

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

HARRY EDWARDS
Harry Edwards: An Oral History

Interviews conducted by
NADINE WILMOT
in 2005

Copyright © 2010 by The Regents of the University of California

Since 1954 the Regional Oral History Office has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of Northern California, the West, and the nation. Oral History is a method of collecting historical information through tape-recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of preserving substantive additions to the historical record. The tape recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The corrected manuscript is bound with photographs and illustrative materials and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and in other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

All uses of this manuscript are covered by a legal agreement between The Regents of the University of California and Harry Edwards, dated October 18, 2005. The manuscript is thereby made available for research purposes. All literary rights in the manuscript, including the right to publish, are reserved to The Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley. No part of the manuscript may be quoted for publication without the written permission of the Director of The Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley.

Requests for permission to quote for publication should be addressed to the Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, Mail Code 6000, University of California, Berkeley, 94720-6000, and should include identification of the specific passages to be quoted, anticipated use of the passages, and identification of the user.

It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

Harry Edwards, "Harry Edwards: An Oral History" conducted by Nadine Wilmot in 2005, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2010.



Harry Edwards
Professor Emeritus, University of California, Berkeley

Table of Contents—Harry Edwards

Interview History	viii
Interview 1, October 18, 2005	1
Audio File 1	1
Family background and growing up in East St. Louis, Illinois--early influences—religion—his wife and children—reopening of the Emmett Till court case, the impact of learning about the murder of Emmett Till when an adolescent, a conversation with his father about it—coming to terms with racism and mortality—Hurricane Katrina, sport and the state of African America, the Superdome—the roots of his scholar activism, facing racism from teachers in the classroom as a young person.	
Audio File 2	17
Racism and early education--love of learning at Fresno City College--commentary on intelligent design versus evolution debate--literature and music important to him during the early 1960's--intellectual community as a scholar athlete--perspectives on feminism, gender, and sexuality in the Civil Rights and Black Power movements--interracial marriage and dating--homosexuality and professional sport--Maya Angelou's introduction to his autobiography--on fear, when challenging the status quo; becoming more cautious as he married and made a family.	
Interview 2, November 1, 2005	36
Audio File 3	36
Monument at San Jose State University to commemorate the 1968 protest at the Olympic Games in Mexico City, reflections on public memory and student activism in the 1960s--reflections on the current absence of activism among black athletes in connection with an absence of a movement--young black athletes today and political consciousness--his work as a consultant to major league football and basketball teams.	
Audio File 4	50
More on his work as a consultant to major league football and basketball teams--more on homosexuality and professional sports, Cheryl Swoopes--the risks and constraints faced by athletes in speaking out--more on homosexuality--the primacy of Christian ritual in professional sports--the documentary films <i>Hoop Dreams</i> and <i>It's Only a Game, Ladies</i> --pre-global warming/pandemic politics versus post global warming/pandemic politics--taking the post of Director of Oakland's Park and Recreation Department for three years--reflection on the experience of being a large man.	

Interview 3, November 8, 2005	65
-------------------------------------	----

Audio File 5	65
--------------------	----

More on the intersection of political activism and professional sports historically and in the present--the Black Panther Party--the role of women in the Black Power Movement--the evolution of his own awareness of sexism--Shirley Chisholm.

Audio File 6	80
--------------------	----

On Marxism, *The God That Failed*, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*--Third World Marxism--Hugo Chavez--his dissertation on race and sport, his dissertation committee, on race and gender and sport--publishing *The Revolt of the Black Athlete*--white liberal racism--looking for work after completing his PhD--coming to UC Berkeley as an assistant professor--meeting with Chancellor Heyns, the athletic director, and the football and basketball coaches.

Interview 4, November 22, 2005	97
--------------------------------------	----

Audio File 7	97
--------------------	----

Happy Birthday--coming to Berkeley--Third World Movements on college campuses across the nation--outcomes of Third World movements on college campuses--perspectives on the growth of the African American Studies department at UC Berkeley--maintaining the terms of his contract at Berkeley--the department of Sociology when he joined in 1971, his position within it--his perspective on how decisions were made in the sociology department, diversity and access, tenure--more on sociology, the department and the discipline, at Berkeley, pursuing his work in that context.

Audio File 8	113
--------------------	-----

His tenure case--teaching, learning from teaching--learning to teach gender, sexuality, and sport--the intersection of cultural studies with his work--religion--controversy around administering an exam on Yom Kippur--reflections on college athletes and academic performance sparked by a question about Alex Saragoza--American Cultures requirement.

Interview 5, December 6, 2005	132
-------------------------------------	-----

Audio File 9	132
--------------------	-----

Jesse Owens, Joe Louis, racism in sport--Proposition 209, SP 1 and SP 2--affirmative action--serving on the graduate admissions committee--more on Proposition 209--1998 Ethnic Studies FTE debate--mainstreaming area such African American Studies, the evolution of African American Studies into Africana Studies--American history--more on his position vis á vis institutional structures at Berkeley.

Audio File 10 147

UC Berkeley inquires about his consulting activities--his participation in the anti-apartheid movement--Viet Nam War--war in Iraq--summary remarks.

Interview History—Harry Edwards

Professor Harry Edwards joined UC Berkeley's department of sociology in 1971. He conducted pioneering scholarship in the area of sociology of race and sport and is also renowned for his involvement in the famous Black Power salute on the victory podium at the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City. Edwards has long been a controversial figure at UC Berkeley. In fact, several of the narrators interviewed in this series pointed to his 1974 tenure case when discussing curricular transformation and discrimination in hiring and promotion.

I initially contacted Professor Edwards to explore the possibility of conducting an oral history in early 2003. After two years of scheduling conflicts and delays on both our parts, we sat down to conduct the interview October through December of 2005. Professor Edwards is very much a public figure who has documented himself in numerous interviews and books, including an autobiography, *The Struggle That Must Be*. For this reason, we agreed that this interview would be less of a life history. However, as it turns out, the interview spend significant time on his early life and upbringing in addition to his role as a scholar-activist, his time at Berkeley, and his current work as a consultant to national football and basketball teams. The interview consisted of five sessions, all of which took place on UC Berkeley's campus at ROHO's Evans Hall offices. The interview was recorded on minidisc as well as on digital video. After it was transcribed and audited, Edwards reviewed the transcript for accuracy of names and dates.

Harry Edwards 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.

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
August, 2005

Interview 1: October 18, 2005

Edwards 01 10-18-05.wav

01-00:00:00

Wilmot: October 18, Professor Harry Edwards, Interview 1, with the Regional Oral History Office, this is Nadine Wilmot. So, good morning.

Edwards: Thank you for having me here to do this.

Wilmot: We're very glad to. I guess the way we usually start these things is by saying, when and where you born, and could you tell us a little bit about your family background?

Edwards: I was born in St. Louis, Missouri. I grew up in East St. Louis, Illinois, right across the river. I was born November 22, 1942. And my mother and father married young. My father was, essentially, an ex-convict. My mother was sixteen years old when he married her. He was twenty-eight. And they eventually had eight children.

That, as you can imagine, was a pretty rocky marriage, pretty rocky situation. My mother eventually left home when I was nine years old. That was the last time that I really lived with her. My father literally went into bad health trying to prove that a black ex-convict in a substantially racist society could support a wife and eight children on sixty-five dollars a week. So that was a very rocky, rocky environment.

East St. Louis, at that time, was a totally segregated city. Blacks largely lived on the south side and the east side. And whites lived on the north side and the west, and never the twain shall meet.

I was influenced by two big events in my life. The first was *Brown v Board of Education*, Topeka, Kansas, which allowed blacks to attend traditionally white elementary schools, junior high schools, and high schools in East St. Louis. That was in 1954, and then in 1955, the lynching of Emmett Till. The *Brown v Board of Education*, Topeka, Kansas, Supreme Court edict influenced me in the sense that they integrated the elementary schools in 1955, after the 1954 decision. They integrated the junior high schools in 1956, and the integrated the high schools in 1957. And I was part of the first class to be integrated into the high school. So, that was my real first experience, directly, with racism. Up until then, I didn't know that I was either poor or Negro. I was just Sonny. That was me. And everybody in the neighborhood protected the kids at that time. But that was my first real experience, when I went to East Side High, with direct racism.

The lynching of Emmett Till in 1955 impacted me tremendously. I remember when that photo came out of him and his casket, an open casket that his mother insisted on being open to the world, so that they could see what was

really happening, in terms of this lynching in the South. And he was about the same age that I was. He was fifteen at the time, I think I was thirteen. And that had such an impact on me. Because I remember asking my father, “Why did this happen? What are they going to do these people?” And he looked at me and said, “Absolutely nothing. He was down there. He had no idea what he was dealing with, or who he was dealing with, and nothing’s going to happen as a result of it.” I said, “Hey, the same thing could happen to me. The same--” My father looked at me and said, “Hey, the same thing could happen to me.”

And that was the first time that I really realized that there were some things that my father, for all of his power—and I thought my father was one of the strongest men in the world, I thought he was the biggest man in the world. He was about 6’3”, about 235 pounds, had about a 32-inch waist, he was just a man’s man. And I realized at that point, there were some things that not even he could protect me against. That was like a child becoming aware of death for the first time. There’s a cloud that enters your life that you never really can get out from under. And that was also something that tremendously impacted my life. So, the combination of that and my experiences as one of the first to really integrate on a mass scale, East St. Louis High School--those two things impacted my young life, I think, more than anything else.

Wilmot: I want to ask you a little more about your family background, as far back as you are aware of it. Were both of your parents from St. Louis? Were they from other places?

Edwards: My father was born in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. His father was a traveling troubadour, poet, rolling stone, gambler, and so forth. And his mother, at that time, I think that when he was born, was about sixteen years old. And then when she got married, she had to let him go. So he left the house because he was an illegitimate child and the man that she married did not want him around, really. So he was sent to Chicago to live with my grandmother’s mother, in Chicago, with his mother’s mother. And it was there that he got in trouble. It was there that he started running with the wrong people, dropped out of school, began to do burglars, and so forth. And that’s how he ended up in Joliet State Prison.

My mother was born in Mississippi and her family had about fourteen kids. Her mother was an Indian African American mix.

Wilmot: Do you know which tribe?

Edwards: No, I don’t. I really don’t. I have pictures of the shanty that they all lived in, all of the surrounding woods and things. It was really a backwoods community. And they were substantially illiterate. Just working, hard working people whose background—family background—was really slavery. And my mother’s mother and father—their parents were slaves.

That was the background and that was the history that they brought to this union—that my mother and father brought to this union. By the time that things really got rocky, there was not a heck of a lot to fall back on, either materially or spiritually, as far as keeping the family together. It was really and truly an issue of mental and physical survival, for my mother. You can imagine eight children, no substantial resources, in, basically, a two-bedroom place that my father had built. Outdoor toilets, outdoor water hydrant, there was no indoor plumbing. And no real future that he could see at that time. It was a difficult situation at best, and looking back on it, the thing that amazes me, is that they were able to do as well as they did. That's the thing that really amazed me, because I don't think I could have done it.

Wilmot: When I read your autobiography, I was so struck by the compassion and tenderness that you had for your parents and their marriage. That really struck me. You had a perspective which was like, "Oh, that didn't work, but they really tried and they were doing the best they could." So I remember that.

Edwards: That was the thing. One of the things that my father—I remember when I graduated from San Jose State, and we'll get into this later I know—I had a Woodrow Wilson fellowship that paid \$36,000 a year, and I had also been invited to camp by the San Diego Chargers and the Minnesota Vikings, which were in different leagues at that time, the American Football League and the National Football League. And I was projected as a defensive end. And the highest paid defensive ends at that time were making like \$25,000 and \$28,000—{Ernie Lad, Earl Faison?} down at San Diego. And my Woodrow Wilson paid \$36,000. Twenty-two thousand of that went to Cornell University and \$14,000 went to me as a living stipend, and I didn't have to do anything but lift my pencil.

And my father wanted me to play professional football. And he was very angry when I didn't do that. Because he wanted bragging rights down at the corner bar, where he could say, "Hey, that's my son at the end of the bench. He's got on a football uniform. He's sitting there. You know, look at him. Isn't he great? He succeeded, where, you know." And that was the great dream, to be a great athlete because that's what Jackie Robinson and Joe Louis and Jesse Owens were really for—those were the heroes that we had, so he really couldn't see any farther than that.

1-00:10:05

He had tried to be an athlete, a boxer himself. And even in prison, he continued to box, trying to get a shot. And so, he always was in awe of me. I remember one of the last conversations that I had with him. We had won a Super Bowl. I was with the San Francisco 49ers. He could turn on the TV and I was standing right there on the sidelines with Ronnie Lott, Joe Montana, Roger Craig, and Jerry Rice—and he would say, "Hey, that's my son, that's my son standing there. He's the first in his field to really bring social psychology to athletics."

And he said to me one day, he said, “Hey, how did you know? When you went to Cornell, and I was pushing you to go into football, you end up in football, you end up with Super Bowl rings, you end up with an Ivy League PhD, you end up teaching at Berkeley, how did you know? Because I couldn’t see that.”

And he was just in absolute awe of me, and after he saw me debating William F. Buckley on sports on the *William F. Buckley Show*, he couldn’t believe it. But what he never understood, was what I was in awe of him, because I did not, for the life of me, understand how an ex-convict in a racist, segregated society could even believe enough to get up and go every day. Go to work every day. That he could raise a family of eight children, support a wife, on sixty five dollars. I just, I never understood how he could get up and do that every day. And for my mother to be there and to put up with some of the stuff, because he’d get so frustrated some times, he’d come in drunk, he’d come in angry, he’d come in fighting. He’d go and gamble and try to raise the extra money to, you know, buy a better refrigerator because the icebox was on the blink. And the gamblers would take his money from him. And he wasn’t a gambler, but this looked like, “Maybe I could make things better. Maybe I can get that refrigerator if I go and put this money down. And maybe I’ll make \$120 out of \$65.” And he’d come home and he’d have fifteen dollars, and they’d get into it over, “Well, we don’t have any food, and you’ve gambled the money away.” And she didn’t understand that. And he didn’t—and a fight would break out.

So I’d look at all of that, and I’m in awe of both of them. I don’t understand what kept them going. And they weren’t big religious people. And at the end, that’s what Jesus is for. Give me something to hang onto when there is nothing to hang on to. Maybe if they’d have been big religious people, they’d have stayed together despite it all. I know my grandmother—my father’s mother and her husband—stayed together for fifty years. And they were both virtually illiterate, [living] off welfare, doing a little piecework here, no insurance, no nothing. But they stayed together. They never started drinking, they never got any dope, they never got into fistfight, none of this kind of stuff. They never got a divorce. They stayed together for fifty years. And they were both big religious people. And maybe that’s something that was missing. I don’t know.

But I know also that in them not being religious people, it gave us a tremendous amount of freedom of thought. We weren’t constricted and restricted, in terms of different religious groups, or different ethnic groups. We could think completely outside of the box, because there were no boxes. And I think maybe that that piece, that spirituality, was not there. And that again, I mean, how did they manage to stay together long enough to have eight children?

So my father was in awe of me, but I was in tremendous awe of him, and he never understood that. He never could understand why. He thought that the be all and end all was teaching at Berkeley, an Ivy League PhD, two Super Bowl rings from the San Francisco 49ers, published in magazines, writing books, debating in television as a public intellectual. He thought that was really unbel—it was another world for him. But I was in awe of them. I always was.

Wilmot: I wanted to ask you your grandparents' names as well.

Edwards: My grandparents on my mother's side were Hiram and Gertrude Cruise. C-R-U-I-S-E was the way that they spelled it. On my father's side was [Iola] and James Edwards. We are largely African, Indian or Aboriginal, Native American, and Scotch Irish heritage, mixed heritage. I have cousins and brothers and sisters that are light skinned like my mother was, coming out of her mother's side of the family, with the Indian and African American. And I have brothers and cousins and so forth, coming out of their fathers' sides of the family, that are as dark as I am. And it's that mixed heritage that's showing through there.

Wilmot: Did you grow up closely with your grandparents?

Edwards: When I left East St. Louis, Illinois, after leaving East St. Louis Senior High School—I won't say "graduated"—I won't dignify it with "graduated", because they never laid a glove on me in the classroom. I left East St. Louis Senior High School largely unscathed by education. I simply played sports. Football in the fall, basketball in the winter, and track and field in the spring.

When I left there, coming out to California, purportedly to play football at USC, I found that there was something called a college admissions exam, which I could not—I could barely read, much less pass. There was absolutely no way that I would have been able to pass it. And so I went to Fresno City College instead, which was a feeder college for USC. And while I was there, I stayed with my paternal grandmother, [Iola] Edwards, in Fresno, and went to school there. It was spring, I graduated in January, it was spring so I ran track, set a national discus record in track and field, became the school record at Fresno City College and stayed for forty one years—I think it was broken in 2000, or something like that. But the time that I spent there, we grew very close. She was very, very religious, as I stated. She went to church three or four times a week.

Wilmot: Did she ever try and bring you in?

Edwards: Yes, she did. I learned a lot about religious commitment. And sometimes, I would just have to cut it off. I would just to have say, "Well, grandma, it's you and me and Jesus. That's the end of it." That's where I left it. I had seen too much, even at sixteen years old, both in terms of what I saw from devout Christians at East St. Louis Senior High School, and what they said and what

they thought about Negroes. I had seen Negro preachers, and I knew just from, you know, the banter around town, the conversation, that everybody wasn't what they were supposed to be.

Wilmot: A lot of hypocrisy there.

Edwards: Yeah, a lot of hypocrisy. And this is not to say anything so much about the religion, as it is about a lot of the people who practiced it, from my experience with them. Because I was just green enough, naïve enough, to see everything and rather than looking at in terms of human frailties and everything, but to look at it just as coldly as it came to me. And said, "Hey, he's supposed to be a preacher, but what is he doing coming out of Mrs. So-and-So's house at four o'clock in the morning?"

1-00:20:02

So, at the end of the day, I was very—for a lack of a better term—almost calloused about some things by the time I got to California. So, when my grandmother began to talk about the church and the preacher, and we've got to go and talk to so-and-so, I'd say, "Yeah, momma, okay, great—grandma, that's fine. That's wonderful. It's you and me and Jesus." And I just kind of left it that. And went on back to studying, because that's the one thing that I really did do at Fresno City College. I really got into the books. That is where I became a student. That is where I learned to read. That is where I understood that reading was really a tremendous adventure. And that's where I became a committed student.

Wilmot: I wanted to ask you also, what kind of choices have you made for your children, around religion and faith in your family?

Edwards: My wife Sandra and I, we've been married now almost forty years. We have three kids, children, {Tazamisha, Fatima, and Damani—Chandradamani—goes by Damani}. And we always left the door completely open. They have friends that they have gone to Buddhist temple with, that they have gone to Muslim temple with. They have friends that they have gone to Jewish temple with. They have friends that they have gone to Hindu religious, Japanese friends, Shinto ceremonies, because that's the nature of the neighborhood that we live in, in Fremont.

Those are the people who went to school with them at Moreau. And that's what they were exposed to. And they would ask me, "What did I think about this religion or that religion?" And my response was always the same, "I see something beautiful in all of them." Because when you remove the tribalism and some of the dogma and get down to the core of what they're saying, at the bottom line, all of them are really saying, in a fundamental way, try to love somebody, try to make life more meaningful, try to make life more serving for as many people as cross your path. That's what they're really saying, try to love somebody. And I said, "If you can get to that level in whatever religion

you finally settle upon. Or if you settle upon a number of them, if you can get to that level, hey, you're going to be fine."

And my middle daughter, Fatima, asked me, "Well, why don't you go to church?" I said, "I have gone to church, and I've gone to temple, and one of my best friends is Rabbi Dave Davis. And he and I discuss all kinds of religious issues, and political—issues at the interface of politics and religion, and race and ethnicity, and so forth." And I said, "I love it." And she said, "Yeah, but, you know, when I was over at Cal, and {Gail Tomitas?}"—this is a Japanese family that lives right up the street from us. At one time, Fatima thought that she lived there, and she visited our house, because they used to keep her during the day while my wife and I were working. And she said, "Yeah, we go to temple," and we'd be talking about it, "And they say the same thing. How do you decide?" I said, "That's for each individual to decide." So that was the religious atmosphere in our house. And they did fine.

Tazamisha is a corporate lawyer in Los Angeles. She was with Brobeck over here in San Francisco for years, and now she's with another corporate firm in L.A., on a partner track. Fatima went to school on a basketball scholarship at Arizona, and then got a full fellowship, came out as a straight A student, as well as a basketball player, and got a full fellowship in the cardiac surgery division at the medical school at USC. That USC scholarship finally came through [laughing]—but for her, not for me. And she's over at UC Med now in pediatric services.

And Chandra went to UC Davis and he's into computers. He works for Apple in their programming and services department.

They're all three beautiful, wholesome, humane kids—they're for all of the causes [laughter]. Yeah, they're for all of the causes. So, you have to be careful what you teach your kids to believe in, and to stand by, because they believe you. So, they're for all of the causes. So, anytime there are issues around gays, there are women's issues, there are issues around minorities, there are issues around transfer of funds and services from the poor to the wealthy, anything like that—

Wilmot: They're thinking about it--

Edwards: They're out there. I mean, they went to Houston. I look up and they're getting on a plane going to Houston, to work with the Katrina victims. The one that's a doctor, the one that's a lawyer went down to see if there was anything they could do with the paper work. My son goes down to see if he can help them in terms of getting on the internet, and following up as far as where their relatives might be, and their banking services, and all of this kind of stuff. So, they're beautiful kids. They're beautiful young adults.

- Wilmot: And I did especially enjoy reading about the thoughtfulness and intentionality that you put into their names. And I was wondering about, what do you know of the ways that you and your siblings were named?
- Edwards: I was named after my father. He wasn't named after his father, he changed his name after he came out of prison. I was named after my father, Harry Edwards. My wife was simply named Sandra—they loved the name. I don't know if she has a relative or somebody that was named Sandra at some point, but that's her name. There was nothing special—I don't think they even thought about the meaning of us. It was only years later, after we were married, we were some place celebrating one of our anniversaries, and we went into this place where they look up the meaning of your name. I think it was about 1972 or 1973, and Harry is a derivation of Harold, which in the English translation, if you will, means leader and all of this kind of stuff. When they named me, I was named after my old man. I mean, it's as simple as that [laughter].
- Wilmot: Oh, okay. I always pay attention to that, because sometimes you can see people's philosophies in the choice of names, and so I always ask questions about this.
- Edwards: Yeah, absolutely. But in this case, I was simply named after my old man. It's a good name.
- Wilmot: Yeah, it's a good name. And of course, that's a philosophy: okay, I'm giving you my name.
- Edwards: Yeah, that was a statement that my father made. But I think at many levels, aside from the fact that I think of all of the people that I have come across—and I'm speaking of colleagues and everybody else over the years—I have come across very, very few people, who just in terms of basic smarts—intellectual capacity, not developed ability, but intellectual capacity, capacity to think—I would put him among the very highest. And this was one of his great frustrations. He was smart enough to know what could have been. And that, I think, in the end, probably pushed him over the edge.
- Wilmot: It's a very bitter pill.
- Edwards: It is. It really is. There's absolutely nothing more devastating than unfulfilled potential, particularly if you see that that lack of fulfillment is directly related to circumstances and issues that are not just beyond your control in so many ways, but palpably evil, I mean oppressive. He was an angry man. It got to the place he had a permanent scowl on his face. That's where I really learned that the—not just, I think, the right, the appropriate, but the healthier road, is to act.

1-00:30:07

And it's not the success, it's the rebellion against evil that really is the measure of a life well lived. And I think that's what keeps the wrinkles off your face, that's what keeps the scowls off your face. People look at me and say, "Oh, man. You're sixty-three years old and you haven't changed in thirty years." Well, I think part of it is I don't internalize very much. I pay a price for that, but part of it is not wrinkles and scowls [laughter]. It's tough, but I watched my father eaten up from the inside, just over that frustration. He was born fifty years too soon. In this age, he probably would have been—my father would have been at least a college professor, maybe a Senator or something like that, not to put one above the other, but that it was his capability. Very bright man, articulate, verbal, and frustrated.

Wilmot: You mentioned that [the murder of] Emmett Till was one of the signal influences in your young life, or signal occurrences in your young life. Have you been following recent events with that case?

Edwards: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. I think that the young man who followed up on that, and went and did the research to find out exactly what happened, who was involved, how the disposition of that case not only was a travesty of justice, but a travesty of human dignity, at such a profound level, that it influenced an entire generation.

I think, to a substantial degree, to a substantial degree, black youth activism of my generation was set off, that that fuse was lit, in 1955, when many of us were adolescents, or even pre-adolescents, that that fuse was lit. And I think that that exploded in the 1960s, less than a decade later. Because those of us who were thirteen, like me, by 1960, were eighteen. Those of us who were fifteen, like Emmett Till, by 1960, we were twenty, and that was the activist generation of African Americans, of blacks.

So, I followed this case, the reopening of it, the names that have come up that had not been previously divulged. The fact that there may have even been some—at that point what were termed Negroes—involved in it. They may have been ordered to beat Emmett Till, perhaps even to kill him, by their white co-conspirators in this situation, if you will. Although I hesitate to use the term co-conspirators, because they were not co-equal. It was a master/servant, master/subordinate situation there. But I'm fascinated by the work that this young man, that this young man did.

Wilmot: And one thing you mentioned in telling me about that is that you went to your father with a real sense of chagrin, and in a sense, it sounded as if that Southern culture, which your father was fluent in, was something that was in a way foreign to you. And I wanted to ask you, how would you characterize the culture of East St. Louis and St. Louis? I'm from California, so I'm never sure, is that the South, is it--?

Edwards: No. My father, having been born and in his early years raised in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, having spent time in Joliet State Penitentiary at a time when the penitentiary was segregated and real abuses took place because there was no such thing as prisoners' rights or anything at that time, and black prisoners in particular were on a very short leash inside of those walls.

And then coming to East St. Louis, which had itself a phenomenally raw race relations history, going back to 1917, the riots of 1917, where blacks in East St. Louis literally went across the bridge to East St. Louis, Missouri, a Confederate state, in order to secure some degree of safety from marauding whites on the Illinois side. He had all of that experience in his background, and so he understood that it was not just the South. It wasn't just Mississippi. Wasn't just Alabama or Georgia, or Arkansas. That it was Illinois. That it was Missouri. He understood that.

But in East St. Louis, for me, as a young child, the community was a cocoon. I never knew that I was poor. I never knew that I was a Negro. I never felt any threat, because my mother and my father and {Ms. Ings? Eames?} next door, and Ms. Johnson up the street, and {Ms. Cook?} across the street—they were all parent figures. Even Mr. Goldstein, who ran the local mom and pop store, that everybody had a tab in, where they could go in and get food until the money got right, made sure that the kids were protected, in a sense. There were things that we just didn't know. Like the fact that we were poor, or the fact that we were Negroes, or the fact that there was another community not far away that absolutely hated our existence, at many levels.

So, when I went to my father, really looking for an answer of not just how could this happen and what was gonna be done about it, but how do I bring this into some reasonable context in my life here, where I don't know anything about it. What is this? And this is at thirteen years old. Because I went to an all-black elementary school. Dunbar Elementary School, named after Paul Laurence Dunbar, the black poet. Went to an all-black junior high school, {Hughes Quinn?} named two individuals who were renowned teachers in East St. Louis. Their families were still there. Mr. Quinn still came by the school on certain days, to speak to the kids, and talk to the teachers, and inspire the principal. Our Negro history was a living history. I went to Dunbar Elementary School.

So, how did I bring what I really wanted to know, without being able to articulate it? But what I felt. How did I make sense out of this within this context? And my father essentially told me, "It is what it is. He's down there, whistling at those white women. You don't do that. Because if you do that, this is what's going to happen. And nothing is going to happen to the people that did it." And that blew me away.

Wilmot: So that was the forward vocabulary. With a whole different meaning.

Edwards:

At this stage of my life, I realized that I couldn't have been any more taken aback if my father had said, "There are Martians out there, and here one is." And when my father said that, it didn't just bring that cloud into my life. Again, it was akin to—I remember when my second daughter became aware of death. That what she was living wouldn't last forever. She didn't really grasp it, but she knew. That there was a worm at the core of the apple. She knew that there was a cloud hanging over this whole thing. And I don't care how happy we are today, I don't care what—that at some point, we were going to get up, put on our shoes, and a coroner or somebody was going to take them off of us, because we were going to be dead. And she began to grasp that. At around four-and-a-half, five, five-and-a-half—somewhere in there, because I remember her raising the issue. And at that point, I felt so sad, because I had been in her world, where that didn't exist.

1-00:40:04

And I recognized it, not because I remember when I became aware, but I remember Emmett Till, and when I became aware that there were some things that not even my father—as big and powerful and strong as he was—there were some things that even he could not protect me from. I could not protect my daughter from my death. And I knew that she knew. And that was a cloud that came into her life at that point. And my father did not have the, for lack of—social-psychological skills to say, "This is one you're going to have to negotiate and live with on some terms. I can't do that for you. You're going to have to arrive at some rapprochement with this. You accept it, you fight it, you rail against—but you're going to have to do that. I can't do that for you. I have arrived at mine.

And all I can say is, 'Hey, you don't go down there and whistle at white women.' And if you do, this is what's going to happen." That was the way he settled on it. Because that was his option. He had eight children that he had to—so my father laughed and smiled, but it put wrinkles in his face. Put a permanent scowl on his face. He didn't have the vocabulary, the social psychological—but, sense—words—to tell me that I had to arrive at my own resolution of that. The way that, over years, in talking to my kids about death, that death is a part of life. And you have to learn to live fully in the moment, and put some emphasis on service, on the realization that life is good, it's beautiful, it's worth cultivating—not because of the ultimate destination, but because you have the privilege of taking the trip. And there're a lot of people that you help to make this trip, not just easier, but fuller, through service, through understanding. And that's where the emphasis is.

And over the years, they came to their own—like we all do—resolution of that death situation. And it's not just denial. It's just not denial. It's faith. They get up every day. We know, like I say, one day we're going to get up and tie our shoes on, and the coroner's going to take them off of us. But we have the faith. Not today. So we get up. We do what we do. We make our plans. And not just for today. We plan for tomorrow, and next week, and I'm not going to

take that vacation this year. I'm going to take it next year. So, that's not a denial of death, it's faith in life. And we're going to live it fully. And that's what we—those are the conversations that I had with my kids, and that's the kind of thing that I had to arrive at with the Emmett Till thing.

Wilmot: You mentioned Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. I wanted to ask you what kinds of conversations—that's a way of getting in—what is your impression? How do you experience this? Perhaps one way to get at it is the conversations with your children.

Edwards: Well, Katrina had its biggest impact, and most media-covered impact on New Orleans. And over the twenty years that I've been with the 49ers, for most of those years, we were in the National Football League West Conference, which included San Francisco, St. Louis, New Orleans, and Atlanta. So, every year we went to New Orleans. And while there—we would leave on a Friday, we'd be down there through the Sunday game, and Saturday was a free day for staff. And so we always went out on Bourbon Street, of course, and the French Quarter. But two or three blocks off Bourbon Street, a half a mile out of the French Quarter, you got into some of the most depressed, dispossessed, marginalized, black communities imaginable. So for going back at least until 1985, I knew that there was an entire community that never showed up in the travel brochures, that never showed up in the Bourbon Street promotions, and so forth.

So when I saw Katrina hit, I knew that this was not an incident of the moment, in terms of those flows of largely black populations going into the Convention Center—going into the Superdome and going into the Convention Center. That this was a legacy of a long-term marginalization of an entire community, in this case, African American. Marginalized economically, marginalized politically, marginalized in every way except culturally, because so many of the cultural dimensions, whether it be the food, the music, the conversation, the language, were eminently exploitable. So, some of these people showed up in the low-paying jobs on Bourbon Street, in the low-paying jobs in the hotel, in the low-paying jobs in various other service industries. And sometimes, on a street corner blowing a horn, collecting change.

So I saw that over the years, and I was not surprised at what happened.

But there was another dimension that I talk about with my kids, which had to do with sports. Over the years, the traditional African American community has become so marginalized and so depressed, that it is no longer capable of generating the athletic talent that it has over the years. When the sport institution in mainstream America was integrated, it had access to a pool of African American athletes that theretofore had been largely shut out. And so, those athletes began to move into traditional white universities, into professional sports, and so forth. But they were generated by the traditional black community, which was not involved in the Civil Rights Movement,

except as participants. They saw the Civil Rights Movement on their TV sets and in their newspapers, they saw it up close and personal when they participated in the marches, but they never saw it in their community. Because the Civil Rights Movement was a largely middle-class oriented and middle-class led movement.

So, you got affirmative action and open housing for the middle class, and you got public housing and social programs for the working and lower classes of black society, but most of those people were not able to move on the basis of those kinds of resources and support, out of the traditional black community, like the black middle class was. If there was open housing and they could afford to put the \$50,000 down, they moved into, on the periphery of the suburbs. There was affirmative action and because they had the education and the training and the language and the articulateness and the social values and sentiments and style, they could move into or onto the periphery of white economic and political institutions, but the black masses stayed in those communities.

But as time moved along, and whites moved further out, and those blacks who could move out of the traditional black community did, on the basis of their middle class status and resources, the black community became more depressed, more marginalized, more pushed to the curb. As a result, it is no longer able today to generate black athletes. The economy is largely underworld and underground, marginal if it's mainstream at all. The politics are virtually non-existent. The schools are troubled because the tax base is gone. You have teenagers, who not only no longer believe in education, but oftentimes have dropped out of school. What would-be athletes have turned in team colors for gang colors?

And the outcome is that we are jailing and burying our potential point guards, wide receivers, boxers, and so forth. I remember when, in the 1960s, there was Muhammad Ali, there was George Foreman, there was Kenny Norton, there was Smokin' Joe Frazier, there was Buster Mathis, there was Floyd Patterson, there was Eddie Machen, there was Ernie Shavers, there was Ernie Terrell, and there was a guy who could only be a sparring partner even though he too aspired to be a contender, by the name of Larry Holmes. Today, who are the heavyweights? I defy anybody to tell me who the heavyweights are.

There are now four heavyweight champions. I defy anybody to tell me how many of them are African American, and what their names are. Most people couldn't name one. The outcome of that, of course, is to provoke reflection on what happened. The reality is we're jailing and burying our potential boxers, wide receivers—right along with our potential college professors and others who'd be coming from that realm.

Therefore, I think it is both tragically prophetic and poetic that those people would have been marshaled out of the community in the wake of Katrina, into the Superdome, which was one of the athletic palaces of modern America. I looked at that for the real and true meaning, because you are now looking at the future of the African American athlete, and what that really signaled for me, was the end of the golden age of black sports participation, when blacks dominated boxing, when blacks dominated basketball, when blacks dominated baseball in terms of home runs, bases stolen, so forth and so on.

Today, you not only have that situation in boxing, you have a situation in baseball, for example, where, in 1973, major league baseball was twenty-three percent black—today it is less than nine percent black, and the numbers of blacks on the field are still declining. If you look at basketball, today we have more foreign-born basketball players playing in the league than at any other time in history, because sports are globalizing, and as that happens, blacks are being marginalized. So, we have seventy-six foreign born players in the league today, and on the championship San Antonio Spurs, of the ten players that were in their loop of players who actually got on the floor and played, five of them were foreign-born. So, who did they replace? The number of blacks in professional basketball has declined. So again, that is what I saw in Katrina, and that's what I explained, and that's what my kids and I oftentimes discussed. That was the context in which I framed it.

Those people are a reflection of not just where we are as a society in terms of race relations, but where we're headed, as a nation, and in terms of our major institutions. And sport, as I've always stated in my classes here, is really the canary in the mine shaft. It tells us something about what's happening, first of all, to black youth, but more generally, to black people. And that tells us about what is happening in American society.

- Wilmot: I wanted to ask you—in our conversation off camera right before we started, you were discussing how the roots of your scholar activism actually began before you came to Fresno State, or to Berkeley, or to San Jose, that actually the roots go much further back.
- Edwards: Yes.
- Wilmot: And it seemed to me, as we were discussing—before we leave your early years in St. Louis, I wanted to just ask you to talk to me a little bit more about these roots of scholar activism.
- Edwards: Again, I was in that first class of blacks that went to East Side High School in 1957, in massive numbers. There had been one or two, but this was the first time they brought in massive numbers under the integration edict. And we were really marginalized in the school, because the teachers, the principal—the had no idea about “how to handle” Negro students. The old lines demarcating Negroes from whites were still in place. So, there was

absolutely no contact between Negroes and whites socially, on the dance floor, and so forth and so on—even though it was not segregated. The pre-school morning dances that everybody got there for 8:00, and school opened at 8:45, but they would have these socials. But you'd go in there, you'd find Negroes one place, whites some place else. You go into the cafeteria at lunch time, Negroes on one side of the table, whites some place else.

And the sports realm was different. The locker room was not segregated. When you went on the field, you could not play quarterback if you were a Negro. You could play running back, you could play wide receiver, you could play tackle, you could play defensive end, you could play those—you could play linebacker—you couldn't play defensive back, really. There were lines and everybody knew where they were.

And then once you left the field, you know, whites went one way because they were going to the north and the west side of town. Blacks went another, they were going to the east and the south side of town. The classrooms were much the same. We took English. I went into English class, but I was like most of the athletes who were there. We were big. I remember {Ms. Kluth?}, my English teach. I walked into class the first day. I was thirteen years old. And I walked in and I sat down right in the front row, you know. And she looked at me and she said, "Are you supposed to be in here?" She thought I was maybe a junior or senior or something like that, you know, and I was—I said, "Yeah, I'm supposed to be in here. My name is Harry Edwards." And she went down and she said, "Yeah, you're supposed to be in here, but you've got to move to the back of the room." I said, "Move to the back of the room?" She said, "Yeah, because you're so big. How old are you?" I said, "I'm thirteen." Well, at the time I was about 6'5" and about 235 pounds. So, I sat in the back of the room for the rest of the year.

What I learned in the English class was minimal. And it wasn't just the teacher. It was me. I mean, I had no idea how to deal with these people. Even less idea than they had how to deal with me. They sounded funny. They looked funny. They acted funny. Any time they looked at me, it was almost as if they were asking a question rather than making a declarative statement. We were always off-center, we were always off-balance, because it was two cultures coming together. Whatever we learned in school, whatever I learned in school that day, I forgot on the bus on the way back to the south end, because it had absolutely nothing to do with what I was living out there. And that had a tremendous impact on me.

And then I had some run-ins with the coaches and the principals. Like a lot of young black men. I mean, my father wore a moustache, all the men in my community wore a moustache. They wore a hat, you know. When I went over there, that was the culture that we had. The principal came into the class and said, "Hey, I want all you guys—come to the office." And so "you guys" was us, the young Negro males of the class, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen years old.

And he said, “I want those moustaches gone by the time you get in here tomorrow morning or I’m going to dry shave you. “

So, I went home and told my father. I said, “Hey, Mr. Downey said that if I didn’t shave my moustache off, he’s going to dry shave me tomorrow. So, my father first looked at me and said, “What moustache?” I said, “This moustache.” He said, “You don’t have a moustache.” He said, “Don’t worry about. Don’t worry about it. I’ll go back in with you tomorrow.

So he went into the principal’s office with me the next morning—we didn’t go to class, we went straight to the principal’s office. And my father looked at {Ward Downing?}, the principal, and said, “My son says that unless he shaves his moustache off today, you’re going to dry shave him.” He said, “That’s right. That was what I sent him home with yesterday.” And my father said, “Well, you dry shave him, I’m going to dry shave you,” and that was the end of that. But from that point on the travails that I had at East Side were absolutely phenomenal, because you just didn’t do that. Negroes didn’t do that in East St. Louis. So, it was a whole series of incidents, and then finally when I left East Side, I remember one of the teaches saying, he asked me, “What are you going to do?” I said, “Well, I’m probably going to go out to California and play football,” because all the other members, black guys, on the football team, were going to places like Iowa, Drake, and Southwest Missouri State.

1-01:00:06

And so I said, “I gotta get out of here.” My father and a close friend, Frank Summers, they wanted me out, out of the area, out of East St. Louis. “Go to California, go to USC. They’ve inquired about you, go out there and see if you can get that done.” And his [the principal’s?] words to me were, “You’ll be back. You’ll be back before Christmas. “ I said, “Okay.” So it was that kind of an experience that I had there.

