that this is going to affect people this way or that way or that way? Boom.” Years ago, Gregg Thomson and I, who’s a director of student research—they had a summer program for Oakland students, advanced program, and they had it at Skyline High School. Advertised for black students. It was structured in such a way to seriously disadvantage students who did not live in the Skyline area. The times and the bus schedules and so forth. I said, “Have you thought about this?” Ruth Love was the superintendent there, and I remember getting into these battles with her. And of course they backed down. When you lay it out there, they say, “We’ll make special provisions for this, special provisions for that.” But people just hadn’t thought of it.

19-00:38:18

Wilmot:

What were you battling with Ruth Love about?

19-00:38:19

Banks:

There was a special program that the Oakland school system and the university set up at Skyline High School. A summer [program]. We argued that it disadvantaged those students that were most trying to help. Flatland students, broadly defined. Evidence was right there, but nobody—Skyline’s nicer. The view.

19-00:38:53

Wilmot:

Those fog lights.

19-00:38:53

Banks:

Sure. Let’s not quibble.

19-00:38:59

Wilmot:

Okay. I feel like I sidetracked you a bit when I asked you who were the other black faculty in the division.

19-00:39:08

Banks:

Divisional Council, yeah.

19-00:39:10

Wilmot:

What you were starting to say was you get stereotyped. There were only two or three black faculty. I interrupted that thought, and I wanted to ask to finish fleshing that out.

19-00:39:23

Banks:

Hm-mmm. You can pick your shots. I’m very sensitive to that. I’ve been in the university for thirty years; I understand how these dynamics work. Most of the time, I pick issues that are not obviously race issues. Just like with the arts requirement. We had this lady—I can name her, I think. Probably don’t remember her name. I think she was either dean of the law school or a major player in the law school at UCLA talking about the value of music in IQ and testing. That Mozart leads to intellectual development, and so forth—a theory that’s been debunked. There’s a group at Harvard that studied all the literature about it. You have a child, you play Mozart to it. To say nothing about the fact that people who listen to classical music are likely to have more money. I’d just say, “Wait a minute! Wait, wait, wait, wait, hold it!” But it’s such an alluring idea for people who are like that, who like Mozart, who have done well in school. So can’t everybody? Isn’t this reasonable for everybody? This kind of suburban mentality, willingness to just empirically—well, how do we know this? Aren’t there other factors that correlate with that, that might have more potential for explaining something than exposure to classical music at a certain period? It’s maddening. But that way, it doesn’t have to become a race/class thing. It’s just like, “Where’s the evidence?” Mozart as opposed to Stravinsky? Or Bartok? John Cage? Do

we know that, or are we just reproducing ourselves and how we think, and putting that on districts and schools all across the country? And what happens? Students have to fulfill some UC requirement about fine art, so you throw together some garbage course for those high-achieving students, just to say you've done it. Kids make an A. Is that really a way to improve education? No. But we have a sense of ourselves as the leaders, and we say, "If we require it, they'll do it." Yeah, they'll do it but a school strapped for resources—I mean, look at the situation now. They're eliminating music programs. Teachers of the arts are the first people to be cut. Now, what's going to happen? But you don't see that discussion. You don't hear that. Three years ago, you had a fine arts requirement. They eliminated fine arts. What does that do for Richmond public schools, or such-and-such public schools? What do we do? "Well, aaaah. The governor's going to turn it around." Okay. Then you just nod.

19-00:42:36

Wilmot:

Were there any other issues at the Divisional Council that you wanted to speak to?

19-00:42:40

Banks:

No. There were others, but I can't—well, the Ethnic Studies takeover. The Divisional Council was very much involved in that.

19-00:42:51

Wilmot:

Was that 1998?

19-00:42:53

Banks:

Yeah, I think so. And the role of the chair of the Divisional Council, {Bob Brentano?}. He was a figure who was negotiating with students and the chancellor and so forth. That led to a group of faculty members in, basically Political Science—Jack Citrin, and Ken Jowitt and others—moved to censure Brentano for his involvement in negotiations. The argument was that he presumed to speak—he was speaking for the faculty in the Divisional Council without its permission, explicit permission. The motion of censure came before the Academic Senate and it lost, real bad. But the Divisional Council was involved in that debate because Bob was the chair at the time. Of the Divisional Council. And, as a group, it was discussed about the appropriate role and blah, blah, blah. Apart from the merits. The merits weren't discussed, about the FTE and the faculty positions. That's not proper governance. But what is the role of the senate? How does the senate's views get articulated in a crisis? Which is a generic, idea question. That was interesting. Those were the issues that I recall. I'm sure there were others.

19-00:44:29

Wilmot:

That's a big issue. That's actually something I've heard about from different people. What is so interesting to me is how Ethnic Studies kind of starts off in the early seventies, and in some ways is kind of this marginal issue "over there"—as far as I can understand—with regard to the larger campus and the larger campus's attitudes towards that kind of curriculum innovation. Then, by 1998, it's just polarizing the whole campus.

19-00:45:07

Banks:

Mmm. Yeah. In some ways though, I think it's a little different issue. I just think that people have accepted ethnic studies, maybe in a marginal position. So there's somebody over here that you know exists that's not worth—or a grandmother in the attic. I'm sorry. The grandmother or the madwoman in the attic. They're over there. You have some relationship to them.

19-00:45:36

Wilmot:

Still part of the family.

19-00:45:37

Banks:

Yes. Still part of the family. You can't throw them out. It's not worth the hassle, because they'll just create dissonance other places in the system. I think there is, to some extent, that attitude that's developed. Nobody wants to get rid of Ethnic Studies. Some obviously do, but there's not a big incentive for that, because there are people who are doing good stuff, doing well. That's one of the paradoxes of—that's one of the things I learned early. If you get people who do incredible work, you don't get the kind of dumb critiques that you got years ago. "Nobody can do this. The only people that can do this—" If you get people who do incredible work, the university will tolerate—at least tolerate—you. And I'll say this in a particularly pejorative way, because it's a very cold place. There's not a lot of collegiality, or any kind of community. You're in History, that's what you do. You're in Political Science, that's what you do. Exceptions, obviously, but in terms of people. There's not that kind of camaraderie. But if you have a reputation for doing incredible work, you can do a lot of things under the guise of intellectual ability. Whereas, if you don't, if you're not respected in terms of your academic, intellectual contributions and so forth, you can't get to first base because you don't enjoy that credibility. You raise your hand, people go, "Okay." But it's clear, if you have a history of doing this, this, this, this, this article, this research, this experiment—whatever—you get some juice. That's the way that system works. Of course, the other place where I take that is that once you get that juice, what do you do with it? Is that just for the purpose of the individual faculty member, individual scholars, individual intellectuals? As somebody said recently, they were talking about the lack of push by black and brown faculty members, and they concluded, "Well, I guess we've earned the right to be irrelevant too."

19-00:48:02

Wilmot:

Who was talking about this?

19-00:48:03

Banks:

Oh, a friend of mine.

19-00:48:06

Wilmot:

Someone who is a faculty person as well?

19-00:48:08

Banks:

No. Not here. Not at this institution. “Was this all the struggle in the sixties and the seventies was about? For us to get here, make a lot of money and become irrelevant?” There’s a Pogo line: “We’ve seen the enemy, and he is us”. There are all kinds of ways of thinking about the institutionalization, the co-option of—you know, it’s a point of view.

19-00:48:39

Wilmot:

Have there been opportunities for people to dialog about that at Berkeley’s campus?

19-00:48:45

Banks:

I don’t know of any. I remember the days when the black faculty met once a month and eighty percent of the people were there. For lunch. Nothing formal. At the Faculty Club. We’d just have a big table and just talk about what was happening, what we thought, and so forth. That kind of mobilization doesn’t occur. Everybody’s doing their own individual research. There are all kinds of reasons not to give time or energy to these clumsy issues like race and class and stuff.

19-00:49:32

Wilmot:

I want to return to this question of the Ethnic Studies discussion at the Divisional Council in 1998. What was your role in that kind of debate or conversation about what the questions were on the table?

19-00:49:56

Banks:

Again, there were more questions as to the appropriateness of Bob Brentano—as it came to the Divisional Council: What role should the Divisional Council play in such deliberations? That’s not a very pregnant kind of issue for me. Of course, they should play a role: We’ll name two people who will meet with—duh! It never got down to the merits of the ethnic studies debate. It was more of a kind of procedural issue. That’s how it came to the council. There you just listen very carefully and try to keep people honest. When it veered too far in the direction of criticizing Brentano, his politics, and so forth, you can kind of stop that.

19-00:50:57

Wilmot:

How? [tape interruption] So, what does that mean: to keep people honest? In an environment like that, the Divisional Council. When they are getting into personal attacks—which I think we were talking about.

19-00:51:16

Banks:

Well, you try and let them know that you know what is being said. “Look, do we really want to talk about this?” Most of the time, they really don’t want to. They could say something disparaging about individuals, something clearly politically linked, and move on to something else. And it’s like you taint the dialogue by throwing that out.

19-00:51:47

Wilmot:

Like an attorney might do in front of a jury.

19-00:51:48

Banks:

Exactly. Exactly. And you call people on that from time to time: “You’ve mentioned this, and I don’t know if that’s something we want to talk about. We can.” And people move on. Mind you, I lose. Ninety percent of the time I lose. I realize that it’s not like I am super-effective in changing people from left to right or from this to this, but Derek Bell put it to me in a very poignant way. He says, “Look, Bil. You can’t expect to win. You just have to love to fight.” That’s a very perverse way of putting it, but if you think about it—I mean, you get depressed and “Oh, God! This is wrong. I’m angry,” [thumps table]. But just know that you fought the good fight. You fought the good fight; you were as effective as you can be. But the idea that you’re going to take this Representative Assembly from here to there—and every now and then you can moderate this or that, but the idea of making these big profound shifts in politics and so forth, that’s just not going to happen in my lifetime. Certainly with respect to race. It’s more about power or different kinds of things. These deliberations, they would just listen carefully and, as they say in the streets, just “shine you on” and then go and do what they want to do.

19-00:53:34

Wilmot:

In what context was Derek Bell—Derek Bell’s book, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*, was one of the first—gosh, I read it in one of my first years in college. Anyway, in what context was he telling you this?

19-00:53:50

Banks:

He came for graduation. He spoke as a black graduation commencement speaker several years ago. *Black Intellectuals* was about to come out and we were talking about—he’d seen drafts. I’m sure it wasn’t out. I was talking to him about sharing frustrations. This, this, and don’t they see? They’re gonna beat you up. Basically he was saying, “Look. Don’t go into this thinking it’s win or lose. You’re just gonna have to know that you’re going to be struggling for a long time. Throughout your lifetime. This isn’t something you’re going to see come to fruition.” If you start out like that, that’s when people get depressed and become self-destructive and all that kind of stuff. Let’s just say you have to kind of get an enjoyment. He had this interesting quote. In fact, I saw—I don’t know if it was in one of his books or some place or maybe somebody else said it: You just have to enjoy the fight. Which is out of character for me, because I don’t think I like the fight, but you just do what you have to do.

19-00:55:13

Wilmot:

Well, I think we should take a break. I’m going to change the tapes and then we’ll come back for our last thirty minutes. How’s that?

[End Audio File 19]

[Begin Audio File 20]

20-00:00:18

Wilmot:

I want to just ask you, the Committee on the Regents Professors, was that important?

20-00:00:24

Banks:

Yeah. I think. I can tell you why.

20-00:00:28

Wilmot:

Please do.

20-00:00:32

Banks:

Are we recording?

20-00:00:32

Wilmot:

Hm-mmm.

20-00:00:35

Banks:

That's one of the big honors of the Berkeley campus, Regents Professor. At one point, I'm pretty sure it was a Regents Professor—there was another one, the Chancellor's—but the Regents, that's the number one thing. We were able to get James Baldwin here for that.

20-00:00:53

Wilmot:

Phyllis Bischoff was showing me such beautiful images from that time.

20-00:00:59

Banks:

And, you know, you make the case: This is a person, national figure. A couple of other times when you're able to draw attention to an eminent scholar that might be something other than a mainstream person. I can't remember all of the candidates. A lot of them just turned it down: Look, I'm too busy doing this. They tried to get John Hope [Franklin] at one point to do that. People have other things to do. But, again, you get a chance to bring up names or to suggest people and argue for people who wouldn't normally get the attention of the establishment. Again, that's a committee that meets maybe two or three times a year. Let's talk about what we have to do. Bring in some names. Give them to the chair to negotiate and so forth. So it's not an organic committee.

I think Baldwin's time spent here was really good. He talked to students and ran classes. He was really surprisingly active.

20-00:02:06

Wilmot:

How long was he here? A semester?

20-00:02:07

Banks:

It was a long time. It was a crazy long time. Because I remember I was married, and my wife was pushing him to live here with us, while he was here as a visiting professor.

20-00:02:27

Wilmot:

In the downstairs area?

20-00:02:28

Banks:

There was space upstairs. There were no kids and stuff. It was long before them. I just could not imagine. It's just like, host to Baldwin. All the calls and people coming by. I'm much too private a person. She thought that would be a cool thing to do. It might have been—if it were just a week, all right, but over a period of time, uh-huh.

20-00:02:58

Wilmot:

Did you actually broach this with him?

20-00:03:00

Banks:

Oh no. I broached it with her: No. You know, you have the customary arguments and settle it.

20-00:03:13

Wilmot:

What kind of interactions did you have with Baldwin over this time? Let me clear about when this was. This was 1979, so it was late seventies.

20-00:03:25

Banks:

Thereabouts. Well, we talked a lot about writing. I was interested in his expatriate experience and the notion of stepping outside of America to sharpen your vision. That's been talked about a lot. Richard Wright leaving, Chester Himes [leaving]. Leaving and going to Europe or going some place else, you get a better fix on America. You're buffeted by social realities of race and stuff here, so stepping back. I remember good conversations about that. That that operated, and how did it operate and pros and cons of that. How did that make its way into his work? These were the topics. I can't remember the details.

20-00:04:23

Wilmot:

Can you tell me about your experience with that? That kind of stepping away from America's race paradigm.

20-00:04:34

Banks:

I'm not sure I can. One, I've never lived abroad for any extended period of time. Maybe about two weeks—in Europe, last year—which was really good. I thought, Maybe I wish I had done this at a different time or a different place, and so forth. But I've never had that kind of sustained experience, and I'm not a writer like that where I just sit down and talk about what's happening in America from the vantage point of the outside. I've just always been inside the thing. I employ

that paradigm, vision, in writing about “white culture.” Sometimes I can do that. Just imagine myself as being “in” or “out.” Just trying to get away from the oppositional thing. Try to see what’s happening. It’s fun. I don’t know how good or insightful it is. I wish more African American writers would do that. I’d love to see more African American writers write about white people. I’d love to see it. I think they would bring so much to an incident like the torture and stuff in Iraq. No race. Just talk about what’s happening there. But sometimes that’s too solemn. The other side of that coin is—who said it? One of the critics. Ralph Ellison or somebody. “You write best about that which you know most about.” And if you know most about black people—why do black writers write about black people? Because it’s what they know. I think it might be changing as more and more people get up, and you get the Paul Beattys and Colson Whiteheads and people who know different things, it might change.

20-00:06:35

Wilmot:

They’re still pretty centered on writing about black people, but of course there’s so much to write about when it comes to us.

20-00:06:43

Banks:

Exactly. I’ve never read—and, again, I don’t read a super-lot—but just a hip black love story. I’d be hard-pressed to name a love story, a romantic love story, not just that which is self-consciously a love story, by a black author. I don’t know women’s literature that well. I don’t like most of it, but that’s a different issue. But I just haven’t seen something that’s self-consciously a love story. And again, maybe I’m thinking of the romantic nineteenth-century traditions and stuff.

20-00:07:26

Wilmot:

Hm-mmm. I think you are. James Baldwin was one of my favorites and so I want to know what type of person he was.

20-00:07:36

Banks:

Hyper. With you one minute, drifts the next minute, comes back. Very sensitive. He understands that he has a mercurial personality, and he just lives with that. He’s not oblivious to people. I’ve never heard him say anything unkind, socially, around people and so forth. But he jumps on an idea; he doesn’t feel a need to develop it in ways that I would, as an academic. That this leads to this, leads to this, leads to that. It’s just like the insight is enough. In his writing, it’s different because he sits down—I mean, you take the essays like *The Fire Next Time*. You see where it goes. Whether you agree with it or not. But in conversation, or whatever, that wasn’t always there. He loved children. He had this thing about kids. Just references to kids, people he knew. Some of his relatives and brothers or stuff. I can’t remember who, but he managed to often reflect on them, which was kind of cool because I like kids too. Rarely do writers and academics reflect on children. That’s just not something that gets talked about. I remember thinking about that when I was interviewing for *Black Intellectuals*, how I’d be hard-pressed to recall a person who talked about their children. Some of them were not married or didn’t have a child. But something. No matter how oblique.

20-00:09:28

Wilmot:

Maybe different spheres.

20-00:09:28

Banks:

As you say. Maybe that's how it's seen. I'd feel it was important to throw out something about kids as I talked to people. This was informal. This was not like an interview; it was just talking.

20-00:09:49

Wilmot:

Where did he live while he was here?

20-00:09:52

Banks:

They got him a place—he started in one place and then I think he moved in with Erskine Peters, another professor here who passed some time ago. I think that was his situation.

20-00:10:08

Wilmot:

And he was here for a semester.

20-00:10:10

Banks:

Maybe not a semester.

20-00:10:09

Wilmot:

Maybe a couple of months?

20-00:10:11

Banks:

A month or—don't quote me.

20-00:10:13

Wilmot:

I need to check in with Phyllis Bischoff because she has the photos.

20-00:10:17

Banks:

Yes. She has the photos, documentary stuff.

20-00:10:23

Wilmot:

At this time, was African American Studies in Barrows?

20-00:10:25

Banks:

No. Dwinelle.

20-00:10:26

Wilmot:

It was in Dwinelle. So he had his own office in Dwinelle?

20-00:10:29

Banks:

Yes. Office in Dwinelle. An aide. Somebody to be—a “runner,” it’s called on the streets. “Do this. Do that.”

20-00:10:43

Wilmot:

Did you ever show him around the Bay, or was he already familiar with the Bay Area?

20-00:10:45

Banks:

No, I don’t do that. No. I’m too cool to be a tour guide. [laughs]

20-00:10:54

Wilmot:

Okay. Thank you. We kind of stumbled on that topic. Before we leave all these committees, I just want to make sure I’ve got the important ones.

20-00:11:12

Banks:

I think you’ve touched bases. There might be others like the Committee on Education Development. Basically we got money each year and we decided on grants to faculty members to develop courses or to do things that we thought to be important. That was kind of nice.

20-00:11:32

Wilmot:

Were there dynamics there that you wanted to address?

20-00:11:34

Banks:

They were pretty good, because I was the chair, first of all. Power.

20-00:11:39

Wilmot:

That was 1986-1987?

20-00:11:41

Banks:

Yeah. And you have a very concrete kind of thing to do. You have \$100,000 and these people writing grants: I’d like to do this, this, this. And you make judgments. You make judgments based upon what’s important, what makes sense, what your priorities are. Other people did the same thing. Committee members. I think there were three or four other faculty members and a student representative. At the end of the year, you’ve done something very concrete. You’ve helped this person over here do this. You’ve helped this person do that, and you make judgments about how effective it was, and that’s always been a high for me, as opposed to just discussion where you end up nodding.

20-00:12:27

Wilmot:

One last question on the Divisional Council, is you said that Bob Brentano kind of urged you to run. Was that both times?

20-00:12:46

Banks:

No. The second time he did. The first time, maybe Bob Middlekauff or somebody. My first reaction is: “Campus-wide? Who’s going to vote for me?” You question, why do you think, out of fifteen hundred faculty members, how could I could get enough votes to win. I don’t have that sense of myself as popular or a player. For whatever purposes. But that’s just my own self—again, my attraction to it was power. If you’re going to be on a committee, you might as well be on a committee—like I said before—that does something. That achieves something. Has some real authority. And I just have this sense of citizenship. I think more faculty should get involved in the governance, what happens and so forth. More voices. Philosophically I believe that. And I thought this would be a chance to really make things happen. It didn’t turn out that way. But it was a learning experience. Maybe I made a difference, a slight difference here and there.

20-00:14:27

Wilmot:

Did you have a sense that there was a constellation, or somehow some kind of machinery in place in terms of allies that moved you in that position?

20-00:14:40

Banks:

Well, yeah. I think the dynamics were, I had just spent time as provost, I believe. I think I enjoyed some success there, and certainly many people knew that. People knew African American Studies. I don’t know. I’m uncomfortable explaining why anybody would like me or think that I should be—I didn’t rig the election. [laughs] I can assure you of that, but beyond that I’ll just leave it up to wiser people to explain.