And then the other instances where I did see a young man by the name of {Abondis?} Jackson. He had the audacity to have a white girlfriend. He had gone to join the military and we were all out running track. We were on the track team. In fact, we had a state champion track team that year. We came in 1-2-3 in the discus. We just had a phenomenal track team, mostly black athletes with the exception of the pole vaulters. And I remember {Abondis?} Jackson, who had been a football player there, who had been a hurler there, great athlete, he had joined the army. And he came back and he had this white girlfriend. And he came out to the track to see the fellows, with this lady, and the coach went absolutely nuts. And I couldn’t figure out, initially, because all I saw was Abondis. I never put him together with the woman. And then, when it was pointed out that he was with the woman, all the Emmett Till stuff flashed back. And then I looked at the response of the coach, the track coach, the head track coach, who had been such a big Abondis Jackson guy. I mean, he was going over to shake Abondis’ hand and say, “Hey man, you look great in that uniform.” Until he saw that woman. And what rang in my head, “Oh,

this is the guy that lynched Emmett Till.” And so that had a tremendous impact on me.

Edwards 02 10-18-05.wav

02-00:00:00

Wilmot:

We were having a conversation about the roots of your scholar activism, and you were discussing some of your experiences as a young person, and it just struck me how much you were kind of dealing with your white teachers’ concerns around black masculinity, as a young person, as a child, when they were supposed to be in a position of teaching and fostering and nurturing, and what you were kind of fielding from them was their concerns and their fear, and kind of all their feelings.

Edwards:

Oh, absolutely. And I think that the incident that I related about {Ms. Kluth?}, who was really a wonderful—Ms. Kluth was really a wonderful person, teacher. But what do you do, when you have essentially the black football players in your English class? And we were put in her English class because she was over the cheerleaders. She had connection with the athletic teams. What do you when you go in there and you have people like myself, and {Claude Webb?}, who was 6’5”, about 215 pounds, and {Donny Brooks?}, who was 6’3”, about 215 pounds, and we’re all sophomores and freshmen, and so forth, in a high school. How does she deal with that when she walks into her class, on one fateful morning of high school integration, and that is who she’s confronted with. So, her thing was, “Hey, you’ve got to move to the back of the class.” And I can appreciate where she was coming from. It wasn’t just because we were black, we were blocking out the next three students behind us, in our seats in the front row, it was a “Hey, give me some space here.” And that I could understand.

I think about the principal Ward Downing’s thing, that he was going to dry shave the black athletes to get rid of the moustaches. I mean, what was that about? Again, I think it was this whole issue of black masculinity. I think that the Emmett Till lynching was about black masculinity. I think that the coach’s response to the ex-football player in [?] who went into the military and came back with this white girl friend, was a response to the threat, the perceived threat, of black masculinity. So at the end of the day, I don’t think there’s any question that there was that carry-over that went all the way back to slavery. Black women were intimately involved in the [slave uprisings] and so forth, but it was the Nat Turners that raised the real fears.

Wilmot:

And you mentioned you think you might have had a very different experience if you had been in an all-black environment at that time?

Edwards:

Oh, absolutely. Some people, some of the black students who were scheduled to go to East St. Louis Senior High School, as opposed to the black school Lincoln, which is where everybody had gone previous to integration, for the

most part, absolutely refused to go. They were determined to go to Lincoln, for all kinds of reasons, some of which my father did not agree with. They had an entirely different experience. And of course, when black students and their parents refused to go to East Side, that wasn't faulted, that was okay, go ahead to Lincoln if that's what you want to do. Also, some of the students who were integrated and were determined to be a problem of some sort, they were sent back to Lincoln. They left the school, either of their own accord or as a result of being asked to leave, and went back to Lincoln.

I think if I had been in an all black environment, it would have been pretty much a continuation of the experiences and the protected kind of social relationships and so forth that I had had growing up in an all-black South End, East St. Louis community. I think that probably would have continued. I think that if I had graduated from Lincoln instead of East Side, rather than thinking about going out to Southern California, I would have done like a lot of the black students who graduated from Lincoln did, which was to go from Lincoln High School to Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri, or to University of Arkansas, or Arkansas State at Pine Bluff, or to go down to Southern in Louisiana, or Southern in Texas, or to Prairie View, or out to Oklahoma at Langston Hughes University, which is where most of the black students who left Lincoln went. And so, that would have been an entirely different experience. Issues of black cultures and black professors and black students, and this kind of thing, never would have been an issue, because I would have been surrounded by, again, that protected environment. But by my moving to East St. Louis Senior High School, then from East St. Louis Senior High School out to Fresno, and then from Fresno rather than going to SC [University of Southern California] coming to San Jose State. Well, just to cut it short, the rest is history.

Wilmot: Is there anything else you want to say about your roots of scholar activism from that time period?

Edwards: Well, I think the thing that was really amazing to me, once I got to Fresno City College, out of East St. Louis, was the tremendous deficit between my capacity and what I had actually achieved in terms of education in three years of high school in East St. Louis. That I was amazed at how little I had actually been challenged, and how little I had actually learned relative to what I could learn, and what I could do academically.

And once I became a student, at Fresno City College, I opened to worlds that I had passed by, or trampled over, in classes at East Side—history classes, geology classes, even some science classes. Because they were going to give us a C anyway, because that's what it took to be eligible, to continue to play football, to play basketball, to run track. They were going to give us a C anyway. And it didn't make any difference what we did, we were going to get a C. Some students were really excellent students, and I remember one black student by the name of {Willie Terry?}. He had the option, he left East Side

and went to Michigan. He had the option of going to one of the military academies, just a first class athlete, all-state football player, all-state track individual. But there was always one or two that got highlighted, that got tremendously supported. But most of us who came, the combination of baggage, cultural and biographical, based on our family circumstance and history, and what we were dealing with at home, and socioeconomic class status and so forth, and the reluctance on the part of people in this newly integrated school environment—the principal, the teachers, the coaches—to really deal with all of that, along with trying to make whatever they could out of what had been—in terms of, make whatever they could out of bridging a racial divide that had been in place for decades in East St. Louis. When it got down to the personal baggage, they just wrote it off. Say, “Hey, this one, we can carry across the bridge, because he doesn’t have this baggage, that baggage, and so forth.” But there were so few of those people, male or female. Most of them were just like me.

The thing that really, I think, opened my eyes to dimensions of my experience at East St. Louis that I had not been aware of, and really propelled me for laying a foundation of scholarship, along with my athletics, and the melding of those two ultimately turned to scholar activism, was an awareness after just one semester in Fresno, and some good teachers, and some teachers that had been used to dealing with minorities, Latinos, Mexican Americans, as we called them then, and blacks who had come out to work in defense industries in the fields and so forth around Fresno, who wound up going to college.

02-00:10:06

They had been used to dealing with blacks in a different context. And I didn’t have the baggage that I had in East St. Louis, because I was on my own, I was living with my grandmother. So, all of that helped lay that foundation of academics. And more than anything else, how much had I been handicapped coming out of that East St. Louis experience, academically. I became aware of that at Fresno and that really laid a foundation. I wanted to be a student. It was fun for me, and at some point, it became easy.

Wilmot: I really got that from reading your autobiography, just the thirstiness and the delight, just the absolute delight—

Edwards: Joy.

Wilmot: Yes.

Edwards: Hard work, I mean, brutally hard work. But the work was easy for me. It was hard, but it was easy for me. By the time I wrote my dissertation, I had already written, as a student, two books and something like twenty-eight articles, on sport and society, and on black students, and on the revolt of the black athlete, and the black Muslim family. I loved it, I absolutely loved it.

I had started lecturing on things that people hadn't thought about. You know, sport is not the toy department of human affairs, this is a serious area. "You got to be kidding me. Prove it to me." Then I would go into it and people would get all excited. "Man, I had never thought about it." And that was a tremendous delight for me. It was not just an opening of new dimensions of myself that I was not aware of, it was a delight in it. And it was easy for me. It wasn't that the work wasn't hard. I had found the shortcut to fulfillment in it, and the shortcut, which is about the only shortcut in anything that's worth doing, I found that the shortcut was hard work. And I delighted in it, I loved it. And do to this day. Yeah, I do to this day.

At one point, here at Berkeley, I was teaching full time, I was consulting with sports groups, and I still would read five or six books a week. I was getting like three or four hours of sleep a night, and loved it. I mean I just, I loved reading, everything from physics to sociology, I mean, history. I would go down to the bookstores along Telegraph Avenue and walk out with an arm full. I sat down in Cody's and read the book where the author, Berkeley physicist, cosmologist, wrote a book where he said this project would build the face of God. HE found the imprint of the big bang, and how the big bang actually generated clusters out of which came the galaxies and the planets and the stars and all of that. I went down to Cody's to buy that book, after he held that press conference here on campus, talking about the outcome of the {Kobe?} research, which was essentially to map the dispersion of heat gradations in the universe in all directions. And I stood down there, in Cody's, from about 3:00 in the afternoon until that place closed that night at 11:00, and I read that entire book. I mean I used to do stuff like that. I just loved it. Do to this day.

Wilmot: By the way, are you following the debate that's starting to unfold around intelligent design versus evolution?

Edwards: Yes, yes. And I don't see a conflict. I don't see a conflict. I think the universe is phenomenally creative. And that there is an intelligence to that creative method that is sufficient to generate you and me, a universe that is comprehensible. And the notion of a beginning, and possible ends, of that universe, which means there is some cause-effect kinds of relationships, which emerges out of some—I hesitate to use the word rational—because I think that the problem between intelligent design and science is not so much a contradiction in ideas, but a contradiction in terms of the language, the linguistic currency that we have at our disposal to express those relationships.

Science deals in math and theorems, while intelligent design, almost by definition, deals in ideas and concepts. There's a gap between them because we have not—we have not arrived at the language, the linguistic currency to bridge those two things, given the magnitude of the separation between them. So, my basic idea is that there is not a contradiction between intelligent design and science, intelligent design and evolution, because I think that the universe

is phenomenally creative. I think that there is not a contradiction, there is a problem. And the problem is we not only do not have the language, we not only do not have the established linguistic currency to bridge that relationship,

I'm not sure that we are—for lack of a better term—intelligent enough to develop that linguistic currency at a level where it can be reduced to a formula that makes sense to both sides, and to those who would push intelligent design. I also think that there is another problem. And that is that many of those who push intelligent design are really simply Creationist in different clothing. That is, they really want to believe Genesis. And they've put an intelligent-design label on it to make it more palatable, and perhaps even acceptable to some who refuse to take Genesis literally, so I think that there's that underlying problem. But I have no difficulty with intelligent design versus science in the guise of evolution, because I believe that the universe is phenomenally creative. Does that make me a Creationist? [laughing]

Wilmot: No, I don't think it does. But it is a unique voice that you're putting forth, and certainly there is politically charged environment that this debate is born into, is being birthed into. And the terms that we're working with are very quickly being kind of--

Edwards: Politically encapsulated and launched.

Wilmot: Exactly. And I think that your analysis exists separately from that, however the debate is occurring within that political space.

Edwards: Well, my perspective on it comes from reading everything from Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time*, and looking at some of his ideas, reading Paul Davies' books on popularized versions of cosmology and quantum mechanics, and all kinds of ideas from scientific analysis of the very small to scientific analysis of the very large. And of course reading everything I could get my hands on for years, having to do with Einstein and his special and general theories of relativity, and his whole thought process, the philosophies and ideas of Albert Einstein, and how he arrived at those ideas. And so, my perspective, for a sociologist, is probably somewhat unique, but I really truly do not see a conflict between intelligent design and science.

Especially the guise of evolution, because all you're really saying is that the universe is very creative, and it moves in evolutionary time, and creates the necessary harmony for that intelligent design to appear over eons and eons of time. Thirteen to fifteen billion years since the big bang is a very, very long time. And so, I don't see a conflict. And if Einstein's theory of general relativity is anywhere close to correct, and every test has shown it to be correct—if what Stephen Hawking has stated in terms of *A Brief History of Time* and some of his ideas relative to quantum cosmology and that whole process—not to speak of Darwin and his whole theory of evolution and some of the theorems that are generated from that—I don't see a conflict.

Wilmot: Okay. And I asked you that question, and in some way, I kind of moved us out of the realm. We were just discussing your time of coming to California and learning and education, and kind of entering that time of your life. And I just wanted to ask you, if you were to name the top five books or authors that were most influencing you at that time, or top three or however many number—five is totally arbitrary. But just what were the things that you remember at that time that were just kind of seminal and mind-blowing, or deeply redepentive or confirming your own experience.

Edwards: From my academic years at San Jose State and Fresno City College?

Wilmot: Yeah.

Edwards: First of all, I really got into reading, to the point I just loved to read. I mean I would look up the footnotes that authors would put there, and then go to class, and when the professor would make a point that the author made, I would raise my hand and say, “Yes, but if you check this footnote here, I have the original work here and what he says is not exactly what the original meant. Even though they both use the same words, look at the context.” I loved doing that kind of thing, and then I just started reading everything I could get my hands on.

By the time I had really decided on a major and started reading sociological works, and social historical works, the works of W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*. I mean I just loved that. When I read, “The problem of the twentieth century will be the problem of the color line,” I said, “Wow, that gets right back to what I was dealing with in East St. Louis. That’s Emmett Till. That’s what my father was dealing with. That’s what—.” I loved his work.

The other person whose work I loved to read was James Baldwin. James Baldwin was a jazz musician, he was not a writer. And he would have these long paragraphs, and they would be grammatically impeccable, but they would be like that thick. There would be a rhythm to them. And I loved reading his works. And by the time I had gotten past his fiction and stuff, such as *Giovanni’s Room*, which had a gay theme and this kind of thing, and *Go Tell It On The Mountain*. And then I read *The Fire Next Time*, and it just blew my mind. I mean, it just blew my mind. Had a tremendous impact me.

Another book that had a tremendous impact on me was by a good friend of mine, Louis Lomax, who I also have a chapter on in my book, *Brother Lomax*. He wrote a book called *The Negro Revolt*. And in 1963, he came to San Jose State, the only Negro student in sociology, really I think [the only one] allowed to major in sociology. The sociology department was sponsoring him and I got a chance to spend two days with him. I had never read his book. And the first thing he asked me when we picked him up at the little airport out in San Jose was, “Have you ever read my book, *The Negro Revolt*?” I said,

“No.” I said, “Do you have a copy?” He said, “Yeah, I have a copy. When I get to the hotel, I’ll unpack and I’ll give you a copy.” And so he gave it to me. And so, the next day when we went to pick him up, I said, “Hey, that was a heck of a book.” I said, “I really, really enjoyed that book.” He said, “What do you mean? What’d you do, how much you read—the first chapter?” I said, “No, I read the whole thing.” I said, “I read the whole thing.” He said, “You read the whole thing?” I began quoting him stuff and relating it, and that’s when we really became close friends. That book had a tremendous impact on me, and that last chapter where he says something to the effect, irrespective of how this revolt may turn out, one thing the record will show that once the dust settles, inspired, sometimes confused, black people once passed this way, Negro people once passed this way. I mean it was—that had a phenomenal impact on me.

Then, the other thing that had an impact on me was Maya Angelou. Maya Angelou was writing and I’m not sure when I first—but her and Louis Lomax were very good friends. She had written a book called *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*. And I thought that that was just phenomenal. And some of her poetry that she wrote about the experience of being a Negro woman. And I had never really thought about that. I had never really thought about that. I always thought about things out of my eyes. And then I looked through eyes that I could identify with. My father’s eyes, Frank Summers’, my attorney’s and sponsors’ eyes, the great athletes’ eyes, and then all of a sudden Maya began to talk about these Negro women. Wait a minute. And so I began to try to put myself in that space.

Reading allowed me to see things through eyes that otherwise I would have never seen. And that had a tremendous impact on me. For the first time really, because the only real experience that I had had in men dealing with women was really my father and my mother. And that was one I kept in a box, because it was so brutal in so many different ways. Not uncaring, just brutal. But then as I began to read these women, I began to see things that I had not seen. The black writer who wrote the poem *Young, Gifted, and Black* and *A Raisin in the Sun*, Lorraine Hansberry.

Wilmot: Lorraine Hansberry.

Edwards: I had read her stuff, her and Lomax were good friends. They all lived in New York, and so he knew all of these people, and he would suggest stuff. “Hey, have you read this? Read that. You need to read So-and-So about—.” Because obviously when I was discussing things with him I probably made some very ignorant statements about women. “You need to read this. Read Maya. Read Lorraine Hansberry. Go back and read so-and-so.” And so I began to do that, and again I was just thrown back.

The other thing that happened was that I began to listen to jazz, as a result of reading both James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison. Ralph Ellison had some

tremendous—*The Shadow and The Act* was one of the greatest books that I read by Ralph Ellison. And he talked about all of these experiences. And he was at a very fundamental level a jazz artist. So I began to listen to jazz, and one of the first people that I listened to—I went to back to my roots, of course, because he and I grew up less than a mile and a half from each other—Miles Davis, in East St. Louis. He was a big hero back there. So, I began to listen to Miles Davis and relate it to intellectual ideas. And going back and hearing his music outside of the East St. Louis context, which is—that’s a lived experience, as opposed to an in-depth, intellectual experience where you try to deconstruct and understand what Miles was trying to get at, and what he was trying to say in the music. And then of course I went from Miles to Coltrane, you know, and then off into Herbie Hancock, and all of those people who played with Miles, that one band that Miles put together, the 1958 sessions at Columbia, which came out in the sixties, where he had Coltrane and Cannonball Adderly, these people in this band.

2-00:30:04

It was phenomenal. And then I heard the album, *Kind of Blue*. And I remember sitting there at San Jose State with this record player that I had, listening to *Kind of Blue*, and I couldn’t believe, I just couldn’t believe it. And to sit and read James Baldwin and listen to Miles Davis, it was a kind of experience that was so intellectually energizing that I would go for two days without eating. I mean, I would just listen to music, go to class, come back, listen to music. Soon as I ran home, I’d put it on, then go to basketball practice. It was just phenomenal. I’d run to the library. I’d stay there, get my homework done, everything, because when I went home, I was going to put on some music and start reading stuff that I really wanted to read. So, all of those books. Baldwin, Ellison, DuBois, Maya Angelou, Lorraine Hansberry, the jazz stuff. I was living all of that at that time.

Wilmot: I have two questions that come out of this. Do you have more to say?

Edwards: Yeah, of course.

Wilmot: The first question is, you mentioned Louis Lomax as being someone who you were in community with at this time. Who else were you in intellectual community with at this time?

Edwards: Well, really nobody. I was really isolated at San Jose State. At San Jose State, you had, if you were a scholarship athlete at San Jose State, that was your community. It’s pretty much as it is today. Black athletes on traditionally white campuses are largely isolated and insulated from the broader intellectual and academic community. The thing that got me in touch with Lomax was that I was truly a student athlete, and my academics eventually outpaced my love for athletics. But at the time, they were running neck and neck. And Milt Rendall, who was chair of the Sociology Department when Lomax was invited for what used to be called Negro History Week, when he was invited

to speak, he said, “Well, have Harry go with so-and-so to meet him at the airport.” And I was his escort around campus during his day and a half stay there. He came in that evening, we had dinner and so forth. Then the next day he spoke in a class and then gave his general lecture, hung out with the faculty, had dinner, and then went all the way back.

But I was pretty much isolated, and you were expected to be an athlete first, because they were giving you an athletic scholarship. I mean that’s why I had to walk around with that little—once I was admitted to sociology provisionally, that’s why I had to walk around with that little blue card that I had to have all of my professors sign to make sure that I was still eligible. Because I was expected—the first thing, first line of business, was maintaining your eligibility so you could continue to play athletics.

Wilmot: You may have already answered this, but were any of your fellow athletes, did you find some kind of intellectual community there at all?

Edwards: No, not really. Because they thought—when I would leave—we would play a basketball game, and I would leave the basketball game—the basketball game would start at 8:00. By 10:15, we’d be leaving out of the San Jose Civic Auditorium, heading back, walking back to campus when it was a home game. I would walk back to the dormitory, I would go to the library. I couldn’t wait to get back to the reading. I couldn’t wait to get back to the homework. They thought I was bizarre. I mean they really thought this. Because they were going to a party, or they were going back to the dorm and relax and rest, and whatever. But I would leave a basketball game and go to the library. Leave the library and go home. I’d be up half the night listening to music, or reading books that I really wanted to read. I loved that part of it. I don’t know of anyone who ever really understood that dimension of my career at San Jose State, among the other Negro athletes at that point.

And they were not surprised when the Woodrow Wilson Fellowship Foundation awarded me the Woodrow Wilson Fellowship. They said, “Hey, man, this dude is really heavy. He’s real about the books. He’s *real* about the books.” The coaches were surprised. My professors were surprised. Because all they saw was me as one of all of the other athletes, but my fellow athletes were not surprised.

Wilmot: And then when did that shift for you? When did you get to have—I imagine it as a joyful exchange—when did you get to have a community of other folks who you could exchange with, and be in communication with about these wonderful--?

Edwards: Actually, when I got into the movement. And all of a sudden—Maya Angelou, one of my heroes, wrote the foreword to *The Struggle That Must Be*. When you go and look at some of the people who supported us in the Olympic project for human rights, this was a time when intellectuals were—public

intellectuals—in terms of what was called the Negro Revolt, or the Negro Revolution, it was called early on in the early 1960s. By 1966, it was done, but early to mid 1960s it was called the Negro Revolution. And a lot of intellectuals, poets, artists, writers were absolutely public in their intellectual activities. And if you were part of that, you hooked up with them. That's what gave me—those kinds of exchanges with people like LeRoi Jones—Baraka—they gave a lot of us the strength and the faith, not only that we had something to say, but we could put it in a book. So as a student, I wrote two books. But you had people in prison writing books. I was very good friends with the author of *Roots*, *Autobiography of Malcolm X*—Very good friends. He'd come to San Francisco and we'd go out to dinner and talk about all kinds of things, at the time that he was writing *Roots*. And he had written *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, and boy I loved that book. I loved the transformation and the capacity for change. Eldridge Cleaver was in prison writing books. Huey Newton was writing books. Stokely Carmichael wrote a book with a professor at Howard by the name of Hamilton, called *Black Power*. Rap Brown wrote a book called *Die, Nigger, Die*, speaking of the U.S. disposition largely towards black males. Angela Davis wrote a book.

But these were all people who were in communication with each other, and they were all students, and they had direct access to people who were artists, writers, intellectuals. So there was nothing unique about—once you got into those circles, then that circle of reinforcement was there. It's a different kind of thing than what—there's something I never would have found with my white colleagues at San Jose State, for example, once I went back there. To some extent, here, but not really.

Wilmot: We'll talk about that. I don't want to leave that last statement in particular. I do want to talk more about, you know, the kind of—collegiality is the wrong word, but kind of intellectual environment and the change that happened here.

You've given me this wonderful question to ask you, which is about two things. From that vantage point that you described, being part of a kind of a community of people nationally, perhaps even internationally, who were thinking about being black, thinking about politics, thinking about nation, and creating, along those lines, creating from that source. From that perspective—and also you just mentioned, when you were discussing, you mentioned some issues of sexuality and gender, and awareness around sexuality and gender. My first part of this question is, what did you see, with regards to sexuality and gender, people's attitudes around sexuality and gender? And I'm coupling them in the movement. And then I want to ask you about your own growth during that period, with regard to those two areas.

2-00:39:55

Edwards:

During the 1960s, black women wrote about gender, not so much sexuality, but gender, in a way, that either was not in your face—and by that I mean that in their writings, black women were identified and had a role, but oftentimes it

was in support of the movement—which was black-male-led—or in support of black men, or in support of the black family, or in support of black culture, unlike the broader feminist movement which was in your face: women as women, discussing issues, primarily, principally, up front, unadulterated, unquestioned, undeniably about women.

What black women's disposition did on the first level was to keep the movement together. There wasn't a Negro Revolution with a feminist split. It was the Negro Revolution, and black women, because of the tact that they took in writing about it, discussing it, and so forth, kept it together.

The second thing that it did was that it enabled the movement to assume a pre-eminence of race issues over gender issues, to such an extent that there was basically a presumption, that once we resolved the issues of race, as principally defined by black men, the issues that impact black women will be resolved.

And so there was no hesitancy whatsoever, or questioning, when Dorothy Height, who was president of the National Negro Women's Organization, requested from Bayard Rustin and Martin Luther King and A. Philip Randolph that a woman be put on the speakers' list for the 1963 march on Washington. They said, "We have a woman on the list. Mahalia Jackson's going to sing before we begin." And she was the only one that made it to the podium. Because [the attitude was] once we resolved race issues, any issues that women may want to talk about are going to be resolved, so what's the problem?

The issue, as it arose in the movement, never had to do with the status, the state, of women within the movement. We never dealt with the reality that a lot of what happened to black women did not happen to them because they were black. It happened to them because they were women, and a good deal of it happened at the hands of black men, including the definition of what a woman's place was in the movement. Stokely Carmichael's now infamous statement when asked, "What is the place of black women in the movement?" And he said, "On their back, with their legs up." But that was a more brutal statement of a broader presumption about the dynamics of race and gender in a society that most certainly was racist, but even more pre-eminently was sexist. There was an argument about whether, for example, black men could be coaches, and athletic directors, and executives, and major players on integrated teams in the 1960s. But there was no argument about whether or not they should be. With women, there was an argument about whether or not they should be. I mean, I don't know, after twenty years in the NFL [National Football League], anything that any general manager does that a woman capable of being a partner in a major law firm, demonstrable capability of functioning as the CEO of a Fortune 500 company, or less, could not do. I don't of anything that a GM does that a—but there's not a single woman

general manager in the history of the NFL. Even where you have women as owners, in many instances, thanks largely to their husbands dropping dead.

But be that as many, again, sport reflected society, but the reality was that during the movement it was presumed that race trumped gender, in terms of resolving these issues. Now, the impact that that had on my perspectives on this situation was to really make me back up and think about my own activist frameworks and issues, but it also caused me to be very realistic about what was doable and what was not doable. What was my fight and what was not. So if you read all of my work, I have focused on men in sports, because I learned early on that women are not only deserving of a separate treatment and reality, but they have issues that can not be subsumed at any level under the issues that black males, for example, face in sports. Because sexism is not just, in many instances, race. It is race plus class plus sexism. So, this is something that has to be treated separately, and you can't treat them all in one article, or one treatise, even one book. So my thing was basically to stay away from it, pick your wars, deal with what you can deal with. On a practical level, it meant that in organizing athletes, to try to organize black athletes and black women athletes, is an absolute losing battle. Nobody has that kind of intellectual, political dexterity. Even in terms of some issues that emerge later on that may have seemed crystal clear. For example, the demand for parity with women in sports, where that parity would mean the diminution of scholarships in the two sports which hauled most of the athletic budget, basketball and football.

Now, black women were really caught in a no—well, let me put it—in a no man's land, in that situation. Because the two sports that hauled the most money are the revenue producing sports, which is where most black athletes get their scholarships. We don't get scholarships in water polo, golf, tennis, diving, swimming, hockey, and so forth. We get scholarships in the revenue producing sports, because that is where the reward is greatest, and therefore that is where we have the greatest toleration. So, if you take scholarships away from there to give to women, you are diminishing the scholarships available to black men.

Where do black women come down on that? As feminists, they say, "Hey, give us our share. We're athletes, too." But as black people, as black women, they say, "Yeah, but when the scholarships go, they're going to take them away from the brothers." So, I can't talk about expanding black access, equality, and so forth in sport, and also talk about women's issues. You've got to talk about that as a separate reality, separate set of dimensions and dynamics. So what I learned, in terms of my own personal thing, is to be aware and supportive of the feminist issues and surmounting the challenges, but understand what that means within a context of race, gender dynamics, particularly for black women.

Wilmot: And you would say that came into your awareness, in your experience, in that time period?

Edwards: That came into my awareness in looking at how we handle race and gender in a Civil Rights Movement.

2-00:50:10

Wilmot: So it happened at the level of theory—

Edwards: It happened at the level of practicality. Because in 1966/67, when I began organizing athletes, we had to deal with some real challenges there. Wilma Rudolph, Wyomia White. I mean these were black women, gold medalists, champion athletes. Were we going to try to organize them, or were we going to try to deal strictly with the male athlete contingent that fit much better into our analytical and political paradigms, as far as the relationship between sport and society, and what happened at the interface of race, sport, and society. Because when we begin to talk about what's happening at the interface of race, gender, sport, and society, that's a huge world. That's a fog-shrouded minefield, in terms of dealing with it from a political organizational base, in terms of something like the Olympic Project for Human Rights.

I mean, I would have ended up having to ask for equal time in the media to answer myself. It would have been that kind of a constant set of contradictions and morasses that I would have gotten involved in, so I was compelled to say, "Okay, we're not going to deal with that. We're going to focus our effort here and hope that, as did Martin Luther King, as did Malcolm X, and hey, as did Stokely Carmichael, women will find a way to come along and then begin to craft and design their own response to this thing." And of course, coming out of 1968, women did. They pushed for Title IX. In 1968, there were twenty-six schools in this country that gave [athletic?] scholarships to women. There are today over six hundred that give scholarships to women. And you begin to get a women's movement in athletics thanks to Billie Jean King and all these people. But it really came out of was the Revolt of the Black Athlete, because they looked at that and said, "Hey, you know what? We can change this damn thing. And we can change it in a way that benefits us." So, that's what you have to do.

Wilmot: During that time, were you ever someone—say you had a good friend who was saying or doing something sexist, would you say, "Hey, that's really sexist. You need to—that's really kind of sexist and you should think about growing your awareness and treating sisters better." Would you ever say that to a good friend?

Edwards: No, no. I would never say that to a good friend. I mean, the kind of friends that I had, you look around and all of the sudden they're slapping this woman upside the head. And I would say, "Hey man, I don't know what kind of dude it takes—I mean, what's she going to do? Is she going to out punch you? Is

she going to wrestle you to the ground? Is she going to beat you up? What is the challenge there?" And the conversation would go at that level if I was there and saw it happen. And I would simply say, "What's she gonna—is she going to beat you up? You're doing this because you can do it, you can get away with it, what kind of a dude does that?"

I wouldn't challenge his sexism and his feminist awareness—I would challenge him where he—because none of that's there. Otherwise, he wouldn't do it. I would challenge his manhood. What kind of a man slaps a woman? What kind of a man, you know, rips his woman off? What kind of a man comes in and takes advantage of this woman at that level? I mean, if that's what it really was, a sexist kind of thing.

No, I didn't have those kinds of conversations. I would just tell them, I would challenge their manhood, what kind of a dude does something like this? That has always been my tack. This is like forty years that I've been with my wife, and I have yet to even so much as push her. I couldn't imagine doing that. She's smacked me a couple of times, but I had it coming. [laughter] She hurt her hand, I mean, what's she going to do? I'm 6'8", 325 pounds, and she's—"I told you, don't do that." It was more funny than anything. I mean, what's she going to do? Well, what is she going to do?

So at the end of the day, no, I never had those kind of intellectual conversations. If somebody was that far-out, the chances are very good that I'd just say, "Hey, man"—I don't need those kinds of friends. And anything I could do for the lady, I would. But I don't need those kinds of friends. But if it was somebody that was really a friend of mine that did something like that, I wouldn't challenge their feminist awareness and their feminism, they don't have any. I would challenge their manhood.

Wilmot: You were speaking about James Baldwin and I was thinking about the time when, I think it was—I forget if he was Amiri Baraka or LeRoi Jones—and he had leveled a critique, I think it was a homophobic critique of James Baldwin. So that's part of what I was trying to understand, the terrain that existed around sexuality and the movement that you were playing a role in.

Edwards: Let me say something about the whole area of gay rights and homosexuality. In East St. Louis, we grew up with homosexuals in the community. They weren't pushed out of the community. I mean, they were in the church and everybody knew who they were. They were in the schools. Everybody knew who the teachers were who were, at that point, homosexual. Everybody knew that. In the community, we allowed them their privacy. So when I came into sports, that's what I brought with me into sports. The community, as a community and culture, was not alienated, terrorized, upset, out of sorts, about homosexuality, because everybody knew these people, knew who they were, knew in many instances—these two women who lived together weren't just

two spinster school teachers sharing living expenses, they were just—everybody knew that. And it didn't matter.

We gave them their space, their peace, their privacy, their lives. That's what I brought with me to the movement. So, when I have that tremendous admiration for James Baldwin, his sexuality was not an issue. Anymore than Baraka's sexuality. Any more than him being married to—I'll tell you something that did take me some getting used to. Black men who were married to white women. I used to look at that in utter amazement. Man, these people are brave.

Wilmot: They're prominent leaders.

Edwards: Yeah, absolutely. Movie stars. Sidney Poitier. And not only did they survive, they were promoted. Sammy Davis, Jr.

Wilmot: So when you say brave, you mean in terms of their surviving censure from a white world?

Edwards: Right. Dealing with that every day. Because even though they did it, they were obviously, both of them were into this together, it wasn't somebody coercing somebody and this one thing, it was there. Baraka, Sidney Poitier, Sammy Davis, Jr., various singers and everything. You go over to the jazz clubs—the {Bouvan?} and the {Birdcage?} over in San Francisco, and the {Blackhawk?}—the way we used to in 1965 and 1964. We listened to a record and get on the bus, get on the Greyhound bus, and ride into San Francisco to Divisadero. You go to these places, you walk in there, and I mean there are black men and white women, and there are white men and a black woman every now and then, and I'm looking at that and I just thought it was, "Wow." You know, I hadn't been around that. It took me—by the time I began teaching, it was cool, because I had seen it. But I had to wrap my mind around that.

At San Jose State, when I was an athlete there, they were still kicking athletes out of school for recklessly eyeballing white coeds. They cancelled coeducational recreation on Wednesday night because the black athletes would go in there and dance. And there weren't that many black women on campus, so we wound up dancing with the white women. And they shut it down. They closed it down. They went from top forty to square dancing. And when they found out we didn't mind square dancing, they finally just shut it down. So, that one took me awhile to get used to. And I remember a lot of debates about that. I mean a lot of discussion about that. In the movement, and in moving before I became involved in the movement, discussions about that.

2-01:10

I remember this one disposition that really—I said, "Man, that's interesting." The point was that was blacks who are almost universally subordinate in

American society, don't have a right of choice. That this white woman has to position herself, where this black man has access to her and can make those kinds of bonds and relationships exist, because he can't go into her community and into the white world and make a proposal to her. She has to come into his world. And it came about as a discussion, "Hey man, what's going on in this jazz club, man?" They'll say, "Oh, they come in here, because those are the relationships--." But this guy, I don't care how good he is on that tenor sax. He can't go out in Lafayette or Moraga or Sunnyvale and say, "Hey, I'm going to this white club." She has to come in here. And that was one, I said, "Wow, I guess if that's the case, that's the way it happens." So there was a lot of thinking going on around that. Not so much homosexuality.

Didn't have a problem with homosexuality, amazingly. But I grew up where homosexuality was at a very minimum, tolerated, and in some instances—Mr. Brown who played piano and was the best music teacher at the school, turned out some prime jazz piano players, stride piano players, and so forth—The community loved Mr. Brown. Even though everybody knew, we never had a problem with that. The black/white thing, hey, we had a problem with that because people had died over it.

Wilmot: In the context of the movement, was this a conversation at all? Was there conversation about sexuality?

Edwards: Yeah, there was a conversation about sexuality. And I'll tell you where people in our circle came down on it, in athletics. We knew that there were guys that we played with, who would be called today gay. And it never came up, except in discussion among guys who were not. Where it typically came down, because these guys were team members, they were productive athletes, they were great track athletes, they were great football players, they were great basketball players, they were team members, they enabled us to win. And where the level of tolerance generally came down at was, I have no problem with a man coming to—not just like, but prefer—going to bed with another man. I ain't got no problem with that. This was our teammate. The discussion came down there. We don't have a problem with that.

What we have a problem with is: "How did he climb in the bed the first time?" I don't understand that. He can't explain that to me. He can't explain that to me, and so I'm not going to get into that with him. Because I don't really understand how I climb into bed with a woman the first time. If somebody asked me to explain that, I couldn't explain that. So, we're going to just leave that one alone. This guy's a great football player, he's a phenomenal basketball player, he's a phenomenal track athlete, he's our teammate. And I'm going to tell you something else. That's the way most professional teams deal with it.

Wilmot: Hmm, interesting.

Edwards: It's the way most professional teams deal with it. This idea about, "Well, there's a tremendous homophobia in professional sport—" No, there's a phobia about losing in professional sport. And if this guy can play ball, if he goes out there on Sunday in the NFL. If he goes out there on that basketball court in the NBA. If he goes out there on that baseball diamond, and produces, his team is not just tolerant of whatever he is, they will defend him against those who would attack him. There's no homophobia. They can understand that. Even though, if you press them on it, they will tell you. But what I don't understand is how he climbed into bed the first time. That's where the line is drawn.

Wilmot: Interesting, very interesting. My last question for today, because we're now not recording here [video], but only here [audio], is, did you like Maya Angelou's introduction to your book?

Edwards: I did not want her to write a—what do I want to say--

Wilmot: This is in 1980.

Edwards: Yeah. I did not want her to write a choreographed, formed, perfect, "You're going to have to understand what he's saying" type of thing—uh huh. I wanted her to write a perspective on the book from someone, based upon the world that she knew. And the person that she knew. And the situation that she understood at the time. I was not gentle enough for Maya. I wasn't gentle enough for Maya. But Maya understood where the damage was done. She understood that there was a lot of damage done in East St. Louis. And what she is saying in her foreword is, that it is through this lens that you must understand not so much this man, but what he is trying to say here. She understood that there was a lot of damage done along the way.

That's why when we talked about her writing a foreword, she said, "Well, how do you want this—?" I said, "I want you to write a foreword that anybody who picks up and reads the foreword will say, 'OK, this is going to be rough trip. But you look at the other side of it, and he came out of it, not just with some principles, but even more importantly, he came out of it with his humanity.'" But I'm not—Maya is such a sweet person, and it comes through in all of her work. She is an absolutely true humanist in the most positive sense of that word. I'm not, I am not. I think that over the years, if you wanted to—warrior, some people would even say barbarian. But at the end of the day, my perspective was always to challenge the establishment, to get in their face, to push the envelope, to force them to look at stuff that nobody wanted to look at. I was completely satisfied when absolutely nobody was comfortable.

Wilmot: Well, I have a question for you based on that. And let me not cut you off, but what did you do—when you consistently take that position—what did you do with your fear?

Edwards: I cannot remember being afraid. I cannot remember—you know, and I go back to the Emmett Till thing. When I was confronted with Emmett Till and my father's reaction to it, and that picture. And I implore anyone to go back to the 1955 issues of *Jet* magazine and look at that picture, or look at this book that this individual who researched this thing has come out with. Most certainly look at the documentary that he did.

At that point, American society did virtually everything, with the exception of killing me, that they could possibly do, from a psychological and a social-psychological point of view.

So in the 1960s, when I was receiving the death threats, and behind hounded by the FBI, including having FBI informants in our classes, being trailed and stopped by the local police departments and sheriff's departments, I drove in 1960, driving various cars. I had a driver's license in this state from 1960 to 1967, but between the announcement of the Olympic Project for Human Rights and the demonstrations in Mexico City on October 16, 1968—in that period between November 11, 1967 and October 16, 1968, I got thirteen moving violations. One ticket I got for failing to signal a left turn into my own driveway. So, I was never in fear. Part of it, perhaps, was youth. Part of it, perhaps, was resignation, that if I'm going to do this, these are the risks. But a great part of it was that American society did about all they could do to me by the time I was thirteen years old and confronted with the Emmett Till lynching and my father's response to it. But more than that, American society's response to it—the American legal system's response to it. So I do not remember being afraid.

When I go back and look at some of that stuff now, such as the demonstrations at the New York Athletic Club where we were surrounded by people, and ultimately I was picked up by the FBI and taken to a hotel room because they wanted to know where I was while they went through my hotel room and went through my stuff—even then, I was not afraid. In Mexico, when the athletes were down there, I was afraid for them, which is why I was in Canada. Because I think they would have killed us all. But I did not want that on my résumé.

Wilmot: And how about when you had a family? Did your perspective change?