20-00:15:29

Wilmot:

Okay. I also wanted to ask, once you were a member of the Divisional Council, were there—you mentioned that there were representatives from all campuses, from different disciplines, and/or the larger campus-wide committees—campus-wide Budget Committee, that kind of thing. Was there a way in which people’s positionality played out in terms of the dynamics that ensued around specific issues? Were there people who you could count on? Or disciplines, campuses? That you could count on to be more conservative, less conservative? How did that work?

20-00:16:17

Banks:

There were obviously individuals who you connect with and say, Okay, this is cool. But as far as campuses, I didn’t. Let’s start with the big dynamic. There was often a kind of antipathy towards Berkeley from Irvine, Riverside, the smaller schools. Santa Cruz. There was a certain kind of—this is a little pejorative, but I’ll offer it—petty jealousy, like, “Oh, Berkeley. You guys think you know—” Anything that Berkeley was for, a lot of people felt that they had to be against, and I found that off-putting. But that’s the way it worked. Coupled with, joined with, a certain kind of envy. Approach avoidance: I don’t like you, but I really want to be with you. Or: You think you’re so good; I’m just as good as you are and I want to be where you are. I can babble R&B lyrics about that. That was kind of interesting, and it’s doubly crazy being black, because you’re at the elite, but you’re outside. I mean, how does a black person from Berkeley get to be in this? Again, all this is symbolic. It’s not like you have any power or any money for it, or anything. It’s just a crazy set of dynamics. But, you know, you always see that. You get questions, like at

lunch, that nobody else gets: What did you do here? How long have you—? This kind of interrogation, trying to sort it out: How could you possibly be here? As opposed to just—I mean, who cares? That’s always fun to me, because I’m very mischievous like that. Playing people.

20-00:18:45

Wilmot:

Give me an example of that.

20-00:18:54

Banks:

Let me take it out of that context and give you an example that’s a little better. There are times at my kids’ school where that has happened. People say, “What do you do?” “I teach.” “Where do you teach?” “I teach in Berkeley.” You put two or three sentences together, okay, that say—I mean, I’m not showy like that, but I might say something and “What subject do you teach?” You know? This kind of interrogation rather than, “Gee, you don’t seem to fit this, this, this.” Like I said, I’m playful with it, because that’s not who I am. I’m not a Berkeley professor. I’m Bil Banks, and that’s what I do. That’s certainly a big part of my identity, but not self-consciously. I don’t advertise. It’s just my way of talking, thinking, and so forth, is shaped by thirty-something years of that kind of institutional experience, and I fancy myself as a wannabe intellectual. That’s where it comes out at the end, that’s where it is. But people get confused by that. They want to put you in a cubbyhole. You think about that idea, and I’m meeting other people here and there, and people ask you questions, and you feel, well, I’m in African American Studies. And that really stumps them, because that can’t be legitimate. You’re here because of—and, again, we’re talking about maybe a minority of people who actually, certainly a minority of people who actually say anything to me. But there’s this sort of dissonance that doesn’t fit quite right.

20-00:20:54

Wilmot:

You’re kind of surfing other people’s dissonance?

20-00:20:56

Banks:

Yeah. That’s other people’s problems. I mean, I never do that. Part of it’s just shyness. Manners. You don’t ask people about themselves as a rule.

20-00:21:14

Wilmot:

As a member of that Divisional Council did you build and create networks or allies?

20-00:21:20

Banks:

Allies, yes; networks, no. There were three or four people there that you could count on to make sense on issues or to agree with. Every now and then—I don’t want not so much sell myself short, but there were, like on the Novartis issue, there were people like David Hollinger and others who were forceful advocates for positions that I supported. They were leaders. I was just sort of listening, because a lot of the debate was new to me. But once you get into it, you say, “Okay, this is cool. This is critical.” So it wasn’t as if I’m a lone ranger in all things. You make lasting relationships and lasting connections, and some of that happened. Yes. I’m just trying to think of some other. No permanent friends. No permanent enemies. Only permanent interests.

20-00:22:23

Wilmot:

Okay. Interesting. I wanted to turn now to ask you some general questions. From your experience in serving on—have you had experience in serving on different ad hoc committees with regard to promotions and tenure?

20-00:22:45

Banks:

Yes.

20-00:22:47

Wilmot:

From that experience, were there general over-arching things that you learned about the way that the university kind of makes sense of issues of diversity and access at the faculty promotion and tenure level? I may have said that in an excessively complicated way, but I'm really just trying to get at the experience of faculty, when it comes to promotion. Are there any kind of general—?

20-00:23:33

Banks:

I think that there is usually two things. First of all, the committees have usually been constructed in a way to ensure some sympathy, if you will—that's a bad word—sensitivity to the special problems of minority and women faculty members. I've been in both positions. So that you don't get—it's not a random pool. Why? Because the Budget Committee, the spirit of affirmative active, sort of ensures that if you're going to have a black professor, there should be a black person on the committee if possible. Or somebody who knows about the field, which shows some general sympathy. So you start off with that. You're there, or somebody else is there, for a reason. Usually if it's a three-person committee, two people—so, that's the case. You rarely get a totally hostile committee. It's different from—tenure to me is maybe the most important, as opposed to promotions. Most of the time, in committees that I've served on, people have been sensitive to the special responsibilities that—for the purposes, let me just say "black" but I think it refers to other disadvantaged minority faculty members as well—the special problems that they have faced. A guy like Gabor Basri. Tremendous scholar but he's done so much other stuff outside, in terms of committees and helping students in sciences. People are aware and sensitive to that. However, there have been circumstances where people have come up or insisted on coming up for tenure and have done too much of that. That is, the bulk of their case is the kind of service potential and so forth. You do get questions about that. You get questions about—I've never heard anything political discussed openly, but again they would not discuss that in front of me.

20-00:26:07

Wilmot:

What does that mean, "political"?

20-00:26:08

Banks:

Your politics. That you're too left, too right, or anything like that. You don't get that as a rule. It's talked about differently. "Credible." "Empirical." Words like that are sort of buzz words for a kind of scholarship that more people approve of than others. That's what you get a lot of: the kind of scholarship. If you're doing case studies or qualitative kinds of things, it's easier to

criticize than the straight quantitative, historical narrative kind of stuff. You get into interpretations then. That has happened on occasion. Also the credibility of references. That comes up from time to time. Where you have all these letters, ten letters, saying this, this, this, this. Which ones do we take most seriously? You can see some patterning there, that these people, whom these other people know, are thought of as being more credible than others—who might be much more authoritative as far as the field is concerned on the merits, but they're at Harvard. How could they not know about x, y, z? You get that kind of status. We're talking about maybe, in my case, twenty cases over thirty years, and I can't even remember all of them, so it's not like three or four times a year you do this. Maybe once a year. Last year, I think a couple of times I did it. Here and there. But not a lot so that you can compare or even remember. I'm sure there are times that I just don't remember. I'd have to sit down and really think hard about some of the people. At times they're in fields that you don't know a lot about. I was on a committee last year, a guy—talented person—actually this was a promotion. Advanced, accelerated promotion. I knew very little about this particular field. It had nothing to do with race; it was not a minority candidate. So I certainly couldn't be a player. You read the stuff and bring to bear whatever ideas you have about it, but I could not argue with any authority about the academic intellectual merits. And you wonder, "Well, why am I here?" The ideal is you don't want all specialists, you want people who can do other things. I could talk about the teaching and what students said about the person, and so forth. You sit quietly and listen, and—hopefully—learn. It's very important to feel that you're comfortable with not knowing everything or you're pretending that you know everything. That's been my experience.

20-00:29:33

Wilmot:

Are there particular cases that stand out for you?

20-00:29:38

Banks:

One case that I heard about because I was on campus when it happened. Harry Edwards, who at the time was a junior person [interview interruption]

20-00:30:01

Wilmot:

Thank you for raising that Harry Edwards tenure case. I've heard that that was this very kind of seminal tenure struggle—and it was a struggle—on campus. I wanted to ask you how that unfolded, from your perspective. At that time you were chair of the African American Studies department, 1974-ish.

20-00:30:33

Banks:

Yeah, I could have been. Harry Edwards was an assistant professor at the time in sociology, taught classes—undergraduate courses—that attracted hundreds, if not thousands of students each year. Harry is a very dynamic, very forceful lecturer, had a great deal of notoriety through his activities in the Olympics. I don't know if he was with the 49ers at the time, but he's a very visible public figure, political figure, in some ways. Came up for tenure, and there were many people in Sociology who did not take his scholarship seriously. They thought it was shallow, did not merit a promotion for tenure based upon the scholarship. There were other people who argued that his teaching—there was an infamous allegation, which had some truth, that he had

given these large classes True/False exams, which is not usually done. At Berkeley, you tend to be a little more rigorous than that. That he had not taught graduate courses. These are offering some of the criticisms of Harry Edwards. There were some in the Sociology faculty who supported Harry because they thought he brought a unique perspective to the sociology of sport. This is a new field, so it was argued, and that he's one of the pioneers there. This isn't a field like Methods or Theory that's been developed over a long time, and he was a pioneer in that particular field, and that was reason to support his tenure. There were others, quite frankly, who recognized that budgets in departments are determined to a large extent by enrollments. If Harry can bring in eight hundred students, and can teach a thousand students a semester, the department benefits by virtue of that kind of enrollment, because nobody else could bring in that many students. "You've gotta protect Harry Edwards because he's controversial. They'll see him on TV." That's cool. So you have all of these things at play.

At some point he was turned down—I think he was turned down initially by the department, or there was a split vote, or something like that, and Harry went to the community, went to the black community, and sought to mobilize African American leaders. Rumor has it he joined a large church, Allen Temple [Baptist] Church in East Oakland, and made his case to be an example of this popular, courageous black professor speaking out for so forth and so on. Of course, that has a certain ring to it in the black community. This happens so often, that's understandable. He got some support there too. The opinion on campus among black students was decidedly mixed because Harry had not been identified with issues and matters concerning black students on the Berkeley campus. He did not have a reputation as one who was sympathetic or active on behalf of black people in the environment. Many people cynically argued, "Aha, now when—à la Clarence Thomas—you get into trouble, all of a sudden you're black. Whereas before—" I mean, he spoke about Olympics and racism at this level, but in terms of working with students, showing some graduate students—I know graduate students were upset because he refused to serve on their committees at the graduate level. Anyway, there was this undercurrent. But that's not the kind of thing that could get publicly stated. Nobody was going to stand up—no black person at that time was going to publicly stand up and say that, but it was there. I know that for a fact. The part that I know about or heard about, was that the committee finally concluded, or recognized, some limitations as far as scholarship was concerned but felt there was a broader need for a voice like his as a permanent part of the Berkeley faculty. Race, I'm sure, had something to do with it because at the time, there was only one other black—Troy Duster was in the Sociology Department and I'm sure he was the only other person there. And sociology/race. He had supporters like Blauner. He had a constituency within the department, if not a majority constituency. That was the case. Like I say, it was very interesting because all of these things played out. That self-conscious attempt to appeal to the black community "to support me"—and others said, "Well, wait a minute. Where have you been on this issue, on that issue?" I think there's evidence that Harry had not involved himself. Once you decide that you're a national figure, that's your stage. In a way, it's his stage, rhetorically. That's how that situation came about.

20-00:37:10

Wilmot:

I hear that from the time there was a petition that virtually all the black faculty signed on his behalf.

20-00:37:18

Banks:

Oh, yeah. I'm sure that was the case.

20-00:37:22

Wilmot:

How did it come to be something that mobilized the whole campus?

20-00:37:30

Banks:

First of all, there were people—you say “black faculty”—

20-00:37:38

Wilmot:

As I understand it, there was only one person who didn't sign it.

20-00:37:43

Banks:

I'm trying to think who that might have been. Bill Shack, maybe. I don't know. I don't remember, but I don't think there were black faculty members who would publicly oppose it. Because, number one, on the merits, people didn't know and a prima facie case can be made that, “Look, fifteen hundred people on campus. It's not as if you're naming somebody to be president. Of all these people, why single him out? Maybe he's not this, maybe he's not that, but do you have to be a superstar in all these areas to teach at Berkeley? He teaches all these students. Students say he's great, he's funny.” These things get worked out, and that was basically, I think—I mean, you get people in other fields like physics and so forth, they didn't know anything. They couldn't comment substantively about fitness for tenure, but you could make a very good case that he brought something unique to the department, something special, and got many students interested in sociology who would normally not have been interested. That's how the argument goes. But just politically, how are you going to stand up and raise my hand against Harry Edwards because a white sociology department said that he's not satisfactory. That's just not—the politics that shake down like that. Certainly not then. I'm not certain what would happen now. Who wants that headache? “I'm the man who voted against Harry Edwards.” Pffff. Hey, come on! I say that [laughs] rhetorically. Obviously I didn't.

20-00:39:33

Wilmot:

No, I understand. There's very few cases, as I understand, tenure cases, that actually go to the chancellor level, which this one did.

20-00:39:44

Banks:

Hm-mmm.

20-00:39:44

Wilmot:

This one went to Al Bowker.

20-00:39:47

Banks:

I thought it was Heyman.

20-00:39:49

Wilmot:

I think Bowker was the chancellor at the time. Maybe he was sent to the vice chancellor. What were the dynamics at play that this became such a controversy? Most people, when tenure is denied at your department level, you close the book. How did this book stay open?

20-00:40:12

Banks:

Because Harry was able to generate a lot of attention, publicity. National publicity. Harry Edwards was able to generate a lot of attention and made it a political issue in a way that forced the chancellor to think about the politics of it. What are the pros and cons of him getting tenure, given the circumstances? That kind of dialogue doesn't usually happen with a lowly assistant professor in French. There are no implications. But with Harry, when you have somebody that's been a public figure, denied, the dynamics change. Issues come up. You have to consider things that you wouldn't normally consider.

20-00:41:01

Wilmot:

You were clearly on the outside of this, but from your perspective, what were the issues in play when there was someone like Harry Edwards who basically almost single-handedly birthed a field—the sociology of sport—in a place like the United States, where sport and race are so intertwined, and his scholarship was dismissed, as I understand it. So what kind of politics were at play there, perhaps at the department level?

20-00:41:37

Banks:

At the department level, you had people there in Sociology who are very, very major players in the field. People like Neil [J.] Smelser. I could name other folks as well, but they're very mainstream: This is how sociology is done; it's not done like this, it's done like this. And Harry was doing it a different way. He was doing sociology differently. Many of them thought that it was done, not only different, but it wasn't done very well. There was more rhetoric than needed to be vis-à-vis the thing. But it's easy to see how the tried and true people who've studied Durkheim, and Marx, and Mills and so forth, would see Harry going off, not being really sociological but that famous pejorative word “journalistic.” That's more appropriate for a—

20-00:42:42

Wilmot:

Is that a famous pejorative word in the academy?

20-00:42:43

Banks:

Oh, yeah. Once you get labeled as journalistic, that means you're simply recounting things that other people have happened as opposed to digging below the surface making connections. Again, these things are tenuous because there's a lot of good stuff that happens that some people put off as journalistic. I know a person who got the MacArthur Fellowship, a famous American historian, who's at Berkeley—Larry [Lawrence W.] Levine—who was castigated by his colleagues for many years because he was writing about black culture and they didn't think that was a subject that warranted serious attention. Years later, he's a giant in American history but he went through that period—Alan Dundes is another person who, “Why are you studying these

jokes? What merit is that?" I mean, you have to kind of stick with what you're doing and move ahead. I don't want to equate Harry with Larry Levine, or his work with Larry Levine's. I'm just suggesting that the way people view fields and disciplines might vary, and I think Harry had some room there and his case took advantage of it.

20-00:44:00

Wilmot:

Hm-mmm. Is there anything else you want to say today?

20-00:44:03

Banks:

No, I think that's sort of a good point. Hopefully, next week we can talk about some of my students. They've been important to me as I've moved along. I have fond recollections of many. Negative recollections of others, but that's the business.

20-00:44:23

Wilmot:

Okay, great. We'll pick up next week.

20-00:44:27

Banks:

Very good.

[End Audio File 20]

Interview 11 May 18, 2004

[Begin Audio File 21]

Wilmot:

May 18, interview 11, Professor Bil Banks. I wanted to start off by asking you if there's anything that you wanted to say that you've thought about and you wanted to say today.

21-00:00:30

Banks:

Well, I think it appropriate—in that I see my role closely linked to students teaching over the years, and I've had many students—to offer some reflections on some of my students that challenged me most, that were most impressive, some of the difficulties I've had with students who come from a very different generation, a very different place in American society, California. I've thought about it and it bears—maybe it's worth it for me to try to put together some ideas about my background, my perspective, placed in the context of a place like Berkeley and the kind of students that I've taught over the years. Number one, it's further complicated by the fact that the students today are quite different from the students some time ago. But let me just talk a bit, and we'll see how that comes out.

21-00:01:53

When I came to Berkeley, like everybody that—I think most people in the country, Berkeley had this superstar reputation. I just assumed that every student at Berkeley was flat-out brilliant. Growing up back East, D.C., and schools that I went to, not distinguished schools at all, but there was always this Berkeley. Free speech, coming in the aftermath of the Free Speech Movement, you just imagined Berkeley as being this place where everybody was just super brilliant. That was a challenge to me. I'd never done full-time college teaching before. I taught a class at Howard, maybe once a year for a couple of years or something like that. It wasn't that much. But this was my first job where that was an integral part of what I was to do—teach. And I just remember being sadly disappointed at the way students approached learning and academic work. And that confused me quite a bit. I mean, these were students who most of them were bright enough, but as I sit back now, I could not argue that as a group they were not any more distinguished intellectually or in terms of motivation or their academic oomph than the students I encountered at Howard.

21-00:03:54

I was dean of students there, so I interacted with a lot of students and so forth, so I had a real good feel for how they thought, or thought I did. And I just remember trying so hard. I'd have office hours like three hours a day, for three days a week, just to make myself available. I thought I had something to offer and I thought I was personable enough. I mean, who's to say. And no one ever came. They would come to class. They would like the class, but they didn't seem to see learning in the class as being connected with anything particularly in their lives. Or at least I felt undervalued by students. That is, "I can help with this. I know a little bit about this, if you'd just come by." And I'm not a particularly pushy person. I'm not the kind that would say, "Hey, you have to do this." Although—well, I'll get to this later. But that was one of my early impressions: that the caliber of students across the board, and I guess at that point maybe 20 percent of the students I taught were white students who were interested in African American studies and so forth.

21-00:05:18

Wilmot:

Did you say 20 percent?

21-00:05:19

Banks:

About 20 percent, and 80 percent—well, again, obviously—there weren't that many Asian students at that time. And that's rough. In some classes it was different, and so forth. Grading, I just remember just getting into all kind of difficulty about grades, because some students failed, some students got C's, some students got D's, et cetera, et cetera. And "I can't take an exam this day, I'll take it..." And I came from a tradition, my father was a college professor, and I thought he was personable. I knew what he put into connecting with students. I was trying to do the same thing, but these were students who just didn't show the kind of seriousness that I had expected from a place like Berkeley. And I wondered. I thought, "Well, maybe it's the context. Maybe it's because this is African American Studies and given the political character of the department and the times, people had separated the politics from the academic. It sort of blended it all together. So I don't really have to work. I just have to say the right things and come out with the 'dedicated to my people,' 'relevant to the needs of the black community,' those kinds of slogans, and that's all it would take." I'm sure there was some of that.

21-00:07:15

But this began to give me some problems with the administration at the time, because they'd go to the chair: "God, he gave so many C's and I did all the work," these kind of clichés and I'm very compulsive about grades. Here's the work, and boom. But anyway, that was a major league disappointment. I was always overprepared, ready for all these interesting things in class, but it's like nobody—and again, it's overstatement, but the classes as a group did not connect with that. But there were some outstanding students. The first student that I ever taught—in the first class I ever taught, a woman, Diane Milner, who, like I said in that first class, later went to Stanford Law School and she's practicing law in Oakland now. Her daughter, in fact, goes to the same school as my daughter. But she was in that first class. A brilliant woman who clearly was different from the run of the mill. Another woman, Marcia Douglas, later went on to get a PhD at the University of Chicago. This was a white student. I managed to stay in touch with her over some twenty years. There were a number of other students that I recall as individuals who were impressive. But that was one of the big things that I had.