Edwards: My perspective changed in terms of the provisions for my father. My perspective changed in terms of what I involved my family in. One of the reasons, along with Africanizing my children's names, that I did not want them to be named Edwards, was that they did not need that baggage. I had gone through what it meant to be Harry Edwards. I went through one point, that I even talk about in the book, where I would not eat at a restaurant that was not a smorgasbord, because if they did not know I was coming, they couldn't poison my food. I never drank from the water that they put up on the podium--when you go to speak some place, they come up with the pitcher of

water and put it there. Hey, unh huh. No, if I didn't bring the water with me, I didn't drink it. Because I knew what America was capable of.

Was I afraid? No. Was I cautious? Very much so, because I had work to do. Was I paranoid? Uh, some people go back and read the record and say maybe. But when you get 3,500 pages of documents, dispatches, articles, newspaper clips, and everything from the FBI that they kept in your file, maybe I was not as cautious and vigilant as I should have been. Maybe paranoia was not enough. But fear, no. I was concerned once I had a family, and once my children began to come on the scene, and my wife. I didn't want to be in the situation where I was arrested and they were in the car, or shot at and they were in the car, one thing or another. And I went through some of that in the sixties, with my dogs being slaughtered and everything while I was at San Jose State. I didn't want them to be involved in that kind of thing. And I think that them having a different name from me helped in that regard. In point of fact, I know it does. When my oldest daughter, she went to Harvard and then she came to Berkeley Law School, graduated from Boalt Hall, and she went over to Brobeck, law firm over in San Francisco, and they interviewed her and they hired her. But about six months after she was hired, the senior partner called her in and said, "There was one curious thing that we discussed at the time that we hired you and it was never cleared up, and I think we need to clear it up." And they said, "Tazamisha,"—[audio cuts here]

Interview 2: November 1, 2005

Edwards 03 11-01-05.wav

3-00:00:00

Wilmot: Good morning.

Edwards: Good morning.

Wilmot: It is November 1, as you said, interview #2 with Professor Harry Edwards, the Regional Oral History Office of The Bancroft Library. I wanted to start this morning by asking you—I know that two weeks ago you went to the unveiling of the statue at San Jose State University. Is that correct?

Edwards: Yes.

Wilmot: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Edwards: Well, first of all, it's a phenomenal statue. I hope that everybody will have an opportunity to go by there and just take a look at it. It's about twenty-four feet tall, ceramic and bronze, really quite impressive, and it was basically to commemorate the demonstration by Thomas Smith and John Carlos at the 1968 Olympic Games. That whole movement, which was called the Olympic Project for Human Rights, was basically a demonstration against racism in sport and society, and against the brutalization of people of color, and that ranged all the way from people in the United States through the Vietnam War, and the circumstances of poor people of color more generally in American society, black and otherwise. So, it was really a monumental statement that was made, and it's become one of the icons of the 1960s. I think that it's important from the perspective that it commemorates that movement. I think it's also important from the perspective that it commemorates the beginning of a serious disposition academically, politically, and socially toward sport in American society.

Wilmot: Can you tell me a little bit about the program that day?

Edwards: The program was very interesting. It was basically a program that was begun by students at San Jose State, and I think that at a very basic level, the university and some of the people associated with the university felt that they should get out ahead of the parade in order to avoid being run over by it, because the students had made it very, very clear that they wanted to commemorate student activism. And it was really a focus on student activism. As far as the broader parameters movement, the roots of the Olympic Project for Human Rights and so forth, very little of that was actually part of the program.

It was really an effort by students to commemorate student activism. I don't think that they really had a good handle on what that meant. I think as far as

the people from the university who were getting at the head of the parade, so to speak, in order to keep from being run over by it, there was an effort to confine it, to make it seem as if—if you are a student demonstrator, you're going to be appreciated, you're going to be loved, they're going to put up statues to you and so forth—rather than dealing with the realities of the movement. For example, at the very outset of the Olympic Project for Human Rights, not one single faculty member, administrator, or staff member stood up and said, “You know what? Tommie Smith, John Carlos, Lee Evans, Kenneth Noel, Harry Edwards. You guys are right. We want to work with you on this and try to work this out. See what we can do here to set an example in terms of how this thing should be corrected.”

In point of fact, there was an adamant anti-student activism disposition. Tommie Smith received a letter from the administration saying that he did not qualify to graduate. Even though he was in ROTC and finished four years in ROTC, he was never commissioned as a lieutenant in the army. He was given, in point of fact, an honorable discharge as soon as he finished his ROTC. I was fired from San Jose State as an instructor in sociology for even having the temerity to raise issues of segregated fraternities, and segregated approved housing, and segregated majors, and segregated academic clubs, and segregated social, cultural life on the campus.

The show that was put on, the program that was put on, down to and including the activities associated with the unveiling, did not really reflect the realities of that situation as it evolved. And in order to assure that that would not be reflected, I was not even on the official program. I was able to present some of the demonstration and so forth to Lee Evans and Tommie Smith and John Carlos and to Peter Norman, the Australian who came in second in the hundred meters and wore an Olympic Project for Human Rights button. But beyond that, there was every effort to make it seem as if this was some kind of gold and silver staircase, and if you are a student activist, this is the way it's going to turn out.

Student activism in the 1960s was a dangerous and oftentimes deadly, and most certainly career-altering experience. None of that came through. And to show you how adamant they were about that reality not coming through, I had even talked to the president of the university about contributing to the statue. I understand that San Jose State University may not want any involvement on my part with the athletic department and so forth because all of the things that I did while I was there. I understand that. But I saw no reason why the university, or the student body for that matter, should bear the burden of paying for the monument that was put up to the movement, and so I had written a check, to be quite specific about it, for \$274,000, to pay off the remaining debt on the monument, and also to set aside funds maintaining against graffiti and vandalism and whatever else may happen to it. To make a long story short, it wasn't accepted. I mean it was simply not, we were not able—

Wilmot: The president refused it?

Edwards: Well, no. When I walked up to talk to him, he just walked away. The check was--

Wilmot: You didn't have the opportunity to give it to him?

Edwards: No, no. And so after forty years, than anger, that hostility—and I understand where he's at. He's probably doing what he has to do as the president. I mean, there were no boosters there. There was nobody there from the athletic department. There was no one there from the Spartan Foundation. There were very few faculty members. Most of the people there were students who were over because of class assignments in many instances, and as I talked to one of the staff people at the university about whether or not there were people there from academic departments--history, sociology, and so forth—he said he had sent out letters of invitation asking them specifically to use class time, give class credit, use class time for students to come out, since this was a monument to student activism. He said he didn't get a single solitary reply.

There were some students there from African American Studies classes. There were a couple there from other Ethnic Studies classes. Some students who just happened to be walking by stopped. And even some of them came up and asked me, "Hey, what's going on?" It wasn't this great celebration of 1960s activism that people would presume it to be. I mean, when you're looking at a university in this day and age, as strapped for cash and one thing or another, as universities are, and then there's something like this which is really kind of a side issue, as far as line item budget considerations—and then you can't even give them the money to pay it off. That says something about what they really feel about what is going on and what has happened in this program.

3-00:10:05

I think that the celebration was honest and earnest, as far as the students who organized it, proposed it, and really pushed it through—the student body president, some of the other people who considered the proposal and backed it, supported it. But I think as far as the university was concerned, that it was just an issue of getting at the head of the parade so that could keep from getting run over by it.

I think that in the final analysis, none of that matters, because if it's a hundred years from now, that monument is going to be there. And the serious people who want to really know and understand what happened, why it happened, everybody and everything and every issue that was involved, are going to be able to go back and research that history, and understand the price—the risks, and so forth, that people took. The death threats, the nasty letters, the firings, the dismissals, the banning for life from athletic participation, and all of the other things that happened in that regard.

Wilmot: It's so amazing what you've talked about, because there's all these aspects of social memory, and institutional memory, and how has the student body changed, how do they—it's amazing just to think that, yes, student activism at that time was a life threatening activity. And now, it's maybe something you could do recreationally.

Edwards: They had a panel, for example, one of the questions that was asked was, "When you weren't being an activist, what kind of food did you enjoy? Did you enjoy Taco Bell?" That's the level at which this thing was projected. They did not get into the relationship between the cancellation of the football game at San Jose State and the Olympic Project for Human Rights. They did not get into Ronald Reagan, who was Governor at the time, and his threat to call out the National Guard to assure that the game would be played. And they did not get into, and didn't have anybody up there on the panel—this one panel that I attended in the audience—who could stand up and stipulate to the fact that I met with the president, Robert Clark at the time, and we discussed the implications of the National Guard coming into a football stadium, armed, under the authority of Ronald Reagan, and Attorney General Meese, to assure that demonstrators and others would not impede entry to, or disrupt in any way, a football game being played.

Now, I don't think that Ronald Reagan, once he sent those troops in there, could have controlled them. I know, as I told Robert Clark, that I could control students and so forth that were demonstrating, but I couldn't control all of the periphery groups that had talked about coming down, and would use that as an opportunity to directly attack, verbally, demonstration-wise, any military presence in that area, in light of the ongoing Vietnam War. You have to remember, this is 1968. With National Guard people coming in, there would have been all kinds of groups that would have shown up that I would have had absolutely no ability to control.

The other thing that people have to realize—and that should have been discussed at that forum—this was two years before Kent State. This was two years—this was 1968—Kent State's 1970. We really dodged a bullet in that regard. And this is why President Clark cancelled the football game. It wasn't because the demonstrators were going to go out and disrupt the football game. He figured that Ronald Reagan was angry with him for having called three days of conferences and open town-hall type meetings at the university to discuss racism and segregation on campus, and so forth. He was angry with him for having done that. Robert Clark knew that Ronald Reagan could not control those troops from Sacramento. He also knew, because I told him, that I could not control who would show up, both against the football game and against the troops' presence. And once you get that kind of a situation, you have a situation that is rife for a real tragedy. This was the one that they were not able to manage at Kent State. And the results of that tragedy are historic. None of that was brought up [at this panel discussion]..

Wilmot: Those realities.

Edwards: None of those realities. So students at San Jose State who attended this thing largely have an image of student activism as some kind of a holiday, picnic, kind of parade activity, that you do almost as a recreational aside while you're deciding whether you're going to have McDonald's or Taco Bell for lunch or dinner. That's the way that this thing was presented. So at the end of the day, what came out of it was the fact that the monument exists. Was the fact that Tommie Smith and John Carlos got recognition that was long overdue.

Wilmot: Were they there?

Edwards: They were there. Yeah, they were there. They got recognition that was long overdue. But no one there made an effort to really present the true character of activism in a very oppressive and racist situation in 1968. There were people that left there thinking that the price they paid for what they did was that they gave up endorsements that they would have gotten as a result of their athletic success in Mexico City. In 1968, blacks didn't get endorsements. You couldn't name a single solitary black individual who got endorsements in 1968. The only one who came close was Muhammad Ali. And he got an endorsement with a company that makes the "Roach Motel" product.

O.J. Simpson came afterwards in 1969-1970, because he was the, in effect, the anti- or counter black athlete. A lot of people in the white sports mainstream choreographed and projected O.J. as the kind of black athlete you should be if you want to be successful. And they gave him all kinds of endorsements, Hertz Rent-A-Car, Pennzoil, some of the other large corporations. And the people around him were always whites. They made a deliberate effort not to have any blacks in the O.J. Simpson endorsement advertisements. Because they wanted O.J. to be accepted as presentable to whites. So when he's running through the airport, you don't see a lot of black people standing around saying, "Hey, Juice. Go, man, go!" You see old white women, "Go, O.J., go." They're sitting down, and the people clapping and everything, are whites—because they wanted to project him as being acceptable to whites. In other words, you want the endorsements, you want the money, here's what you're going to have to do. But the endorsements came largely as a consequence of the Revolt of the Black Athlete, and the need to have a counter to Tommie Smith, John Carlos, Jim Brown, Bill Russell, Curt Flood, even Arthur Ashe.

Wilmot: I want to ask you a question. There are so many places we could go from here. Just briefly, could you tell me a little bit about where John Carlos and Tommie Smith are now.

Edwards: Tommie Smith is retired. He was a coach at Santa Monica Community College for about twenty years, track coach and a teacher in the physical education department. John Carlos is down at Palm Desert High School where

he's a track coach down there. He is not retired at this point, he's still coaching. But Tommie Smith has moved to Georgia. He sold his home in Santa Monica, he and his wife and family. So, he's essentially retired at this point.

3:00:20:00

Wilmot:

Did you all have an opportunity to discuss the commemoration?

Edwards:

Well, we spent some time together while they were here. We spent some time together while they were doing the groundbreaking. We spent some time together while they were here this time for the actual unveiling. But after the thing was over, I mean it was like everybody was gone. It was almost like, "Hey, let's get these folks out of town. Let's get them out of here as quick as possible." There was really not a lot of opportunity to talk except during the ceremony and leading up to it, and so we spent probably a couple hours talking over the course of the day, but they were being pulled in every direction by the media, by the press. I was doing all kinds of things with the BBC and other companies, so it was a pretty busy day.

But in between time, we had a lot of time to talk. We talk on the phone quite a bit. Ken Noel, who worked with us to put this whole thing together, was a co-organizer of the Olympic Project for Human Rights probably talks to John Carlos and Lee Evans a couple of times a month. I'll talk to them maybe once a month, something like that. They'll call me, I'll call them, just to see how folks are doing and make sure everybody's health is okay.

Wilmot:

When you look at the state of black athletes' activism at that time in 1968, has there since been an equal height of activism—

Edwards:

No.

Wilmot:

--in black athletes? And how would you compare where we are at now with where we were then?

Edwards:

You really can't—there hasn't been an equal level of black athlete activism, in the sense of even a few extraordinary individuals taking extraordinary steps to kind of broaden the base of democratic participation and involvement in sports, much less in broader society. There are no Tommie Smiths, John Carlos, Muhammad Alis, Curt Floods, Bill Russells, Jim Browns, Arthur Ashes out there today. A number of factors are responsible for that.

The first factor is the demise of what some refer to as civil rights, but what I prefer to call a broad based political and cultural movement toward progressive change, as far as African American outcomes and opportunities in society. That has gone into virtual, total decline. Part of the reason for that is the success of the movement. In other words, when the lines were clearly drawn, whether you were a doctor, an engineer, a school teacher, or the town

drunk, if you were black, you were in the black community. There was no opportunity to move into and onto the periphery of white society. In the 1960s, the targets were clear, the issues were much clearer and unambiguous. You could not eat at a Woolworth's counter. You rode in the back of the bus. You could not get admitted to the University of Alabama, University of Mississippi, and so forth. All of those things were very, very clear.

As the movement achieved success, the issues became far less clear. And as the black middle class took advantage of the successes of the movement, they moved out of the traditional black community, into and onto the periphery of white society and white institutions. And the outcome was now, you have at least two groups, if you're going to create a movement, that you have to speak on behalf of. So how do you speak on behalf of both O.J. Simpson, Michael Jordan, the greater entertainers and so forth who are making millions and tens of millions of dollars—Oprah Winfrey—and also on behalf of people locked intergenerationally into the traditional African American community, which was suffering declines of unprecedented tragedy? Because, in large part, of the success of the movement. The middle class had moved out of the African American community. The entrepreneurs. The schoolteachers, even. The moral, political, economic base of the African American community [and the base of?] the integration movement. It was a one-way move and was largely middle-class. So, given that situation, and given that sport invariably reflects society, you find that the base in sport was gone as well. There was not this broad-based cultural movement against which a movement in sport could evolve, and as a reference point for athletes who would be politically activist.

The second thing that happened was, that once the movement declined, and the basic fundamental justification, rationalization of activism disappeared, what we were left with, in sport in particular, was the nuances of the movement, which to a substantial degree involved a change over from the self effacing, low-profile kind of disposition put forward by Joe Louis, Jackie Robinson, and Jesse Owens. So, Muhammad Ali, in saying, "I'm black and I'm proud," and so forth, that was a huge change from Jackie Robinson and Joe Louis, who simply did their work, left the field, took whatever was put on them, and then came back for more the next day with no real reference to who they were, what they were, what they were fighting for, their humanity, human dignity, respect, and these kinds of things. They were just battling for access. Ali changed all of that.

Once the movement was gone, and being black and proud went with it, as slogans, as points of reference, as almost a mantra of self identity and purpose, once that left, all you had going from that point was ego. And without the movement, without those definitive political, cultural statements to back up action, the athletes degenerated into almost a narcissistic, self-referenced group who were left with simple statements, "I'm doing this because I can and I want to." Self promotion, self aggrandizement, because there was no broader reference. And of course when you got to people like Dennis Rodman, a few

others, they took that whole process right up to the gates of the asylum. To the point to where, hey, if you want to dress up in a wedding dress, put on full mascara, and three inch heels, I'm gonna do that.

Wilmot: But I'm not going to speak against this and so, this injustice that's happening in my country--

Edwards: On whose behalf? Toward what end? Where's the movement that gave purpose, direction, justification, for speaking out and the sacrifices of speaking out. The movement was dead. It was gone. It was no longer there. You remove the Nation of Islam. You remove the Civil Rights Movement. You remove Malcolm X. You remove Dr. King. You remove the Black Power Movement. From Muhammad Ali, Tommie Smith, John Carlos, Arthur Ashe even, Bill Russell, Jim Brown. And what do you have left? Individuals making statements with no broader reference or resonance, if you will, with the cultural and political disposition of the broader community that they would propose to be speaking out on behalf of.

So when you eliminate the movement, and that broader reference is not there, athletes are essentially at sea without a compass. What was left over from the sixties, after we broke with our fathers, we broke with Jesse Owens, we broke with Jackie Robinson, we broke with Joe Louis, and these self-effacing, "Let me simply go in and guarantee access, keep up the door open, and not speak up about these issues. Not speak up about my own perspectives as a human being and as a man." Once we broke with that, and the movement was there to give resonance and reference to how we stated this broader perspective, we were cool. But once the movement was gone, all we had was the self-referencing statements.

03-00:30:01

And what you come out of that with is Dennis Rodman, Deion Sanders, Charles Barkley. All these athletes—who had they been of the sixties era—probably would have been part of The Revolt of the Black Athlete. Because what they were really saying was that I'm broader, I'm bigger, I'm more than simply what the athletic institution has not just defined me as, but required me to be, for purposes of the athletic institutions' interests. Marketing to the broader, largely white, mainstream, ticket-buying, product-buying public. "I'm more than that," except that there's no broader reference for them now.

Could somebody come out and say, "Hey, look at this broad mass of African Americans who have been dispossessed, marginalized, and kicked to the curb," the ones who showed up in the Superdome in New Orleans. Could an athlete come out and say that? Absolutely, of course. And somebody's going to point to, look at this broad swath of African Americans that are in colleges, that are on MTV, that are on the football fields of even schools in the Southeastern Conference and so forth, many of them the children of those

people who are from that stratum of people who were in the Superdome in the wake of Katrina. So athletes get essentially branded as ne'er-do-wells, as problem guys, as political, which carries a much higher price than simply being branded a clown, or a fool, or a self-marketing, self-promoting, narcissistic individual. In American society, that's not really a big problem, if you're entertaining.

If you come out and say something solidly political, you have a real problem. You're marginalized, you are essentially persona non grata, because that carries the potential to change the situation. And the situation is the way it is because the sports institution and those who control it want it that way. So they'll tolerate clowns a long time. They'll tolerate narcissistic, self-promoting individuals forever, and even give them jobs, make them celebrities, because they are absolutely no threat to anything.

Wilmot: In your work, do you come across young athletes who want to step forward and say something in a public fashion, but are scared to, or feel that they will be penalized?

Edwards: No, not really. I come across athletes where they discuss a lot of issues. They bring issues up. But they never cross the line of, "How do I make a statement about this." Or, "The next time that there's a press conference, I'm going to step up and make a statement about this." In twenty years of working with professional athletes in all three major sports that blacks participate in—basketball, football, and baseball—there have maybe been two occasions where someone has come up to me and said, "I want to make a statement about this." One of them was Ronnie Lott, at the point of his induction into the Pro Football Hall of Fame at Canton, Ohio. He said, "I want to not just stand up and make a statement. I want to make a statement about all of those black athletes who came through this league and put up with so much so that I would be able to one day play this game, and stand here where I am."

So he went back, and in his speech he talked about the 1965 black all-stars, American Football League all-stars who refused to play the game in New Orleans after they tried to get into a club, and somebody at the door of the club stuck a gun into Ernie Ladd's face, and told him, "You may come through this door, but you're gonna fall through because I'm going to blow your brains out. No niggers allowed in this club." And so they said, "Why should we play in a city where we cannot even go out to a club, when everybody else is out clubbing, parting, celebrating, including our white teammates before the game and afterwards?" So they had to move that game to Houston. So Ronnie Lott mentioned them. He mentioned people like [Paul] "Tank" Younger. He mentioned some of the other early black pioneers in the National Football League. But beyond that, no. Very, very seldom.

It is not a world that athletes transition into with any degree of ease or certainty. People don't realize the impact of a broad-based, political, cultural

movement in defining not just the issues, but a realm of possibilities in terms of how people see themselves. My father's generation could have never conceived of not being colored or Negroes. My generation came along, and could conceive not only of not being colored, not being Negroes, but of being black and Afro Americans, and ultimately African Americans. My father could never have even conceived that—he never would have raised that issue.

It's the same with this generation of athletes. They cannot conceive of athletics as a forum, where, as individuals, they can step up and make statements with a clear understanding of the issues that they're trying to enunciate, the price that they're going to have pay for that enunciation, and the reality that at some level, it is important to make the statement even if you cannot ensure the change. That it's important to continue marching even when it feels like you might be marching up the down escalator. You've got to continue marching, you've got to make that statement. They cannot conceive of that world.

So, these are the kinds of issues that this monument, as the society distanced itself from that movement—it's only been forty years—will be able to go back and look and see and understand from the perspective of those who were involved in it. This generation of athletes, November 2005, cannot conceive of that world and making that kind of a commitment, that kind of a statement, taking that kind of action, any more than my father could conceive of himself not defining himself—much less being defined as—not defining himself as colored or a Negro.

Wilmot: Do you see that as your job in your work that you do with athletes? Do you feel that part of your job is to bring to them a framework that they can understand themselves as political actors?

Edwards: Oh, absolutely. We talk about a lot of things in my work with athletes. For example, at the San Francisco 49ers, I'm at the office every day. I'm at the locker room, and we talk about a lot of things. And not just with the black athletes, with the white athletes, the Samoan athletes. And part of the thing, they look at me kind of like a walking history chapter from a book. The average athlete at the San Francisco 49ers today was born in the 1980s. The average age of our team is twenty-three and a half. That means that they were born after 1980 for the most part. So, 1968, they put me somewhere back in the same time frame as the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, this kind of thing—World War I, World War II—I mean, it's all somewhere back there in the foggy, distant past. But when we sit down and talk, we oftentimes get into these kinds of discussions: “What were the athletes of the 1960s thinking? Tell me about Jackie Robinson. Did you know Bill Russell? Did you know Arthur Ashe? Tell me about Ali. Did you ever spend any time with Muhammad Ali? How was he in the 1960s when you first met him, when he came to San Jose State when Julie Menendez, the boxing coach at San Jose State, was the Olympic boxing coach, and he was at San Jose State training

for a month, which was also your freshman year at San Jose State, and you—what kind of a guy was he then? What did you think about him then?”

:

We talked about these things, and in that context, I tried to give them some kind of historical framework, so that they would not just understand this as, “Jeez, what was it like to know a celebrity before he became what he ultimately became.” But [more along the lines of] what was happening around Muhammad Ali at that time that carried him in the direction that he ultimately moved in? What did I see in Muhammad Ali—as a freshman at San Jose State—when he was there training for the 1960 Rome Olympics under Julie Menendez that I was able to pick up on, and kind of put together when I was a graduate student at Cornell University, and used to go down to New York City to the Audubon Ballroom to hear Malcolm X speak? What did I think when I saw, in 1963-1964, Muhammad Ali with Malcolm X, and Ali being recruited into the Nation of Islam? What did I see in that regard that enabled me to get a little bit better handle on what happened to the young man that I saw in 1960, that ultimately turned out to be the athlete known as Muhammad Ali in the mid and late 1960s?

So, we discuss those things. We talk about those things in detail. I’m not sure how much gets through. But I think that ultimately they have a little bit better handle on the dynamics and complexities of these kinds of situations, and why you don’t hear athletes speaking out today, why there are no Muhammad Alis and so forth. I think they have a little bit better handle on it as a result of these conversations. I know that inevitably I’ll start talking to one athlete in the locker room, and the next thing I know I look around and about ten athletes have pulled up their stools, and we’re all just having this discussion about the 1960s and where we are now, and what the world looks like now, and what their obligations might or might not be. So, we get into those kinds of things quite often.

Wilmot: Can you tell me a little bit more about your consulting? What do you consider your work with the young athletes, the scope of your work?

Edwards: Today I am doing essentially the same thing that I’ve been doing for the last forty years. I was fortunate enough to have people like Bill Walsh, Eddie DeBartolo, who owned the San Francisco 49ers, Dan Finnane and Jim Fitzgerald, who owned the Golden State Warriors of the National Basketball Association, Peter Ueberroth, who came out of San Jose State, who was commissioner of Major League Baseball, who invited me in to work with them in terms of the issues that I’ve been talking about for the last forty years. And those issues involve the management of issues at the interface of race, sport, and society. That not only impact the athletes and the communities from which the athletes come, but the very character and evolution of the sports institutions involved.

I spend a great deal of time with the owner, talking about the dynamics, the developments in the locker room, not just in terms of success on the athletic field, but what is happening in the locker room, between the locker room and upstairs, in terms of the evolution of the franchise.

Bill Walsh once stated, when I asked him what he saw my role as in the San Francisco 49ers, he said, “With all due respect to winning Super Bowls, to winning championships, to winning football games, the real reason God gave us the National Football League and the San Francisco 49ers is to publicly, and in a very high profile way, show, demonstrate what we can achieve together using the same values, the same sentiments, the same kinds of rules that prevail in society overall.” And then he looked at me and said, “I’ve read enough of your work to know what those are.” And I said, “Yeah. Competitiveness. Discipline. Hard work. Mental fitness. Physical fitness. Religiosity. Patriotism.” He said, “Yeah. All of that. We can take all of that and put blacks and whites and Samoans and Indians and Catholics and Protestants and Jews together, and go out and win championships. We can do the same thing in every realm of society.”

Wilmot: It’s so amazing because it’s such a—what you just listed is such a complement of Protestant ideals, really.

Edwards: Those are the rules that we function by. Bill Walsh’s basic disposition was, “The problem is that they’re not applied equally. They are projected as necessary. Everybody must subscribe, but when it comes down to application, they’re not applied equally.” Bill Walsh and I put together a minority coaches’ outreach program, to bring in minority coaches, to get them exposure in the NFL, and a lot of the assistants that are in the NFL now, virtually all of the African American head coaches, came through that minority outreach program for minority coaches.

In other words, he recognized that if we’re going to level the playing field, if we’re really going to subscribe to these notions of competitiveness and discipline and so forth as a route to success, then we’ve got to give people equitable opportunities from the outset. And that means bring them in, developing them, getting them exposed to this league, and then helping them in those areas where they may be deficient for all kinds of reasons, not the least of which is inequitable opportunities to grow and develop, encouragement to grow and development in their own individual past history. So, that aspect of my work is ongoing.

A great deal of what I do in the locker room also has to do with the transitions that occur in the locker room as a result of the broader culture. Coaches tend to have a pretty set image of what they expect their athletes to be when they arrive on the scene in the locker room. When I was a scholarship athlete, if a coach said, “Run through that wall,” you ran through that wall. By the time I was teaching here at Berkeley and had completed my PhD, a coach would say,

“Run through that wall,” an athlete would say, “Why?” By the time another decade passed, an athlete wouldn’t ask why, he would say, “Why should I do that?” And by the time you got to the current generation of athletes, the wall was torn down, the coach was asking the athletes, “Do you think that we can do it this way?” In other words, what I’m saying is that the athletes continue to evolve toward greater and greater and greater independence. And coaches oftentimes have a difficult with that transition. The music changes. The relationships among the athletes change. The relationships to the front office and the coaches change. Coaching authority doesn’t carry the weight that it used to carry.

There is more difference today between the black athlete in the locker room today and say, Jerry Rice and Ronnie Lott—there’s more difference between Jerry Rice and Ronnie Lott and these black athletes today than there was Jerry Rice, Ronnie Lott, and Joe Montana. Or Steve Young, our quarterback who came from a staunch—I mean he’s the great, great grandson of Brigham Young. And there’s more difference between these black athletes today and Ronnie Lott and Jerry Rice—than there was between Jerry Rice and Ronnie Lott and Steve Young. The cultural gap is just that great. It is phenomenal the changes that have taken place.

A lot of my responsibility is bringing the coaches up to speed in terms of where the athletes are. I spend a lot of time listening to the music that the athletes listen to. And I mean some of this stuff is awful. I mean I listen to it. I listen to Usher, I listen to Alicia Keys, I listen to Cyara, I listen to Ludacris, I listen to 50 Cent, I listen to Jay-Z, all of them. If you listen to the music and dispense—blow Miles Davis and John Coltrane and Aretha Franklin and the Four Tops, put all that out your mind—listen to what they hear in the music, and that’s the first clue I always get in terms of where they’re coming from and how they view their world. And this stuff, in many instances is—well, let me put it this way—it is what it is.

And if you as a coach are not prepared to rhythm up with that, you’re not going to be the coach that you have to be, they’re not going to be the athletes that they could be, and you’re not going to win. So, a lot of what I do is to sit down with the coaches and say, “Hey, here is the kid that you have. He’s as much concerned about making his next rap record, or getting his personalized \$50,000 diamond- and gold-initialed chain to hang around his neck, as he is about the game plan that you’re putting together. So you have to understand that you have to get on the same page with him, relative to those kinds of concerns. Because if you put him down because of it—‘Don’t come in here wearing that stuff. What is that around your neck? Why are you listening to that garbage?’—you’ve automatically turned him off from anything else that you’re going to be able to say.”

Wilmot:

And hasn’t that historically been kind of a component in that coach/athlete relationship—a part of it was humiliation and degradation?

Edwards: Coaches historically have come in and told athletes, “Cut your hair. Shave off that beard. You can’t wear those clothes. I want you in bed by ten o’clock. You’re in this meeting by S-and-So. You take this course and not that course. You eat this and don’t eat that.” Those days are gone. If they tell a kid, “You can’t wear your dreadlocks. You can’t have that hair hanging out from under your helmet,” that kid’s going to be looking for another team. If they go in and tell that kid, “You can’t come in here with the baggy pants on. You can’t come in here with the gold and diamonds, the ‘Mr. T’ starter kit around your neck, you can’t come in here with your [cell] phone in the locker room because we want you sitting there rhythming up with your teammate,” that kids going to be looking for another team as soon as he gets the opportunity. And at that point, given the fact that it’s the athletes who play, you begin to alienate the very product that you’re putting on the field.

The athlete wants to get paid, the athlete wants to play, the coach wants the athlete to play. That’s the nature of the business. Somewhere within the context of that cultural climate, there’s a middle ground where the athlete can feel comfortable, the coach can feel in charge, and they both can do the thing that brought them all together, which is not to resolve the misogyny of the hip hop music, not to resolve the narcissistic nonsense of all this diamond and gold, and the Bentleys on the parking lot and the Ferraris and all the rest of that. It’s to win football games. Somewhere in the midst of that, there’s a middle ground. And so I do a lot of that kind of work, along with working with the team as far as these race issues, and other kinds of concerns.

Wilmot: Let me ask you a question. This is a question I have to ask, which is about, in your book *The Revolt of the Black Athlete*, you leverage a very serious criticism of a “mainstream sports industry that uses black bodies and exploits black bodies,” and I’m wondering how do you—

Edwards: Transition to this situation where I’m working with the institution to make the most of the--

Wilmot: And to make the most of—the words you used were “franchise” and “product”. Both of these words that you just used. So I wanted to ask you, how do you reconcile that? Or is there reconciliation necessary for you from the position that you held thirty five years ago to the current time?

Edwards: Well, there are two points I want to make. First of all, probably second only to religion, American society in general and blacks in particular, see sport as an unambiguously beneficent realm of activity. Unchanging, ubiquitously beneficent. The reality is that both religion and sport change. The same Christian religion, which at one time justified slavery, justified a lot of things that ultimately were changed. Today justifies broadening the base of democratic participation for both women and for minorities in American society. So, religion changes. Sport also changes.

That change over the last thirty-five years has been one that, even within the context of traditional sports relationships with blacks in particular, women to a lesser degree, sport has changed. You find black coaches, you find blacks in the front office. You find a much more accepting disposition relative to black culture within the sports institution. I mean if you want to listen to what they play before basketball games, it's hip hop music. You turn on the football games, nine times out of ten they're going to be playing hip hop music in one guise or another. The kinds of celebrities that they bring on board for halftime shows are nine times out of ten going to be hip hop celebrities, if they're going to be playing music—sometimes much to their chagrin and embarrassment, but they still have bought into black culture. So, sport has changed.

More importantly, because of the deterioration in the traditional African American community that has traditionally generated black athletes, sport is probably the last hook and handle that we have on the youth of those communities. Because of no-pass, no-play at the junior high school and high school level, in terms of academics and athletics. Because of Proposition 48 at the college level, we're disqualifying increasing numbers of young, black athlete prospects, both male and female. Because of the violence in the traditional African American community, the drugs, the underground and underworld economy, we're disqualifying—we're not just disqualifying, we're jailing and burying increasing numbers of young black athlete prospects. These young people typically are alienated from school, are outside of traditional avenues of access to the economy, to the political structure, even to religious organizations, which have always been more middle-class oriented, even when they were located in working-class and lower-class communities. The middle-class values, sentiments, lifestyle, from the preacher on down, has been the aspiration. So, sport today may be the last hook and handle that we have on these young people.

When I talk about marketing a product, it is the effort to maintain the only heroes that these young people often look up to, with the exception of the hip hop stars and moguls, you're looking at athletes. So when you go to the African American community, even though they may not be going to school, they may be single parents, they don't have jobs, they may be involved in drugs, they may be involved in gangs, you see them wearing the TO jersey, you see 'em wearing the Donovan McNabb jersey, you see them wearing the Raiders jerseys, you see 'em wearing the Michael Jordan jerseys, you see 'em wearing all this athletic gear. That is because they still are involved with the athletic institution. And if you can maintain that, then you can maintain that connection. And that's why it's important that I do what I do.

Edwards 04 11-01-05.wav

Edwards: So aside from the fact that sport may be the last hook and handle that we have on an entire generation of young inner city kids—males in particular—there is

also the fact that being associated with the sport at the level that I am, and the context that I am, I'm constantly called on to interpret, to make statements, to clarify issues that develop in sport, and particularly at the interface at these race, sport, and society concerns. And oftentimes, the issues are so broadly germane to the same concerns I've been dealing with for the last forty years that my involvement in sport provides an opportunity that otherwise would not be there.

Let me give you an example. This icon of ultra right wing broadcast, Rush Limbaugh, was hired by a sports network to make statements and give opinions about developments in sport that had to do with broader societal issues. So, of course it wasn't long before Mr. Limbaugh made the statement that the only reason that Donovan McNabb was given the publicity that he was given, and the contract and so forth that he was given, was because that he was a black quarterback and that everybody wanted to see a black quarterback succeed. So, he was given all kinds of coverage even though he was not that good.

Of course this created a firestorm. Why would you make the statement? Goes back to the notion—people accused Limbaugh of going back to the notion that blacks do not have the intellectual capacity to be quarterback, that if he were white he wouldn't even be getting the kind of accolades and so forth that he was getting, and so forth and so on. And of course, my phone was just ringing off the hook. “Well, Dr. Edwards, what do you think about that? What should be the punishment for Rush Limbaugh?” And all kinds of questions of that nature. The position that I have inside of the sports institution, understanding and knowing the basis upon which quarterbacks are chosen, the basis upon which they maintain their jobs, how do you look at their statistics and evaluate what they're doing and how they're doing, and so forth and so on.—that enabled me to really bring some expertise to the situation that otherwise would not be there—I'd be sitting up in academia some place reading newspapers and *Sports Illustrated* and other popular sources trying to figure out, well, what's really going on with the black quarterback, as opposed to being inside of the institution. So, there's that dimension of it, as well as the fact that as these athletes come in from this traditional black community, and I have a chance to interact with them.

And also, to keep some kind of perspective on what is happening, not just with these athletes, but with these communities—to keep that perspective in the forefront of both institutional and societal concerns. Both the disposition and attitude of sports, as well as the disposition and attitude of the broader society as far as these issues are concerned. I can talk, for example, about the fact that we've gone from twenty-three percent of African Americans in major league baseball down to less than nine percent, and what this means as far as what is happening to black youth in the traditional black community, what this means as far as major league baseball is concerned. How long can an institution really survive with a substantial percentage of its population not

being represented in that institution in some kind of meaningful numbers? I can address those kinds of issues with some authority, and I think that that's important. But is it uncomfortable? It becomes very uncomfortable sometimes. There have been numerous instances where I have gone to the office holding my nose because of something that has happened in sports. For example, when we began to push for more minority head coaches, a trend developed where the coach being fired was able to name his own successor. So, there wasn't a general interview of candidates in many instances. It was a situation where the coach being fired could name his own successor. And of course, the person he named was typically part of the all-white old-boys club that has prevailed for years. And the explanation was, "Well, we gave So-and-So the latitude to essentially name his own successor, and this is who he named." Well, you look at that, and even if you can't make a case that this guy is not a decent coach that was named, where is the commitment to opening up the pool of legitimate candidates, and giving people a chance to interview who could do the job?

So, yeah, there are times when I've gone into the office with a clothespin on my nose and sick to my stomach because of things that happen within the institution. But it's one of those tradeoffs that you have to deal with. I oftentimes look at it from the perspective of, suppose I was not here to even raise that issue. Suppose I was not here to even bring up the decline in African American athletes—some of the changes that are taking place in all of the sports that blacks participate in, in numbers—where would be then?

Wilmot: What issues do you feel that it's important for black athletes to stand up for now?

Edwards: Well, I think that there is a broad swathe of issues that black athletes, if there were the broad-based political, cultural movement to support them that athletes could stand up and speak out on. To take one that is current, recently, Ms. [Sheryl] Swoopes, who is the MVP three times running of the Women's National Basketball Association, came out and said that she was a lesbian, that she was gay. And immediately, a whole flood of articles came out about the lack of men athletes coming out and saying that, "Yeah, there are gay athletes among us," and those who are gay coming out and saying, "Hey, I'm a gay athlete." The articles, I think, did both that issue and athletes a disservice because it only dealt with the salacious, the sensational, the prospect of, "Oh jeez, and he's out there hitting people and running touchdowns and so forth." They did not deal with the issue.

First of all, not just athletes—and this has been my experience after fifty years of being in locker rooms as both an athlete, collegiate athlete, a consultant and so forth—[it's not just] athletes, neither male athletes nor men in general in American society,[who] have a problem with homosexuality. We do not have a problem with homosexuality. The American male's problem is with women.

In the 1980s, I did a survey of male oriented soft-and-hard-core pornography magazines and films, and in over sixty percent of the scenarios presented, it was women with women. These are productions that are aimed towards men. Men have no problem with homosexuality. Women with women are part of the great American male fantasy.

4-00:10:00

Women with women, and then I come in and do them both: that is part of the great American male fantasy. So men don't have a problem with homosexuality. They have a problem with women. The problem that men have with men homosexuals is that men homosexuals are projected as acting like women, who men feel comfortable with only if they can subordinate, control, if not demean them in some fashion to demonstrate their dominance. Men overall are scared to death of women. And the more desirable the woman, from a physical perspective, from a perspective of, "Wow. Look at this beautiful human being," the more afraid they are of them, the less likely they are to approach them. Some of the loneliest women that I have ever met in my years in athletics and sports are beautiful women. Why? Because everybody is afraid to approach them.

So they feel this urge, this need, to dominate, to subordinate, to control them. They project male homosexuals as acting like women. They are afraid that if a male homosexual approached them, they would be put in the position of a woman, and that is what they object to. If we could resolve our problems with women, we would resolve our problems with the gay movement. Now, there is no broad scale societal movement outside of the gay community to embrace, push progressively forward, the issue of gay liberation, gays being just like the rest of us. There's no movement of that nature. Therefore, there's no background support in the same sense that there's no broad based political, cultural civil rights movement that black athletes can stand up and say, "Hey, here's where I stand on this issue," so they say nothing for the most part. Although they discuss it. They say nothing about the gay issue, although we discuss it often in the locker room. If there were this broad-based movement, I think that you would find male athletes coming out. But that is really not the issue.