21-00:09:00

It was agonizing, because I thought my politics—I was comfortable with my politics. I was politically mature. You're never completely mature, but I was not stupid. I didn't have any ego needs, or I wanted to prove that I'm black. I'm from Georgia. And that kind of stuff tended to frustrate me, where I'm working so hard, I've thought about all this stuff. I think I have so many ways of engaging students and an eighteen- or nineteen-year-old kid comes up and, "You're not black because this," You know, the first temptation, or a temptation was to get angry. "What? You don't know anything. I know this, and, this you don't know anything. How dare you question me?" This lashing out. And that happened out with a lot of black faculty across the country. When they were challenged by students, instead of staying at the table engaging, people just fall back with hostility: "Here are these crazy, stupid kids." That happened at a lot of different places, because these are people who genuinely did know a lot. And for an eighteen-year-old to come up with that, that was just crazy. And in particular I remember a lot of the

students—historically this has been the case; I don't know if it's good or bad—at Berkeley High. Berkeley High had some of the craziest— [coughs; interview interruption to get water]

21-00:10:55

Wilmot:

Berkeley High had one of the—

21-00:11:27

Banks:

Yeah, I mean the students from Berkeley High always came with the kind of fervor and audaciousness that was often frustrating because they knew everything, they thought. The kind of confidence. An old friend, who was a head of black studies for many years, Richard Navies, very smart guy who did a lot to put black studies on the map at Berkeley High. I think it was probably one of the first black studies departments in the country. We'd argue often about rigor. The idea of rigor, rigor. And it was a healthy argument because he certainly, himself, was thoughtful and understood and so forth, but somehow students would leave thinking that they knew everything. They knew everything about slavery. All these topics, these issues that I was really confused about intellectually. Different points of view, different theories, interpretations, I'm really trying to figure all this stuff out. And here was an eighteen-year-old kid from Berkeley High, "Oh yeah, it was about this, it's about that." What do you do? Get angry, or do you just step back and say, "Well, they don't know anything. I'm going to distance myself from black students," and that kind of thing? So that was a real issue for me at a student level. How do I deal with all these crazy goddamn students who think they know everything. And they didn't. They didn't.

21-00:13:24

In those days it gets personal because students correctly reasoned that, because of students, the Black Studies Department existed. They were right. The students and the community. It wasn't like a group of faculty members got together and created that. It was a result of political energy, political initiative, political pressure, and they knew that. "We went on strike to give you your job. Now, what is your obligation to us?" And that's something that I'd thought about that. I knew that. They didn't have to convince me about that, but they were—instead of asking me, they were telling me: "You should be doing this, this, this, because this is black, and you're not doing this. We're oral people. I don't want to read all of this." That was an issue that I had to constantly deal with for the first probably ten years, I dare say, because it's ever-present. That was a big student issue with my. My notion about standards and expectations and how African American studies fit into the whole body politic, whether it was oppositional or so forth, how to relate to people. That was a very big problem for me. And many others. I don't think I'm unique in this regard.

21-00:15:03

There were many other black professors across the country who faced similar challenges. What is blackness? Who decides what being black is? And so forth. I think I was much more prepared than a lot of people, because when I did the book, I interviewed a lot of black intellectuals, they talked about this, and they were much more agonized by this than I was. I was angry. What they were saying, I knew didn't make any sense. I wasn't questioning myself, but I was just: "Okay, given these attitudes, I'm not going to get disengaged. You're not going to chase me out of town. I'm going to stay in there. I'm going to fight. I'm going to fight hard." And, "How do I fight?"—

that was my issue, not “you’re white,” or however white was thought of in those days. That wasn’t going to happen. But many other people who did come from more traditional lower-class backgrounds than mine—my background was clearly middle class. It was a middle-class intellectual background, and these are people who had—you know, my dad had a Ph.D., and we argued seriously over the breakfast table and dinner table all the time that I was in high school, and so forth. It wasn’t about money and status and big cars and stuff, it was more that education was a given.

21-00:16:45

Wilmot:

You started to say that “many people with far more traditional middle-class backgrounds than I were—,” and you broke off at that point. I wanted to ask you to flesh this out about the trend you saw nationally about how people responded to this kind of—[narrator coughs]. Do you want to take a break?

21-00:17:11

Banks:

I have a cold, so I’m not sure if I’m going to get—

21-00:17:16

Wilmot:

Okay. How people kind of responded to this spotlight on what their obligation or role should be.

21-00:17:30

Banks:

There was a tendency in far too many black academics to pander to students—to feel that they could become authentic by caving in or pandering or cutting back on readings, or not being demanding. Just that whole thing to read and to study and all that kind of stuff, that was less important than the expressive culture, for that matter. Skip Gates put it to me once. He said, “There are so many students who come who end up—if you read *Native Son* and conclude that it’s nothing more than a black man choking a white woman, you don’t understand literature.” And there a lot of people who didn’t go beyond that. The fact that there was an angry black man who was frustrated and killed a white girl. That’s one way of reading that. But there are other ways of reading *Native Son*, for instance, and other materials as well, that can be much more rewarding than that kind of simplistic approach. I know many colleagues that sort of caved in to that, and just sort of played to the masses. That was the name of that game—across the country; not just at Berkeley.

21-00:19:05

Wilmot:

If you were to historicize that—and you did, in your book—how would you look at those two almost paradigms encountering each other? How would you describe that? Intellectual strivers meeting, I don’t know if you’d say black nationalists, but that’s another way to say it.

21-00:19:28

Banks:

That’s the other thing, too: I always thought of myself as a black nationalist. Not a separate state and all that kind of stuff, but a “race man.” I like your other word better. I’m a race man. Not because I feel any sense of lack of interest or hostility towards “the other,” if you will, but I look

at it as: given the resources that I have and given the resources that people like me have—same color, oppression, all that kind of stuff—can't a few people dedicate themselves to that? You don't have to be against white people to be for black people. That was one of the questions that I used to pose in class. Is it possible to be pro-black without being anti-white in the context of American society? That was always a rich conversation, because you get into helping people sort this out and getting out of the box as far as being pro-black you don't like white people, or don't date white guys, all that kind of simple stuff that fits into so much stuff in that time.

21-00:20:49

So, yes, I thought of myself as a black nationalist. I valued independence. I didn't think that all black nationalists had to think the same way, and this was reflected in the literature of the time. There's [Amiri] Baraka, the black esthetic people, the Panthers, US, the Nation of Islam. We have all these varieties. I saw myself as having to keep some distance, not become immersed in the Black Panther Party or the Nation of Islam. My job, my role, as a professor—and that's the other thing too: I was always very protective of that. My personal politics as opposed to my role as a professor. I tried to always keep that—"Why am I here? I'm here to help these students get from point A to point B, wherever point B might be. That's what I'm here to do. Not to have them like me. I'm not running a political party." Because, if I had the answers, I'd do that, but I didn't know. I didn't know anybody that knew. Black people should be doing this, this, this. And that was always the thing. "What's the solution?" I'd come up with all these analyses and you're sitting there in class, "Well, okay, I understand. What's the solution?" They could not—I'm in for the journey. "You come to your own solutions; you come to your own conclusions. I'm here just to throw out flashlights and signposts. Stop signs here and red lights here or yellow lights here, and so forth." It's up to a bigger kind of historical context to decide what happens. But I always saw myself as keeping some distance from that. And that's probably a kind of intellectual stance.

21-00:23:02

It wasn't to say that it wouldn't be relevant. There were times when you have to commit, and I like to think I did that in terms of things I did on campus and to some extent in my writing. It was activist stuff. Not just writing, just the ivory tower kind of thing. I was involved in campus admissions. You do that. You do that. You can't just sit back. There's a paralysis of analysis kind of thing. But that was the striving black nationalist, dedicated to black people but also committed to intellectual values. I just never accepted that you can't be one without the other. In my own way, I tried to put that together.

21-00:23:56

Wilmot:

I wanted to ask you if you could mention or speak to if not the actual students, connection with students that you found—either graduate or undergraduate—that were enriching to you. Or even to just describe the tenor of a connection with these students that you felt very proud and happy for, or something that enriched your intellectual framework in some way. Do you want to speak to that? It doesn't require individual examples. You may choose to go there; that may be how your memory works.

21-00:24:44

Banks:

There was one student—I guess I can mention his name; Cordell Abercrombie—who was a leader of the movement against me. The class boycott. He was head of the BSU [Black Student Union], called a boycott of Black Studies when I became chair. That whole controversy.

21-00:25:04

Wilmot:

In 1971?

21-00:25:09

Banks:

Yeah. He was a leader, was beat up by the cops. The people at the Berkeley campus police. A very violent, aggressive guy who hated my guts. Threatened me publicly. We'd have meetings in the community and so forth, and we'd always end up—and eight years later, we became friends. I invited him to the class to talk about those days. He invited me out to his house to meet his wife, and so forth. We didn't become personal friends, but it was a kind of respect. I pushed him, I said, "Well, what did you think I was doing there?" And we had some good conversations.

Gloria Burkhalter was another person—who's on campus now as head of the student EOP [Equal Opportunities Program] operation. Gloria Burkhalter was brought to campus by Ron Lewis to be a counselor in the department, and—

21-00:26:15

Wilmot:

I want to ask you—you didn't finish what you were going to say.

21-00:26:17

Banks:

About the student, yeah.

21-00:26:18

Wilmot:

About Cordell.

21-00:26:19

Banks:

Cordell, yeah. Cordell Abercrombie.

21-00:26:24

Wilmot:

You were saying you had some interesting conversations and you pressed him, "What did you think I was doing?"

21-00:26:27

Banks:

Right. And he said that nobody knew me. I was such an unknown, and they didn't know if they could trust me. Stuff like that. And I said, "What were the specific things that I did? Let's make this concrete. In that we're friends now, we're sitting here drinking wine." He kind of got quiet and said, "Well, you know, a lot of people were dependent on the department for their livelihood." A whole lot of people were working—working part-time, making \$20 an hour. I

found that interesting, but I kind of sensed that. Here was a person on the inside, a person that had been making a lot of money in the department, as a work-study. There were all kinds of scams going on, and that was a big part of the equation. And the other thing he talked about, black students couldn't afford to get C's in Black Studies because they knew they were going to get C's in other courses. "I can't get a C in Anthropology and get a C in Black Studies because I'll flunk out. I have to get an A in Black Studies."

21-00:27:53

Wilmot:

That was speaking back to that issue of you being very rigorous with students, especially with black students.

21-00:27:59

Banks:

Right. And the role of the department. Me as an individual, and I was not reflecting what he judged to be the mission, that is, to address the concrete needs of black students vis-a-vis grades.

21-00:28:11

Wilmot:

Different interpretations of what nurturement is?

21-00:28:14

Banks:

Yes. That is a good way to put it, yeah. He talked about how he came to really respect me because I never flinched. He said he was always surprised when I would show up at these rallies that were 200 people after me, and I'd always show up and dealt with that. He respected that, because I'd been portrayed by Ron Lewis as an ivory-tower intellectual, an outsider. All he wants to do is get Ph.D.'s in the department, and all that kind of stuff, and that was seen as antithetical to the "real" black studies. I would always come and I'd deal. I'd engage people. He came to respect that. And that was good, because it helped me understand the power of—courage sometimes shines through. The fact that you are willing to stand up in the face of adversity, that that can be respected. Even if people just disagree with me very fundamentally. That was good for me.