I do not understand, for the life of me, why there is this push to have gay athletes come out. That's where the issue, as well as the athletes, are done a disservice. What about the gay coaches? What about the gay writers, who hang around the periphery of the locker room of the sports institution and so forth? What about the gay sponsor? What about the gays who are in the front office? There are gay people throughout the sports institution. But the focus is on the athlete. Why? Because that's the spotlight, it's salacious, it's [titillating]. They seem them out there in this form-fitting outfit and so forth.

Wilmot:

And also, it's a supposed paradox. It's a supposed contradiction.

Edwards: Well, that's my next point. That this is supposed to be the paragon of masculinity. This is John Wayne personified. This is the Great American male hero. And that too is inaccurate. You find a full spectrum of male types, if you will, in sports, just like you do in the rest of society. But they've got this thing that this is like the soldier, this is the warrior, this is the quintessential man. And in reality, they're just like the rest of us.

I think that that's an issue that athletes could speak out on. I think that some of the issues that have to do with the growing economic disparity between wealthy and the poor in this society, athletes could speak out on. But there's no broad based political, cultural movement in the society that that kind of speaking out would resonate with. And so, when they do speak out, if they spoke out, they'd be regarded as cranks, as troublemakers, and their career for all practical purposes would be severely impacted, and next thing you know they're out of the game.

Wilmot: Are people constricted by legal agreements in their contracts—

Edwards: No.

Wilmot: --around political stuff?

Edwards: No. The only thing that their contract states is that they are not to do anything that reflects negatively upon the integrity of the game, the franchise, or the league.

Wilmot: So if they were to criticize George Bush, what would happen?

Edwards: That agreement does not abrogate their First Amendment rights. Nothing officially would happen, but they would become controversial, perhaps even a distraction to the major goal and emphasis of the franchise, which is to win football games. And at some point, they might find themselves either being traded, if anybody would take them, or simply being out of the game.

Wilmot: Did you see, recently there was a young brother who gave a talk at the anti-war march, and he's I believe a basketball player—what is his name? I'll find out and tell you. But he came out and he had a big spoken word, he had a whole spoken word poem about many of the issues that we've been talking about today.

Edwards: I don't doubt that. I talk to athletes every day who have very serious concerns about the war, about the whole direction that American society is moving in relative to women's rights, relative to minority rights, relative to what's happening on the United States Supreme Court--

Wilmot: --so people are thinking?

Edwards: Oh, they're thinking. And it comes up. We discuss it. This whole thing about Miss Swoopes came up, and for the most part, they applauded her, they applauded her courage, they wondered about her judgment in doing that, they made such statement as, "Well, that puts her in the same bag as Martina Navratilova and Billie Jean King, and jeez, for what they accomplished, I haven't seen a whole bunch of advertisements and endorsements and you know, these kind of opportunities for them." So, they understand. They discuss everything and they arrive at—I think at an intelligent disposition towards some of these issues.

The other thing that is a restraint on them speaking out—it's not just that there is not any broad-based political, cultural movement with which that kind of statement and speaking out would resonate, but they feel an obligation to the guys that are in that locker room. Not all of them think the same way. Not all of them are of the same mind, in terms of the war in Iraq, or in terms of gay rights. We have a lot of fundamentalist Christian subscribers—I won't say believers, but I'll say subscribers—who buy into the notion that homosexuality is basically a lifestyle and anti-Christian. They buy into that. There are others who are no less religious, who feel that their religion encompasses everybody, and if that's where a person is coming from, that is what God has created. But they also have a commitment, a greater commitment, to each other. What brought us together was bonding into a team so that we could win football games. That is going to be my first allegiance, and then I will deal with these other issues as they come up off the field or in my other life, or wherever, or through/how I make my charitable donations, or whatever else. But I'm not going to bring it into this locker room if it will become such a disruption and distraction that we can not do the thing that brought us all together in the first place, which is to become a team and to win football games.

Wilmot: The mentality, the connection of the group.

Edwards: Yeah. It's a major, a major factor restraining athletes from speaking out.

4-00:20:00

Wilmot: One aspect I think of the whole news around Sheryl Swoopes, as you said, as you kind of alluded to, the ways in which people are so quick to speculate about the sexuality of female athletes, whereas there's not the same kind of hyper speculation that happens for male athletes, because there is supposed contradiction of being athletic and strong, and being a woman. Basically, that's basically what we're dealing with.

Edwards: Right, absolutely. Strong, independent athletic women are part of the threat image that men feel in many instances toward women. Women must be subordinated, dominated, if not demeaned.

Wilmot: So hopeful--

Edwards: --in order for men to feel in control, to feel masculine. I mean that is a simple, and in many instances, that is what is projected in sports. That is why you have men out on the field playing football and all of this, this big gear with the big shoulders and the hard hat and the helmet, and women on the sideline more and more exposed—in what is really a sex exhibition. It's a mini meat parade where they're secondary on the sideline supporting the men on the field, the warriors, who are all doing all of these great things. And the more they cheer, the more they scream, the more subordinated they look to the action that is going on. They're basically and literally cheerleaders.

So when you get a woman who all of a sudden is not out there in the push 'em up halter tops and the micro mini skirts, and all the rest of it, but who is out there handling the ball, who is out there playing soccer and kicking the ball and heading one into the net and so forth, she's either on something, or a man, maybe she's not a real or complete woman. I mean that is the image. But that doesn't say anything about women. It says something about the men who control the sports media industry and who control the sports institution in American society. They have to do that to feel in control.

And again, I state emphatically that men do not have a problem with homosexuality. We have a problem with women. The only issue that men have with male homosexuality that is really substantive, is that they have a difficult time, an impossible time, understanding how a man could climb in a bed with a man the first time. After that, hey, but the first time. But then—most of them don't understand how they climb in bed with a woman the first time. So, that's where that really breaks down. Beyond that, if we could resolve our issues with women, the gay thing would become a non-issue.

Wilmot: Have you written about this a great deal?

Edwards: No, I haven't written about it a great deal. I've taught about it a great deal.

Wilmot: I'm trying to see if I'm mining something that's already been written. I don't want to spend too much time--

Edwards: No, no, no. I taught about it a great deal because it always came up in my classes. I had a lot of gay students in my classes. I had gay readers. And they say, "We need you to cover this aspects of sports." And so we would cover it in class.

Wilmot: So that was when you were teaching here?

Edwards: That was when I was teaching here, over the thirty years. I mean I always covered it. Because I thought it was important that people really understood and were able to wrap their mind around, and what direction this thing was moving in. And until the gay movement breaks out of the gay community as

its center of focus and activism, it will remain that way. The thing that saved the Civil Rights Movement was that it broke out of the African American community as its center of focus. It became mainstream. The gay movement in American society has not yet become mainstream.

- Wilmot: Okay. One last question on this topic. More actually just about your current work. Has there been a time when you were in your role as consultant to the different entities that you consult to, and you were faced with a moral dilemma that you could not resolve, and simply could not work within the structure that you were working with?
- Edwards: There have been issues that came up. We have Christians, Jews, Muslims, Animists—some of the athletes from the Pacific Islands—on our teams. After the game, the coach has said the Lord’s Prayer. He’s a Christian. I’ve always felt that to say the Lord’s Prayer within that set of circumstances is imposed on the team. For those who are not Christians, it’s at a minimum, disingenuous. And I’ve always thought that a moment of silence, for whatever you want to do with it, is much more appropriate. But when I have raised that issue about having chapel for Catholics on the team, Mass for Catholics on the team, chapel for Protestants on the team, nothing for Muslims, nothing for Jews, nothing for people from the South Sea Islands, so forth— I’ve always felt very uncomfortable with that, so I don’t participate. I just remove myself from that scene. I don’t participate in chapel. I don’t participate in Mass. I don’t participate in the post-game prayer. Because ultimately I see value in all of them. And if you can’t serve all then I think that you really have an obligation. If you’re going to be in that situation where we’re bonding as a team, bonding as an organization, where you either have a time when you speak to issues of spiritual commitment, everybody in their own way take from this what applies, but when you go in there, and it comes down to Jesus Christ, I think that that’s a bit much. So what I have done in that regard is to simply not participate in that, because I don’t feel that it’s morally or practically correct. I think it’s an imposition.
- Wilmot: That’s interesting. Because I hadn’t really come—you’d mentioned the kind of Protestant values that kind of animate the field of sport. I hadn’t really realized the extent to which religion, and Christianity in particular, is mixed into the *mélange* of the glue that keeps the team together. There’s also ritual here.
- Edwards: Oh, absolutely. And that’s even at the high school and public schools. This idea about no prayer in public schools. I mean that’s absolutely nonsense. It may not be in the classroom, but I’ll guarantee you it’s in the athletic department. It’s on the field, it’s in the locker room before games, it’s in the locker room after games. I mean it’s there. I guess it was at Air Force where they made the head coach at Air Force take down a banner that he had put up in their practice facility which said that “I’m on the team with Jesus.” You know, “I’m on Jesus’ team.” And because there are people there at Air Force

who are Muslims, there are Jews who are there, there are people who are Japanese and Shinto religious commitments and so forth. This kind of institutional embeddedness is pervasive from religious perspective in sports.

So what I do is to simply—and it didn't make a difference whether I was with baseball, basketball, or football, because my understanding of that broad array of interest and the level of commitment of these athletes—I just remove myself from that. I didn't participate in that and don't to this day.

Wilmot: Did you see the movie *Hoop Dreams*?

Edwards: Yes. As a matter of fact, I consulted with the people who put it together. We spent a good deal of time talking about what that commitment to athletics meant from the perspective, not just of the individual athlete, but of the families that were involved, and the communities that were involved, and the high school coaches that were involved, and how much everybody had invested in this 17- or 18-year old kid—and how they ultimately really became commodified. I mean they were basketball commodities. Everybody had a tremendous interest in them being successful. But when you look at it, it's so patently unfair and inequitable from the perspective of the kid that's involved. And when he fails, he has let everybody down.

Wilmot: And what is his sense of self and self-esteem?

Edwards: And the only person that has really been brutalized in the whole process is the kid. We talked about that prior to them making the film and following those kids over a number of years to make that film. It's a great film.

Wilmot: I think it's a pretty great film, too.

Edwards: It's an absolutely great film.

Wilmot: The other film I've seen recently is *It's Only A Game, Ladies*. Have you seen that one?

Edwards: No, I haven't.

Wilmot: I'm going to have to get a copy. It's this one about the, I believe it's the Rutgers coach of the women's basketball team.

Edwards: No, I didn't see that one.

Wilmot: And she's the one of the few black women head coaches at that level, maybe one of three. So, do you see—well I think I'll leave it. I was going to ask another question about strategy—do you see a strategy or potential for forming—because in some ways our athletes are already de facto leaders in the black community. That's just where we're at, at this time. So, do you see

any hope for people kind of, or strategy for people stepping forward? And you're saying they would require a movement to support them?

Edwards: Absolutely, and this is why it's so difficult--

Wilmot: Without that movement, they can't step forward? Is that what I'm understanding?

Edwards: The movement and the leadership evolve concomitantly. They evolve together. And that's whether you're talking about sport or society. And almost always, nobody can see the direction that it's coming from.

Nobody saw the emergence of Martin Luther King, who was a twenty six year old junior preacher at his daddy's church, as the leader he became. Nobody projected the evolution of Malcolm X. Nobody saw that. Nobody saw San Jose State becoming the fertile ground, which prompted *The Revolt of the Black Athlete*. If you had asked somebody, they probably would have said, "Yeah, well, Michigan, Ohio State, the University of Mississippi maybe, which doesn't recruit black athletes." I mean they'd have gone all over the map probably, and nobody would have said San Jose State.

So again, I think we're into one of those areas where it is extremely risky to project where and under what auspices the next movement will emerge, and how the leadership will evolve concomitantly, concurrent with the evolution of that movement. I think that if what we hear about global warming, if what we hear about the potential about bird flu pandemic, is anywhere close to the truth, many of these issues are going to be subordinated to the broader concerns of environmental catastrophe. It really will not make the kind of ripple that has been made in the past.

Because if you're looking at a bird flu pandemic with millions of people dead, the issue will be survival. If you're looking at global warming and hurricanes and things that we've seen as evidence of us being pretty far up that road, I think that some of these issues of human relations of a social and cultural nature, are going to be subordinated to the point that it's going to be very, very hard to gain traction in the public mind or in the media. I think that if global warming and this pandemic situation are anywhere close to valid, that we will be entering a new age where we won't be talking about pre-*Brown vs. Board of Education*, Topeka, Kansas, and pre-*Roe vs. Wade* and post-*Roe vs. Wade*, or even pre-Vietnam and post pre-Vietnam, pre-1969—we won't be talking about that. We'll be talking about pre-pandemic bird flu and post-pandemic bird flu. We'll be talking about pre-global warming opportunities and realities, and post-global warming opportunities and realities.

Wilmot: Interesting. Amazing. A quick question. Why did you choose to take on becoming Director of Oakland's Park and Rec?

Edwards:

Because Jerry Brown asked me. When I was fighting for tenure here, there were a lot of people who supported me. Willie Brown, who was mayor of San Francisco at the time [Willie Brown SF mayor 1996-2004, Jerry Brown, CA Governor 1975-1983]. Jerry Brown, who was governor at the time. And he made the statement: “You all can go ahead and deny Dr. Edwards tenure, but if you do, I’m going to appoint him to the Board of Regents, and then he can decide how much you get for your campus.” [laughter] I don’t think that it had a phenomenal impact on that outcome, but it was good to have his support.

So, when he asked me to come, and he said, “Hey, we have a problem here. We need to clean up the Parks Department. It’s going to be a tough job. It’s going to be a thankless job, more than likely. We have some issues down there. I don’t even know who’s down there. I don’t know who’s on the payroll. All I know is that we have a constant and an incessant complaint about what is happening in parks, the level of works in parks, the organization, who’s in charge, what’s being done. We’ve had four or five directors down there. A couple of the directors have been beaten up on the job.”

My first week on the job, I came into the office after lunch one day. The doors were locked at the main office. The secretaries were all in the back room. The staff were all back in the offices with their doors locked. And I wanted to know what was going on. Well, some guy had come by and threatened to shoot up the place. They were scared to death. They said he does it all the time. He was a guy who was once on the staff, who was let go about two years ago. He has come by here about once every three or four months, threatening to kill everybody, and because he’s also a mental case on medication and he’s had some run-ins before, including being seen walking along the sidewalk out here in front of the office with a rifle, everybody is scared to death of him. And so I told them, “Open up the doors, get out from under your desk. I want you at work. And the next time this individual comes by, you make sure, don’t argue with him, just tell him, ‘The Director wants to see you.’” And so he had no idea who I was. He had never seen me before.

So he came by, I guess about two and a half, three months later. And sure enough, they walked him into—“Mr. Edwards, our new Director. wants to talk to you.” And he was belligerent and he was angry and he was this. And all of a sudden, he walked through the door. And as I came out of my office, his eyes got as big as saucers. Because all of a sudden, here’s this six-foot, eight inch, three hundred and twenty five pound, muscular black man with a shaved head and a beard and a goatee, and I had one thing to say to him. I said, “Hey, you been threatening my staff?—Come here, come here.” I put my arm around his shoulder and walked him back out the door. I told him, “If you ever come in my office, bringing me this garbage again,”—and I didn’t use those nice a terms—“they’re going to carry you out of here. Don’t ever come

to my office with this nonsense again.” And he had his bicycle with a baseball bat or something, parked. He had come up the steps and set his bicycle on, leaned it against the building. He said, “Oh my bike.” I said, “That’s okay, I’m going to get you your bike.” And I walked him down the steps, took his bike—he was standing about fifteen feet away. I went back up the steps, he was standing about fifteen away. I tossed it over his head about thirty feet. And he sat and watched that bike go. And I said, “Next time, you’re going to be on the bike.” And that was the last time we ever saw him.

But people had come up into the office and threatened people. All kinds of madness was going on. They had something like \$700,000 in cash and checks in an accounting office downstairs. And people were just walking in and getting money. And when we were trying to get a handle on where this money came from and who it belonged to, and how did it come to be here, why wasn’t in the system?

I was literally talking to my new assistant, finance manager, and we were trying to assess how do we manage something like this? And the guy walked in, and just broke open a bag, and reached in and got a handful of money. I said, “Yo.” Because he didn’t know who I was either. He just thought I was another parks person who was standing there, and so he broke open a bag and pulled out a handful of money. I said, “Yo, where you going with that?” “Oh, I just came into get some money.” I said, “No, no, no, no. That money belongs to the City of Oakland.” “So?” I said, “So, you don’t come in and get any money.” Took the money out of his hand. He said, “Well, who are you?” I said, “I’m the new Director of Parks.” “Oh, Dr. Edwards, okay, alright. Yeah, okay, man, I understand.” I said, “Yeah, and from now on, nobody walks up in here and just breaks open a bag and pulls out a handful of money.”

Wilmot: How long were you Director there?

Edwards: Three years. And by the time I left, I had totally automated the department. Made it very difficult for anyone to cheat the department, everything that we took in, everything that went out, everybody that was on the payroll, everybody who checked in every day, everybody who was fired and let go, it was all in the system. It was very difficult to cheat.

I had totally reorganized the department so that everybody was responsible for the city, not just for some little narrow neighborhood, or zone as they called it. I had totally reorganized that. I had cleaned out the staff. There were about 730 people who were on the payroll in one capacity or another. Part-time, full-time, retired, I mean, just all—and I pared that down to about 376 people who were actually showing up to work. Most of those people who were on the payroll had either been on the payroll and simply quit and never been taken off the payroll, so they still received the checks.

There was one lady who had come in to teach a six-week summer class in dance at one of the centers, and she was paid so much an hour. So if you wanted to sign up for an hour-long dance class, you paid \$48. Well, that went in to the books as \$48 an hour. So, after the six-week class was over, she was still on the books for \$48 an hour, and this money continued to go out for over two years, even though she not only did not work there any longer, she didn't even live in the city. We found a number of cases like that. So, I cleaned up the payroll in terms of staffing, and I also made it impossible for the budget that the Parks Department was given to be recommissioned, shall I say, to other causes. That is to say, we're given a budget, but sometimes the money for the water would instead be taken and spent for police services, or something of that character. Parks, in many ways, was a holding budget for other city interests, that could not get money for otherwise. So, I tried to clean up a lot of that stuff.

Of course, when you do that, you make a lot of enemies. Because a lot of people on the Parks Department payroll were put there by past mayors, by past city councilman, you know there were people's relatives on the payroll, all kinds of things. So when you get them out of there, you make a lot of enemies. But I've always taken tremendous pride in being disliked by the right people, so I didn't have a problem with that. But after three years—I told the mayor I would give him two, I wound up giving him three years. And when I walked out of that position, when I left Oakland, that Director of Parks position, I felt like a man leaving San Quentin after three years for a crime that he didn't commit. I was just glad to get—I enjoyed it there, I loved the commitment, I was happy to be able to work there, but I'm not a conventional political person. I'm just not. I don't have the patience for it. I don't have the stomach for it, to go and listen to speeches that I know are just rife with promises that nobody intends to keep. I'm not attuned to that.

But I knew what I was getting into the very first day I was on the job. Microsoft had a bought a thousand Raiders tickets to give to the kids of the city. When they handed the tickets to me, I went and had my staff count them and double count them. And then I had the tickets handed out to center directors who signed a form. Then I had the center directors have the parents of the children who got the tickets sign for them. So, we had the first count, the second count in the central office of Parks and Recreation, then we had the signatures of the center directors for the tickets that they took, which matched those two counts. Then we had the parents' signatures, which matched the original three counts.

Wilmot: Did it follow through?

Edwards: Yes. When the tickets were handed out, we had 576 tickets. There were a thousand tickets that the city had said that they gave to me. Of course, by the time that they got to me, there were only 576. And so, of course, there was a huge scandal, because there were kids that were looking to get Raider tickets,

and when they found that the tickets were not there, they wondered what happened to the extra tickets. And so of course the newspapers were saying, “Dr. Edwards, according to the city offices, they say they gave you a thousand tickets, what happened to the tickets?” I said, “Oh, no, no, no. We got 576 tickets and I have the counts to prove it.” “Well, are you saying that the city stole the tickets?” I said, “No, I’m not saying that. I’m saying that my staff counts are correct.” And that’s where I left it.

But that’s the kind of thing you have to do when you’re in that political climate, and I would rather have said, “Hey, look, you’ve got some people downtown who stole the tickets from the kids. It’s as simple as that. And let’s move on. We handed out what we got. The rest of them went to somebody else. Go down there and talk to them about that.” I couldn’t do that. I had to say, “No, I’m not saying that the tickets were stolen downtown. I’m saying that the count provided by my staff is correct.” [laughter]

Wilmot: That’s very good. I have one last question and I think we’re near the end of our time for today. You mentioned in your story the man who would come into the Park Service and threaten the staff. You said, “I came out, 325 pounds, bald headed,” everything you said—you said “shaved head”. But I was wondering, how often, how do you kind of field people’s perceptions of you based on your physicality? You seem to be very aware that people are seeing you, and maybe even are willing to use the way people see you in certain circumstances?

4-00:50:05

Edwards: Well, I’ve been aware of that all my life. I mean I was aware of that when I first went to East Side and the teacher told me to move to the back row.

Wilmot: You told me about that.

Edwards: Because I don’t see myself as big. I see myself the way most people see themselves. I’m looking out of these eyes and I probably see the world from a slightly different angle, but it’s still the same world. But I’ve always had to be very conscious of how people see me. So if I see somebody, I’m always very quick to smile. If somebody comes up and they’re walking past me, I always smile. Whether I’m in the grocery store or shopping mall or at the—it doesn’t make any difference. Because people are intimidated by size. And I also probably project a level of—I don’t think it’s aggressiveness, I think it’s presence—that people, “Yo, wait, man, wait a minute.” I mean they don’t feel comfortable with that. And then when I reach out to shake somebody’s hand, and their hand disappears, they’re probably thinking, “Oh, man. I hope this guy’s in a good mood today.” And so I’ve become very conscious of that. At times, it prevents a lot of nonsense. Because people, even cops, are very reluctant to simply walk up to somebody who is that big and say stuff like, “You’re loitering.” I mean nine times out of ten they just hope this guy moves on, because they don’t want that.

In other instances, it becomes very, very difficult. I mean I've known people I've been around for years, and all of a sudden they'll turn to me and say something like, "You know what? You are one huge man." And I'm wondering, where'd that come from? I mean, where's that been all this time? There are other kinds of problems. There are women who are enamored of big men. They look at big men and say, "Wow, this"--you know. I mean I've had, me and my wife will go somewhere, somebody, we were out three weeks ago at a reception. And this lady walks up to us, looks at me, and asks my wife, "What do you do with him?" And she looked at me and I just said, "Well, she's still practicing. She's still trying to find out." What are you going to do with something like that? And so you get some issues in that area, where you have to deal with that.

And in other instances, it's been very useful. I mean I walk into a room, and people, you know, you've got their attention. I remember time after time, I'd walk into my classes here, especially freshman classes where kids are right out of high school from out in Lafayette and Moraga and you know, Concord and this kind of thing, and I walk into the class, and all of a sudden jaws drop and eyes get big and one thing or another.

"Man, is that Dr. Edwards?" "Yeah, that's him, man." "Oh my God. He's huge! Who is this guy?" And then they get into the class, and of course by the end of the semester, they love it, they've forgotten about it, they don't see it anymore. But initial impressions are just something that I have to deal with. I mean it is something that I have to deal with. It's almost like two heads. You know when you walk in, folks are going to look, but you hope they'll get over it and get past it. It makes it tough in a lot of ways. And when you combine that with the image of the aggressive black male, I mean that really—it's hard, it's tough. But hey, it's not my issue.

Wilmot: Okay. Well, let's close for today. We didn't get to the things we said we were going to do. That's par for the course. That's what happens.

Edwards: Kind of like what Coltrane said when he and Miles were playing together. Coltrane said, "Well, we didn't play what we wanted to play." And Miles would look at him and say, "But what we played was okay." [laughter]

Wilmot: Yeah. Excellent. Okay. Thank you.

Interview 3: November 8, 2005

Edwards 05 11-08-05.wav

05-00:00:00

Wilmot:

Professor Harry Edwards, Interview 3, November 8, 2005. So, just to begin, I had a follow-up question to something we discussed last time, which was about how black athletes operate, or do not operate, with or without any movement to support them. Let me frame it a little bit better. I think the question is more about, could they initiate the movement? Or is it necessary they have some support or a real movement that is carrying along or supporting them as they did back in the late sixties?

Edwards:

Well, let's start like this. First of all, you find very few leaders in any realm, whether you're talking about business people, whether you're talking about athletes, whether you're talking about academics. Athletics tend to generate celebrities, so it's probably even more the case with athletes that celebrity tends to be confused with leadership.

Over the course of sports in this country, there probably have been very few leaders in the world of athletics. You look at a Paul Robeson, who was a tremendous athlete, a great leader in athletics and outside of athletics. If you look at a Jackie Robinson, of course. And then in the 1960s, you had leadership spring up in a number of contexts, because there was a broad based social movement, political, cultural movement that supported it and gave it a point of reference. So you had Muhammad Ali, you had Carlos and Smith, you had Jim Brown, you had Bill Russell, you had Arthur Ashe. All of these people started organizations, in many instances, for leadership purposes.

The leader and the movement tend to rise concomitantly, they tend to rise together. The movement gives the leadership a point of reference and a constituency, whose vision and whose hopes and whose interest the leadership can project and articulate and sacrifice for. Without that movement, that leadership tends to founder. It tends to be scattered.

Now, can an athlete start a movement? I think that an athlete, within the realm of sport, if there is a sufficient amount of discord, dissatisfaction, discontent, among athletes, can start a movement. But it would be strictly confined, in terms of its referant and constituency, to the sports institution. I'm not sure that that's a movement that really can sustain itself, a movement within the context of a single societal institution. It has to be more broadly based than that. So, I think that it's possible for an athlete to start a movement, but it's more likely to turn into something like a labor effort, or a labor action than it would be to turn into a broad-based political social cultural movement that would catch fire in the rest of society, say, even among youth of that same age.

Today in particular, it's difficult, because there are so many factors that would have to be overcome. In the past, you had very defined roles for athletes. The athletes knew who was in charge. The coach knew that he was in charge and wielded ultimate authority on a team, for example. That's no longer the case. Today you find teams where it's clear that the athletes are in charge. In other instances, you find a single athlete in charge. An athlete that can literally get a coach fired, at the professional level, and in some instances, even at the collegiate level. So at the end of the day, the institution has changed to such an extent that it becomes extraordinarily difficult for an athlete to start a movement.

Let me give you another example. The money is so big today. The media is so saturating today in terms of its involvement in the lives and activities of athletes. The line between the private and public life has totally disappeared for athletes. The marketing is such a big part of it. And then you have these mega-egos that come along. Megalomania that evolves with athletes, many of whom have never had a checking account before they sign a multimillion dollar athletic contract. So, now the combination of money, marketing, mega-egos, and the media has made it virtually impossible for athletes to identify with their cohorts as equals, under equal pressure, equal tensions, having equal concerns, and so forth.

How does a basketball player, for example, coming out of high school, who signs a \$10 million contract with the National Basketball Association, gets another \$70 million in endorsement deals from shoe companies, sports apparel and sports equipment companies, automobile companies, and so forth—relate to an aging veteran, who may be in the last years of his final contract, who may be making \$3 million a year in each of those last three years? How does that veteran say anything to, or even relate to, that rookie coming out of high school? Here you have a guy that may be 36, 37 years old, trying to relate to, see some common ground with an 18- or 19-year old kid who is making 25 times the amount of money that he is making over the course of the next three years. So at the end of the day, the media, the money, the marketing, the megalomania, has almost destroyed the capacity of athletes, even to emerge as leaders within sport because they tend not to see each other as being equals, as being peers, as being comrades, if you will, with a common plight and a common condition. This does not even begin to deal with what marketing, money, Megalomania, and the media spotlight have done in terms of respect for the game. Respect for the traditions of the game. Respect for those who came before who made it possible for these young athletes to make all of that money. It has virtually disappeared.

So is it possible today for an athlete to create a leadership role for himself and lead in the sense that athletes led in the 1960s, when the money was far less, the media saturation was far less, the marketing of black athletes in particular was virtually non-existent? And even where there was some kind of megamania, it tended to be contained because the coach was in control, the

athletic franchise was in control, the college was in control, the athletic department was in control. I don't think that that's possible in this day and age. I just do not see any possibility of that happening.

Wilmot: Do you see it being part of the realm of responsibility of the black athlete at this time?

Edwards: I think that when you begin to look at the athletes sense of responsibility to a broader interest, beyond his own athletic and financial and career interests, I think you have to ask the question, relative to what audience? Relative to what reference group? Relative to what clientele, if you will? How does an athlete who may be making \$10 to \$20 million a year identify with the hopeless, dispossessed, marginalized masses that we saw, for example, in the wake of the Katrina catastrophe in New Orleans? How does he step up and say, "We must be concerned about these people," and purport and propose to speak on behalf of those people, even when those are the people from whom he emerged.?

Most athletes, once they make that money, move out, move up, move away. There's a total disconnect. And when you look at the fact that they tend to be surrounded by people whose basic interest is in marketing them and managing their money, there's no way that people with that broader set of interests and perspectives can even get to this young man, in many instances, beyond his own immediate family. And oftentimes, what they're looking at, is not how can you use your wealth and your position to help the masses, but how can you use your wealth and position to help your immediate family. And beyond that, it's almost hopeless.

The other issue is this. That if an athlete speaks not to some specific constituency, but to broad spectrum issues, say women's right, gay rights, labor issues having to do even with such humane things as a living wage, broad-spectrum health care—there are constituencies who for all kinds of reasons—some good, some bad—oppose such concerns. And he would have to wade through that political jungle and come up with some rationale that would keep him centered, while at the same time he focuses on athletic career. When you look at women's rights, how does an athlete come out and say, "I am for women's rights," when women's rights covers everything from a thirteen-year old minor's right to go to a Planned Parenthood clinic and apply for an abortion without her parents' knowledge, without consulting whoever the father is and everything—I mean, how does an athlete get involved in that kind of an issue, when I am quite certain people who oppose that kind of latitude on behalf of say a thirteen-year old, are doing it for what they consider the best of reasons. A thirteen year old is not perceived in any realm of American society, or any institutional context, to be responsible enough to make adult decisions. Or is that person responsible enough to go to an abortion clinic and apply for and get an abortion? Does an athlete really want to wade off into women's rights, given the fact that these are the kinds of

issues that emerge within the context of women's rights, as on the propositions that are on the current ballot in California. I don't know. I don't think so.

I don't know that an athlete wants to spend his time doing that. So most athletes just hide behind their managers and handlers, and say, "Hey, have your people get in touch with my people," and that's the end of it. So I don't think that the current complexity of the issues and so forth, irrespective of the right or the wrong of the issues, really is encouraging as far as athletes taking stands, as happened in the 1960s when an athlete could simply say, "I'm against segregation. I'm for opening up the athletic clubs that host and sponsor the track meets and the football games, and so forth, so that we can join. If we can play, we should be able to join the club." The issues are no longer that clear.

Wilmot: And they're certainly not portrayed as that clear. When you think about the ways, in California especially, the propositions are kind of formulated and put up, and it's never clear—that's been one of the major issues associated with our elections for the decade, basically.

Edwards: Oh, absolutely. Just the wording of what it is that you support. By the time the lawyers finish with the wording of the pros and cons of any political issue, you almost have to be a lawyer to sort out, what is the right thing to do. So oftentimes for athletes, when it comes to these complex issues—and there are a lot of them—these are the issues that people want athletes to take stands on because they matter to people. They tend to be these complex, contentious—oftentimes a mix of legality, reality, perspective, and so forth. These are the kinds of issues that they want athletes to take stands on. And you almost have to be an attorney to sort out not whether or not you want to do the right thing, but what is the right thing to do. So many times these athletes, who tend not to be among the best read and the most tutored, in terms of these kinds of issues, political or otherwise—they are not in a position to take those kinds of stands. It was a much simpler world in the 1960s when you had all of these athletes lined up literally in leadership positions.

Wilmot: Well, let me ask you a question. I got most of the way through your book, *Revolt of the Black Athlete*, and one of the questions that emerged for me in reading it was, in what way was this movement, this protest movement that was centered with black athletes and largely orchestrated by yourself and a few other people—in what way was this movement in dialogue with a larger black power movement?

Edwards: In the 1960s, we understood that our legitimacy and effectiveness would be substantially determined by the extent to which we could show both—not just consistency with, but involvement in—show ourselves as an extension of the broad-based political cultural movement that started out being called the Civil Rights Movement, that morphed into the black power movement and a

number of other movements. We openly courted the endorsement of Dr. Martin Luther King. In point of fact, he and I met in New York for a weekend, discussed this very issue, how what we were doing in athletics was not only a legitimate extension of what he was trying to achieve in the Civil Rights Movement, but an imperative extension of what he was trying to achieve in the Civil Rights Movement. That we had to move beyond Jackie Robinson, which is where the movement in athletics had essentially been contained and constrained, even though since 1946, since Jackie Robinson retired, there had emerged this broad scale movement that impacted all areas of American life, not just athletics. So we had that conversation, and he came out and endorsed the movement.

Wilmot: What year was that?

Edwards: This was 1968. It was February of 1968. He was assassinated about two and a half months later.

Wilmot: Wow.

Edwards: We spent a weekend in New York discussing those issues, and he came out and endorsed the Olympic Project for Human Rights. We also sought the endorsement of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, which at that time was chaired by H. Rap Brown, which was a more radical kind of an arm of the movement than what Dr. King was doing. We sought the endorsement of CORE, which at that time was under Floyd McKissick. He endorsed the movement. We sought the endorsement of the Black Panther Party, which I worked very closely with here in the Bay Area with Huey Newton and Eldridge Cleaver, David Hilliard, Bobby Seale, other members of the movement.

Wilmot: Could you tell me about that, working closely with the Black Panther Party here in the Bay Area?

Edwards: In 1967, when we first began to organize the Revolt of the Black Athlete, we sought the support of black youth groups all over the country, because this is where the black athletes came from. As I've stated before, the Civil Rights Movement was largely a middle class oriented, middle class led movement. Black athletes do not come from the black middle class. They never did. They never will. The kind of time and effort that you have to put into athletics argues against the kind of focus that the black middle class has, which is typically academic, entrepreneurial, professional, and that is not something that really is supportive of developing outstanding world-class level black athletes.

05-00:20:00

So, we tried to cultivate the black youth movement. And when it comes down to black athletes, you're talking about that level, that spectrum of black

society that really the Black Panther Party was attempting to organize and coordinate. The churches did not really focus on that stratum of black youth. The Civil Rights Movement most certainly did not focus on that stratum of black youth. The two institutions that really cultivated that stratum of black youth were the military and the coaches, the athletic sector, because that's where the athletes came from.

The Black Panther Party focused largely on those youth who were not outstanding athletes, they were not headed for the military for all kinds of reasons—a lot of them were high school dropouts, a lot of them were junior college kids not involved in athletics—and so we tried to coordinate with the Black Panther Party because the Black Panther Party and the Olympic Project for Human Rights had an overlapping constituency. Young black males largely, working class, lower class, who were or were not involved directly with athletics.

The Black Panther Party also did a lot of things in the community which were supportive of that class of young people. The breakfast program that was initiated by the Black Panther Party. The preschool programs that were initiated by the Black Panther Party. The support for single mothers and others in the African American community, in terms of being able to get in a van and go shopping and pick up groceries and bring them back home. As opposed to getting on a bus, changing buses, going to the grocery store, getting back on another bus, changing buses again with an arm full of groceries. The Black Panther Party was involved with the community stratum that we were involved with in terms of our dealing with athletes.

Wilmot: So, can you tell me a little bit more? Did you work closely with Huey Newton? What was he like to work with?

Edwards: Huey was a great guy to work with. He was--

Wilmot: I'm not sure if you answered this question in other formats already, but if I'm mining an area that's already--

Edwards: No, no. I never had a problem with Huey Newton. He was bright. He was articulate. He had guts.

Bobby Seale was very bright. He was articulate, had tremendous courage. I mean, [in him I saw] the same kinds of things that I see, and have seen all my life, in athletes. People think athletes—well, there's a dumb jock phenomenon, added to the dumb black, the intellectually deficient Negro phenomenon. Always put a very negative, created a very negative image of the black athlete. Young black males are seen as basically, we're seen as basically bestial, short on intellectual prowess, long on physical animalistic instincts and this kind of thing. I did not see any of that in athletes. Athletes are bright individuals. They've simply been tutored in a particular realm of

development, as far as their intellectual capabilities and abilities are concerned.

If you took the average 4.0 student at Berkeley—and I taught thousands of students over my 31 years here on this faculty—and gave them your average Pacific 10 football play book in the spring, and told them they had until September 1 to show up able to execute those plays against the defenses stipulated—which means they have to know the offense, they have to know the defense, they have to be able to make the adjustments if there are changes—I question whether you could find one, because they don't have the experience. They haven't been tutored in understanding how one executes in three-dimensional space, and with the speed factor bringing in time. They're used to reading books and calculating on that basis. [Not based on] how they move their bodies in three-dimensional space with the time factor involved, in coordination with ten other guys that are working with them, and eleven others that are working against them. And within the context of something that could be changed immediately, with the change of a play. They couldn't do it.

That same kind of capability I found in people who were associated with the Black Panther Party. Even though Bobby Seale and Huey Newton were at JC [junior college] in Oakland, they were of a particular mind set that we call street-wise, because that is what they came up dealing with. They came up dealing with issues in the street. They came up dealing with the brutality of the police. They came up dealing with a lot of those kinds of concerns, both personally and based upon what they witnessed in the community. So, when I talked to Huey Newton, and when I talked to Bobby Seale, when I talked to David Hilliard, when I talked to Eldridge Cleaver, these were not guys that were stupid. These were not guys that were just out to raise hell and destroy. I mean you're not talking about barbarians here. You're talking about bright, political, committed people. And that's what I appreciated about my dealings with them.

The thing did not leave the track for me until it got down to the guns and the violence, and the revolutionary overthrow notions that tended to creep in to the Black Panther Party movement as they became more and more associated with the white left, as much as anything else. And I think, to a substantial degree, lost their focus.

And from there, all of the sudden you were into drugs. To be under the gun to begin with was absolutely horrific, as somebody involved in the sixties black youth movement in this country. But once you brought in drugs and that kind of thing, now it became really bad. And there was no way that one could really rationalize that. The gun thing, the thing that bothered me about the guns, to have a gun, to let the police and others know that you have a gun, it might keep them from just breaking in on you, and blowing you away, because they know whether a guy is armed. I mean they had me down as

armed and dangerous, because you find out early on that if you have a gun, it will at least slow people down. And they may come armed and shooting, but that's a self-defense thing that you have, that they know that you have a gun. They know everybody who had a gun, because you had to register when you bought it. But it could slow down the people who would just break in on you, and blow you away. And a lot of that happened during the 1960s. A lot of members of the Black Panther Party and a lot of members of the movement were just murdered. By the police. By what I call vigilante groups like the Klan and others. Who were working with the police in many instances, particularly in the South. But I'm not convinced that there were not interests out here, that were not working directly with the police against so-called black militant groups and black militant individuals.

Wilmot: Interests?

Edwards: Interests, yeah. I think that campus police worked with the police departments. I think that campus police and faculty worked with the police department. I think that there were people—I know that there were people working directly with the FBI who were on the faculty at San Jose State. Students that were in my classes. I know that the campus police at San Jose State worked directly with the FBI.

And as much as anything else, I was concerned about me—because I was concerned about me—because they knew exactly where I would be. All they had to do was look at the class schedule. They knew exactly where I would be. What would stop them from coming into my house? They didn't know who was there, but they knew that if there was a gun, it would slow 'em down, rather than just bust in they way that they did a lot of people in the 1960s. So, I can understand arming yourself under those kinds of circumstances.

But what I don't understand, and what I didn't feel comfortable with, was declaring armed revolution your goal and "We're gonna get guns and we're gonna do this." I mean, they owned no gun factory, they owned no ammunition factory, they owned nothing. And they were outgunned by the biggest arms producer in the world at that time and to this day, the United States of America. So, it didn't make sense to me. And at that point, we started to—you know, that's when I really began to kind of distance myself from that aspect of the movement, because I did not see any gain that could come of that. And ultimately, of course, it totally destroyed—it was a factor in the destruction of The Black Panther movement.

Wilmot: So, were the members of the Panthers and people whose names you've mentioned, would you characterize your relationship as friends, comrades, fellow strategy folks--?

Edwards: I think that the effort that the Black Panther Party made, that Bobby Seale and Huey Newton and Eldridge Cleaver were making in Oakland, to put some kind of constraints on the police department, so that they did not continue to literally murder black people, men, women, and children in the City of Oakland, was another dimension of the movement in the same sense that what we were doing with athletes was another dimension of the movement. It just so happened that we were working with the same constituency, if you will. Working-class, lower-class, African American males, for the most part.

And my relationship with Huey was always friendly. I had a lot of respect for him. I thought that he did some phenomenal things. I had a lot of respect for Eldridge Cleaver. Tremendous amount of respect for David Hilliard. And Bobby Seale. But I had a different job. I had a different job to do. I thought that they were among the most courageous and intellectually capable and competent people that the movement produced. I mean these people fed thousands of kids who were going to school hungry. These people put together schools for kids in Oakland. These people put out a newspaper, the Black Panther Paper. They published books. These were committed, dedicated activists. Very bright people. Extremely committed people. And their adversaries, the J. Edgar Hoovers, the local police chief, members of what at that time was an overwhelmingly white police department patrolling an African American community, oppressing an African American community—to take that on was a phenomenal act of courage. And to do it the way that they did it, for as long as they did it, I think was absolutely incredible, unbelievable. The fact that the movement was destroyed. The fact that you found its leaders foundering in terms of drug use, in terms of being out of work, in terms of being dispossessed, and even at some level forgotten, I think was probably inevitable.

The last time I saw Eldridge Cleaver, I was walking to my car, here in Berkeley, from a late class that I had. It was about 4:30 in the afternoon, and somebody approached me wearing a big straw hat, a sombrero type sun hat. And he said, “Hey, Harry.” I turned and I looked, and it was Eldridge. I said, “Hey, man, what you doing? What you up to?” And he was picking up cans, picking cans out of the recycle boxes that had been put out by some agency or organization that had a contract with the city. And in point of fact, he had a complaint going about the fact that he was being restricted from being picking these cans up. But he picked those cans up.

[interruption]

Wilmot: Sorry for that break. I wanted to ask a question about—did you know women in the Black Panther Party?

Edwards: Yeah, yeah. I knew Elaine Brown. I knew Kathleen Cleaver. I knew Huey’s first wife. It was very much like throughout the movement. They were in secondary positions. They contributed tremendously to the movement. A lot

of the work that had to be done in the movement, whether you were talking about the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, whether you were talking about CORE, whether you were talking about the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, whether you were talking about the Olympic Project for Human Rights, whether you were talking about the {United Simbas} under Maulana Ron Karenga, whether you were talking about the Black Panther Party, a tremendous amount of the work that was done, was done by women. But they were basically cast in a supportive role. And the Black Panther Party was no different in that regard. Women were cast in a secondary kind of role. When it came down to who spoke for the party, when it came down to who were the powers in the party, it was like virtually every other aspect and dimension of the movement. It was a male-dominated, male-oriented leadership core.

Wilmot: Did you see that at that time? Did you have a critique of that at that time? Or were you just more of a participant in that?

Edwards: No. It was a combination of features that determined how people reacted to that situation. First of all, the battle that was being fought over race was so horrific and so immense. Black people were being murdered, discriminated against, and so forth. Both male and female. Not based on gender, but based on color. That was the central focus that we were trying to deal with.

Secondly, to have an external struggle going and to initiate an internal struggle over gender related issues, would have so divided, exploded whatever cohesiveness and so forth there was, that probably we would have been ineffective, most certainly less effective, in dealing with either the gender issues or the race issue externally. In terms of our struggle with the broader society.

And then thirdly, there was a phenomenal, and from today's point of view in retrospect, almost unbelievable blindness to it. I mean nobody in any substantial sense saw the reality that black men were not going to go anywhere that black women did not go as full and equal partners. We simply did not see the situation in that regard. We did not see the fact that a lot of what happened to black women did not happen to them because they were black, it happened to them because they were women. And a good deal happened at the hands of black men. We did not see that as even a secondary or tertiary issue, much less a primary issue.

And so at the end of the day, between the external battle with racism and the broader society, which was really the focus of the movement, the fact that there were those who could see that there were internal issues, but were not tremendously enthusiastic about initiating that internal struggle over gender in the face of that external challenge about race, and then the overwhelming blindness of most of us to the contradiction of thinking that we could move ahead as black men and deal with race, and once the race issue was dealt with,

the gender issue would become a moot point if not utterly irrelevant, and resolved. Those three issues just made it—I mean it was every day. You walked into the office. You told the ladies to fix the coffee. Is there any paperwork to be done? Type this. Get this out. Make sure that this is delivered at so and so. And, by the way, how are the kids doing at home? So, I mean it was simply—that was where the movement was in the 1960s. And in some instances, women were simply told [what to do].

I mean, Dr. King simply told Coretta, “I’m out here getting arrested and in a movement. You stay home.” Malcolm never—you know, it’s absolutely absurd to think that Betty Shabazz was going to be out and active in the movement beyond whatever she did within the context of the Nation of Islam women’s focus. And when it came down to those of us who were in such dimensions of the movement, the Olympic Project for Human Rights, the Black Panther Party, everything—the women there were there to, hey, you know, support your man. Support your man stepping up. Support this male moving out of the status of a boy and becoming a man. And one of the ways that he becomes a man is to be supported by a strong black woman. So that was where it was.

Wilmot: You know I asked you this before, but when did you kind of begin to have an awareness and consciousness of this personally? How did that—you said we experienced this--

Edwards: It really started in my personal life. After I got married, my first two children were girls and then my mother-in-law moved in with me, and we had a lady that worked with our kids, and babysat, and one thing or another. So for about the first ten years of my marriage, I lived in a house full of women.

You know, I used to go out and I’d have a drink with a couple of my colleagues from here, or some friends out of the athletic world, and I’d always leave and say, “Hey, I’ve gotta get out of here. I’ve got five women waiting on me.” They used to crackle, “Oh, man, five. Well, that athletic life must be—” I’d say, “Yeah, a wife, a mother-in-law, two daughters, and a housekeeper.” And they all, you know, they all stayed there. And so by the end of those ten years, I either had to make some adjustments, and really begin to look at this thing from a different perspective, or they would have had me out in the backyard on an eighteen-inch chain. It was the kind of thing where all of a sudden, I was in the distinct minority. And I had to get a grip. I had to try to understand things from a different perspective and a different world view.

And it became very clear, not just because of the celebrity, because the people—“Oh yeah, that’s Dr. Edwards, well-to-do, so-and-so and such-and-such.” But I saw things happen to them as women. When they go down to get their car serviced. When there’s a salesman trying to sell them insurance, and all these other kinds of things. And the minute I show up, there’s a total and

complete change. People may not have even known who I was, but there's a total and complete change in the way that they were being treated. And so, that first ten years of marriage, from 1970 to 1980, when my son was born—as soon as he was born, he became a focus [laughter], and I got some relief. But up until then, as the only man in the house, I mean it was like coming from all sides. So I had to sober up and get a grip real quick. And a lot of things that I had assumed, I knew and understood and had a handle on in terms of women. By the end of those ten years, I mean, women were probably the biggest mystery of my life. And at the same time, I had a different appreciation of the realities that they live with.

I mean, it never had dawned on me, for example, that I would walk out of the house at 11:30 at night, and walk six blocks to a store to pick up a half gallon of ice cream and walk back. And it's 12:15, 12:45 at night. Whereas my wife and my daughters, my mother-in-law, the lady who lives with us and kept house, they would be out there with a flashlight, looking around at 11:30 at night, walking out the front door and around the house to the garage to get in the car.

And then I began to expand that to some of the classes that I would have here. It gets dark at 4:30 in the evening in December, and the female students might have to walk from here five or six or seven blocks to a dormitory, or to an apartment where they live. Men walk out—heck, they walking down the street, whistling, taking short cuts through alleys and parking lots and everything. Here's a lady may have to walk a block and a half out of her way because it's lit all the way and there are other people walking. She's not going to cut through that alley. She's not going to walk through that dark parking lot. And that kind of thing had just never dawned on me. The kind of pressure that women live under, until that ten years.

And then of course, really spending time with people like Maya Angelou, who used to talk about some of her early experiences and how it's possible for women to grow up literally fearing strange men. And that there's a tradeoff in some instances. You put up with the man that you're dealing with for all of his inadequacies and limitations and deficiencies, because that at some level is some kind of protection against all of those other men. I mean, here's a guy who goes to the movie with, does shopping, goes to the car dealership with you, wherever your social events with you and everything.

The extent to which women can grow up actually uncomfortable with men, that had just never crossed my mind. What the heck? 12 o'clock, midnight, I'm going to walk to the store, pick up ice cream, and come back, no problem. Women can't do that. And I had never really thought about that until I get into this situation with these five women living in my house. And I began to really pay attention. So that's when it really sort of hit me, and I began to think about my students leaving here. And after classes, I have a class that starts at 5:00 and it goes until 6:30. It's dark at 4:30 and here's some woman walking

by herself maybe six or seven blocks down Telegraph Avenue through some—wow, that takes courage. “Well, I just wish for the best and keep my head on a swivel. Keep moving. Act like I know where I’m going.” I used to have my students tell me that. I also did something else when, I guess it must have been in the 1980s, they had the parking situation. They had a parking situation where, depending upon your seniority in the university administration, faculty, and so forth, and of course the higher you ranked, the more likely you were to get a parking spot pretty close to the building where you were. So you paid your parking fee, but then what parking you had access to was determine to a substantial degree by your status and rank on the faculty. Now, I can see that in the sense that some older faculty members, a professor emeritus and so forth, who may be seventy or something, maybe is not in a position to walk seven or eight blocks to a parking area, assuming that they could find a parking space there.

But I did not understand how faculty members such as myself could get a parking space right adjacent to Barrows Hall, on the other side of the Women’s Athletic Department, or right up the street off of Channing Way, when the secretaries and administrative assistants, these women in the department, if they could get a parking permit, it would be a parking permit for a hunting license on a parking lot that’s six or seven blocks away. And they’re the first ones there in the morning. They’re usually the last ones to leave in the evening. And I didn’t understand that, so I refused to participate in the parking program.

Wilmot: Well, you know Berkeley’s a very hierarchical place.

Edwards: Oh, absolutely. But most formal organizations are male oriented, male dominated, and men don’t think of those issues. So, I just refused to participate in the parking process. I would park down on Alcatraz and walk up. Kept me exercised and even—the whole thirty-one years that I was here I never had a parking pass.

Wilmot: You really talked about the ways in which sexism impacts women’s feelings of safety. You mentioned that women in the black power movement were primarily occupied as subordinate, supportive roles. I wanted to ask you—I’m just recapping for my own benefit. Was it also during these ten years when you kind of developed a critique, or an awareness, of that dynamic as it was playing out in the movement?

5-00:50:30

Edwards: Oh, absolutely. It became somewhat of an issue with me in the sense that women were not just ignored, they were cut out of the movement. In many, many ways. I remember going to black power conferences, where women would come to the conference, present papers, or participate in conference panels and raise the issue of alternatives to joining the women’s movement, as

it came to be defined, as opposed to continuing to participate in the black power movement, or in the broader black Civil Rights Movement.

There were all kinds of arguments and debates about the extent to which black women should become involved in the women's movement. And one of those discussions even prompted Fannie Lou Hamer, who was a major civil rights figure, particularly with regard to the {Lyons?} County Democratic organization, which posed an alternative to the regular Democrats, Dixiecrats who were seated at the Democratic National Convention. Fannie Lou Hamer says that she supported the women's movement, but she wasn't going to be involved in anything that separated her from her man, or from black men. She just wasn't going to do that. And so much of the cutting edge of the women's movement in the late sixties, early seventies in particular, when it was really establishing itself, in the wake of *Roe vs. Wade* and so forth, had to do with them separating themselves from the domination of men. And that was a lot edge that the women's movement had. And a lot of black women took exception to that. They did not want to be separated in any ideological or philosophical or political way from black men. They did not see themselves moving ahead as women separate from black men. They did not see themselves as in the same situation and predicament as white women. So they were very reluctant to join the women's movement in the sense of a wholehearted, philosophical, political buy-in, particularly at that stage where there was this effort on the part of women to literally separate themselves out from male domination and male dominated political and economic philosophy.

Wilmot: This is a little later, but do you remember when Shirley Chisholm ran for President?

Edwards: Absolutely.

Wilmot: I think it was 1972. Tell me what your memories are of that.

Edwards: Well, Shirley Chisholm, first of all, she had one phenomenal liability, and what I call it is the Stevenson syndrome. She was extraordinarily bright. She was extremely intelligent. That's a phenomenal liability in the convention of the American political scene. She also had an independence to her that put her outside of the authoritative black leadership influence and control circle. The authoritative black leadership influence and control circle tried to get her not to run. They did not feel that it was "time" for a black woman to step out and run for President. She ran without the endorsement of the NAACP, without the endorsement of the Congress of Racial Equality, without the endorsement of SCLC, without the endorsement of Operation PUSH and Jesse Jackson. She ran on her own.

The combination of being intellectually unacceptable to the established political structure, of being independent, not just of the established white

political structure, but of the established black political civil rights structure, and being a woman, was strike three, as far as she was concerned in her Presidential bid, which meant that in the primary she got a lot of votes from people like me. And that's when I first found out that as a registered Independent, I couldn't vote in the Democratic primary, so I couldn't even vote for her.

But she got a lot of votes from people in the movement who had distanced themselves, a lot of young black people in the movement, such as myself at that time, who had distanced themselves from the conventional black civil rights leadership structure, who never had any real sympathies, if you will, or allegiance to the established political structure for whom, she, like Stevenson, was far too intellectual and bright and analytical and consistent in her thought.

Wilmot: Courageous.

Edwards: Yeah. And [people have] long since bailed out in terms of picking the lesser among evil men who were running for office. So, Shirley Chisholm was a natural fit for a lot of people of my generation who were in the same mindset that I was in. Except that a lot of them were also registered Independents, which meant that they could not vote in the Democratic primary.

Wilmot: You know I went to an event and I saw this wonderful documentary. And Barbara Lee was there speaking about how Shirley Chisholm had been her wonderful mentor, and lent her beautiful clothes so she could appear and do her work. What really struck me was just the crisis of support for Shirley Chisholm. She was such a brilliant sister.

Edwards: That was her problem.

Wilmot: There was a crisis of support within the black community, and it was kind of amazing to see that.

Edwards: It was. Again, the intellect, the political establishment—the male, civil rights political establish—and being a woman. Strike three. And from that Presidential election, she gradually was simply written out of the process. She never was able to make up with the black civil rights establishment. She never really had a foothold in the established conventional white mainstream Democratic political structure. And as a woman, once you are in that kind of a situation where your natural constituency turns its back on you—the black civil rights structure—and the established structure, the conventional Democratic structure, has no use or interest in you—if anything, they see you as a threat because you may peel off some black votes that otherwise will go in their direction. Or at least alienate those black votes from you to the point that they stay at home. They have no interest in you. There's no place really for a woman to go. And so whether you're Shirley Chisholm, a black woman, or Geraldine Ferraro, a white woman, the outcome tends to be the same.

You're kind of banished to the land of anonymity and non-personhood. And that's unfortunately where she ended up.

Wilmot: How did you see her Caribbean heritage playing out in this? Was it an issue?

5-01:00:00

Edwards: I think that the Caribbean heritage has always been an issue in the African American community going back to Marcus Garvey. The split between Marcus Garvey, Booker T. Washington, W.E. DuBois has carried forth right up through the present. Marcus Garvey, Stokely Carmichael, Shirley Chisholm. It has always been a subterranean issue, right down to Colin Powell. It has always been a subterranean issue. The African American community is not monolithic. You have the Caribbean population. You have, in many instances, members of the Puerto Rican population, who are black and who have an entirely different heritage. You have increasingly the African and North African populations, some of whom identify themselves as black.

But in reality, you're really talking about that core of three hundred plus years of cultural existence as a people on this land. That people who emerged from slavery on this land and that's a different population than those who came in later years from the Caribbean, or those who came up from Panama, or those who came up from Brazil, or those who came directly from Africa. You're talking about a different set of people, so that's always been an issue.

Edwards 06 11-08-05.wav

06-00:00:00

Wilmot: You mentioned that there was a place where basically you and the Panthers kind of split. In your book, you speak about it more in terms of, because of the level of surveillance, you were becoming a liability to the organizations that you were affiliated with. But I wanted to kind of probe deeper what you said, and ask about—how was Third World Marxism and did it make sense to you?

Edwards: You know, during the 1960s, unlike today, for example, not only are there no activists in the sense that there was broad scale political cultural movement, in that sense. There are still activists, but it's not at the same level. Not only was there this high level of activism, but people read. People read all kinds of literature. And that meant everything from Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, and *The Colonizers and the Colonizer*, but also books, critical books. *The God That Failed* was one of the books that came to mind, and this was a compilation of essays by black activists from the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, who had been affiliated with the communist party.

It's a book entitled *The God That Failed*. And what they did was to go through and look at all of the challenges that they were dealing with in terms of race, with the broader American society. The broader Western Civilization, capitalistic structure. And then look at how they became affiliated with the communist party, the socialist party, and then how in the end, they found that

they had not taken steps towards really liberating themselves. They had come under the influence of yet another master. In other words, they found that the Marxists that they were involved with had a broader agenda that did not begin and end with their racial, or even nationalist, black nationalist, interests, programs, definitions, and so forth.

So, in *The God That Failed*, you had people such as Richard Wright. You had people like James Baldwin. You had people like W. E. DuBois even, saying, “Hey, this is not working out. Many of these people have the same issues in terms of controlling black folks and black agendas that white racists have. It’s simply that they come at you from a different perspective, and the minute you get outside of that agenda, you’re done, you’re fried, you’re finished.” And so, *The God That Failed* really set me to thinking about where in this Marxist perspective. Whether it’s academic or whether it’s activist. Does that movement really fit? And because some of the people that I had very good relationships with, participated in conferences with—Angela Davis, for example—were allied with the American Communist Party. And we had a lot of discussion about the Party, both with Angela and with Fania Davis, her sister, who was a student here at Cal for a number of years. They never could show me where what they were talking about, and what they were pushing, relative to “broad spectrum working class interest” coincided in fact with the broad spectrum interest of African Americans in this country.

I can see where capitalism exploits racism in order to maintain control through divide and conquer, whether it’s work related or whether it’s simply ideological. A white worker is worth more than a black worker. But they could not explain to me how the same labor unions that supported desegregation in the South, when the movement came north—forget about the labor era, when blacks were lynched over scab activities related to whites, forget about, I’m willing to say people made mistakes in the past—but why is it that those same labor unions—Walter Reuther, United Autoworkers, the AFL/CIO, so forth—who pushed for desegregation in the South, supported the Civil Rights Movement, gave money to Martin Luther King and the Congress of Racial Equality and the NAACP—when it came to the North, and the desegregation of jobs in the North, they shut down all monies going to civil rights organizations looking to desegregate the plumbers, to desegregate the electricians, to desegregate the carpenters, to desegregate the heavy equipment and machinery operators.

Wilmot: This was in your lived experience?

Edwards: Yes, absolutely. And so, they couldn’t explain to me how this tremendous working class camaraderie could work so well in the South, but when it came to the North, it didn’t work. And it was an extension of what I found in academia. When black students were sitting in, in the South, and the

traditionally black schools suspended them for school for a year because they were arrested integrating Woolworth counters, integrating swimming pools, integrating hotels in the South. Places like {Shaw?} University, Delaware State, and Tuskegee, and Clark College—suspended these students. Liberal white professors and college presidents led the way, in terms of opening up their institutions for these students so that they would not lose a year of education. Brought ‘em in, tuition free, dormitory fees waived, for a year, as a gesture of support for the integration movement. But those same liberal professors, those same liberal college presidents, balked, when it came down to, okay, black students, yes, but it never crossed their mind that black professors would move on to those same traditionally white campuses.

And it became a stalling action. The pool isn’t great enough. We recruit basically out of the Ivy League schools, and out of the upper ten percent of graduate institutions in the country, and look at the pool of black professors coming out of those institutions. Well, if these students, who were at places like Delaware State and Tuskegee and Morehouse and Clark College and Tennessee A&I and Prairie View, could come in and do work at San Jose State, University of California, and UCLA, and elsewhere—UC Berkeley—then the professors who taught those students, I would think, who have their Ph.D.s, would be qualified and competent to at least be in the pool of candidates interviewed for faculty positions at places like San Jose State and University of California at Berkeley. Wasn’t the case.

It wasn’t until a Third World Strike at the University of California, for example, that the issue of seriously recruiting African American, Latino professors, Native American professors, really was taken seriously by the administration. That’s the auspice under which I was brought here. That’s the auspice under which most of the black faculty who were here while I was here were brought here, because they were in the African American Studies Department, which emerged out of the Third World Strike. The same with Latino professors. They were in the Latino American Studies Department, which emerged out of the Third World Strike. So at the end of the day, the Marxist disposition that working through the unions, and with the white working class, offered an alternative avenue of struggle and access to progressive development, broadening the basis of Democratic participation in American society, did not add up in the final analysis. It was really, for me, a verification of the positions taken in the book *The God That Failed*.

6-00:11:50

Wilmot:

And had you read, or perhaps taught, Harold Cruse’s book?

Edwards:

Absolutely. I used Harold Cruse’s book, both *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, as well as his other book, the title of it escapes me now. Used both of them in my classes for a number of years. And Harold Cruse was an adamant critic of the Communist Party, and the Negroes who bought into the

Communist Party. He saw even what they called the Black Renaissance in Harlem as a dimension of Negroes who had essentially sold out to a white patronage class--

Wilmot: --patronage--

Edwards: right, patronage class. And had totally given up any sense of struggling for black interest and black goals. As a matter of fact, Harold Cruse came to the University of California at Berkeley and spoke in one of my classes, one of my large race relations classes, from his book *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*.

Wilmot: You had a chance to host him and spend time with him?

Edwards: Yes, spent a lot of time with him. Spent about three days with him.

Wilmot: How was that?

Edwards: It was great. He was declining in health at time, he didn't have the energy that he once had, but he still had the same fire that he had concerning those issues. And I asked him specifically about the white left and the kind of points that he makes in terms of the white left and its betrayal, really, of black cultural and political interests, and he elaborated on it to a great degree. I'm not as embittered by it as he obviously was, as he expressed in his writings and in his lectures. But at one time, he obviously bought into it. So that disappointment and that sense of betrayal was there. I never bought into it. And I used to tell Fania Davis this all the time, Angela's sister. I'd say, "Look, I'm catching so much hell being black. Why would I want to be red, too? Especially since, where's the reward structure in taking on this additional burden?"

06:00:14:40

Wilmot: Well, let me ask you about that. One thing is, there is an idea, yeah, alliances with white working class domestically, but within a Third World Marxist perspective, how did an international perspective resonate with you? The idea of being in struggle with Chinese working class, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Russian? At that time, how did that language and belief system strike you?

Edwards: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. The idea of having a sympathetic disposition toward Third World struggles in other countries was absolutely there. Whether or not the struggles in those third world countries shaded more off internationalism as opposed to international socialism or communism is another issue. I was always convinced that the Vietnamese were more nationalist than they were communist. And after they ran the United States out

of Vietnam, to get into a shooting with China, within eight to ten months after that period, was simply indicative of that fact. At its base, I believe that socialism, communism, are secondary to nationalism in these Third World countries. And once that is their priority, what they're really saying in terms of any global or international movement is essentially, "Our enemy's enemy is our friend. But as soon as our enemy is no longer our enemy, whether he's still their enemy is secondary to our national interest."

It comes down to the same thing that has been noted for years. That all politics ultimately are local. And so, as sympathetic as I am and have been throughout my activist years, with Third World countries struggling against First World hegemony—economic, military, and political—and as sympathetic as I am with the reality that usually an oppressed people has to use whatever means, whatever vehicles are available, irrespective of the sincerity of their commitment to those vehicles. And I'm not saying that the Vietnamese are not committed communist, or socialists, or that the people of Guinea-Bissau, or Tanzania, or the ANC during its anti-apartheid struggle, did not have sympathetic or real socialist dimensions, commitments, as far as their struggle was concerned. I'm not saying that. I'm saying that above and beyond all else, whether you're talking about the ANC in South Africa, whether you're talking about the Vietnamese and their struggle against the French and the United States. Whether you're talking about the struggle in Angola or Guinea-Bissau, irrespective of what you're talking about, ultimately, they are nationalists first. They are looking to first free, and then build their nation. The vehicle might be communist, socialist, a mix of socialism and capitalism. I mean, in China right now, they've got Starbucks and Kentucky Fried Chicken. They've got Ford Motor Company. They've got IBM. They've got these capitalist enterprises because the Chinese see the necessity of developing those dimensions of their economy for purely nationalistic reasons. Not because they're part of any grand capitalistic movement.

Some people may say, "Well, this is a sign of the bankruptcy of the communist regime in the People's Republic of China, that you can go in Tiananmen Square and buy a cup of Starbuck's coffee." Well, that may be. But the incentive, the motivation for it, is to develop their national economy, and they've done that to the point, in fact, that the United States has a phenomenal trade deficit with China, as a result of China participating in the capitalist system.

I don't buy into this notion that socialism and communism at the global level trumps nationalism, or local political interests, even when it comes down to the struggle against racism in this country. Because ultimately, whether nationalism or whether you're talking about defeating the impact of racism and racist structures in America, all of the politics ultimately are local.

Edwards: There are personalities out there. Angela Davis. There are always personalities that push the broader picture that if we pursue it somewhere up the road, in the by and by, if the struggle is united and people come together and realize that we don't make these Faustian kinds of agreements with capitalism and with racists and so forth, for nationalistic or local, political convenience or expediency, we can most certainly make that argument.

But the reality is that movements don't move straight ahead linearly without bending back upon themselves, crossing paths and so forth. That is not the real world. I'm all for people projecting up the road, painting the broad utopian picture of what could be, what should be, and all the rest. But in reality, down here on the ground, that's not real life. It may be something at the very edge of the high beams of the vehicle that we're traveling in, but the one that you have to be concerned about is the bump in the road, the sharp curve that you're getting into right now, that's what you have to negotiate. And that's very immediate, very local.

Wilmot: All right. You know, we've spent a lot of time here in that era. Still in that era, I want to ask you about your dissertation. You've talked about in your autobiography, but I wanted to ask you a little bit about your research process and the kind of support that you got as a graduate student, from you—you could have a committee, professors.

Edwards: First of all, I think that you have to understand, in the mid-1960s when I began researching my dissertation, 1966-67-68, in that era, started really looking at sport and the relationship to society, there was no such thing as the sociology of sport. Sport was consigned to physical education in American academia. That is where all of the focus for the most part was.

If you wanted to look at sport, if you wanted to analyze sport, if you wanted to study sport, you were in physical education. No self respecting anthropologist, sociologist, social psychologist, anybody in organizational behavior, anybody in race relations, all of these sociological, anthropological disciplines would study sport. Why? Because sport was presumed to be the toy department of human affairs. This was games played by children for fun. So, as a serious sociological interest, much less career pursuit, it was seen as, "Come on, you've got to be kidding me. You're joking."

When I indicated that I wanted to write my dissertation on race and sport, the basic disposition was, "What's to be told? Sport is the citadel of interracial harmony and brotherhood. I mean, look at Joe Louis. Look at Jesse Owens. Look at Jackie Robinson and all that he did in sport. I mean, our issue is not to study sport. We know what's happening in sport. But how do we make the rest of society like sport? Where, if you're black and you go on the field, and hit a home run, that home run counts no more and no less than if you're white.

If you're black and you jump seven feet, that seven foot jump is no more and no less more than a white guy who jumps seven foot. I mean, it's one of the areas in the international spirit of human relations where we can go out and everybody get on a field, and whoever wins the 100 meters crosses that finish line first, black, white, or otherwise. Where's the story? Where's the challenge? Where are the issues? Where are the problems that you're going to be researching?"

So, right out of the chute, I had to demonstrate that what I was doing was worthy of sociological investigation. And the point that I finally made, where the department said, "Okay, you can do it," I said, "Look, I took a class on small scale social relations, where we studied the dynamics of dyads and triads, and how these fundamental units are at the very core of broader social relations, whether in the family, the corporation or anywhere else. From the psychological, social psychological, social organizational, structural perspective." I said, "How can we be so concerned about the dynamics and relations involved in dyads and triads, two person and three person systems, and then turn around and see a hundred million people watching the Super Bowl, and say 'There's nothing there worthy of sociological investigation.'"

[Pause in recording]

6-00:26:26

Edwards:

Ultimately [it] did allow me to do my work in the area that ultimately came to be called the sociology of sport. But there was a reluctance, because to be associated with anything having to do with physical education as a sociologist was seen as a step down. Physical education has always been the stepchild of American academia, in terms of its intellectual legitimacy, it's too much hands on, it's too physically oriented. And so there's been this bias in American academia.

But more than that, I wanted to focus on race and sport, and that's always an area of—that was touchy. Sport and race was settled academic inquiry. I mean, that's what Jackie Robinson was about. Sport and race was settled. So, to go in and to disturb that, and to begin to really challenge some of the presumptions surrounding race and sport, I mean that was a lot for a sociology department to take on. They'd be taking on physical education, the physical educators who were basically the people who were defining the realm of reality in sport, race related or not. And they would also be taking on settled issues, so to speak. And so, they allowed it, but they were very cautious, let us say, reluctant. I never really got the total amount of support that would have occurred, perhaps had I been involved in another area.

For example, the person who directs your dissertation, the people who collaborate with you on the faculty in terms of developing your dissertation, are typically the people who, for a lack of a better term, get credit for having turned out this student who did this great work. They step up to the plate and

they get the credit for the work. None of that happened with my dissertation. It was strictly me.

Even twenty-five years later, my dissertation director, {Gordon Stride?}, who was the faculty member who essentially was supervising me in my dissertation, invited me to the University of Florida at Gainesville, which is where he had transferred from Cornell, into the geriatric program at Gainesville, and on the way back to the airport after I had finished giving my lecture down there that he had invited me to give on the sociology of sport, he said, “You know what, Harry? I would say that the biggest mistake of my career was not jumping on this sociology of sports thing. That’s one that we could have lot of fun with.” I said, “Oh yeah, I’ve had a great deal fun with it.”

By this time, twenty-five years later, almost every campus in the country had a sociology of sport class, or a sport and culture class, or something in sociology or social studies that related to sport. And a lot of it used my work, or people who came after me and developed their dissertations and so forth around that area. So, that was the atmosphere within which I was developing my dissertation.

06-00:30:07

Wilmot:

Were there other people on your committee?

Edwards:

Yes, Robin Williams was on my committee. He dealt with the race relations aspect of it. Gordon Stride, he directed the dissertation, his area was geriatrics and the family. There was a lot of family research and social economic class research that was involved. And then William Foote White was my third member. He was in organizational behavior. He wrote *The Organization Man*, that classic study. William Foote White was a tremendous organizational academician. So, that was my committee.

Wilmot:

Given the anecdote that you just shared about your director of your committee, that he actually didn’t know what he was dealing with, was your committee supportive? Did they provide valuable contributions? And then finally, of course, did they open networks to you when it came time to look for work?

Edwards:

Let me start with the first. They were supportive in the sense that they let me do it. As far as contributing to it, I never got so much as a note saying, “Look at this. This is applicable to what you’re doing.” All of that I had to do myself. And in point of fact, in turning it in to them, there were four different versions of my dissertation. Not revisions. I had to rewrite it four times. And it turned out to be the longest dissertation in Cornell University history, 1114 pages or something like that.

Wilmot: Why did you have to rewrite it four times?

Edwards: Because nobody on the committee really knew anything about sport. And there was a difficulty in terms of my central thesis that sport was an ignored institution of society. Not a physical education aspect of the education institution, but sport was a separate and distinct, although integral, institution of society. Like the family, education, religion, politics, economics, the military, mass media, what have you. It's a separate institutional configuration. And one that has a vital connection to all of the other institutional processes, such as reaffirming and re-enforcing secular values and sentiments. Whether it's competition, discipline, physical fitness, patriotism, religiosity, character—that sport had a vital role in that. Along with providing occupations for millions, whether they be coaches, physical education teachers, whether they be athletes, whether they be public relations people, marketing people, advertisers, providing jobs for millions of people. It has an economic dimension. It has a dimension that has to do with the politics of society.

This is why you have *The Star Spangled Banner* being played before the games. This is why you have the fly-over of the Blue Angels at football games, and so forth. It has to do with gender relationships, where you have men on the field, participating in all of these competitive and challenging activities, while women are on the sidelines, supporting them in their role as sex objects and so forth. All of that is involved in sport, and we have to understand it.

And it most certainly has a role to play in race relations, where blacks are the world's greatest twentieth century gladiators, but negligible in terms of authority and decision making positions such as head coach, athletic director, or even assistant coaches at the time that I wrote my dissertation. There were entire collegiate conferences, such as the Southeast Conference, and the Southwest Conference, that did not even have a black assistant coach on staff, and had just begun to bring in one or two black athletes. So, all of that flew in the face of this notion of sport as the citadel of interracial harmony, brotherhood, and sisterhood, and so forth, where it only mattered how you played the game, not your gender, your color, your socioeconomic class, and so forth. All of that was absolute, unadulterated, sports propaganda. So, that's what my dissertation sat out to prove.

And of course, the more I went down that road, even after they had said, "You can do it," the more distance they put between themselves and the dissertation. Because they just didn't see it, and most certainly were not so supportive of it that they were willing to begin to stand up and answer questions about racism in sport, and sexism in sport, and political conservatism in sport, and the lack of judicious and representative kinds of punitive actions in sport. If you were

an athlete in a sport in the late 1960s, early 1970s, a coach could just come in and take your scholarship away from you. There were no proceedings. There was no “Let me go to the chancellor, let me go and talk to”—you were just out. You were done, even though that was your education.

And then when I began to get into such things as why black athletes dominated some areas of sports, such as boxing and basketball and football, and those areas where they had access and numbers—that really became controversial. Because what I was saying at that point was something that totally flew in the face of logic, which was that black athletes dominate those sports where we have access in numbers, because of racism and discrimination in the broader society. And they just—forget it, we can’t see that.

But of course, if you open up one area to black competition, and close all other areas, you’re going to have a disproportionate number of highly talented people challenging for that one area. And it’s just a matter of time before they come to dominate it. In the same sense, that if the University of California says, “We’re shutting down all majors, except English, and we’re going to bring in the same numbers of students, we’re going to keep the same numbers of faculty, but we’re only going to teach English.” In a predictable period of time, an inordinate and disproportionate number of outstanding English teachers, English majors, English writers and analysts and literary critics and everything else will be coming out of the University of California at Berkeley.

06-00:37:28

Wilmot: Well, given the real scant support you were getting—no, I don’t want to say that--

Edwards: Reluctant support.

Wilmot: Reluctant support. And also, just kind of not having a whole lot of—it sounds like intellectually they weren’t really sure what to do with the project you were undertaking.

Edwards: That’s right.

Wilmot: So you weren’t getting support in that realm.

Edwards: That’s right.

Wilmot: Where were you getting your inspiration? I'm really speaking intellectually. What were pieces that were really—where were you looking for intellectual framing?

Edwards: Discovery.

Wilmot: And discovery in order to frame this work that you were undertaking.

Edwards: Just my own intellectual intuitions, instincts, the joy of discovery. Being able to look at something that passed as settled fact and truth, and say to myself, looking at the statistics, looking at the realities, that that is absolute nonsense. How can sport—just from a general level—how can sport be the citadel of interracial harmony and brotherhood when they will not interview a black candidate as a head coach? When we have blacks going to schools, participating in some instances as athletes, but not graduating from those schools, because there's the assumption that they'll go to the black schools to get their degrees after we've taken their football or their basketball from them. How can that be the case when the most segregated—how this can be a citadel of interracial harmony and brotherhood when the scribes responsible for chronicling the realities of sport, are themselves in a situation with absolutely no black input? When the press box is the most segregated corner of society, of the sports world.

And then when I got into a growing consciousness as a result of my family situation relative to women, which was literally years after the Olympic Project for Human Rights. I'm now into the 1970s. I'm writing my dissertation. I'm doing three or four articles a month. My wife and my daughters and they're beginning to make me consider these kinds of things. And then I look at the situation of women and find that there are only twenty six schools that give athletic scholarships to women. And most of those are black schools like Tennessee A&I.

Then what's the difference between black women and white women? Then I find out that black women are not really regarded, they're not put up on the same pedestal as white women. Black women are seen to be somewhere between black men and white women. They're not put up on the same pedestal. I mean this is where Flip Wilson became such a hit with his character Geraldine. It was a natural kind of a flip, if you will, for him to become a black woman, or for a black woman to become a black man. There was in between. A black female athlete did not carry the same burden of proving her femininity as a white female athlete. Wilma Rudolph never carried that burden in the African American community. People thought that Wilma and Flo Jo [Florence Griffith Joyner] were beautiful. The Williams

sisters, Serena and Venus, do not carry the burden of having to demonstrate their femininity in the African American community. We don't have that hang-up and that problem with regard to black women athletes.

White women are put up on a pedestal, and what dawned on me at that time, is that if you really want to constrain somebody, if you really want to put them in a prison, don't put them behind bars. Don't constrain them in a box. Put them up on a pedestal. Because there's nowhere to go. And any time they make a move, they fall. And that was the situation that white women athletes were in.

So all of that kept me going. Any time I looked at something and discovered that, it kept me going despite the fact that nobody believed in what I was doing. But what it also meant at Cornell, was that I could not write anything to prove to people the validity of the tack that I was taking, much less such things as the distinction between black women and white women athletes, that racism and discrimination are the principle factors generating the outstanding black athlete, the black domination of those sports where blacks have access in numbers, such as boxing and football and basketball. Because it was so counterintuitive, and their basic thing was that, you know, "Blacks are great athletes, and eventually they'll learn to be great coaches, they'll learn to be great athletic directors, they'll learn to be--" – Hey, they're great coaches, great athletic directors now, if you give them the opportunity. That was my argument.

That's a bit much, because now you're taking on the whole athletic establishment, the whole of the NCAA—am I going to sign off on this? Ahhh, I don't know. So I wound up going back and rewriting it four times, expressing essentially the same thing. Tone it down a little bit. Put a little bit more of this twist on it. Consider that option. Bring in that piece of work. I noticed where you mentioned it here. Follow-up on the footnotes and see what else he says on it. At the end of the day, they just accepted a version. They just accepted a version.

6-00:43:54

Wilmot:

Were you pleased with that version?

Edwards:

Was I pleased with that version? No. And when I began to publish articles out of it, I was approached by Homewood Publishing Company, which published textbooks, and they say, "Jeez, all these articles you are publishing, we would like to publish a textbook."

I say, "Yeah, but look, I'm not going to publish the articles, because they're disjointed. This is about race. This is about factors at the interface of socioeconomic mobility and race. This is about opportunities relative to education. This is about opportunities relative to employment. So, to jam

those together, there are no transitions there where people can see—” “Okay, we’ll publish the whole dissertation.” I said, “Which version?” “Well, look, Robin Williams is our editor in sociology. He was on your committee. Let him take the last version, he will edit it, make it right for publishing.” So I said, “Okay, great.” Because I wasn’t going to publish the separate articles. They took the last version and they published it exactly as it was. There was no editing. Because at the end of the day, Robin still didn’t buy into what I was doing. So he said, “Okay, publish it.” And they published it, as it was. Mistakes, errors, everything else. Because at Cornell, they finally said, “Okay, you’re done, we’ll accept the dissertation.” Because, I don’t care what they asked me to do, it came out at the same place. “Soften this, add that, follow-up on this.” It was that kind of a thing, so you wound up rewriting entire chapters. Not revising here and revising there, rewriting entire chapters, to the point that by the time I finished the last version, the whole thing had been rewritten four times.