21-00:29:34

Wilmot:

I want to ask you a question about this that I didn't ask you at the time we were talking about this more fully. What kind of support did you have in your life so that you—how were you supported in that time?

21-00:29:48

Banks:

I had a very good friend during that time. A guy named Dale Rubin, who grew up in West Oakland. A very important political family—Lillian Love and company. Went to McClymonds, then went to Berkeley, undergraduate, transferred to Stanford, graduated from Stanford, came back and finished Boalt law school. He became a very close friend during those days, and he was cantankerous and courageous, and he enjoyed fighting stuff like I did. He was certainly my closest friend during that period. There were other people too. I'm thinking of people at the

personal level. There were sort of political allies on campus, white faculty members. Winthrop Jordan was a good—he's a close personal friend.

21-00:30:57

Wilmot:

I'm thinking of this as a very difficult experience to weather as a human being, and so that's why I'm asking you that.

21-00:31:04

Banks:

Yeah. I had my—and I liked a woman very much during that period. She was a very important source of support. She understood what I was trying to do, and she helped a great deal.

Obviously, my parents—we could spread it out—but on the ground, that is, these were people that were quite dependable, I could always go to say to somebody, "You did something right." Again, I'm thinking more personal support as opposed to—

21-00:31:59

Wilmot:

That was my question.

21-00:31:59

Banks:

Yeah. I'm trying to extend it a bit, a little bit. There was a whole category of people who were my enemies. John Burris, Oliver Jones. All these people. Leo Bazile. Everybody hated me. Most of these people came around to being—just accepting me. I don't know if they liked me—I don't really care. But those two people, I think, were very—

21-00:32:46

Wilmot:

There for you.

21-00:32:45

Banks:

Yeah. We'd listen to music. And music, too. I don't want to underestimate music. Jazz, that's not a person but certainly to listen to music all day on Saturday and cook, and just think about a [Charlie] Parker or a [John] Coltrane, just to get engrossed in that. Very, very important. I'm so disappointed now, at this part of my life, that music doesn't or cannot play the role that it played then. I don't listen to music nearly as much. I have a million albums, but I don't listen to music as much. Maybe it's the family situation, or that—I don't know, but I'm wondering could it ever rise again and help me put things together in ways that it did at that time.

21-00:33:49

Wilmot:

Every time I come over here you are playing some wonderful music that I've never heard before.

21-00:33:54

Banks:

Yeah, well. Like I said, you just don't. I remember as soon as I got home—boomph. There were groups—well.

21-00:34:08

Wilmot:

You had mentioned Gloria Burkhalter as another student who was very important.

21-00:34:15

Banks:

Person. Not important to me, but she was an example of a person who was a bitter enemy and ended up being one of my strongest supporters on campus within the past five years. Even before then. She was one of the people that I had removed—involuntarily transferred out of Afro-American Studies. One of the conditions of taking the job. You remember the letter—“I want my own staff”—and she was there, and she had to leave the department. They fought it all the way to the supreme court, the California supreme court. It was a supreme court case whether a university has the right to involuntarily transfer a person without cause. Like I said, it went all the way to the California supreme court, so I’m in the history books at some level.

21-00:35:07

Wilmot:

You or the Regents [of the University of California]?

21-00:35:09

Banks:

They were the moving party against me. Yeah, I guess so. Technically, the regents. They were against the regents, but they were talking about my actions. The facts of the case revolved around what I did.

21-00:35:27

Wilmot:

And that’s more of a reconciled situation at this point?

21-00:35:29

Banks:

Yeah. I was able to do it. They couldn’t come back.

21-00:35:31

Wilmot:

I mean reconciled in terms of your, at the time Gloria Burkhalter became—

21-00:35:39

Banks:

She came to recognize that I was consistent. I was fighting for the interests of black students, and a lot of people who were talking, weren’t doing anything. But like I said, I don’t like too many rags to riches stories in the world, but she’s another person who, over time, came to at least see that I was consistent.

21-00:36:05

Wilmot:

There’s probably other teacher-student relationships that have been—I just want to get back to that question of teacher-student relationships that have been fruitful or illuminating for you. Either in terms of learning about being a teacher or just exciting, intellectual connection. Is there anyone else you want to speak to?

21-00:36:32

Banks:

It depends on where you want to start. I have a student that I'm very much involved with now. Of all things, an Iranian student from Alabama, who's a pre-med major, took a course—we've talked about him. Just the Iranian pre-med student and a Black Studies professor—how do you make that work? But it's quite good. Going back, Katie Moore was another gem as far as I'm concerned. Katie was a kid from Los Angeles—Altadena, specifically. She quickly reminds me. A science major, but ended up taking every course that I offered, I think. She just loved to learn. She could just in any office all day and just listen and ask questions. And she was serious. It wasn't about trying to keep from doing this or keep from doing that. She graduated something like a 3.8 GPA, finished UCSF last year. Just a gem. [tape interruption?] Maybe there was sort of a father-y thing there, which I carefully avoid, because that can be a trap. That co-dependence. "What do we do?"

21-00:38:14

Wilmot:

What do you do?

21-00:38:15

Banks:

Exactly.

21-00:38:18

Wilmot:

That brings me to this very interesting question. In one of our other interviews in this series, we talked about this idea of when one comes to inhabit the status and position that you inhabit as a professor at UC Berkeley, do you construct yourself then as a friend—a kind of friendly father—or do you construct yourself as a stern father? This question is asked in the larger framework of a father within this institutional framework, which means, are you affirming this institutional framework or are you thinking about transforming it?

21-00:39:07

Banks:

Okay, let me maybe muddle through.

21-00:39:10

Wilmot:

That's a muddling question.

21-00:39:11

Banks:

Let me just start with "stern"—I project myself as a stern but hip father. In an African American sense of the word. This guy is cold, but he's hip. I'm not friendly. I don't reach out, fun and games. It's not like that. I walk in the class to the end. I immediately scowl. It gets the attention. "Oh, God! Bad day, bad day!" So you establish that, then you get into what you're doing, and when it gets too warm, you scowl again. Charisma, they tend to follow that. And they often pay more attention. These are things that you learn over time that has its effect. But I never project myself as a friend to students. That takes you in different directions.

21-00:40:21

Wilmot:

And the second part of that question, which has to do with—we've talked somewhat about all the mechanisms in place at a place like Berkeley, and at most universities, for taking the measure of faculty and promoting them or not. These kind of, what some people refer to as degradation rituals. Step by step. Evaluation. Even once you're a full professor. I've been asking this question about, do you see this as a necessity for maintaining the integrity of a guild, or do you see it as something that could stand some transformation? Do you see hope for transformation in that respect?

21-00:41:28

Banks:

I'll start with the last. I don't see much hope for transformation at the institution. I think there are transformations within certain departments, perhaps. Some more so than others. But Berkeley will never become a warm place, a supportive place, for faculty. Bottom line, that's just not going to happen. The rules of the game don't encourage that. It's a very competitive place, and so many people—let me get back to an antidote. No, I just think, as a research institution, as an institution that values scholarly research, and that whole business, that's not going to change. The argument would be, "This is what's made us great, and this is what's going to keep us great. And all these other things are variations here and there." Again, some administrations are more sensitive than others. Some departments are more flexible than others. But as an institution, that's not going to change a great deal, certainly in my lifetime.

21-00:42:36

Wilmot:

In asking that question, I'm often not sure if I'm asking an irrelevant question and I've gotten varying responses. You were saying?

21-00:42:45

Banks:

A friend told me about an eminent professor in sociology, a person who's a household name around the world, and how this person got depressed because one year he did not get some kind of step increase that he thought he should get. What? How do you get so locked into a definition of yourself, linked to something so corny as a merit increase when you're a name in the world? It's the equivalent of a John Hope Franklin, instead of getting a \$2,000 raise only gets a \$1,500 raise. That was mind-boggling. Again, I know this professor; I work with him. Then you say, "Well, gee. Once you get into this, this bitch goddess will just pull you in." The striving kind of thing. Going beyond any real meaning in terms of money, stuff like that. It's a rat race. You just feel the need to accumulate these tokens as you move along, and at what point do people just become at peace with themselves and say, "Well, gee. I don't have to write the Great American Novel. I'm going to step away from it. I'm not going to do that. Either that's been done or I don't have it within me to do it. I'm going to carve out some things that are important to me as a person, as a professional, and do them well and go off into the sunset." It's sort of an academic male anxiety. I don't want to be too charitable to women, because there's evidence that they're getting into that, too. You're successful as a black woman academic by doing what women academics do—sorry, this isn't race-specific. This is across the board. This other professor wasn't black. It's just that system that encourages that. And black people have that same impulse. It's somewhat exaggerated because there's always that suspicion that, well, the only

reason we're here is because of affirmative action. There are a lot of people who buy into that. Black people who feel a sense of defensiveness about that. They have to prove that they're desirable, they're wanted, they're really good, as opposed to just being good.

21-00:45:40

Wilmot:

That's another aspect of it. Has there ever been a time where you've felt that your self-concept is at odds with the position that you occupy? Does that make sense?

21-00:45:57

Banks:

The question makes sense, yeah? No, there's never been a time when my self-concept was at odds. When you sort it out, you say, "This is what I can do; this is what I can't do. And this is where I work. How do I do it?" That's the question. And of course it's at odds in a political way—that's the nature of the beast. If you can't function, you shouldn't be here. When I finished graduate school, where does a black intellectual come to rest? Howard, a black college. That follows as night follows day. A black nationalist—which is as I fancy myself—that's where you go. Do you want to deal with black people, issues affecting black people, Washington D.C., Chocolate City, a black campus, long tradition—[Franklin] Frazier, Tate, [Ralph] Bunche—that's where you have to be. My self-concept, it did fit, but at another level it didn't fit, or it fit in ways that I thought would be ultimately self-destructive to me. It obviously wasn't because the people were black; it's just that there's a whole lot of other things that were going on at Howard that worked against the fit.

21-00:47:27

What do you do? I reasoned that in political Berkeley, [a] history of liberal activism, [that] kind of stuff, that would be nurturing that. Another strong tradition of excellence, of scholarship. That's the fit. Flawed as well, but you just plunge into it. Make decisions and come to understand your environment, and make the most of it. That's what my parents and grandparents and great-grandparents and back on, in Georgia, did. That's how they did it. In transforming that, you don't—as Derrick Bell says, you're not going to transform, you're not going to win a lot. But sometimes it's a struggle, and sometimes that can be an example to other students. You just learn to have fun fighting, which is a drag, but what's the other option? Sitting around being depressed? "These people don't like me. They don't respect me. This is a racist university."

21-00:48:46

Wilmot:

Okay. I want to ask you a question also, about your current research. You're working—due out shortly—an anthology of black thought. Is that right?