And so, when Robin Williams, who was the editor at Homewood Publishers, took the dissertation as opposed to about fifteen articles that I had written from the dissertation, which were disjointed, and published it, he didn’t do any more than when he was on the committee. He said, “Okay, publish it.” And that turned out to be *The Sociology of Sport*. Now, people use the book all over the country. It was the first integrated textbook in the sociology of sport. But the reality was that there were footnotes that were jumbled, there were words—it simply was not what I would have wanted.

When they asked me—they wanted me to revise it for a second edition—no way, no way. But that was the second time that I had had that kind of a problem with a book. If you look at *The Revolt of the Black Athlete*, an editor at Free Press, which was a division of Harper and Row at the time, came to me and said, “We want you to write us a book on the revolt of the black athlete.” I said, “Okay.” I said, “I’ve never written a book before. I’ve written a number of pieces for magazines, *Look* magazine and so forth. But I’ll undertake it.” They said, “We’ll have an editor work with you.” So I wrote the book, flew back to New York, sat down with the editor, really a nice guy. Ultra liberal, he said, “This is a story that needs to get out. No, people are not aware of what’s happening to black athletes. They don’t understand why you guys would rebel against the sports establishment the way you did with the Olympic Project for Human Rights and shutting down a game at San Jose State, and what the relationships were between the two.” This guy was really tremendously behind it, but we got into a discussion of whether or not it was George Washington Carver or Booker T. Washington who said, “As separate as the fingers, but like one as the hand.” And I told him a thousand—I said, “Look, it was Booker T. Washington, at the 1896 cotton exposition, who made the statement, ‘We can exist as separate as the fingers, black and white, but as one as the hand.’” In other words, we Negroes are aware of and are committed to staying in our place. That’s what accommodationism was all about.

He swore it was George Washington Carver. Well, George Washington Carver was the peanut scientist, out of Tuskegee Institute. But he was the one that whites really knew about. He was not political in the sense that Booker T. Washington was. He was the scientist. He was the icon that white America really put up for young blacks. Be like George Washington Carver. And we argued about that. And we even went through—I said, “Well, look. This is a publishing house. You’ve got to have a book here somewhere that covers Booker T. Washington and George Washington Carver.” We sent secretaries all over the building and everything. In 1968, there was not a book that we could find that had that clarification in there. I said, “Look, I’m the writer, I’m the author. It’s Booker T. Washington, trust me.” When it came out it was George Washington Carver. George Washington Carver, in the front of the book, you check it out.

6-00:49:33
Wilmot:

How maddening.

Edwards:

George Washington Carver. And what that told me, was again, I don’t care whether you’re talking about Marxism and socialism, whether you’re talking about professors who are open to bringing black protest students onto the campus and giving them free room and board to continue to their studies after they’ve been kicked out by black institutions in the South for demonstrating—this guy was as liberal as they came, but in the end, he knew best.

And again, that taught me something about even whites who were on our side, supportive of us. And going back to *The God That Failed*, and Harold Cruse and *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*. And then what I saw in terms of, yeah, we don’t mind bringing the black students on board, but when you start talking about professors—you know. We don’t mind giving you money to desegregate the South and desegregate up—but when you start talking about the jobs in the North and the working class—working class are not with you on that. That again came down to, jeez, at Cornell, I was a Woodrow Wilson fellow, they brought me in, they let me write about what I wanted to write about, even though initially I’m convinced that they thought, “Well, this is just a Negro jock, a black jock, who doesn’t know anything else to write about so he wants to write about sports. This is sociology, this is not physical education.” I think that was probably the disposition.

And then this editor at the Free Press. Nice guy, liberal, progressive. But in the end, he knew best. In the end, in the movement, the whites that we were allied with, knew best. And when, my final experience in that regard, just to finish this up, was when SNCC began to talk about black power, and black control of black institutions in the black community, and black leadership in the black movement, And began to move away from, “We’re in this together. We shall overcome and we’re going to take money and direction from our

white supporters.” Whites peeled away from SNCC like a peel being pulled away from a banana. I mean they abandoned the movement wholesale. If they could not control it, they did not want any part of it.

That was just instance after instance after instance, where that dawned on me, ranging from this discussion that I had with the editor over Booker T. Washington versus George Washington Carver, to discussions that I had with colleagues at San Jose State when they were bringing in those black students, and I asked, “What about black professors, and administrators and coaches, too?” The discussions with Angela and Fania Davis over the communist party and the black movement. My discussions with Harold Cruse and all the rest. Right up to my dissertation, and the fact that, hey, it’s an all-white faculty, there was no way that I was going to convince them of the legitimacy and credibility of a dissertation that literally overturned and challenged what was then believed to be, not just prevailing, but settled fact about sport developments, and issues at the interface of race, sport, and society.

6-00:53:22

Wilmot: Let me ask you a question. At this time—this was 1969, I believe.

Edwards: 1969, 1970, yeah.

Wilmot: And at this time, you had already been a faculty member at San Jose State, and then you had returned to finish your dissertation. Having completed your dissertation, what did your job horizon, your professional outlook, look like? Coming from Ithaca with a Ph.D. in sociology.

6-00:53:49

Edwards: There was a poster on the bulletin board at Cornell, which was from the black schools, saying, “Completing your dissertation? Teach at a traditionally black university.” And so, that was my initial ideal. And I talked to people at Howard, I talked to people at Tuskegee, I talked to people at Morehouse. “Oh, we’ll get back in touch with you. We’ll get back in touch with you.” Even had some people contact people at these universities. Only one got back in touch with you, that was the guy from Howard, and he said, “Hey, Dr. Edwards, the United States Congress gives us our money. We bring you on the faculty here, that’s just not going to work. That’s not going to work out. Things may change. Keep in touch. Let us know what the deal is.”

That was the one and only time in my life that I applied for a job. I’ve never applied for a job in my life, other than that one instance. I didn’t apply here. I didn’t apply at the 49ers. I didn’t apply for the job I had in the commissioner’s office of Major League Baseball. I didn’t apply for the job that I had as a consultant with the NBA. I didn’t apply for the job at San Jose State. I never applied for a job, except in one instance, and that was to the traditional black colleges, and two of them I never heard from again. And one guy just told me

straight out, “Hey, Congress gives us our money, man, we can’t hire you. You’re too big, you’re too heavy for us here. You were behind the 1968 demonstration in Mexico City and The Revolt of the Black Athlete. I would have to go up and explain that to somebody. I can’t hire you.”

6-00:55:46

Wilmot: Do you know who you spoke with then at Howard?

Edwards: I don’t remember his name.

Wilmot: But he was like a dean?

Edwards: He may have been a dean or department chair. Sociology. Something tells me Jones—maybe he was even the president. Somebody by the name of Jones, I believe. You’re talking about 1969— that was, what thirty, forty years ago. Dr. Robin Williams, who was on my committee at Cornell, got a call from Cal, asking if he thought I would be interested in teaching at Cal. And this was in the wake of the Third World Strike. And Troy Duster and Bob Blauner and Dave Matza and Arlie Hochschild, Bill Kornhauser. A lot of people said, “Hey, look, let’s go out and get the best person that we can, who can come in and teach and get this high profile issue off the table.” So that’s the auspice under which I wound up at the University of California at Berkeley.

6-00:57:01

Wilmot: Do you remember your interview?

Edwards: I never had an interview. I came in and signed the papers.

Wilmot: Wow.

Edwards: I never did an interview. I never did an interview.

Wilmot: What were the initial terms of your coming here? Were you coming to an assistantship?

Edwards: An assistant. My paperwork said, “Assistant Professor, tenure track.” That’s what my paperwork said. That’s what my contract said. Subsequently, I found that somebody here, in the Chancellor’s office, in Chancellor Bowker—Chancellor Heyns’ office—because [Roger W.] Heyns was the Chancellor at the time—told the FBI that I was hired on a strictly temporary basis. Even though my contract with the university said, “Assistant Professor, tenure track.”

Now, there was a communication disconnect between the Chancellor's office and the department, or this was something that came to the department later, when the FBI found that I had been hired here. Because Ronald Reagan, who at the time was Governor, came out and said, "It's hiring people like Harry Edwards and Angela Davis that has gotten the University of California system in trouble, and why the people of California are losing faith in the university." So, right out the chute, with Reagan, and then Attorney General Meese, and the FBI, dealing directly with the Chancellor's office, my situation was on the edge.

A month after I was here, Chancellor Heyns, along with the athletic director, and the football coach, and the basketball coach, called a meeting with me at Chancellor Heyns' house. I believe it was either right off campus, or on campus, I forget where it was. But we met at his house. They told me to be there at 7:00. When I got there, everybody else was already there and had been there for some time, because there were empty coffee cups around where they were sitting. And I was only there for about fifteen minutes. They talked about, "We were very reluctant to hire you here"—this is Chancellor Heyns—"we did not know that this was going to be the issue that it has become. And what we need to know from you is what are your intentions as a member of the faculty of the University of California at Berkeley?" I said, "To meet my committee responsibilities, to teach my classes, and more specifically, to incite my students to think." They looked at each other and said, "Well, we think we've heard enough. Thank you very much." I got up, walked out, and from that point on, it was one issue after another.

Wilmot: We'll stop there.

Interview 4: November 22, 2005

Edwards 07 11-22-05.wav

7-00:00:00

Wilmot: Good morning, happy birthday to you.

Edwards: Well, thank you very much. I deserve it. Sixty three years, given what I've done to the world and what the world has done to me, I feel pretty good on balance.

Wilmot: Do you have special plans today?

Edwards: Any special plans? Yeah, I intend to continue with my day and make it as productive as possible. As far as my 63rd birthday, I think sixty three years is special enough. I may have a glass of brandy or cognac or something like that, just to tip a little glass for all of the brothers that ain't here, but beyond that, no, I have nothing special planned. And I'm trying to avoid those who have something special planned for me.

Wilmot: Something special in store for you.

Edwards: Right.

Wilmot: Good luck with that. Well, let's see. Our last interview we had discussed your dissertation. And I'd almost gotten you to Berkeley, and I just wanted to ask quickly—you mentioned the Third World Strike at Berkeley was one of the primary reasons that you were courted and brought to Berkeley.

Edwards: Yes, yes.

Wilmot: Can you first tell me a little bit more about that, and then tell me what did you hear about it?

Edwards: Well, I didn't know anything about it until Robin Williams called me into his office. He was a professor who was on my committee at Cornell University, and he said, "Berkeley is very interested in having you come there and teach." And I said, "Well, that's interesting, because I haven't applied to Berkeley. I haven't applied anywhere for a job, in point of fact." In point of fact, I had never applied for a job in my life anywhere, because I know what it means when I walk through the door. And so, at the end of the day, I said, "Well, if they're interested, I'll go out and interview for the job." I said, "But I would

just as soon keep it very, very quiet, because I don't want to attract any more attention in this situation than I have to." I was already at that point a volatile personality, and all of a sudden Edwards is going to Berkeley, and it's in all the newspapers, and people start, you know, having all kinds of second thoughts, and "What is he going to do, and jeez, what, this is like throwing a match into a powder keg."

I mean, you get all those kinds of reactions. So I said, "Just keep it quiet and I'll go out and talk to the people and see exactly what they're interested in." So I came out and literally signed a contract at that time. And it was not until after I had signed the contract that I learned that the real mode of force in bringing me here was the fact that many of the sociology students were involved in the Third World Strike, many of the professors in sociology were supportive of the Third World Strike, and they had one African American professor in the department, who was Troy Duster. They felt that they were more than justified, given the number of students that they have, in having two, that one was not enough. So that was the auspices under which I came to Berkeley. But it became much more complicated after that.

07-00:03:22

Wilmot:

Well, let's talk about that some more. What had you heard about the Third World Strike? I know there were other Third World movements, San Francisco and across the nation.

Edwards:

Yes, right. There was a Third World Strike, Third World movement at Cornell University that wound up on the cover of *Time* magazine, with the students coming out of Willard Straight Hall with the guns, after they had been assaulted by fraternity types, and you know, John Wayne hero types on campus, who were intending to dislodge them by force from Willard Straight Hall after they had called the strike and literally took over Willard Straight Hall, the student union, in protest of the failure of the university to accommodate minority student interests and program.

So, there was a movement at Cornell. There was certainly a movement at San Francisco State, which brought Hayakawa to the fore as the president of the university, and ultimately he parlayed that through the conservative movement to a senatorial seat. So, the Third World movement strikes, boycotts, building takeovers were widespread across the country. I also knew that there was some action going on at Berkeley in that regard, but I did not know until I got here that my position arose out of that movement.

07-00:04:48

Wilmot:

What were these movements about? What was at issue here?

Edwards:

They were basically about local politics more than anything else, because it really did not speak to national coalitions around national issues. But what

you did find was student movements and local communities galvanizing around those student movements. So, you found Latinos, Asians, African Americans, Native Americans, progressive whites, coming together in coalitions to compel changes in curriculum, academic seating as it were, who was on a tenure track, who was not on a tenure track, who belonged in the serious pool of faculty and administrative candidates, and who did not. They were looking to change all of that. But for the most part, these movements were local, even though there were a number of them. National conferences and national rallies around Third World community issues.

The reality was that despite the efforts of people such as Cesar Chavez, despite the efforts of the Brown Berets and the Black Panthers and so forth to come together, the reality was that the circumstances of the various communities and their interests beyond making inroads and to changing a very conservative, in many instances racist academic structure in the case of the colleges and the universities, and political structure in the cases of local communities and states, there was very little that they really had in common. If you take rural, largely, newly migrant—I don't say immigrant, because they're migrants when you look at Latinos coming over from Mexico to here. Colorado, Nevada, California, New Mexico, Texas, that was all part of Mexico prior to it being stolen fair and square by the United States. So, newly migrant people with language differences, having coalitions with substantially urban blacks, who have a whole different set of problems, that was a difficult one to put together, but on campuses they did come together in coalitions to force issues in terms of academia and hiring.

7-00:07:21

Wilmot:

What did you see as the catalyst for equal rights activism?

Edwards:

I think the greatest catalyst was a substantially bankrupt, largely deprecating, subordinating, academic structure that either ignored minorities, or depreciated their value in the campus situation to the extent that they felt not like students or faculty members, but they felt like guests on the college campus. They were isolated in many instances. In other instances, they were alienated. And a lot of it was by institutional tradition. It wasn't just the case of bad people. It was institutional tradition. So, as these things became more and more recognized by a broader and broader section of the campus community, particularly among the students and progressive faculty, you began to get these movements that caught on across the country, because the circumstances were so similar on these established, largely traditionally white campuses.

Wilmot:

The kinds of changes that were made in terms of curriculum—and I understand in your book, in your autobiography, that you were I think somewhat centrally involved with the Third World movement at Cornell University. In your opinion, what were the outcomes of these movements? I

know it varied from campus to campus. And then also, were the outcomes what had been intended?

7-00:09:31

Edwards:

No. The outcomes were not what had been intended in many instances. In other instances, the outcomes that were achieved were less than productive in terms of the projected goals. In many ways, the outcome of the Third World movements across the campuses in this country followed a path of co-optation and dilution, similar to integration, in the sense that the goal, from the black perspective, for example, of racial integration in America, was supposed to be two way, and mass. That is, black hotels would have white customers. White hotels would have black customers. Same with black restaurants, black housing areas, black—you know, it would be two-way. Blacks going into white institutions, whites going into black institutions. Instead, it was one way. And what was one-way was substantially individual, and by all deliberate speed. In other words, the slowest pace possible. So not only was it less than what was projected and sought, but what was achieved was diluted. That was simply the way that it was done because the mainstream had the power.

You also had a situation where the movement was substantially co-opted. Some of the very people who had been responsible for the perpetuation of segregation got at the head of the parade and took it in a direction different from what the masses of blacks had anticipated. Some of the most ardent supporters of segregation and the isolation of African Americans were unions. And yet unions became some of the biggest supporters of the integration movement, in the sense of giving money to integration organizations such as the NAACP and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and it went in an entirely different direction than what many blacks expected to go in. The same happened with regard to the Third World strike. When the Third World strikes across this country occurred, there most certainly was the expectation that there would be African American Studies departments, Native American Studies departments, Latin American Studies departments. But at the same time, there was also the expectation that African American history would be integrated into the history program.

You can look and see where you have Russian Studies departments or Slavic Studies departments, but when you read the history of World War II, they don't write the Russians out for that reason. You find that integrated into the regular history program. We expected W. E. DuBois. We expected other African American sociologists to be integrated into the Sociology Department, not to have just African American sociologists and others covered over in African American Studies. So, there was really two prongs. What you really ended up with was African American Studies, Native American Studies, Latin American Studies, Women's Studies to a substantial degree coming out of that too, because that was part of the movement, but when you got into the

“regular curriculum,” you did not find any substantial change in terms of how those areas of interests were integrated into the mainstream academic offering.

What some departments did, and what students oftentimes demanded, was not just Women’s Studies department, but that more women be hired in sociology. Not just African American Studies, but that more blacks be hired in English and anthropology, psychology, and so forth. And so, what one found was that, in large part, the mainstream academic institutions capitulated to the demands of Third World movements on campus by establishing those focus departments—African American Studies, Women’s Studies, and so forth—but then they isolated them. They found themselves being underfunded, undersupported, and what you ended up in the final analysis with was, for all practical purposes, these intellectual, academic bantustans, where their existence was literally year to year.

You found all kind of ruses to sustain the tenuousness of their existence. For example, a disproportionate number of the faculty members who were assigned to African American Studies, Latin American Studies, Women’s Studies, had dual appointments. You were in African American Studies and English, you were in African American Studies and anthropology, you were in African American Studies and philosophy, or African American Studies and some other department. And when it came down to getting tenure, you got tenure not in African American Studies, but in your base department. Or you got tenure in a combination of African American Studies and your base department. It was only under those circumstances that you saw that kind of dual citizenship, if you will, on campus. So, again, it is something that evolved in a way that was different, that what the people active in the Third World movement had projected and desired, and what was achieved was watered down and diluted.

07-00:15:38

Wilmot:

While we’re on this subject, I know that you were outside of the Black Studies department, the program at that time in early seventies, but do you have a perspective of what unfolded there? I mean, did you know about what was going on?

Edwards:

There were all kinds of rumors going around, as you saw people who were active in establishing the department essentially being forced out. As you saw people coming in, being brought into the department, who had a more abiding commitment to and regard for established academic criteria of excellence and merit. There were all kinds of rumors about transitions in the department and where it was going. The price of stability in the department. The price of stature, academically, in the community for the department was apparently the dismissal, or at least the encouragement, to leave by those who established the department, and who taught economics classes based on the economics of the traditional black community integrating, not just Keynesian economics and

capitalist economics, but the underworld and underground economy, the welfare economy, and how this impacted the lives of people in very distressed circumstances in many instances.

That clearly was not something that the university was interested in or particularly encouraged, although there were classes being taught like that, where they had individuals who were, for example, welfare mothers, come in and talk to classes about how do you exist on the underside and the lower end of American society. Not these platitudes about the socioeconomic ladder, and how hard work and competitiveness and so forth will enable you to move up to middle class if your parents are working class, and to upper middle class if your parents are middle class, and this presumption of progression intergenerationally, but how do you live after intergenerational welfare status, where you have just enough to subsist, and not enough to get the kind of support that you need in order to actually begin to make progress as a family or as an individual. So, the university clearly did not want that.

As this began to disappear from the scene of Ethnic Studies, this type of heuristic presentation and analysis. As this began to leave the scene, you began to get traditional academic types in African American Studies. Now I'll tell you a nice story. I wasn't traditional enough. Because at one point, it was very clear that Sociology had no intention of giving me tenure. And as a consequence, I was literally encouraged by the individual who at that time was the chair of the Sociology Department, Leo Lowenthal, to accept a position that had been verbally discussed with me, as far as moving from sociology over to African American Studies. I didn't care. I really didn't care. I would just have as soon been in African American Studies.

But then some issues emerged. One, there was a problem with me leaving sociology, and probably a substantial population of students leaving sociology as well, given that I was teaching five and six and seven hundred students a class. That those students would probably end up in African American Studies. Secondly, if those kinds of populations of students were in African American Studies, if one professor brought in, say, two thousand students a year, into African American Studies, and any substantial minority of them ended up majoring in African American Studies, then the university had some major issues with how do they continue this downgrading of African American Studies.

The third problem was, I found out, that—I was told by the person who at that time was chair of African American Studies, Bil Banks, “I know we discussed that, I know that this was something that was on the table, but that's all changed.” And I said, “Well, what's the problem?” And he said, “Well, we don't have an office for you.” I said, “Hey, that's no problem. I don't need an office.” I said, “My students are following me from class. We're setting up in the classroom for an hour after the course is supposed to be over, if there's nobody else coming in.” I said, “I don't need an office. Maybe we won't get

an office until next year, but I'll take the position." And finally, he just said, "Hey," he said, "Harry, I can't offer you the position. I don't have the authority to offer you the position." I said, "You can't offer me the position that we discussed?" He said, "Yeah, it's as simple as that." And so the complications came into it. They were moving in toward a traditional status, but I guess I wasn't traditional enough. The decision, I think, was already in the mix. In point of fact, I know that that decision was made right after I signed the contract to teach here. That I would not be given tenure, that my position here was strictly temporary, according to the FBI documents that I got. And that decision, that statement, was made to the FBI by the Chancellor's office, and whether it was Ira Heyman or Chancellor Heyns is neither here nor there. But one of them made that statement. I do know this. It was not the janitor who told the FBI that "Harry Edwards is on the faculty here, and his position is strictly temporary." "Temporary" in academia means you are there to teach a course, you are not tenure contract. My contract with the university said, "Assistant professor, tenure track." That is not temporary.

So at the end of the day, the decision was made, in the wake of Governor Reagan coming out and saying right after I had signed a contract, "The reason that the University of California is in trouble in terms of the legislature and in terms of its budgeting is because they continue to hire people like Harry Edwards and Angela Davis. They continue to let the students run amok." In the wake of all of that, and the FBI intercession into my career, it was already set that I would not get tenure at the University of California, so I understood when Bil Banks said, "Hey, man, I know we discussed it, but I didn't know how deep this thing ran. We don't have a position for you."

7-00:22:50

Wilmot:

What did you think of Bil Banks and this kind of strategy—

Edwards:

I understood where he was coming from.

Wilmot:

--around the African American Studies department? What do you think about the way, the choices that he made?

Edwards:

That was his department. I was not in that department. If I'd have been in that department, I'd have done the same thing that I did in Sociology. I would have expressed what I felt about it. I thought it was ludicrous that more women were not being hired in the Department of Sociology. I didn't think it made any sense that Latinos and African Americans were not in the established pool of creditable candidates. I thought that that was ludicrous. And not only did I protest that, back in the 1970s, and even into the early 80s, the numbers of women that were being brought into the department and put in tenure track positions, and who were taken seriously in terms of their scholarship—not only did I protest that, but at a particular point, it got so ludicrous to me that I

just quit going to faculty meetings. In point of fact, my last twenty years there, I don't think I attended a single faculty meeting, because I thought it was a joke.

7-00:24:01

Wilmot:

Well, let's talk a little bit then about the Sociology Department when you joined it in 1971. Let's talk a little bit. What was the lay of the land? What did it look like?

Edwards:

Well, the department was split. The Third World Strike and some of the anti-war efforts and so forth had really split the department badly. The department in many ways was still reeling from the loyalty oath issues of the late 1950 and early 1960s. The House Un-American Activities Committee demanded that you sign a loyalty oath. And at places like Berkeley, that caused a lot of activity on campus. So, when the Third World Strike came about and people began to shout down speakers and to take over buildings and one thing or another, the department split. You had people on the left, you had people on the right, and then you had a handful of people in the middle trying to hold the department together. That was what I walked into.

And coming in under the auspices that I did, with substantial support from those professors who were perceived to be the progressives on the left, people like Arlie Hochschild and Troy Duster and David Matza and Bill Kornhauser and Bob Blauner. People of that political persuasion. And then, myself, being put on the successor to the House Un-American Activities Committee's list of sixty-five revolutionary subversives, speaking and lecturing on college campuses. When I walked into it, I essentially walked into an ongoing battle, clearly aligned on one side, even though all of that was going on before I even got here.

I think that my situation was substantially untenable from the outset. I walked into a split department, under auspices that, in and of themselves, were volatile and political. So, it wouldn't have made any difference how much I published, or where I published, or how many students I had, or how great a teacher I was, or how much I represented my area of expertise in terms of consulting and all of the rest—it wouldn't have mattered because there were people in my department who were determined that they were not going to give any quarter to the other side.

It was simply a political struggle from the outset, and a political struggle that I became very, very comfortable with. In point of fact, if there were not some political issues going on in the department, along those lines of fracture, my basic position was, "Hey, hey, what's wrong? What's going on here?" Because it was just that turbulent, and just that continually turbulent.

7-00:27:35

Wilmot:

How did that play out in interpersonal dynamics?

Edwards: People spoke to folks. Over the thirty years that I was in the department, there may have been four, maybe three occasions where one of my colleagues was in my office, irrespective of their political persuasion. I can't remember being in anybody's office, other than Troy Duster's occasionally. And it wasn't that I had a hostile attitude, most certainly not toward people on the left. It's just that, hey, I would come here, take care of my classes, meet with my students, and I really didn't have time to visit. If I had a two o'clock class, the class would go, say, from two until four. At five o'clock, if there was another coming in, we're probably still sitting there, because the students would continually ask questions, discussion would go on. Then I've got an entourage of twenty-five or thirty students who are following me from the class. And when I get up to my office, the ones who left, I find out that there may be a hundred of them sitting along the wall, waiting to come in to talk about some specific issue that they have, something that they want to discuss, something that they want to deal with in detail.

I never had a lot of time to hang out and socialize. And after a day like that, dealing with six, seven hundred students, hey, as soon as I could get out of here, hey, I was gone. So, most of the time, as from my perspective, I was into a lot of socializing, principally because, to use an old saw from the *Godfather* series, "It had absolutely nothing to do with business." So, I just didn't do it. And was quite happy like that. And apparently, everybody else was as well.

7-00:30:00

Wilmot: Did you have allies within the department?

Edwards: Oh, yeah. I mean there were things that I was in total agreement, like I said, Arlie Hochschild, Troy Duster, Bob Blauner, David Matva, Bill Kornhauser—these are quality people, who I talk to occasionally even today. Very good relationships, allies, anything they wanted me to do I was there for them, and so forth.

There were people in the department that detested me being there, and that's okay, too. Like I said, I've always taken tremendous pride in being disliked by the right people. So I had no problem with that whatsoever and it didn't bother me. There were situations where I'd hear people talking in the hall, and I would turn a corner, and I would see somebody look up, and all of a sudden a door would slam, a foot would go past a door case, which was cool with me. And so I had no problem with that. And on top of it, in terms of the kinds of measures of value with your colleagues, the kinds of measures of status with your colleagues--

7-00:31:20

Wilmot: What are those?

Edwards: Merit increases, appointments to particularly powerful committees, the graduate curriculum committee, the committees that review the work and so forth of people that are up for tenure and everything—I never got any of that. Merit increases, I actually asked them, “Please, do not—I’m not interested in a merit increase.” “Well, every three years, you’ve got to come up for review.” “Go ahead and give me the review, but I don’t want the merit increase. First of all, it’s only going to mess up my taxes.” And I said, “The second point is I don’t care about what my colleagues think about me because I know where many of them are coming from. It does not bother me. It’s not important to me. They don’t control anything that I value. I can’t afford to. It doesn’t make any sense. And as far as merit increases are concerned, I don’t want a merit increase. Don’t bring up me up for a mer—if you have to review me, go ahead and review me. And whatever decision they come to, it’s alright with me. I don’t care, because it doesn’t matter. I couldn’t care less. Whatever it is, whatever the amount is. Take it. If I get a merit increase and you have to pass it on to me, I donate it to whatever charity the department feels is appropriate.”

And once, I think they brought me up for a merit increase, and I didn’t get the merit increase, they gave me half a merit increase. And that’s when I sat down and wrote a letter, explaining my position, and stating flat out in the letter, because of the clownish charade of tenure review and merit increase review that has become ubiquitous in this department and many sectors of this university, I am donating this one half merit increase to the *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, our graduate student sociology journal, in the name of Homey the Clown. And I sent that letter to the provost and to the department chair, and made sure that whatever merit was coming my way, that that money went to the *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*.

7-00:33:40

Wilmot: What year was that?

Edwards: I don’t remember. I don’t remember what year it was.

Wilmot: Did you get merit increases subsequently?

Edwards: No, no. I don’t know. You know what? I think I came up for review. I don’t know whether or not I got a merit increase. I really don’t. I couldn’t tell you today how much I was making at the time that I retired. I have no idea what I was making at the University of California at Berkeley in terms of salary.

I remember when Troy came on as the chair, I was promoted to full professor. I had been given a position in the office of the commissioner of Major League Baseball, as a consultant to them on minority issues in sports. I had been given

a staff consulting position with the NFL and with the San Francisco 49ers, again on issues of diversity and minority programs, both for coaches and for players. And I was also working with the NBA. I had another clients, again dealing with diversity and other kinds of issues, including the FBI, the local police departments, the sheriff departments, many of whom were the same people who had been running me around the country during the 1960s.

In point of fact, {Dick Hale?}, who was the agent in charge in San Francisco and who got the order from {Cecil Pool?} to run me down in terms of my draft status, said that a lot of what they did didn't make a lot of sense in retrospect, but at the time, they really sincerely felt, like my FBI file said, I was armed and dangerous. So, I had all of that stuff going.

Troy Duster became the chair of the department, and he said, "Hey, before this guy gets to be nominated for something that's so far out that we're going to be embarrassed, why don't we just make him a full professor?" And that's what happened at that time, the department voted me a full professor. I have no idea what that meant in terms of salary. I have no idea what that meant in terms of my status and responsibilities. And to be quite honest with you, I never went to a faculty meeting, so I never found out.

7-00:36:10

Wilmot:

You did tell me that you didn't serve—there's what I come to learn is a kind of citizenship in the community, university community, and the department community which involves sitting on different committees, and that type of work. And you did not function in that type of--

Edwards:

I was never appointed to anything.

Wilmot:

So does that mean that you don't have a perspective on the way that the Sociology Department, other than your own case, hiring and promotions--

Edwards:

--oh, I have a good perspective--

Wilmot:

--diversity, gender, and ethnic diversity entered into hiring and promotions?

Edwards:

Yeah, I have a very good perspective.

Wilmot:

You want to share that?

Edwards:

Yeah, I have a very good perspective. I think that over the years, the Sociology Department was reflective of the University of California more generally. I think that a lot of it has to do with cronyism. I think it's the same

kind of thing that we see that runs right up to the top of operations in American society. I think it's the same thing that I saw in sports. I don't think it's accidental today, for example, that cronyism has dictated, I mean this is how Mike Brown got to be head of FEMA, and that fiasco. This is how Harriet Miers got to be a Supreme Court nominee under the Bush Administration. It's cronyism. Comfort zones and cronyism outstrips competence almost every time. And the reality is that that had a lot to do with who got what, and who gets what in academia. And anybody who tells you anything else is either very, very naïve, or just flat out being disingenuous.

The reality is that who gets a position and who gets tenure is influenced as much by cronyism as it is by anything having to do with merit. How else does one explain the dearth of women during that period of time, in the 1960s and 70s and so forth, in sociology and throughout this university? How else does one explain that women and minority faculty, to this day, make less money than white males of comparable training, years on the staff and faculty, and other kinds of objective considerations, such as publications and so forth? How else does one explain coming into the university and finding white male after white male who are the dumbest teachers, the greatest sleep inducers since Nightol, but they can continue to move right on up the status structure and so forth, and you find minorities who "don't qualify," who are not "Berkeley caliber." Well, what is Berkeley caliber? Some of the stuff that I've seen as Berkeley caliber, quite frankly, I found embarrassing. But that's just me talking.

There are also some great professors here. There are some tremendous teachers here. There are some phenomenal researchers and academics here. That makes this a great university. But being white and male doesn't give you an edge, doesn't give you a monopoly on qualifications to teach at the University of California at Berkeley, or in the Department of Sociology. You don't have to be on top of the cesspool to know it's there, you can smell it a mile off. So what I'm saying is it's not an issue of being in on every single case and saying that, jeez, this didn't go right, that didn't go right. I'm saying that there is a systemic bias in American academia, of which is Berkeley is a part, that still discriminates, to this day, against women and minorities in traditional academic departments.

It wasn't that I didn't participate in committee meetings and so forth, and therefore I didn't know what was going on—come on. I walked into that department so many times, and went to faculty meetings in my early days there, holding my nose. It finally just got to the place it just wasn't worth my time to go. You knew that the decisions were made at the poker game the night before, or at somebody's house party, or in a bunch of back room telephone calls. And what was on the table and being debated and discussed had nothing to do with anything, because everybody had already taken their position. Why go in and participate in something like that? And that was simply the way it was.

7-00:41:44

Wilmot: Did you not see it to be of value to become part of that social fabric, so that you were part of those faculty decisions?

Edwards: No, no, no.

Wilmot: Did you see that to be useful at all?

Edwards: No, not from my perspective. Not from my perspective. I didn't have that kind of time. I didn't have that kind of patience. I mean, if somebody's up for tenure, let's look at what it is they have done, let's determine the extent to which it fits into the curricular and research offering and direction of the department, and let's come up with a candid and honest assessment of this individual. And if we can't do this, why waste time in some back room deal, trying to work out whether or our crony or their crony is going to get into this. That's dishonest, that's disingenuous.

You know, one thing old Hank Kissinger was right about—I mean, he was wrong about Vietnam, he was wrong about so many things during his course of involvement as Secretary of State in the Nixon Administration. But when it came time to go back to Harvard, one of the press reporters asked him, “Mr. Kissinger, you've been away from Harvard now for a period of time that makes it mandatory that you either come back or lose your tenured professor status. Do you intend to go back to Harvard, or do you intend to stay in the State Department, where you are confronted with the Vietnam War, the Middle East, with relations with China?” He said, “I think that I'll stay as head of the State Department, because the politics here are not as brutal as in academia, where the people are so petty and there's so little at stake, that the politics become excessively brutal. I think I'll stay here and try and work with the Middle East and China and the Vietnam War.” And he was absolutely correct. That was the one thing that he was correct about.

And I had so many things on my plate, in terms of my classes, in terms of my writing, in terms of articles that I was dealing with, journals such as *The Journal of Sport and Society* that I was an editor of, working with the NFL and the NBA, National Basketball Association, Major League Baseball, giving at that time sixty to seventy lectures a year, invited lectures on other campuses, and at conferences and symposiums, the American Sociological Association symposium, for example, where I gave the first organized section on the sociology of sport. I had so much, I just didn't have time for it. It was a complete and total waste of time. And it wasn't going to change anything any way, because half of the faculty in sociology didn't listen to anything that I said. And the half that did listen, my vote didn't make any difference putting in with theirs, in terms of the outcome. It still was 10-10.

7-00:45:10

Wilmot:

Let me ask you a question, and this is the last question on this topic, which is about, how—well, it's two questions. First is, did you participate, or did you try to bring in more faculty of color or women faculty?

Edwards:

Oh, absolutely.

Wilmot:

And what did that look like?

Edwards:

We would get circulars from the chair of the department saying, "We're looking to fill a position and so forth and so on, and we want a diversity of candidates." And I would automatically pass that on to the Association of Black Sociologists, the ABS. I would talk to people like James Blackwell, "Do you know of anybody? Do you know of anybody that would want to come here and deal with this situation?" I would be very honest with him about the situation that I was in, and that my situation was unique, so don't take the scuttlebutt about Edwards and his situation at Berkeley to be the norm for what you can expect here as a black assistant, ladder ranked, tenure tracked professor. You want to talk to Troy Duster, who will give you a much different kind of perspective on it. I'm in the media far too much. I'm too high profile. I've got too many things going on. I've got too much of a history coming in here. But there are young black men and women out there who would make perfect candidates for the Berkeley Sociology Department. I cannot think of a single, solitary one that ever ended up in the final pool.

7-00:47:15

Wilmot:

To what do you attribute that?

Edwards:

That people just felt that they didn't have a chance. That they were not capable, competent, Berkeley caliber. I don't know of a single, solitary one. In point of fact, when I left the department, as far as tenured professors were concerned, Troy Duster and I were still the only two black professors. And that had been the case since I came in 1970, and I was the first in the department other than him, and he came in 1965. So at the end of the day, you know, traditions die hard.

And I think that the department is now more open and forthcoming in terms of that kind of thing, than probably it has ever been. But there are so many people that have to sign off on this thing up the line that you really don't even know how much sway at the department level, how much power there is at the department level.

Somebody told me, "Well, Dr. Edwards, when we grant tenure, this is a million-and-a-half-dollar commitment over a thirty-year career, and the university has to be very clear that this is what is going to be—" You know,

and I'm sitting up there thinking, "This is a million-and-a-half-dollar commitment over a thirty—give me a break!" So I don't know where that thing ultimately ended up, whether the provost could sit down and say, "We're not going to accept this," or somebody, the Dean of Letters and Science can say, "We're not going to accept this." I don't know where it broke down. I have no idea. And know that when my denial of tenure was reversed, it didn't come from the department. It didn't come from the dean. It didn't come from the provost. It came from the Chancellor.

7-00:49:15
Wilmot:

Let's get to that in just one minute. Was there ever a prospective faculty person of color or a female faculty prospective that you championed through that process?

Edwards:

No, because you didn't—I wasn't in any position to champion anybody [laughing]. In point of fact, I believe to the extent that they came with my recommendation, they may have been hurt—at some level, whether it was at the level of the department or the dean or the chancellor. If they came in with my recommendation, their chances would probably have been diminished. So this is why I would go to somebody like James Blackwell, the president of American Black Sociologists Association, and have him submit some people—"We have some brilliant young candidates here and I understand you have an opening in your department in organizational change, or institutions, and this is a person we would like you to consider." So I went that way as opposed to me going to the table with something, because I mean you know—give me a break. How serious was that going to be? When they'd say, "Well, Edwards submitted this." You can forget it.

7-00:50:30
Wilmot:

My next question is about curricular transformation. And of course, your tenure case is in some ways very central to that question, so we can either go and talk about that tenure case or— Mostly, I wanted to ask you just about how when you came to the department, how was the department, how were members of the department thinking about sociology as a discipline? And what was in the environment of sociology, and what did you actually think about and talk about? And teach?

7-00:51:05
Edwards:

The department was split in a number of ways. You had people who were basically interested in theory. People like Lowenthal. And people like Kingsley Davis. People like Guy Swanson. Then you had people who were more quantitative. Kingsley Davis had some of that going for him. But you had others who thought if you couldn't quantify it, it didn't exist. And then you had a whole section that was more qualitative, who were interested in ethnography, who were interested in getting down on the street and finding out how people really live. I mean you're talking about people who were along the lines of Erving Goffman, Durkheim. People who wanted to know,

how do people really live in their day-to-day lives. And these qualitative people were the people I found a natural alliance with because one of the things that I have always done as a scholar activist is to try to link up whatever the academic and quantitative and theoretical perspectives were, to what was actually going on down on the ground.

And one of the things that I found is that you found people in academia who never left the library, who had these almost pristine, perfect, logical paradigms that were absolutely irrelevant to anything going on outside of their front door. And particularly in areas that I was interested in: race and ethnic relations; sociology of sport; the family, in many instances. A lot of this stuff had nothing to do—all of their paradigms and their multi-varied analyses and all of the rest of that stuff—had nothing to do with what was actually happening, for example, in sport, or in race and ethnic relations.

I got to the point where I had just determined that if you want to know anything about race and ethnic relations in American society, what's going on today, much less what might be coming up the road, the last thing you want to do is ask a sociologist. Because there was this period of time, coming out of the fifties and into the sixties, where there was a tremendous thrust towards quantitative, they were going to become more scientific, and so everybody, everything—show me your tables, tell me about your multi-varied analysis, show me how this breaks down in terms—and at some point, it just didn't make any sense any more, although it was beautiful to look at. The reality is that social life is messy. The reality is that social life is something where you've got to go out, put on your waders, roll up your sleeves, put on your gloves, and if you're really going to get serious, maybe even your foul weather gear, and get down with people and find out: what are they thinking? What are they doing? How do they see the world? And what can we learn from this in terms of broader kinds of paradigms, understandings, theories, and so forth?