21-00:49:05

Banks:

Yeah.

21-00:49:05

Wilmot:

Can you talk to me a little bit about how you came to that project?

21-00:49:11

Banks:

Basically, in doing the earlier book on black intellectuals, I read a great deal about the thinking of people over time. I started off knowing a great deal about where people were coming from—the historical figures and some of the contemporary people, and so forth. David Wellman and I—David’s a professor at UC Santa Cruz—got together. He’s a sociologist. We got together and decided—Jewish, incidentally, if that matters—to come up with a book that would give voice to figures outside of the canon. Not exclusively. You’ve got to deal with Washington, Du Bois and so forth. There are a lot of voices out there, and it was our intention—and it is my intention—to do that, and see if it would work. See, for a long time—certainly in literature, and even in the social sciences—there’s this notion of “the canon.” You’ve got to read *Native Son*. This is the canon. The canon. The canon. The canon. But let’s bump it around a little bit.

21-00:50:45

Not that these works have to be as good as *Souls of Black Folks*, but: “Here’s a unique point of view—let’s talk about how this idea moved into the frame of things.” Let’s hear some other voices. That was, is a challenge. Two challenges. First of all, identifying such voices. Who are these people that have a lot to say that are yet unheard of? Let’s talk about women’s movement. Excellent piece by Kelly Miller arguing that black women shouldn’t have the right to vote—that we’ve put too much faith in this notion about women, and so forth. Let’s muddy the waters a bit. Let’s hear some of these other voices. So that’s the challenge. Number 1, identifying these voices. And getting—and this comes later or maybe now—a publisher that wants to make a lot of money to buy into this. It’s so much easier to just double-consciousness—I mean the standard tropes that da, da, da, da. You just repeat those time and time again. “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”—Frederick Douglass. That’s the standard. Can you get a professor to select a book for a class that talks about Hosea Hudson, a black labor leader in Alabama at the turn of the century? Can you get a person to reread St. Clair Drake about Brownsville in Chicago, *Black Metropolis*? Sections of that. Some of the less notable things by Zora [Neale] Hurston. That’s the intention of the anthology. It’s sort of a—not anti-canon, but; “let’s open it up a bit.” Again, I’m falling into that trap myself. Because I don’t see these as canons. If it’s a great piece with a lot of insights, do what you want to it. In many ways, some of the arguments are flawed, there are things I would disagree with. But don’t we need all of that in the mix to make sense of this?

21-00:53:05

But again, getting material and how do you convince people that this new music is good music, as opposed to the same old Beethoven’s Fifth.

21-00:53:18

Wilmot:

It sounds like an extraordinary and a necessary project.

21-00:53:21

Banks:

Well, I hope you’re right. It’s a monster to do. We bit off far too much, and I would never do anything like it again. A lot of the reasons are technical, but I think it’s something that—we’ll see.

21-00:53:39

Wilmot:

Have you been having fun with it?

21-00:53:39

Banks:

No. All books are fun the first year. After that, nothing's fun. For me. I mean, there are people who love to just do that, but I'm not a—after the first year or so, it becomes a drag. I tell students, "Select dissertations that you can do and get finished as quickly as possible, because it's going to be a drag. No matter how interesting. It starts, "Oh, this is great! I'm finding this new information." But after a year, a year and a half, boy, "How do I wind this up?" You want to be able to finish it and go on to something else, or to just do it differently. That's an issue.

21-00:54:28

Wilmot:

What have been very formative influences in this project, in terms of, for example, do you refer to—I know Gerald Early has that huge monster of an anthology *Speech and Power*, several volumes. What has helped you think about and—edit, basically—choose your pieces?

21-00:54:55

Banks:

We put together a book proposal. What we called a thematic chronology, looking at different periods and choosing a theme, rather than strictly chronological. Here's a theme, and we tried to write about and talk about what we were doing. What are the ideas we were looking for? Why do we think the themes are important? And again making reference to other voices. Sure, you have to deal with Douglass; you can't just omit that. But here are some slave narratives. Can we talk about—aren't there some good writings by slaves? Aren't there some things that are quite revealing? Some of the WPA [Works Progress Administration] things. That's the other thing, too. They're not long, developed pieces like you would get with an Emerson or a Thoreau or a Mark Twain. They're often just two pages. How do you convince people that this two-page piece can carry that kind of power? It's kind of difficult. You could write more about it than the piece itself. So it's that kind of mind-boggling challenge.

21-00:56:23

Wilmot:

Who's publishing it?

21-00:56:24

Banks:

Oxford [University Press]. It was well-received. When we put the proposal together, we had three offers, publication offers with Oxford, UC Press, and New York University Press. We went with Oxford. Incidentally, I should mention that David—the press of his other projects caused him to drop out, which was really a drag because he has far more energy than I do. But that's the way it goes sometimes.

21-00:57:01

Wilmot:

Was it exciting to be working with him? Working together?

21-00:57:02

Banks:

Yeah, that's been a big fall down. There's always that challenge of arguing and disagreeing. He's very feisty and argumentative, and that's good for me. And he works hard. That was clearly a step backwards. Plus, there are a lot of—you know, I don't want to get into problems. You can always whine, but my grandfather said, "Good babies don't cry."

21-00:57:32

Wilmot:

Sounds like you miss him.

21-00:57:33

Banks:

Yeah.

21-00:57:34

Wilmot:

Not your grandfather. David Wellman.

21-00:57:40

Banks:

Yeah.

21-00:57:39

Wilmot:

Okay, well. And that's due out any minute?

21-00:57:45

Banks:

No, no, no, no, no.

21-00:57:45

Wilmot:

It keeps being pushed back?

21-00:57:46

Banks:

Yes.

21-00:57:47

Wilmot:

When's it due out?

21-00:57:47

Banks:

I don't know. It's not just me. They have their marketing—let's not even get into the world of publishing. It's just like *Black Intellectuals*. At some point, I'm going to do—perhaps—an update, a revised edition of that. Maybe. But at some point it's out of your hands. Oxford is sitting on a lot of stuff that's—I know somebody, they were ready to go four years ago, and for their reasons—that have nothing to do with anything but their sense of marketing—it's business, as they say.

21-00:58:47

Wilmot:

Yes, I understand. Okay, let's take a break and change our disks and our tapes and then we'll take up again.

21-00:59:01

Banks:

Okay, sure.

[End Audio File 21

]

[Begin Audio File 22]

22-00:00:10

Wilmot:

There's a question that I've neglected to ask you in the past. It has to do with hiring and promotions within African Studies Department. I've asked you about the ambience, environment, practice, culture around—[narrator coughs]. Are you all right?

22-00:00:34

Banks:

Yeah. I'll get some water.

22-00:00:45

Wilmot:

In our last interview, we talked a bit about some of your work serving on ad hoc committees, and perspectives you had gained around the university's culture practice—mechanisms around hiring and promotion. What I neglected to ask you was about the way, the practice of hiring and promotion as it took place within the African American Studies department. It's kind of vaguely stated, but my question is really, were there certain standards that you attempted to put in place around that? Was it generally just following the tone of the university, of other departments? That's the question.

22-00:01:36

Banks:

Hm-mmm. Sure. There are different stages that I'll try to give. Initially, I was a prime mover in decisions about hiring and so forth. I was the Man. In making hiring decisions--first of all; then we'll move to promotions—I tried to get people who I thought were committed to African American Studies. No joint appointments, for instance. As opposed to, "I'm in African American Studies and literature." Because, as a new department, we thought that we—I thought that I needed all the resources. I wanted you 24/7, or 100 percent of your time. Plus, for a junior person, it isn't always good to have to juggle the expectations of two masters. You have to satisfy English over here and African American Studies over there. Often that can be a tension, and who's ill served by that? The candidate. So in selecting these people, number one, that commitment full time to African American Studies. Two, a greater emphasis on teaching undergraduates. That is, people that we thought could not teach effectively at all, we figured out a way not to select that kind of person. Because that's a big part of the {engine?}, and at that point there was no graduate program. Again, these are early days up till, say, 1980. There was not a graduate program. So basically you're talking about an undergraduate program.

Research that one could argue would be pretty relevant as far as the field—Barbara Christian was a very good example, of women writers and criticism and so forth. That’s right on target. Henry Jackson worked on Fanon. And there were mistakes made, too. I want to talk about them, as well. But basically a greater degree of emphasis on undergraduate teaching than I think would have been the case in other departments. And a kind of political sensibility. I wanted people who were comfortable with the fact that they’re black professors at an all-white institution. A lot of people aren’t comfortable with that. Interviewing people, you could feel that, you could smell that. This is not the place for them, because that’s not going to change. I encourage people to spread out. I think that’s one of the things African American Studies hasn’t done enough of, spreading out to other departments and connecting with other people, but you have to be comfortable with where you live.

22-00:04:58

Wilmot:

Figuratively.

22-00:04:58

Banks:

Exactly. That was a consideration. Now, in terms of promotion, chair; and all these things emanate from a chair at some point—I’d never been involved with an unsuccessful promotion case. I don’t think, I can’t remember, in hiring—everybody I wanted, I got. By being quite aware of the standards of the university, being aware of how standards and people are often connected. The fact that the endorsement of a person over here in the History Department, for instance—people on the Budget Committee, the head personnel committee, they understand that’s the old boy network. If Bil Banks says you’re good, you’re good. You get some props for that. And you use this, just like other departments and chairs used it. Like I said, I’m not apologetic about that at all. That’s the way the system works. You can get two eminent people who say radically different things about the same person. If you don’t know which one to choose, you’re not doing your job. If you really want to bring it off.

22-00:06:28

We ended up competing with Harvard, for instance. Reginald Jones had an offer at Harvard, and we ended up going toe-to-toe with Harvard for that. Same was true with Al Raboteau. He later got an offer from Harvard, and we were able to compete effectively there. So, again, it’s just a matter of realizing the environment that you’re in, how that system works. Another view would be to challenge that. I was pushed in that direction very early. Somebody that I didn’t think could make it. I said, “Well, you should challenge it. We’re talking about a new thing here. We just can’t be a slave to the old standards and so forth.” I’m certainly sympathetic to that, but in that case, it wasn’t there. The person wanted tenure. Your interests are not the interests of black people. And what’s revolutionary on the surface—just because it will help you, that doesn’t mean it will have any long-term value. There’s a lot of garbage that goes on in the name of blackness and so forth. But that is an issue, that you have to try to weigh the priorities of the department. People who worked a lot in developing things, new courses, student energies, and so forth. I think there is a place to incorporate that and to, again, shift the emphasis. Not radically change it. That’s not going to happen at Berkeley.