My natural allies were in that qualitative arena. The department oftentimes, where everybody has to vote on something, everybody has to determine what is going to be the curriculum of the department. There was a constant struggle going on there. How much is going to be quantitative? How much is going to be qualitative? What's going to be our curricular offerings? And oftentimes, where you had students coming in and taking the qualitative courses, because they could sink their teeth into it, they were down on the ground with the action. The books were germane and relevant to what they thought they may have seen or experienced themselves. As opposed to, "Let's quantify this and after we break down the multi-varied analysis, then we'll talk about what this might mean in terms of some spectrum of behavior and so forth."

So there were all these struggles going on. So my basic position was, there's a place for qualitative sociology, there's a place for quantitative sociology. You can't be a respectable and competent qualitative sociologist unless you can

read the tables and understand the statistical analyses and so forth, and do the statistical analyses. There's a place for those who indulge in pure theory, sociology theory, who don't go quantitative or qualitative, because they're fundamentally not interested in down on the ground research. They're interested in theoretical paradigms that might be useful in down on the ground research. So, I think there's a place for all of that. But there was not mutual respect among all sectors, in terms of what other people were doing.

By the time that I had been in the department two or three years, I didn't care what anybody thought about what I was doing. It didn't matter. Because I didn't care what they were doing. All I cared about was their right to do it.

7-00:56:55

Wilmot:

What do you mean when they say that, just that they have the right to do that work?

Edwards:

They had the right to do that work, and whatever they did was fine. And if they did it well and it was competent and it was well regarded as far as that circle of people that were involved with that, then as far as I'm concerned, that's cool. I didn't have any problem with it. But as far as me caring about what they did, and them caring about what I did, I couldn't have cared less. And the bottom line of course is that your colleagues is where you're supposed to draw your sustenance from, your support, your encouragement, your legitimacy, your status, and all the rest. But I found out that once you get into that bag, you're in deep trouble in a department that was split as badly as that one was. You're just in deep trouble.

I drew my sustenance, in terms of encouragement for my work, from all over the world. I mean, I communicated with people in the People's Republic of China, in South Africa, in London, in Japan, in Korea, in Copenhagen, who were interested in the Sociology of Sport and some of the things that I was writing, and how I was connecting with the family and politics and race relations, the women's movements, issues around homosexuality, and economics. They were interested. And so that's where I went for that kind of sustenance. What my colleagues thought about what I was doing—you'd go nuts trying to figure out what do they think I ought to be doing, especially since they're voting on whether or not I get promoted, whether or not I get a merit increase. By the time I had been in the department three or four years, I didn't care. It didn't matter. It didn't make any difference.

Edwards 08 11-22-05.wav

8-00:00:00

Wilmot:

I'd like to hear about your tenure case.

Edwards: My tenure case grew out of my political activities in the 1960s. My membership in the Black Panther Party, my organization of the Olympic Project for Human Rights, the perceived threat that I was to the institutional sport in American society from amateur and professional down to the collegiate levels. And someone, and I believe it was in the Chancellor's office, had told the FBI, according to my files, that I was hired here on a strictly temporary basis. That was the week after I had signed the contract. Because I had signed the contract, and it went up to {DIL?}, and then at that point, when it became public that I had signed the contract with Berkeley, I think that's when the FBI contacted the chancellor's department, or somebody from Ronald Reagan's office contacted the chancellor's department through the FBI. I don't know how it came down, but I know that when I got my FBI files through the Freedom of Information Act, there were a number of documents in there indicating that somebody in the hierarchy, the administrative hierarchy, most probably the chancellor's office, told the FBI that I was hired on a strictly temporary basis.

This was in 1970. I don't care what I did from that point on. The program was to either frustrate me into quitting and taking a job at some other university, or to simply so stifle any progress that I might have, that there would be a record that they could look back on and say, "Well, he didn't get this merit increase. He didn't get that promotion. He didn't do this. And yet, over the period from 1970 through 1977, I taught more students than any other faculty member. In terms of publications and number of publications—books, articles, and so forth—I published more than any other faculty member. In terms of invited lectures, I was averaging, I was *averaging*, over sixty invited lectures a year at other universities, the overwhelming majority of them dealing with the sociology of sport, my area of expertise.

In terms of consulting, I was consulting with professional sports teams. I was consulting with colleges in college and university athletic departments. I had a number of editorial boards that I was sitting on that published materials having to do with the sociology of sport both nationally and internationally. So, in terms of the academic pieces being in place, that was not an issue. But every time I came up for a merit increase or department review, there was something. "Oh, jeez. He's not publishing in refereed journals." Well, the sociology of sport was an area of academic interest that my dissertation substantially established. There were no refereed journals in the sociology of sport, to speak of. But I would think that any time you have things in the sociology of sports emerging—classes and theses and so forth—things emerging in the wake of the establishment of the field, irrespective of refereed journals, I would think that our academic colleagues at other universities who felt the field was sufficiently established that they would allow their students to do PhD theses and master's theses and so forth in it, would be sufficient review of the credibility of what I was doing as an academician.

And the fact that I sat on the review boards of such journals as the *Journal of Sport and Society*, didn't count because, hey, I sat on the board. So at the end of the day, there was a reason why I got less than stellar reviews, my work wasn't taken seriously and so forth. So, I didn't care about that. It was crystal clear. I had no stake in any of that. So, by the time tenure review came around, there was this side of the department that had determined that one, this is a guy, maybe he should be teaching at San Francisco State, as Leo Lowenthal told me. "Or maybe you should be teaching at Oregon State, or maybe one of the larger universities, but jeez, not—Sociology of Sport at Berkeley? I don't know anything about sport," as he stated—"I don't know anything about sport, but I don't think it's something that I find in the regular sociology curricular emphasis throughout the history of this great discipline." I said, "Hey, that's the problem. Nobody thought that the Sociology of Sport was worthy of investigation. Two-person and three-person social systems, triads and dyads are worthy of sociological investigation, but not a hundred million people watching a Super Bowl. There's something wrong with that picture." "Well, that's your opinion," as he told me, "That's your opinion." I said, "That's my opinion." That's my story and I'm sticking to it. So that was where my tenure thing came apart. And at the vote, there were nine for, ten against, and one abstention.

8-00:06:36

Wilmot:

At the--

Edwards:

At the department level.

Wilmot:

At the department level. And those were results were made—they were given to you, they were made public to you?

Edwards:

No. I read about it, I got a call from *The New York Times*. The chairman of the department, I forget who it was now--

Wilmot:

Yeah, who was it at that time?

Edwards:

John—I forget who it was at this point. But they didn't call me and tell me that I had been denied tenure. I got a call from *The New York Times*, asking me, "Dr. Edwards, what is your response to your denial of tenure?" And I laughed. I said, "Hey, I'm going to turn the lights out at the Department of Sociology at Berkeley. I'm going to be the last one to leave. I'm going to be here when the rest of them are gone." He said, "What do you mean by that?" "I mean they can't deny me tenure. That's what I mean by that. It's bogus. It's political. It's racist. It has nothing to do with my performance, competence, capability, or anything else that I've done in this department."

And that was laid out from the very first day I got here, when Chancellor Heyns called together the athletic director, the football coach, and the basketball coach. Didn't call in the soccer coach. Didn't call in the volleyball coach. Didn't call in the swimming or the diving coach. Didn't call in the baseball coach. He only called in the athletic director, the football coach, and the basketball coach—the people who had African Americans on their teams. Because they were convinced that this guy may come in here, and the next thing you know, we have these kids thinking that they're not getting an even deal here. And they weren't. They were graduating less than twenty-five percent of the athletes who came in here on athletic scholarship who were African American. I didn't know that at the time. But I knew, when I left that meeting, that this was a done deal. This is going to be just a straight out confrontation throughout my career at this university. But I was determined to stay here.

8-00:08:50

Wilmot:

When did you begin to suspect that the tenure would be contested in your case? Did you know prior to--

Edwards:

I had been here for two months when Chancellor Heyns called that meeting.

Wilmot:

Okay.

Edwards:

At that point, I knew what the deal was. I had been run all over the country since 1967. This was 1970. By the FBI, every local police department. I would go and give a lecture at a university, and I would have a full police escort from the airport to wherever I was giving a lecture, and back to the airport. I mean I would have a full police escort. And they weren't there to make sure that I got there safely. They were there to make sure that I got out of town.

The FBI, you know, I knew that my colleagues at San Jose State were collaborating with the FBI. My office mate at San Jose State was collaborating with the FBI. I knew that because I would say things to him, and that evening, even though what I told him was not true, I would have an entourage of people following me. And I knew, there's only one place that that could have come from. And I got to the place that I would tell people things just to see what would happen, because if they have a contact with the FBI or the local police, all I had to do was to look for them. So if I told somebody, "I have a meeting with Huey Newton tonight in Oakland." And knowing that I didn't have a meeting with Huey Newton tonight in Oakland. But when I left my house, going to Doggy Diner to get a hot dog, here are two police vehicles, unmarked, with three dudes each in them, following me to Doggy Diner. I knew there was only one place that could have come from. So I knew my office mate was working directly with the police. I also knew that

the FBI had people in my classes at San Jose State. So for three years, I knew what that situation was. So when I get here and the chancellor tells me to come in—I had no illusions about what I was dealing with. None whatsoever.

8-00:11:25

Wilmot:

Well, let me ask you another question about that. After learning that tenure had in effect, even though it was very close, been denied at the departmental level, what transpired after that?

Edwards:

Well, the first thing, in 1977, when the tenure issue came up and I was denied, students organized, they got about 10,000 signatures saying that this is an outrage, this makes absolutely no sense. They put these petitions together. My colleagues in the Sociology Department and across the university, said this doesn't make any sense. Some people in African American Studies. Russ Ellis, outside the department, Troy Duster most certainly, Arlie Hochschild, Bob Blauner, Matza, all these people, said, "Hey, this doesn't make any sense. This is wrong, this is just flat out wrong." None of that really had an impact. I found, because I had hired an attorney to really monitor and look into the dynamics of what was happening, and after he contacted the university's attorney and said, "Dr. Edwards is intending to fight this denial of tenure and I'm going to depose everybody," and demanded access to materials and records, and so forth and so on.

He began to tell me, "This runs much higher than your department." He told me, "It doesn't make any difference what your faculty colleagues are saying. It doesn't matter how many students organize and protest and strike. This one runs beyond the university." He said, "What we have to do is get your files through the Freedom of Information Act. There may be something in there that points to where the pressure is really coming from."

And this is where we got the files showing the contact between the FBI and the chancellor's office, which means it ran all the way to Washington, D.C. Now, in the *U.S. News and World Report* from April of 1977, they have this section in the front—I forget, they call it "Periscope" or something like that—and they had this section in there that said essentially that the situation regarding Dr. Edwards at University of California at Berkeley has come to the attention of the President of the United States. And the word from Washington is that he is acting favorably on Dr. Edwards situation. That was in the "Periscope" section of *U.S. News and World Report*. In my autobiography, I talk about that and I might even put the date of the publication. But the bottom line was not just that President Carter was very supportive of the situation, but that the Freedom of Information Act showed this collaboration between the chancellor's office and the FBI on purely political grounds, and the impact that this had in terms of a tenure vote at America's flagship public institution. That is what—

8-00:15:50

Wilmot: --is at issue here—

Edwards:

That's what was at issue, and that's what turned it around. And that is why it was the chancellor's office. Bowker was the chancellor at the time that it came up, but Heyns was the chancellor at the time that the whole mess was instituted. And it was Ira Heyman who wrote me the letter saying—a very curt, short statement: “Your work and your performance at Berkeley indicates that you merit and deserve tenure. Ira Heyman, Vice Chancellor.”

8-0016:40

Wilmot: So, in effect, you're casting this as a result of, not so much in terms of—basically, you're saying the university had to cover its—

Edwards:

--university had to cover its ass.

Wilmot:

Right. So it's not so much an issue of discrimination or curricular—

Edwards:

No, it's politics.

Wilmot:

--barriers to the canon transformation of the discipline. It might have been those issues at the departmental level. In effect, the way that this came down it was more an issue of the university covering its ass.

8-00:17:30

Edwards:

It was the university covering its ass, not the university looking around and saying, “Hey, this is a situation that's absolutely uncalled for, unjust, and therefore we're going to take corrective action.” It was a political situation and the university behaved politically. Because they did not want a fight where these documents, through the Freedom of Information Act, would come into court, and all of a sudden they have to come clean about who it was that had these conversations with the FBI about a “personnel issue,” as they like to say. And what impact did those conversations have on determining this tenure issue? And so they simply did the prudent thing, which is it say, “You have tenure.”

And it was the first time in the history of a major university where a denial of tenure, at the department level, had been reversed. And it wasn't because they all of a sudden liked me. And for the rest of my time here, there was no question in my mind what my status was on the campus [laughing], with the administration, with at least half my colleagues. So I mean, why fight those battles? Issues of merit increase and promotion and becoming—didn't matter to me. Couldn't have cared less. Couldn't have cared less, it just didn't matter.

What I cared about here were my students. I loved my students. I fell in love with my classes. And it was the most rewarding of all the things that I have done, whether it's organizing athletes or establishing the player programs for the NFL, or compelling the United States Olympic Committee to bring on women and minorities in its authority and decision-making positions, or whether it's establishing the minority coaches program with Bill Walsh in the National Football League, or dramatizing the depth of racism in sport and society through the Olympic Project for Human Rights. Of all of the things that I have been involved in and all of the things that I have pursued and accomplished, I think the greatest thing that I am proudest of, the thing that I enjoyed the most, the thing that I loved the most, was my teaching. I think that I was a good teacher.

8-00:20:20
Wilmot:

And what did you learn from teaching?

8-00:20:22
Edwards:

I learned a lot from teaching. I learned that young people are not just the future. I think we do them a disservice when we say they are the future. Young people are the here and the now. They bring so much to the table, in terms of honesty, in terms of curiosity, in terms of intellectual dexterity. They're not locked into the prescriptions and institutionalized definitions that burden older folks, that burden established folks. They're the life's blood of society here and now. And after you not just work with them, after you deal with them as people, you realize that this mass of folks out there who sign up for your class, who are pursuing a degree and so forth, they're people out there. They're human beings out there. Each one has a story and a history and a perspective and a future and an outlook. And I loved going through my lecture, and then, "Are there any questions?" Hands go up all over the place. "Dr. Edwards, here's what I think." "Well, here's what I feel about that." "What do you think—suppose we looked at it from this perspective."

I grew so much. I came to understand so much. I literally fell in love with my classes. I loved going in there, and when we had a class from 2:00 until 4:00, or from 10:30 until 12:00, and we're still sitting up there at 1:00 and 1:15, going over the issues of the day, going over the lecture and the points of view, and the perspectives and the readings, I mean I love that.

And in point of fact, that's the only thing that I really miss about my time, my thirty years here at Berkeley. I love my classes and I love my students. I found out something about young people. In generation after generation—people say, "Oh, jeez, kids have changed. It's not the same as it was thirty years ago." You know what? These young people come to this situation with the same things that generation after generation after generation of students have come to this situation with. They are hopeful. They are curious. They are aspiring. They have issues. They have questions. This idea that, "Jeez, kids aren't interested in education the way they used to be." That's nonsense. My kids

would be excited to come to class. Sometimes I'd get hung up in the sociology department because there was something going on that I couldn't get here, and after twenty minutes, you know a student is supposed to be able to get up and walk out of class without penalty and everything.

There was one time when I got hung up for like thirty-five minutes, almost forty minutes. I walked into the class—everybody is still there. I mean they're sitting there waiting. They say, "Well, we're going to go an hour over anyway, Dr. Edwards, so it doesn't matter, we just waited." I mean there are seven hundred people in Wheeler Auditorium.

It's kind of like, I was going to the airport with a guy that was associated with the NFL. I was dropping him off at the airport and we passed under this overpass on Highway 101 and there was all kind of graffiti and everything else up on that overpass. I mean people had wrote their names up there. And they know that it wasn't an adult that did that. Only thing that he knew was that there was a kid that did that. And he looked at that, "Look at this. Look at the way these kids defaced and messed this thing up. Kids are just out of control. They're not like they used to be." And I said, "Wait a minute. I mean, what does that say?" "I don't know what it says, but I know one thing. That is just absolutely uncalled—."

Now you could go within a mile or two of that very spot and find fifteen/twenty kids who can not only tell you what's up there and what's said, they can tell you who did it. They know exactly who did it. And all it was, is a kid crawling out over a freeway, sixty feet above a freeway, spray painting, and all they're really saying is that, "Hey, we're not just 'kids', they're some human beings down here. I'm here. I have something to say. I have a perspective. I have a world view." And this guy didn't know it. Couldn't read it. Didn't understand it. All he knew was that he hated it. Why? Basically, because a kid did it.

Now, we're driving down the highway—there are whiskey signs, there are advertisements for the girlie shows in Las Vegas, there's all kinds of stuff up there that nobody wants, not good for you, you can't use, cigarettes, all that kind of—not once did he say, "Look at this garbage." But when we looks up there and sees where some kid done crawled at over the freeway and put something up there, boy, he's against that. He's for throwing the book at 'em. He's for locking up for a year in juvie if they catch 'em with a spray can of paint. So, I learned from my kids that the young people in my classes, how far removed we are from them. And it astounds me to this day. You know, we have lied to them. We've lied to them. Not one young person makes the movies in Hollywood. The Arnold Schwarzenegger, *Terminator* movies, *Total Recall*, *Rambo*—I mean where you've got 25, 35, 45 people being murdered, shot down, killed. That's all made by adults.

It's telling them that violence is fun, violence can be comical, violence will make you a hero, violence is always useful. And the more violent the better. The more relentless and remorseless you are about violence, the bigger man you are. We've told them all of these lies. And then we turn around, "Jeez, these kids are killing each other. They're into guns. They're shooting each other. We look at all of the sex and the stuff in the movies and on television. Not one kid is doing that. But then we turn around, "Jeez, why is there so much pregnancy? Why is there so much illegitimacy? Why are they so caught up in sex?" Look at what we're telling them. We're lying to them about cigarettes. We're lying to them about sex. Nobody—turn on the soap operas, it's in one bed and out of the other. Nobody gets pregnant, nobody gets AIDS, nobody has to drop out of school or get a job. It's just sex and everybody's happily ever after. We're lying to them.

Kids are saying, "Hey, we can deal with the realities. Tell us the truth. We can't deal with the lies." And that's something that I learned from my classes, and the discussions, when we bring up the issues. They're simply sick and tired of the lies. And every generation that has come through here that I have taught, and at the end I was teaching my student's grandchildren, has come with that perspective. And I also watched them go through—and by the time they were seniors, by the time they got to be graduate students—they had come to accommodate all or some proportion of the lies and play the same games, in many instances, as others in order to get over, in order to get through, in order to be acceptable in this system of cronyism, where what you wear and how you act, and what color you are, and how you project yourself, is more important than being honest.

Again, cronyism will trump competence every time, just like profit trumps principle, and money trumps reality. And these kids, to varying degrees, come to accommodate that, in many instances, as a condition of getting over, of being a respectable and responsible member of society. Every now and then, I see one that is not respectable and responsible. They kept that curiosity. They kept that insistence on honesty. But they've done so, in many instances, at a price. They're perceived as cranks. They're perceived as weird. They're perceived often as kind of freakish, or they're opinionated, or what have you. Every now and then, they come through. But when they start in my introductory sociology class, when they start in my sophomore-level race and ethnic relations class, when they start in my upper division sport and international politics class and sport and society classes, they come with this honesty and this curiosity, and that's what I got out of teaching.

Teaching is for me the greatest profession in the world. Because unlike law or dentistry or engineering or medicine, where you're a professional and you do something for somebody, in teaching, you incite people to *think*. You enable them to do for themselves. And that's the greatest gift that you can ever give anybody. So, I really loved it. I mean, I loved it. I loved the students. I loved the process. And I loved to see them four years later. They come up, "Dr.

Edwards, you come to my graduation? We're going to be graduating. We're going to have a reception. I want you to meet my parents, I want you to meet my granddad." And I loved that.

8-00:30:38

Wilmot:

Well, let me ask you a question. You mentioned that it was your students who kind of raised for you the issues around theorizing gender and athletics. And I wanted to ask you, around what year was that?

8-00:31:00

Edwards:

I want to say about 1973, 1974, 1975—somewhere off in there.

8-00:31:12

Wilmot:

And that was gender and sexuality. Or were those distinct?

Edwards:

They didn't all come together. They came in different phases. Because I remember this one young lady, standing up in the class and saying, "Well, Dr. Edwards, you talk about sports, but you're talking about men's sports. That doesn't tell me what I should be doing as an athlete. How should I be thinking as a woman on athletic scholarship playing basketball at the University of California Berkeley?"

And it wasn't that I didn't talk about it, that it didn't come up. There wasn't an organized section of the sociology of sport class where we dealt with that. I had, in my race and ethnic relations classes, there were a lot of gay students in those classes. And I distinctly remember, about 1975/76, a student standing up and saying, "Well, Dr. Edwards, you know, you talk about Asian American, you talk about Native Americans, you talk about African Americans, you talk about Latinos, but you never say anything about probably the most discriminated against group in American society, and that's the gay population." And I said, "Well, first of all, I have not discussed that within a context of racial and ethnic relations, because I'm not qualified to discuss it. I haven't done my homework in that regard. And rather than getting into a lot of superficialities, I would prefer to simply admit that I don't know enough about that arena. Secondly, unless you come out and say that you are gay, nobody is going to know and it's really nobody's business. That's from my perspective. If you are black, you don't have to say anything. They see you coming up the road. If you are a woman, they see you coming up the road. If you are a Latino, they see you coming up the road. If you are Asian American, they see you coming up the road. If you are Native American, they may not know exactly what tribe you're from, but they see you coming up the road." I said, "That's a different order of discrimination and insignia. So, I think that the point that you make is a legitimate one, but I am not qualified to teach on that. And I would rather simply admit that than to go off into some area, trying to spin something."

And I said, “With regard to women, I’m not a woman, but I regard myself as a learning feminist. And I’m working hard at it. And I think that there are some attitudes and dispositions that I can present on it, because most of the problems that women have come at the hands of men, and I’ve been a man for a long time and have studied men and the masculine mystique for a long time, so I can get at that problem through a number of different doors. But I am utterly unqualified to talk about gays, the gay movement, and so forth. And if I were you, I would really see if I couldn’t get a class, going on that issue, in the university with somebody who’s qualified to teach it.” And that was my response to them in that regard.

8-:00:34:50

Wilmot:

And then you went and did some thinking, and did you come up with a segment of your class?

8-:00:34:56

Edwards:

Yeah, we discussed it within a context of sports. I always made sure the gay issue was discussed within a context of sports. I always made sure that I covered it within a context of African American community relations, and why there’s this phenomenal, almost religious-based, antigay sentiment, pervasive, in the African American community. And I discussed it within a context of the religion section, religious institutions, in my introductory sociology class, when we talked about religion being the basis of morality, and how over the course of American history, it has been used to rationalize and justify the subordination of women, the establishment of slavery, the perpetuation of segregation, the perpetuation of homophobia, the casting aside of issues of compassion--particularly when it comes down to illegitimacy, when it comes down to the death penalty, and all of these kinds of things. An eye for an eye. All of those kinds of issues. So I brought it in through those doors. But in terms of teaching a segment on the gay movement, I simply wasn’t competent and qualified to do that.

8-:00:36:30

Wilmot:

Let me ask you another question. Your work around sport and race came before some of the cultural studies movements--

Edwards:

American culture--

Wilmot:

No, actually, I’m thinking of when people started to begin to think about sports and spectatorship—there’s another word I’m thinking of, which is spectography, but I mean like visual studies, and what do bodies signify? And really I’m thinking of the cultural studies movements that came through the academy, often from black British [scholars] in the late—see, this is where my timing is off—I think it’s in the late eighties and early nineties--

Edwards:

Mmm-hmm. That’s right.

8-:00:37:30

Wilmot:

How did that impact your work? Because in some ways, you were talking about some of the same themes, but certainly different tools.

8-:00:37:43

Edwards:

I never really got fully engaged with the deconstructionist kinds of efforts to go back and look at how institutional and institutionalized relations are structured, and literally to break them down into their finest points, to see how they are perpetuated and how unconscious a lot of it is, in terms of body language, in terms of the way we configure ourselves, the way we present ourselves. What is there about a woman's pursuit of a particular body structure that feeds into her subordinate status. When you consider that alongside men's pursuit of a particular body structure and how that is played out in athletics, and how that is played out in male/female relationships and so forth. I never really got deeply involved in that kind of deconstructionist effort.

I was much more concerned about relations at the institutional and intergroup levels, than at the level of the interpersonal relationships and presentation of self, so to speak. I recognized that. I most certainly understood the value of it, particularly when you come down to the image and presentation of the black body in American society, whether it's that of the female or that of the male. The earthy, sensuous, overwhelming masculinity that carries right down to the level of presumptions about genitalia. I'm very much aware of that, have read a number of books and critiques and treatises dealing with that, but I never really got involved in that because I was more into group and institutional level.

8-:00:40:04

Wilmot:

Were there any other kind of areas that your students would discuss gender and sexuality? Were there any others that your students brought to the fore for you in your work?

8-:00:40:15

Edwards:

Yeah, religion. Religion was always big. And it got to the point that I would assign books having to do with the emergence and the development of images of God. Whether it's Paul Davies book, *God and Modern Physics*, or whether it was some of Joseph Campbell's work having to do with God and mythology across cultures and over the human experience. I began to use Joseph Campbell's books and Paul Davies' books. One dealing with the emergence, the mythology of human societies, and how ultimately all God stories are telling the same story through different languages, imagery, and so forth. And then, Paul Davies books looking at how modern physics in many ways ends up at the same eternal questions of why and how. And how do we come to grips with those things that are beyond the realm of experimentation, and outside of the mathematic, theoretical explanation.

As a result of questions and issues that my students raised, I began to integrate those kinds of things into my sociology of sport class, my race relations classes. I would ask, in point of fact, at the beginning of the year—we have exams in here, we have nine hundred people, we're going to have very small windows to give exams, get them back, and then prepare and give you adequate time to prepare for the next exam, because I would give two midterms and a final. I said, "We can't push things back so far, so anybody that has a religious holiday where they're not going to be able to take the examination, you're excused from the examination. You don't have to come and do the makeup, because when you've got nine hundred people and you've got fifteen different religious groups, and you've got to come up with fifteen make-ups, you're not going to have an equivalency in terms of the test, and eventually you're going to be asking the same question that somebody else had on the exam, two/three weeks earlier, and now we have a problem in terms of the veracity and the integrity of the examination. So, you don't have to take the examination. You can do a paper. The paper, for a midterm, has to be between eight and twelve pages. If you can get it in by the end of the semester, that's fine. If you can't get it in by the end of the semester, you can simply request that you get an extension and you can turn it in at any point. There is no penalty for that. But if you can't take an examination because of religious holiday, you can have that holiday off. But I can't start changing the exam date with seven, eight, nine hundred people in the class, to accommodate religious holidays when there are so many religions in the class."

Somebody once asked, "Well, how many religions are in the class?" And I counted twenty-seven different religious orientations in my class. And I said, "If we start moving around exam dates to accommodate religious holidays, we wouldn't be able to give the exam."

And somebody said, "According to the university prescriptions, you only have to accommodate major religious holidays." And I remember this came up in class, I said, "Well, young man, you show me the person in here whose religion is minor to them." And I said, "I'm not going to do it." So then, of course, over some period of time, you're going to run into a major religious problem. So it happened that one of my examinations, about seven hundred kids in the class, fell on Yom Kippur. And I told the students, "You don't have to take the exam. You can do a paper at some point." And they said, "Okay, we're fine with that." And then all of a sudden, I get all of this flack from all over the country. "How dare you give an examination on Yom Kippur and tell the students they can't make up the exam?" I said, "No that's not what I said." And I said at the beginning, "If you are not satisfied with that, given the number of people in the class"—first day of class we spent the whole day on administrative issues—"if you're not satisfied with these arrangements, I would strongly urge that you not take the class, because I'm not going to make exceptions for 'major religions'."

So this is what a Yom Kippur exam came up, which Ronn Owens brings up to this day—I said, “Hey, anybody who can’t take the exam, just do a paper. And I’ll work with you on it. If you can get it in, that’s fine. If you can’t get it in, let’s get an extension going. Let’s work with this.” One student that was coming up for graduation, he said, “I’ve got to have all my grades in at the end of the semester. I’m not going to be able to get the paper in because I’m trying to finish some back stuff that I’m taking.” This was one of the Jewish students who couldn’t take the exam on Yom Kippur. I said, “Look, I understand your situation. I’ll tell you what we’re going to do. We’ll double whatever your grade is on the next midterm. And that way you can graduate. You can put in your time doing your makeup papers for the classes that you got incompletes on, and you’ll be able to qualify for graduate school, and we’ll just get this garbage off the road.” That’s what I did in a number of instances.

But the outside interests, who wanted to have an issue, came in, “Well, Edwards said that the Jewish students—he was going to give the exam on Yom Kippur and the Jewish students couldn’t make the exam up, unless they had to come in and take it on Yom Kippur.” I said, “That’s not what happened.” And I was really torn about the situation—I’ll tell you why. Not because of the situation, because I wasn’t going to change. I wasn’t going to change the rules and say, “Okay, I’m going to cancel the exam on Yom Kippur. And I’ve got fifteen other people waiting to say, ‘Well then I can’t take it and I want the exam cancelled.’” So I wasn’t going to change that. But what happened was I began to get all of these letters. I got letters from groups saying, “Hey, you were right to stand up to these Jews. How can you do this? That’s wonderful.” Oh, it got to be ugly. And at the end of it, I was glad that the people who protested it did so, because what that told me was that there was still vigilance on this issue. They were wrong. They picked the wrong target. They picked the wrong issue. But they did not pick the wrong fight.

There was one group that wanted to give me an award. There was a group that represented, in the letterhead that I got, Middle Eastern Muslim immigrants. And they wanted to give me an award—have a dinner and give me an award. That’s the level of which the antipathy and animosity—

I was glad, in a funny kind of way, that they protested it, that they fought it, that they stood up and said, “This is wrong.” Even though they were wrong, I was glad that they made the noise, that they confronted it. Because this thing is real, and I became very conscious of how real it was by some of the letters that I got. Not just from journalists. “I thought you were about so and so, and this, that, and the other—and now you refuse to give Jewish students a chance to make up an exam that you scheduled on Yom Kippur”—I didn’t pay too much attention to that. But this negative stuff that I got—the attacks on Jewish religion, the attacks on Jewish populations that I got--

8-00:49:47

Wilmot: --to let you know that there was real [anti-Semitism]--

Edwards: --I mean it was blistering, ruthless, bloodthirsty. So, I was glad—even though they were wrong—I was glad that they protested it. And I think that they were right to say—forget about the details—in our estimation, this doesn't pass the smell test—even though they didn't have the facts.

8-00:50:18

Wilmot: Let me ask you a question. Were you still on campus when the Alex Saragosa affair took place?

8-00:50:25

Edwards: I don't think so.

Wilmot: No? Do you know what I'm referring to?

Edwards: No, I don't.

Wilmot: That was when a guest professor, Alex Saragosa, gave a grade to a student who was an athlete and also was of color, when they had not done the work.

Edwards: I remember it. I remember it. I heard about that, but--

Wilmot: And then was severely--

Edwards: --reprimanded.

Wilmot: Yes, severely.

Edwards: You know what? First of all--

Wilmot: And the university went through a major issue in terms of their league, and the what do you call it? The oversight—

8-00:51:10

Edwards: Yeah, the commissioner of athletics, and the NCAA, and everybody got involved in it. I remember the story of it. I wasn't here when it happened. But I may have been on—when was that, would have been?

Wilmot: I think it was 2001 or 2002.

Edwards: Yeah, I was gone. I had already left the university. I was Director of Parks [Oakland] at that time. But first of all, let's be serious. You have, in sports, a major, free enterprise capitalist operation embedded in an academic institution. That's the first contradiction.

The second contradiction is these young men and women are carrying a burden that no other student on this campus carries. They don't have the latitude to drop out of courses. They don't have the latitude to settle for a lesser grade. Because they're confronted, not just with the challenges of the class, but with the challenges of eligibility. On top of that, they are going to class. Particularly during the season—but now the season is virtually year round, because they expect you to go into weight training, they expect you to keep yourself in condition, they expect you to maintain your weight, if you're in women's sports--all of those kinds of things. They go into classes, oftentimes, tired, many times—especially if you're playing football, injured or at least beat up. They go in after traveling, some times across country, to get to play games, and come back fatigued, having to go to class that next morning. That's a lot to put on an eighteen to twenty-two year old. Not just the challenges of class, but the challenges of staying eligible while you're tired, beat up, sometimes injured. And you don't get any latitude because of that.

If anything, in many classes that you go into, the professor looks at you like you walked into class with something on the bottom of your shoes. Because they don't think that athletes have the capability of meeting the expectations of academia on a level with other students. They figure that they're there—especially if they're black—that they're there principally because of their athletic prowess and not their intellectual capabilities. So at the end of the day, in many instances, you have professors that are harsher on these student athletes, don't give them the kind of support and so forth that they need. They expect them to come in and just be another student, which they are not.

And in some instances, you have professors that cut their athletes some slack, because they understand the burden that they are operating under. And that's not that they don't have high academic expectations of them, it's just that they realize they're going to need some additional support and so forth to make those expectations work. Now on the far edges of that, you probably have always had professors who say, "Okay, hey, sign up for the class, come in, I'll work with you on this, and you'll get a passing grade out of this." And sometimes that kind of thing comes to light. But I don't look at that so much as a failure on the part of the professor, even though the professor ultimately is responsible for the conduct of his or her classes—as I do a failure on the

part of the university and athletic department to create the accommodations that are necessary for this athlete to grow academically and culturally, as well as athletically in this environment.

So you find the athlete way out there on the edge, struggling to stay afloat in terms of eligibility and so forth, and a professor comes along and says, “Look, I understand your situation. I’m going to help you in that regard.” And then when the university finds out, “Oh my God. He’s keeping this eligible and putting us in the position where our football team might be able to beat USC and win the Pac-10. We’re going to come down on him like a ton of bricks because he has violated academic integrity.” It’s hypocrisy. If they really feel seriously about that, then create an environment and the support systems where this young athlete can get what he or she needs in order to meet both their academic and their athletic responsibilities, given that that is what they’re charged with.

8-00:56:07

Wilmot:

I wanted to ask you about American Cultures. You mentioned it briefly. And actually I’m going to exchange our recording media in just a minute, and we’ll go a little bit further. But were you involved at all with putting together the American Cultures department? Or did you ever--?

8-00:56:27

Edwards:

No. I was asked early on, when American Cultures first came up. I was one of the professors that they said—because they had—when the American cultures requirement was established, they polled the students and asked, “Which professors would you like to see teaching American Cultures units?” And my name was among the top people that they said we’d like to see Dr. Edwards teach a class in American Cultures. But it would have to replace something that I was teaching. And the way that my teaching schedule was structured, from the point of view of how I had developed it was, I tried to get as many students as I could to come in and take my introductory sociology class, because the students who came out of that class and took my race relations class, my sociology of sport class, my class on the family, whatever else I was teaching—my undergraduate seminars on sport and politics—there was a lot of ground that I didn’t have to cover with them. We could jam more into that next section. Not that every student in the class would have taken my introductory sociology class, but a lot of my students. Probably two thirds of the students who took my upper division classes had taken my introductory sociology class.

In order to teach American Studies, what the department told me was, “You would have to give up your introductory sociology class because we have a lot of people who can teach introductory sociology. We don’t have many people—nobody that can teach the sociology of sport—that’s one of our most popular classes. We want you to teach your race relations class, because you have the biggest race and ethnic relations classes in the department. We don’t

want you to give that up. That's a service to the entire campus. And your option of teaching the family or an undergraduate seminar, you're going to do that anyway, and people are going to come, and your seminars have two hundred people in them. So that means that we want you to give up the thing that we can most easily cover, which is introductory sociology."

I said, "I can't do that, because once I give up introductory sociology, I'm going to have to put in so much time giving people the theoretical overview, the institutional overview, that is the foundation of the sociology of sport, race and ethnic relations, and my undergraduate seminars, that I won't be able to cover those classes. And even now, it's tough, it's hard covering all the material we have to cover. And so I don't want to do that." So I never got involved with it.

8-00:59:32

Wilmot: You were not involved with that.

Edwards: I was never involved with it.

Wilmot: Do you have a perspective on it?

Edwards: Oh, I would love to teach it. I think it's valuable. I think it's necessary. I think that education is one of the few things that you cannot "require". You can require enrollment. You cannot require that they be educated in a particular area. I've always been absolutely shocked and amazed at the extent to which—I mean, education is one of the few things that people are willing to pay premium prices for, and then do everything they possibly can not to get it. And I used to joke with my students, "If I walked in here and said, on the first day of class, 'Everybody in here is going to get an A. You never have to come back again. I'll see you the last day of the semester for you to check off and say that you're still enrolled in the class, and you have an A.'" I mean, cheers would go up, I mean folks would be on their way out of there, it would be great. You might have a few coming back, saying, "Hey, I really want to learn." So I used to joke with them about that. And it was tongue in cheek, and more satire than fact in all likelihood.

But again, education is one of the few things that people are willing to pay premium prices for and then not get. And not complain about not getting it. So, I think a substantial part of education is knowing yourself, your own culture, at least the local reality. Because then you have a base from which you can learn about everything that's out there. And if you can also come to learn something about a number of local realities, look at all the different perspectives that you can bring to bear on the world. When we are born into a particular group, we are blinded to a substantial degree to all of the other possibilities and potentialities that are right there at hand. Because if were

born into Chinese American culture, the chances are very good we would have some knowledge in many instances of Chinese, look at the world through Chinese cultural eyes, at least initially, because that's our home environment, in many instances. If we were born into a Latino population, if we were born into an African American population, and so forth. But by being into one population or another, we narrow down our view and vision, and even our depth of vision, and American Cultures gives us a chance to begin to widen that perspective again, and then based on that, we understand the rest of the world.

8-01:02:33
Wilmot:

Okay. Thank you.

Interview 5: December 6, 2005

Edwards 09 12-06-05.wav

09-00:00:00

Wilmot: Professor Harry Edwards, Interview 5, December 6, 2005. Good morning.

09-00:00:12

Edwards: Good morning. Thank you for having me again.

09-00:00:16

Wilmot: I'm glad to have you again. I had just given you that article to read on Joe Louis. It was just a newspaper article discussing the life trajectories of the two internationally renowned star athletes, and how they ended basically, how both of them had hard ends.

09-00:00:44

Edwards: Absolutely. This is the thing that we were fighting against. Jesse Owens and Joe Louis battled for access to sports, for legitimacy as athletes in sports. The sports establishment felt that access was enough. They had no incentive or motivation or inclination to respect them as human beings, to give them the dignity of men or even as exceptional athletes. So once they left the playing field, they were done. And if they did not behave in accordance with white expectations while they were in the sports arena, they were done. In the same sense that Jesse Owens was banished from amateur sports for life because he refused to continue to run in Europe, making money for the Olympic Committee under circumstances where he could not even accept a pin that somebody gave him over there as a gift, without jeopardizing his so called amateur status, and meanwhile everybody's making money off him. And when he refused to run, when he was simply just run out and wanted to come home, Avery Brundage, who was president of the United States Olympic Committee, simply banished him from the game of Olympic sprinting and amateur sprinting for life, and the whole sports establishment went along with that.

I thought it was ironic that Jesse Owens, who the Olympic Committee, and the International Olympic Committee under Avery Brundage, used against us in 1968 to castigate us for attacking the sports establishment for not giving black athletes the dignity, the respect, all of the other amenities that should go along with superstardom in track and field, that Jesse Owens would be banished, and then that same Olympic Committee, under Avery Brundage, turned around and banished John Carlos and Tommie Smith for their demonstrations in Mexico City, against the very racism that Jesse Owens suffered under.

So at the end of the day, it's one continuous, almost seamless struggle from generation to generation against racism in sport here in American society. And I think that what happened to Jesse Owens, and what happened to Joe Louis, another individual who was never given the dignity, the respect, and so forth from the sports establishment, that he deserved—even as he was used by this

nation and by the sports establishment for political ends— I think that what happened to them is indicative of the struggle, is indicative of what we were fighting against as athletes in the late 1960s.