22-00:08:11

Wilmot:

Not for the scholarship, but just giving value to what in some ways—in the language, I think, a little bit off—but in general it's called service, community service?

22-00:08:27

Banks:

Those are the formal categories, yeah. Service. Teaching, research, and service. That can be campus, outside consultancies, consulting at Dow Chemical or Halliburton.

22-00:08:43

Wilmot:

Right, right, right. Okay. Thank you, because that is what my question was getting at: in what ways is this system of promotion and hiring, how does it reflect or differ from the institution at large? And every department is different, but I know that African American Studies may have some differences or similarities that were important to highlight. I appreciate—I think you did that. So thank you.

22-00:09:19

Banks:

One footnote to that: in looking out at the lay of the land in those early years, that first decade, I ran across example after example of talented people that did not get tenure. Where chairs decided to confront the system: “The person hasn't written anything, but we want them because they're this, this, this.” Inevitably, these people lost. Now, am I doing you a favor by saying, “Hey, Nadine, you don't have to write anything, because you're such a great teacher, you're doing service, you don't have to.” And all the time there were demonstrations. Students protested. “We want Nadine! We want Nadine!” They weren't successful. They give you an extra year's pay and you're off into the sunset. I didn't think I was doing the person a favor, and certainly not the long-term interest of the department any favor, by—it's like selling a kind of wolf ticket. “If you don't do this, we're going to go on strike.” Well, hey. These people are faceless, you don't know who they are, They're writing x's by their name. You can't do that, and that's not going to win at a place like Berkeley. And it didn't win in places like San Francisco State. There are all kinds of examples of people who didn't get tenure and generate a lot of activity, protest and stuff, but ultimately the system sort of tilted this way and got back to where it wanted to be.

22-00:10:57

So reform as opposed to revolution. Because if you don't have the guns, don't pretend to be—like Harry Edwards. That's a case where—Harry had done research, writing, scholarship. One could argue that it wasn't the most penetrating or probing, but he'd done something. He'd done a lot of stuff, and he brought students into his classes. So what do you do? You frame all of that and create something that can be described as valuable, and you try to sell it. But if you haven't done any—where there's a total absence at one level, it's kind of hard to do it. If you don't win, what do you do? You mobilize a community? Yeah, that's one way to go, and from time to time that might work. But odds are that it won't.

22-00:12:04

Wilmot:

Another question I have for you, at one time you said that if you were to do another edition, or if you were to have another chance to do interviews for *Black Intellectuals*—that book—you would

have perhaps expanded the scope of your questions to really say what has family, having children meant for you identity as a black intellectual and your professional career.

22-00:12:43

Banks:

Yeah, I'd explore that area—

22-00:12:44

Wilmot:

Perhaps differently than you have?

22-00:12:47

Banks:

Yeah. Has that put a stress on your family life? Is there any tension there? Would your spouse have preferred that you do something else? Pros and cons, and the life, and so forth. I tend to be structured in interviews—I'd have about four or five themes in my head that I'd try to follow. What I'd want to know is to what extent are you—is this good for you and your family? Is your family good for this career?

22-00:13:26

Wilmot:

Well, that was a question that I wanted to pose to you.

22-00:13:27

Banks:

Hm-mmm. Sure.

22-00:13:28

Wilmot:

So that's it.

22-00:13:30

Banks:

Is your family good for you—

22-00:13:30

Wilmot:

Actually, I want to pose it the way I would pose it, which is a little roomier. You have three children, so how is having children impacting your career and the way you pursue your work?

22-00:13:47

Banks:

My daughter, it didn't impact it a great deal. My oldest daughter. One, she was older and she'd spent most of her time growing up in Montgomery County, right outside of D.C. Our arrangement was that she'd spend all three summer months with me, and back there. I went back there all the time. Every chance I'd get to consult with NEH or something, I'd go back. So it was really cool, and she was a pretty fair student. But it didn't have that organic impact on my career. I did what I had to do, and I gave her summer. Very different with the twins, because they were born in 1990. And that's in the throes of stuff, of *Black Intellectuals*, and—

22-00:14:55

Wilmot:

Writing a book?

22-00:14:56

Banks:

Yeah. That was a drag. And their mother and I separated after, I think, five years. About a year before the book actually came out. But at the time of the most intense working and so forth, they were around. I'm slow anyway, and you compound that with kids, twins—it's not easy. In terms of priorities, there was never any question. My priority was the children. That still is the case. It's harder now. At least in those first five years, there was another person in the house and you can sort of play off that, negotiate that a bit, but during the times that they're with me now, that tends to be—it's just a reality. I know people that can compartmentalize, but I'm not that good at compartmentalizing that—children—because their needs tend to get complicated and expand and to deal with—between the two of them, and so forth, it doesn't help one's career. But that's not why people have kids. So that's the way it goes. Well, it shouldn't be why they have kids.

22-00:16:32

Wilmot:

Now, I posed that question in a certain way, but did you want to answer the question that you would pose, or did you prefer just to answer the question that I posed?

22-00:16:41

Banks:

Let me just give a wrinkle to that. That's children. Spouse, partner, or companion, or "squeeze"—that's important too. I think it is important in this business to be with somebody that understands it. Meaning that because I teach two classes a day, that doesn't mean that from five o'clock—it's not an eight-to-five job. I bring things home. I bring issues home. I have to read. And many people coming from different kinds of enterprises or parts of professional life might not understand that. In the body politic, "You only teach two courses? That's all you do?" Well, yeah. So that means to them that the rest of my time is—you can demand. "Well, let's go to Point Reyes. Let's do this, let's do that." Believe it or not, that can be said, and that can be a drag. It's not personal, but people just don't understand—or some men, women, might not understand how the business really works as far as time and research and writing and so forth. I remember, it was really funny—kind of anecdotal. I got audited, income tax, the first year I came to California. A black woman was the auditor and when I was explaining that writing and research was important in terms of getting promotion—you know, I had expenses, research expenses and so forth—the idea that I would write something and not get paid for it was just—she couldn't understand that. Again, she was probably less informed than she should have been, but you take that idea, "Why are you writing this? For money?" "No, it has value in another way, and people give me credit for it and I get promoted," and so forth. Which is self-evident to many people, but there are people in the world—bright, well-meaning people—who just don't know. You hate to be the one to convince, "Well, I have to go to the library this Sunday." Recently even. "It's such a beautiful day." "C'mon. There'll be some other beautiful days, but I have to get this done." And that can be a source of "conflict", if you will. It's really a paradox.

22-00:19:40

Wilmot:

Okay. I wanted to ask you: How has this oral history been for you? How was doing it? Giving this interview over eleven sessions. How has this been for you?

22-00:19:57

Banks:

Well, it's forced me to recall and reshape and maybe rethink some of the things that happened back in the day. I've been at this stuff for thirty-something years at Berkeley—just at Berkeley, to say nothing about other periods—and try to put it in the context of changes in the broader society. Would I have done different if I had been coming in—what are the mistakes that I've made? I always focus on my mistakes, and I would want to ask, What would I have done differently? This experience has done that. I don't know. There are certain kinds of—the question that you ask at the end, if I were you and had to do it again, I'd probably ask that kind of question about other periods, not just the academic thing. There were personal elements that affected how I got to wherever I am, that I could have talked about. Again, maybe I should have brought it up, but I tend to be shy.

22-00:21:28

Wilmot:

You were being—?

22-00:21:29

Banks:

It's just one of those things.

22-00:21:31

Wilmot:

That's important information. That's important feedback you're telling me.

22-00:21:37

Banks:

And again, it's delicate, because that's not—that's your sensibility, but as I reflect on it, I say, “Hmmm. This relationship is not an academic relationship. It goes beyond dotting i's and crossing t's. They had a great impact.” [tape interruption for phone call]

22-00:22:07

Wilmot:

So the question is, then, what are these questions that I could have asked but perhaps didn't and you're right, that is not my sensibility. Is there a specific—in terms of getting into relationships, non-academic, that influenced your career trajectory?

22-00:22:34

Banks:

It's kind of hard to just go back and do single-shot “this person, that person,” but—

22-00:22:43

Wilmot:

Or even just talk to me about the tenor, the kind of questions that I could have asked that may have been illuminating. That would be very useful for me and also just really interesting.

22-00:22:54

Banks:

Well, the “sources of support” question that you put vis-a-vis now and the individuals and so forth. That kind of question could have been asked about my graduate school. I went to graduate school when I was nineteen years old. Who did I hang with? Who did I date? And what difference did that make? I think it made a lot of difference. To me. But that’s not the kind of thing that I would—I’d answer the question, but I wouldn’t venture it. Similarly—

22-00:23:33

Wilmot:

You wouldn’t have volunteered that question?

22-00:23:34

Banks:

No.

22-00:23:35

Wilmot:

But you would have answered it, had I posed it.

22-00:23:36

Banks:

Yeah. That’s the kind of entree that I think could have, in the future with other people—just give them the opportunity. Some people, you might have to push, and you quickly back off. I can’t tell you what to do but that’s an area—

22-00:23:55

Wilmot:

It’s appreciated. I’m going to ask you a question. I really appreciate it.

22-00:24:02

Banks:

And also, pushing for more self-criticism. People make mistakes. I certainly made million of them. I guess if I were interviewing, I’d just say, “At what point—?” You know, there’s some places where you think you really made mistakes. This idea of being reflective over what has happened and so forth. That always introduces—

22-00:24:39

Wilmot:

The things you would have done differently.

22-00:24:40

Banks:

Yeah. How did you conclude that? Again, pushing. But again, it’s a style thing. But that’s something that really worked well for me in my interviews. Again, that’s my style. I like to be—that. The criticism, the support connections, and so forth, these are—

22-00:25:11

Wilmot:

Very important?

22-00:25:12

Banks:

Well, I think. Yeah.

22-00:25:13

Wilmot:

Do you want to reflect a bit on what you would have done differently?

22-00:25:23

Banks:

No. Not at this point. I'll give it some thought, and if I conclude there's enough there, I'll come to your office, where you won't have to drive over, and we'll get another thirty minutes in.

22-00:25:44

Wilmot:

Sounds good. I look forward to that.

22-00:25:45

Banks:

Okay.

22-00:25:46

Wilmot:

Well, let's close for today, and we're leaving open the opportunity to speak again, should we decide to do that.

22-00:25:57

Banks:

Yeah, just leave it open for—next week can't work. I'll just give it some thought, because I don't want to waste your time.

22-00:26:04

Wilmot:

Absolutely. That's definitely a question I could have posed. All right, then. Great.

22-00:26:13

Banks:

Been good. Been good.

[End of Interview]