09-00:03:45

Wilmot:

What does that struggle look like—I think I've asked this before—but what does that struggle look like now? What does that structure—what does the ownership structure of athletics look like now?

09-00:04:00

Edwards:

Well, the plantation structure of American sports is still intact. There've been some cracks made in it, but the wall of racism and discrimination is still there. As of the hiring of Ron Prince at the University of Kansas this past week as the head football coach, he becomes only the fourth Division I black head football coach in this country. And that's out of a 117 institutions.

That black plantation structure of whites in positions of authority and decision making, and blacks functioning basically as twentieth-century gladiators, moved into the twenty-first century, is still intact. We find that blacks do not get jobs in the broadcast booth in representative numbers. They do not get jobs as beat writers in representative numbers. They do not get jobs in the front offices of sports establishments, either professional or amateur in representative numbers. In point of fact, we don't really get access to sports in representative numbers, outside of those sports which either have political significance, like the sprints in the case of the Olympic Games, track and field, or basketball and football in the collegiate ranks, which are the biggest money makers. When you look at golf and tennis and baseball, even water polo, swimming, diving, hockey, volleyball, rowing, gymnastics, all of those sports, you find blacks in negligible numbers. They're not encouraged to go into it.

Even if they are in it, they typically do not get access to the developmental sports programs that you have in the suburbs and other places. And they're not welcome to come out to the suburbs, in most instances, to participate in those programs. So at the end of the day, the plantation structure persists, the struggle goes on, and each generation simply has to take up its responsibilities to continue that fight in sports.

09-00:06:20

Wilmot:

I think we're spending some time on that. I had wanted today to spend some time back in Berkeley, with talking about admissions policy and issues of affirmative action. In particular, you were on campus as a faculty member in 1995 and 1996. 1995 was SP1 and SP2. Special—what are they called? Senate Bills.

Edwards:

209? Are you talking about the petition, Proposition 209?

09-00:06:58

Wilmot: No, I'm speaking about the Regents decision, their special decision that they made. There were two of them, SP1 and SP2.

Edwards: Relative to admissions?

09-00:07:07

Wilmot: Mmm-hmm.

Edwards: My sense of that is that I don't care about the details and the technicalities. I think what matters is what happens in the end. What happens relative to the end result? And the end result has been across the board black and Latino admissions has declined--

09-00:07:29

Wilmot: --as a result of--

Edwards: --as a result of racism. As a result of discrimination. As a result of trickknowledge. I don't care about the Regents build this and the Regents build that. At the end of the day, there's been a serious decline in access to the University of California system by African Americans and Latinos, and in some instances, Native Americans. My basic thing is, I don't want to get into a discussion of what this one said as opposed to that one, and this nuance as opposed to that nuance. The reality is that if they wanted to let African Americans and Latinos in, they would make that possible.

I don't care about the technicalities and who said what and who did what to whom. At the end of the day, there's been a severe decline at both the graduate and professional level, as well as the undergraduate level, in black and Latino admissions. That's all I care about. The rest of it is nonsense. The rest of it is clap trap. The rest of it is political shenanigans. And I don't care who does it, whether it's Ward Connerly or whether it's the Board of Regents as a whole. I don't care. It doesn't matter. The only thing that matters is that at the end of the day, blacks and Latinos do not have equitable and ethical access to the University of California at Berkeley, and the rest of it is nonsense.

09-00:08:52

Wilmot: Do you have a perspective on how affirmative action operated before 209 and SP1 and SP2?

Edwards: Yeah. They had money. It began by universities getting money to support minority access, and when the money was there, you had an influx of minorities that came in the mid and late 1970s into the mid 1980s. When the money began to dry up for those programs, when you begin to get clowns and sycophants like Ward Connerly agitating for what was projected as "conservative non-racial views," when in point of fact it was simply racist views. It was an opportunity for money to be saved, for money to be diverted to other purposes. That money dried up. And once the money dried up, and it

came down to supporting poor students, supporting minority students getting into the University of California at Berkeley, the Regents caved in, I think the University of California administration caved in, and I think at the end of the day we have what we have. The so-called flagship public university system in the world, underrepresented in terms of an increasing majority of minorities in this state. And that makes absolutely no sense.

09-00:10:20

Wilmot:

What is your sense of how well affirmative action was operating before Proposition 209 and SP1 and SP2?

Edwards:

First of all, the fact that it was needed meant that it probably was not operating optimally. It's like having to put two thousand cops outside the bank to keep it from being robbed. You can say, "Well, that system is operating well because the bank hasn't been robbed," but the reality is that the system's not operating optimally because you need the two thousand cops.

The system's not going to operate optimally because we have to have affirmative action for minorities, in many instances, in order for women, in order for poor people, to get into the University of California. But having said that, given what was happening prior to affirmative action, which were abysmal, dismal admissions records as far as admissions for minorities were concerned, it was a gross improvement.

Now you have to understand that when the University of California wants to get minorities in, they get minorities in. They have no problem getting minority athletes in, who are disproportionately numbered among the scholarship athletes on the football team and on the basketball team. Even though, in many instances, they come in with grades worse than the grades of minority students who were turned down for admissions on the academic side. But they can dribble a basketball, or they could run a football, or they could run track, so they get in. So the University of California doesn't have any problem getting minority students in, as long as they can dribble a basketball, or run a football, or run track, or do something else athletically that the school values.

When you look at what they can do for athletes, as opposed to what they claim to be able to do on behalf of students who only want to be engineers, or doctors, or lawyers, or college professors, or what have you, there's a tremendous disparity there. And that's where the hypocrisy comes in. Even Ward Connerly, as silly and clownish as he was in terms of his role in eliminating affirmative action access for minority students, never was stupid enough to propose that black athletes who did not qualify academically for the University of California system not be admitted. Because he knew that that simply was not going to happen. I look at the whole affirmative action thing in terms of the results. I don't care about what the arguments were. It doesn't matter why they said they couldn't get it done. They can get it done for

football players. They can get it done for basketball players who are black. They can get it done for track athletes. But they can't get it done if a student coming out of those same high schools simply wants to be an engineer, simply wants to be a sociologist, simply wants to be a doctor, or a librarian, or a biologist. There's something wrong with that.

It comes down to the same thing. The proof is in the pudding. Don't tell me about the ingredients, or how hot the oven was, or how far you had to go to get the flour. Let me look at the pudding and I'll tell you about what kind of a chef you are. And this is a lousy situation. It's a racist situation.

[interruption to adjust microphone]

Wilmot: Last time we discussed, I think off camera, how in some ways affirmative action was an imperfect solution.

Edwards: Yeah, it's an imperfect solution. Again, it's an imperfect solution, one, because it's needed. Why should we need affirmative action for African American students and so forth? Secondly, it's not a panacea even if it is implemented to the greatest extent, because there are so many problems down the line. If you have high schools which are only graduating thirty percent of their students at these students, and forty percent, as in one school in Oakland, forty percent of those who do graduate, graduate only marginally literate, which means that they graduated essentially based on attendance and not causing any problem in the school. What difference does it make if you have open enrollment, much less affirmative action, just open enrollment? If the person is not sufficiently competitive academically to survive in a challenging academic environment.

In some instances, to look to affirmative action to be everything to everybody is a pipe dream. There are some instances where we have to begin with the family. A lot of the reason that Johnny can't read by the time he gets to high school is that Johnny's mom and dad can't read. They were dropouts. A lot of the reason why Johnny can't do math when he gets to high school is that the high school doesn't have the math teachers that are necessary to bring Johnny up to grade, in terms of the math that he would need at the collegiate level. One of the reasons that Johnny isn't able to function well with the technology of the day, whether it's computers or what have you, is that his school doesn't have computers. The libraries around or near or accessible to him, do not have the computers, or are not open enough for him to get in and get the kind of training and use of those computers that he would have to have to be competitive. So, affirmative action is only part of it.

Then when you combine that with the fact that it's an uphill struggle to even get that part implemented. And the outcome is what you see on University of California campuses throughout the system today, which is declining enrollment of black and Latino students. And it is by design. It's not by

accident. Because if they wanted to bring students on board, and keep those numbers representative in a state that is very quickly becoming a majority minority state, they would go out and set up the programs to get that done. And at the end of the day, they're not doing that.

When they're not doing that, that means there's a deliberate, calculated program afoot to not get that done, and we should simply recognize that that's what it is, and that is what the real struggle is about. It's not about, "Jeez, these students aren't qualified." But are they qualifiable? Are there programs that can be implemented to bring them in? Not being qualified doesn't stop them from bringing in athletes, who bring millions into the institution. Not being qualified doesn't stop them from bringing in athletes. Then why can't we bring in those students, and also give them the kind of training and so forth that they give the athletes, as far as the athletics are concerned. They bring them in as students, then they have an entire coaching staff over there, whose only job is to get them ready to play football or basketball. They have an entire training staff. They have an entire medical staff, whose only job is to keep them healthy for football and basketball. Why can't we have coaches on the academic side, whose only job is to get these young minority people up to speed, in terms of the challenges academically, so that these universities can serve the majority population of this state.

What I'm saying is, if they wanted to do it, they would do it. Affirmative action has all kinds of problems and holes and gaps and everything else. But all of that can be surmounted. The most difficult thing to surmount is the lack of will to really deal seriously with this problem.

09-00:19:52

Wilmot:

Well, let me ask you. From your vantage point as a faculty person here at Berkeley during the nineties, and eighties, what do you see as the shift that occurred from being willing to kind of implement affirmative action to being unwilling? What were the contributing factors?

Edwards:

Declining money. Declining payments coming in from the federal government. Declining offsets coming in from the state. The idea that the state was shifting and becoming more conservative under Ronald Reagan, in his Presidency, and all of the issues that went along with that, that kind of snowballed the declining funding for these programs. I think that all of that played into it. But at the end of the day, it doesn't matter. At the end of the day, it doesn't matter. At the end of the day, where there's the will, the money becomes available. The fact that the Iraq War is illegal, immoral, unnecessary, hasn't kept the United States Congress from voting more than a billion dollars a day to sustain it. So, I'm saying that where there's the will, the United States Government, its institutions, finds a way to get it done.

And where there's not the will, I don't care how convincing the argument is, there's all kind of dilly dallying and pussy footing and half stepping and moon

walking around the issue. And it just doesn't get done. And in the 1980s, particularly beginning with the Reagan Presidency, and the rollback of civil rights initiatives, attacks on affirmative action, attacks on such things as even the Voting Rights Act and so forth, all of that began to change. And with the cut off of those funds, when the money wasn't there, the university—you know, hey. It began to shift.

09-00:22:15

Wilmot:

Did you notice any marked shift in your colleagues' attitudes? Or as far as you could tell, were your colleagues in the Sociology Department all on board with affirmative action? Or were they critical of it?

Edwards:

No, they weren't all on board with it. There were some that were on board with it. There were others that were not. There were some that constantly railed about declining standards in a meritocracy, as if everybody that they had let in that was not a minority was somehow superior to minorities who were kept out. There were people who came into the sociology department with 4.0s out of some of the elite universities in this country who couldn't tell me who the Vice President of the United States was. I mean they were just out of it. They were great at book learning. They were great at studying. They were great at talking sociological gibberish and gibe. But when it came down to anything having to do with anything real, they were as freaky and weird as you could imagine, but they got in.

On the other hand, there were minorities that I knew were interested in getting into the University of California at Berkeley, who had struggled up literally from the bottom, who were politically astute, who were academically versed, who were hard workers who had tremendous intellectual capacity, who needed to be developed and tutored and mentored in order to achieve everything that they were capable of achieving. And their SATs weren't, there Graduate Record Exam scores were not what they were supposed to be, or there writing skills lacked the sharpness and precision of a burgeoning, budding young scholar. I heard all of this. I heard all of this stuff. So at the end of the day, it comes down to everybody had their own attitude and disposition about it.

There were people that I would have let in who had 3.2 grade point averages, and who were in the middle of the pack in terms of the Graduate Record Examination, but who had outstanding references, who had worked hard all of their lives, who had come up literally from the bottom of some inner-city community in Philadelphia, or the Bronx, or the Hough district of Cleveland, or St. Louis.

Then there were other people who had gone to Harvard, who had 4.0s, who wrote pristine, sterile, unexciting essays and so forth, who hadn't lived anywhere outside of their mama's and daddy's house, or been outside of their frat house at Harvard, and that was their whole focus and world view, who I

wouldn't have let in. I wouldn't have taken them. But that was just me. There were other people who felt exactly the opposite way. And it was all legitimate. I mean this is what the struggle and argument and the debate and so forth is supposed to be about.

Again, I go back to the bottom line. Who got in? Who were the students that they brought in? And by then end of the 1980s, we began to get off drop offs in minorities even applying to Berkeley, because the word, "Don't bother to apply there."

09-00:25:49

Wilmot: Did you ever sit on a graduate admissions committee?

Edwards: Yeah, I was on the admissions committee. I was on the admissions committee on a number of occasions.

09-00:25:55

Wilmot: How was that?

Edwards: It depended upon the makeup of the committee. You know, the chairman of the department always tried to put a spread of representation on the admissions committee. And we ended up reading and grading out a lot of different admissions folders. And again, the department didn't have any set perspective on who should get in, because there were so many factions. It got to the place that it really came down to votes on the committee, how you justified letting this person in as opposed to that person.

And at the end of the day, how does that really play out? The only thing that I know is that I never really looked around in the six or seven years that I was on the admissions committee, and said, "Wow, they're really extending themselves to let in minorities in this class." I never said that to myself.

They did extend themselves, I believe, to let in women. Because there was always an effort to make sure there was some equity in terms of women who got in and men. But in terms of minorities, I never saw that. Did some minorities get in? Yes. Were there representative numbers? Ah, well, what are we talking about? How many minorities are in the undergraduate pool given the schools that Berkeley recruited graduate students from? I mean, you're talking Harvard, Michigan, Chicago, Princeton, Yale, Cornell, places like that. Every now and then, you get somebody in from Oregon, every now and then you pick up some—but how many times did we bring in people from Howard? How many times did we bring in people from Atlanta University? How many times did we bring in people from Tuskegee? Which is where you have the vast pool of minority candidates. Not very often.

But you've got to look at those folders, and look at what those candidates are writing, what they are saying, what courses they took, what effort they made, and somewhere read in there the potential that they have if given the proper

encouragement, mentorship, support, and so forth at a place like Berkeley. And from time to time, that happened. But in terms of me standing back after one of those sessions on the admissions committee and saying, “Wow, they really went out and tried to get this thing done this time.” No, it never happened.

09-00:29:25

Wilmot:

I believe there was a—as you mentioned—a petition to sign against either SP1, SP2, or 209, one of those, by faculty? Were you part of that effort?

Edwards:

I signed a number of petitions against these draconian efforts, really, to diminish and minimize minority admissions and candidacy, particularly when it comes to graduate school, which is where you get your teachers and your professors, and ultimately how you form the character of various departments around the country. I mean, undergraduate admissions, that’s probably the battleground. But the controlling force is what you do in your professional schools, what you do in your graduate schools. And so, yeah, I signed a number of petitions.

Of course, we had those discussions among various faculty members in the hallways and the office door, in those kinds of environments. But again, in the end, I go back to the bottom line. All of that’s well and good. All of that’s well intended. All of that effort is most certainly justified and called for and should be undertaken, but you’re up against a state bureaucracy, a university bureaucracy, which at the end of the day, was not committed to minority enrollment at the graduate and undergraduate level. They simply were not committed to it. Were they tolerant of it? Most certainly. Were they going to go to the wall to fight for it? Absolutely not. And that’s the bottom line.

So, the rest of it, you know I’ve seen in my thirty-plus years at the University of California at Berkeley, I’ve seen so many petitions and movements and struggles and issues, and so forth and so on. After a period of time, you begin to count the contribution made by that struggle in terms of the results that emerge. And the argument can be made that if those struggles had not been waged, we’d be back not to the 1960s, but to the 1950s, when there were more blacks from Africa enrolled in graduate school at the University of California than there were from America. It was easier to get a black person from Nigeria to the University of California at Berkeley than from Oakland to the University of California at Berkeley. Maybe that argument can be made. And this by no means is to suggest that the struggles aren’t worth fighting. As I’ve stated, sometimes you have to keep marching, even when it looks like you’re marching up the down escalator. Otherwise, people think you’re comfortable and totally satisfied with where you are, which is in a descending cycle of exclusion. But I put that on the University of California at Berkeley. I put that on the University of California system. I put that on the state bureaucracy. The government. That’s who’s responsible when you see those kinds of results.

And it's not just a failed struggle on the part of the liberals and the progressives, and the people who wanted affirmative action and more inclusiveness in education and a broadening of the basis of democratic participation by the emerging majority of California citizens, who happen to be minorities. I don't put that on them. I put that on the people who are in control of the reigns of power and authority, from the local level right up to the state. And that's really the bottom line.

The rest of it is stuff for debate and radio talk shows and forums, but the bottom line is if they wanted it—if those who wield power and authority in the University of California system wanted it, they would institute it. The fact that it is not instituted comes down to one thing and one thing only. There is not sufficient commitment for the inclusion of minorities in the educational and the higher education apparatus of this state. From undergraduate students to graduate students to professors and administrators.

09-00:34:38

Wilmot:

Let me ask you something. Were you aware of the kind of fracas that emerged around Ethnic Studies? In 1998, there was a whole kind of furor around the, I believe it was Chancellor Berdahl, and Ethnic Studies having extra FTE? No, not extra, actually additional FTE [full-time employees].

Edwards:

From what I understand of it, because by that time I was on my way out the door, but from my understanding of it, it came down to not extra FTE, but FTE that they reported didn't deserve because they didn't have the body count to justify it. That was my understanding of the situation, and beyond that, I never really got involved with it. But from what I understand, the Ethnic Studies Department wanted to maintain their faculty, maintain their FTE in order to do that, and there was discussion and debate over how is that going to be justified given the enrollment numbers. When you get African American studies, which is principally people, if you will, at the student level by African Americans, and all of a sudden African Americans are not being admitted in even representative numbers, those numbers are declining. Now you're going to have a difficult time, based on the body count, justifying the FTE that you have, much less additional FTE. And at a certain level, if you don't have the FTE, you don't have a department, you have a program. And that was my understanding of what the situation was. But it goes back to commitment by the university to representative minority involvement in the educational process and structure of this institution. And it's just not there.

09-00:36:41

Wilmot:

My understanding was that debate quickly grew past issues of sufficient student body count to get into the issues of what was legitimate curriculum—

09-00:00:00

Edwards:

Of course.

09-00:36:56

Wilmot:

--ultimately resulting in this issue of a vote. A vote was called to vote around confidence in the chancellor at that time, in 1998.

09-00:00:00

Edwards:

You know, again, you're talking about palace politics, when it gets down to voting confidence in a chancellor. I never had any confidence in a chancellor. So I'm outside of that argument altogether. I don't have a dog in that fight. Again, it comes down to whether or not there's a commitment to minorities, minority programs, and so forth. And there just isn't. Everything's a struggle.

I know that even in the context of university politics, where each department in a particular college is fighting with every other department for FTE because you're talking about finite resources and so forth, there's a kind of baseline minimum that everybody accepts as legitimate, because they want the department to continue in existence. And they want their colleagues to be at least somewhat happy, satisfied, fulfilled, coming to work. And so, you don't go in and tell sociology, "You guys, in terms of that stuff that you're teaching, are so far beyond the mainstream of American academia, that we're now looking at ripping off the FTE that you have." You don't do that, because sociologists are esteemed on this campus by their colleagues in anthropology and psychology and the humanities, and anybody else that may be competing with them in Letters and Science for FTE. But when you go in and start saying, "Hey, you guys don't deserve the FTE you got." What you're really saying is hey, come on, you guys are conning the people. And of course it's going to get into a thing of "Well, what are you teaching over there?" Well, they're teaching exactly what they were set up to teach, which is something outside of the mainstream curriculum.

And as the money gets tight and administrators change, and one thing or another, all of a sudden you're going to look around and somebody's going to say, "Hey, why are we giving these people this money? Why are we giving these people this FTE?" It's going to come because the commitment is not there to develop the department, to develop the student clientele, population, and so forth. It comes back to the same thing.

09-00:39:41

Wilmot:

Following up on that, is there any hope then for these—or possibility rather than hope—is there a possibility for these areas that are looked at as outside of the mainstream curriculum to become mainstream curriculum courses of study?

Edwards:

Well, I think that there is some hope that they will become mainstream. But I don't know any other department that functions on the basis of hope. They function on the basis of budgetary commitments. They function on the basis of votes in the Academic Senate. They function on the basis of leadership at the level of the provost and the academic vice president. And all of those things go into it.

If what you're saying is, is there any future for African American studies? I think there is a future for something like that. Like the ethnic studies departments we have, but I think they're going to continue to evolve. Right now, for example, they're talking about departments, all over the country, moving from black studies and African American studies to Africana studies.

Now I knew how that situation evolved at Cornell, where they have a department of Africana Studies, and had it named as such from the outset. And that came as opposed to a department of African American Studies, or a department of Black Studies, because in the early 1970s, there was a tremendous proportion of the black students on campus, and faculty on campus, who had a Caribbean background in history. There were also substantial numbers—and when I say that, relatively speaking—of the black population on campus which had African history. They had come over from Africa to attend Cornell University, on Fulbrights and all other kind of stuff, exchange programs, and so forth.

So at the end of the day, they determined that they didn't want to call it the African American Studies department or the Black Studies department. They called it the Africana Studies department to cover the whole broad base. Well now, you find more and more of these departments, as they lose legitimacy as African American Studies departments, as the number of African Americans enrolling in college drops. As Black Studies departments, because there are those who do not characterize themselves as black. For example, some of the people from the Caribbean nations characterize themselves as Latins, although they are Africana Latins, and so they are morphing into these Africana Studies departments. So I think that yeah, there's some hope. But there's no hope that these departments will be maintained and sustained as they are, much less as they were initially envisioned by the people who fought and struggled in the late 1960s to get these departments.

09-00:43:24

Wilmot:

Interesting.

Edwards:

I think that they'll evolve towards something that the people who fought and struggled in the 1960s to get them would not even recognize as the departments that they fought for.

09-00:43:34

Wilmot:

But don't you think that in some ways when you're talking about history and literature of the African diaspora, those core issues of power, imperialism, colonization—those core issues are certainly not identical, but don't you think they are connected to that of the African American experience as well?

Edwards:

Oh, I don't think there's any question about that. But that was not the way the departments were initially conceived. The African American experience was written completely out of history with the exception of slavery. And every

now and then they would throw in Booker T. Washington and George Washington Carver. Beyond that, it bounced up to Ralph Bunche, Jackie Robinson, Joe Louis, and Jesse Owens. In terms of the actual experience of the African American development in history in this country, that was written completely out of the process.

And when you got into Africa, it came down to Africa through the eyes of European colonists and invaders and crusaders, who went to Africa to plunder, rape, murder, and pillage. And dominate. That was the Africa that we had access to in American academia. So, the struggle was, first, to clarify the realities of home. It's not like the African American reality has now been totally explored, catalogued, put in place, and so forth, as if it was dead and gone and finished, and now we can move onto other things because we've gotten that done. We're not there yet. We're nowhere close to that. The African American experience has not been catalogued, clearly understood. It has not finished its evolution. There's still a phenomenal gap in terms of the American academic presentation of American history. And a lot of that gap has to do with the African American experience. Suppressed, lost, stolen, denied, denigrated, and so forth. All of that still has to be worked out.

Whereas I think that there's no question that a lot of what happened to Africans who were deposited in the Caribbean, Africans who were deposited in South America and Brazil, Africans who were deposited in Central America, Panama, Africans who were deposited in North America, in the United States—that there's a lot of connectedness between their experiences. I think that if African Americans are going to battle to understand something, and to catalog a history and an experience, it should start at home. The equivalent would be: forget about American history, let's talk about world history and what happened to the Europeans who went to South Africa, and the Europeans who went to the Caribbean, and the Europeans who went to South American, and the Europeans—and then we'll get back to American history. The American Revolution, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, slavery, World War I—we'll get back to that at some point, but let's start and understand the European experience globally. And that's essentially what is happening when people say, “Hey, we don't have to worry about African American history. Let's look at Africana history.” And that way we diminish by addition. We denigrate by addition. We subtract by addition.

09-00:48:00
Wilmot:

Yeah, interesting. When I asked that question about the possibility of mainstreaming these curriculum areas that have to do with issues of histories of people of color—and women also—I think part of what I was asking was, is, in some ways, is there a way that these issues can be taught in departments like English and history and sociology, as opposed to moved over to Ethnic Studies and African American Studies?

Edwards:

Ideally, it should be absolutely impossible to teach American history devoid of the history of women in American society. It should be absolutely impossible to teach American history devoid of the history of Native Americans, of Africans, on the North American continent, of Latinos. How can you teach the history of California, Nevada, New Mexico, Arizona, Texas, and not teach the history of Latino Americans? How can you do that? The reality is that American history is taught. What little truth is there is typically escorted through the text book by a full phalanx of lies and myths that are embedded in people, ingrained in people, brainwashed in people, from the time that they first learn to read.

Columbus discovered America, and there were people standing on the shore watching him get off the boat, whom he called Indians. Well the minute you put that kind of a slant on it—how can he discover something and there are people standing on the shore watching him get off the boat? Then it becomes very, very easy to push the myth that Columbus discovered America. Nothing happened until European Americans got here. And once you start down that road, as [James W.] Loewen states in *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, it becomes impossible to teach the truth without being in profound and fundamental contradiction at virtually every turn. You wind up with all kinds of contradictions. Thomas Jefferson, great father of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and so forth and so on, who own slaves, had children by black slave women and then turned around and enslaved his own children. How are you going to teach that Jefferson is this great paragon of freedom and intellectual commitment to the ideals of freedom? And here is a human being who is so low and so degenerate, that not only did he own slaves, but he had babies by slave women, and then turned around and enslaved his own children. How can you do that? Well, what you do is you leave Sally Hemings and her children out. You just leave them out of the equation. They are slaves. They are not people who were enslaved. Because when you are enslaved, you've got to say by whom. And when you say by whom, well, it goes back to Jefferson and Washington, the founding fathers of the Republic.

So, once you begin to bring in women, once you begin to bring in Africans enslaved on this continent, once you begin to bring in Latinos whose land was stolen from them fair and square in the war against Mexico--with Texas, Arizona, Nevada, California ripped off—once you begin to bring in their history, now you've got to tell the truth about “American history,” which never included those people. It never included blacks, women, Latinos, Native Americans. Once you tell the truth about Native American history, then how do you continue to paint Andrew Jackson as a hero and a great patriot—who sent small pox blankets to Native Americans in his capacity as President. How do you do that? So at the end of the day, it becomes virtually impossible without totally deserting and contradicting the myths that American history and legend are predicated on—it becomes virtually impossible to bring these people into their legitimate place and status in the academic mainstream. So, I just don't see that happening. I simply don't see that happening.

09-00:53:53

Wilmot: And you haven't seen it happen while you were--?

Edwards:

I didn't see it happen while I was a student. I didn't see it happening while I was teaching, other than in the classes of progressive professors such as myself, who very quickly got a reputation for being, hey, way out there. I just don't see it happening as a mainstream feature of American education. Too many lies have been perpetrated, propped up, and legitimized as academic mainstream canon in our higher educational institutions.

09-00:54:44

Wilmot:

Professor Edwards, you've talked about yourself as a professor at Berkeley as someone who operated outside of the many traditional structures and committee work and the whole merit increases, all of those things. Was there ever a time when there were things that you wanted from the structures that you were not part of, that you did not have access to as a result of where you had situated yourself, and the way that other people had seen as you "out there", as you said?

Edwards:

Are you asking me, was there anything in the institutional matrix, mainstream, that I wanted and did not have access to as a result of the path that I had chosen?

09-00:55:49

Wilmot:

The path that you had chosen and the way that you were perceived.

Edwards:

No. There was absolutely nothing that I valued enough to sacrifice my independence and going my way in terms of what I saw as a legitimate calling in this academic environment. I mean I would not—I mean, what are they going to offer me? A promotion? I mean, what could they give me? Teacher of the year? What would they have to offer me? More money? More, higher rank? In the eyes of whom?

You know, any time I offer a class and there are 1,500 people, 1,500 students show up for the class, and the classroom only holds 600, because that's the limit on the number of readers we can get to handle the course. I don't need the approval, the salutations, the recognition from my colleagues, many of whom are showing up at classes with forty five students in them, by the middle of the semester there are seventeen, and by the time they're finished, they're finishing the class down at Kip's over a beer with the five or six students that are left. I mean, I don't need that. What do I need that for?

When I walk out of class, I've got seventy-five students waiting up at my office to come in and talk about the last lecture, to come in and talk about that something that they had gotten into a discussion with their parents about—when I have students follow me out of class, thirty-five, forty students follow me out of class and one says, "You know, me and my roommates were up all night last night discussing that idea about the unintended consequences

of superlative, well planned, institutional functioning. And we just started going through stuff. And we were up all night last night. And we wanted to ask you”—and all of a sudden, there are thirty-five or forty five students sitting around on the lawn or on the steps out in front of Barrows Hall, while I’m trying to bring an end to this, because we’ve already been going for two hours of class—when I see a student on a visit to China that took a class from me, and says, “I teach this in my class now. Here are my lecture notes. This came from your class”—I mean, that is what means something to me. When I get down to it and look at—I can’t think of anything.

What is it that this university controlled, or could grant me, that I would have possibly valued enough, to say, “You know what? I’m going to become a good old boy. I’m going to quit raising these issues. I’m going to quit challenging these lines of thought. I’m going to”—I don’t know what that would possibly be. That they maybe would like me. You know what? A black man in a racist society who puts primary priority, even secondary priority, on being liked, is going to end up either a slave—a sycophant—or one miserable, self loathing, half human being. And this is why I’ve always said—I’ve always taken tremendous pride in being disliked by the right people. It keeps you young. It keeps you vibrant. It keeps you alive to know that, hey, come on, don’t bring me that.

Edwards 10 12-06-05.wav

10-00:00:00

Wilmot: So you were just telling a story about how university administration responded to your consulting activities.

Edwards: Yeah, on at least three occasions that I can recall, probably more, I got letters of inquiry from various levels of the administration. From the department, from the provost’s office, saying essentially that they had received inquiries from outside of the university concerning my consulting activities. Now we are at a university where they have what is called the airborne faculty. They’re going back to Washington D.C., consulting with the Defense Department, all kinds of various agencies. And the university typically takes tremendous pride in that, because that is a way that they measure their worth and their value and so forth.

How many UC Berkeley faculty and so forth are consultants with the government and so forth and so on, as opposed to faculty from Harvard and other places. The reality is that in my case, my consulting had to be justified. So I got inquiries asking, “What is the basis and foundation of your consulting with the NFL and with the 49ers, with the NBA and the Golden State Warriors, with the office of Major League Baseball? What are you doing? How many hours does this take away from your academic responsibilities at the university? How much money are you being paid, and so forth and so on?” And in every instance, I simply wrote a one-line sentence indicating that my

consulting was the basis of the research data that I use to write the numerous articles and so forth that I was writing, to give the invited lectures that I was giving on developments at the interface of sport, race, and society. And I felt that that was legitimate.

But the inquiries continued to come. In other words, there was some concern, I think, that--well, if he's not involved in the university--in what is essentially an old boys club, really--then how legitimate are those involvements outside of the university, and to what extent are those involvements taking away from his university duties? And of course, I never missed a class in the thirty years that I was at the university. I never missed a class as a result of anything having to do with my consulting.

10-00:03:00

Wilmot:

And as far as you knew, there were other professors who were consulting were not queried?

Edwards:

Oh, absolutely. Never inquired. I knew professors that were flying back to Washington D.C. on a regular basis to consult with various agencies and departments. Would fly back, teach their classes—in some instances, graduate assistants would hold their classes for them when they couldn't get back whether it was weather or just extended duties. That's normal for a campus. It can get abusive to the point that people are not showing up for their classes. I've known instances of that, not here but on other campuses. But it never reached that point with me. Not only was I teaching larger classes than anybody else in the department, but I never missed a class in the department in all the years that I was here. So this was basically somebody sitting out there saying, "Well, it looks like to me—you know, I saw him on TV the other day and he was doing so and so and such and such. The 49ers were playing at the Super Bowl and he was there. Therefore, I have to recognize—what is he doing and who's meeting his classes and so forth?" Well, I met my classes. But it was just another element of harassment, and it was ongoing.

10-00:04:15

Wilmot:

Interesting. I have wanted to ask you—this is not connected as well—but I wanted to ask you about the anti-apartheid movement here on campus. First, how did you experience that? How did you see that unfolding? And what did your involvement in that movement look like?

Edwards:

Well, my involvement—a lot of the anti-apartheid movement on this campus was rooted in the faculty, the students, some staff members—once you move outside of that loop, I never had the depth of involvement with the campus movement that I had in other areas. So my anti-apartheid effort, going all the way back to 1968, revolved around athletes, athletics, elites involved with athletes and athletics.

My anti-apartheid effort was tied up in the effort that Arthur Ashe, myself, a bunch of people got together and put together Athletes and Artists against Apartheid, to get a total boycott by athletes and artists going to South Africa to participate in events. And the pay was outlandish. Some of these people took phenomenal hits not to go to South Africa. John McEnroe didn't go. You had other athletes who were offered as much a million dollars to come over and run a race, who didn't go.

You had other people who did go. Ray Charles went over there. You had a number of other artists and entertainers who went over there. But for the most part, that was where my efforts were. On campus, there were a number of factors that bothered me. One, not everybody on campus who was involved in the anti-apartheid movement had a principle interest in anti-apartheid. Some of that, a lot of that, was like anti-Israel. It was caught up in the Palestinian-Israeli thing. My sentiment for a long time, in terms of the Palestinian-Israeli thing was, at the end of the day, Israel is going to have to sit down with 150 million Arabs.

There's no way around it. If there going to have peace. At the end of the day, 150 million Arabs are going to have to sit down with a nuclear-armed Israel. There's no way around it. The only question was how many bodies are they both going to have to climb over to get to the table. By the time it got off into the bombings, where you had Palestinians going into Israel and blowing themselves up in cafes and so forth and so on, and the Israelis countering by coming in and blowing up Palestinian homes under the aegis that there was a terrorist who lived there, and then coming in and bulldozing whatever was left. I had gotten to the point that I couldn't have a sane discussion with either side on that issue.

I saw a photo of a seventeen-year-old Palestinian girl who walked into a café habituated by teenagers and young adults, and blew herself up. One of the people that she blew up was an Israeli girl who was nineteen years old. And they had both their pictures up on CNN. They could have been sisters. They could have been best friends. Yet you have these two sides killing each other, blowing each other up. And at the end of the day, they're going to have to sit down and talk about, how do we bring an end to this madness? They look like damn fools. Blowing each other up. And for what? To raise the body count higher. To raise the mountains of bodies to crawl across to get to the table and sit down and resolve the situation?

So, when I started to deal with the anti-apartheid movement on campus, and you get into the room over here at 100 Wheeler Hall, or wherever the meeting was, and people to began these other—"Yo, wait. I know that Israel and United States and Britain are South Africa's major trading partners. Israel processes most of South Africa's diamonds. Israel is supplying weapons to South Africa—South Africa is buying weapons as a major supplier. I know all of that, but let's talk about South Africa. Let's leave this. Because once we get

into that, then my position is a plague on both their damn houses. They're damn fools, they're out there killing each other, blowing each other to pieces, and for what? To raise the body counts? To see who can die the most? Who's willing to kill the most? Because at the end of the day, they're going to have sit down. It's just an issue of how many bodies."

We went through that in Vietnam. When Nixon came to office, there were 25,000 Americans dead, 750,000 Vietnamese. By the time that the United States pulled out of Vietnam, there were over 2.5 million Vietnamese dead, over 60,000 Americans dead. And the deal that was cut at the table was the same deal that was on the table when he came into office. It was just a matter of how many bodies was each side going to have crawl over to get there and get that done. So, for that reason, I would go to the anti-apartheid meeting, but when it eased off into these other discussions, I didn't deal with that. When I was dealing with Danny Glover and Arthur Ashe and people like that, who were organizing and working with Athletes and Artists against Apartheid, I knew where that was going. I knew what that meant. I knew when I was at the press conference, that's what I was going to deal with. That is where the focus was going to be. When I dealt with the ANC [African National Congress] about African and African American athletes linking up at various events in Europe and in this country when there were track meets and so forth, I knew what that was about. That was about South Africa and apartheid.

On the campus, because it is such a political place, and there is such an emphasis on coalitions, on people coming together, which is all well and good, but for me, I had to really sort through that because of how strongly I felt about the Middle East situation. And that is where that train got a little fuzzy for me. And so I was not in the loop, as far as the faculty and others who were pushing the anti-apartheid thing. I signed all of the petitions for divestment, went to all of the rallies for divestment, spoke at a few of the rallies. But as far as the depth of my involvement, like with Athletes and Artists against Apartheid, my work with the ANC, South African Non-Racial Olympic Organizing Committee [SAN-ROC] and so forth, no, I never got that deeply involved with it.

10-00:13:29

Wilmot:

It was more—your work took place outside the campus community.

Edwards:

Took place outside, more on a national scale outside of the campus community. And it wasn't that I didn't have those discussions in my office when faculty people came by—not faculty people—when students came by or in the hallways, when faculty people asked me to sign a petition, "Are you going to the anti-apartheid rally or the divestment meeting that they're having at wherever it's going to be?" I had those discussions, but I was never involved in it to the extent that I was on the outside.

10-00:14:05

Wilmot:

You mentioned Vietnam. Did you know people who fought in Vietnam?

Edwards:

I know people who fought in Vietnam. I know people who died in Vietnam. By the time my turn came, the government didn't want me in Vietnam. They didn't want any of us in Vietnam. I don't think anybody ever was drafted—not Bobby Seal or Huey Newton or Eldridge Cleaver or [Tommie] Smith or [John] Carlos or Lee Evans or myself—none of us were ever drafted. And as one FBI agent said to me, “We had more than enough leaders over there in the military. We didn't want anybody else to get in there who might all of the sudden start organizing black soldiers and so forth in some kind of peace effort.” So at the end of the day, I wasn't going, they didn't want me, but I knew a lot of people. I knew seventeen-, eighteen-year old kids that were killed in Vietnam. Got out of high school, signed up, went right in, and dead inside of six months. I had relatives who were wounded and shot up in Vietnam. So yeah, the Vietnam War was something that was very personal.

At the time, in 1966, '67, '68, I was teaching at San Jose State and they had this thing where if you were in college, you were exempt. You got a deferment if you were in college. And then, because they started running short on troops, you had to be in college and have at least a C average. If you had less than a C average, you were eligible for the draft. And so it put it on a professor, when you gave a kid less than a C, you were sending that young man to Vietnam. And then after there was a rebellion over that, they said, “Well, you have to be in college, have a C average, and be married.” So all of a sudden, you had people coming into your class, at the beginning of a semester, never seen each before, don't know each other, but all of a sudden they're married by the end of the semester because that's this guy's deferment. So all of a sudden he's married. And a lot of people go back and say, well, the explosion in divorces were a direct result of people getting married in the 1960s, late 60s and early 70s, in order to avoid being drafted into the Vietnam War.

But then of course, people just saw the madness of it and said okay, when your number comes up, you're going. And so by the late 1960s, all college deferments and that kind of stuff were basically done with. And that's when you got your peace movement. By the early 1970s, that's when you really got your peace movement going full scale. It had started in the late 60s, but by the early 1970s it was going full scale, because all deferments were gone and they were drafting these middle class white kids off of these campuses. 1969, 1970, 1971, and it was over. And that's when you got your peace movement.

10-00:17:40

Wilmot:

Do you see that being a possibility with the current conflict in Iraq?

Edwards:

With the war in Iraq? I think that for the current government to initiate a draft would be the most destabilizing thing that has occurred in this country since

Vietnam. I think that you would have people in the streets. I think that this government, Bush, Rumsfeld, Rice, Wolfowitz—I don't think they have any credibility with young people, increasingly. They have no credibility with opinion makers and the press, because of the way they went into this war, because of the gross incompetence with which they have conducted this war, and because of the absolute strategic nightmare that has been created over the course of this war, where it's virtually impossible to just up and leave. Because, unfortunately, there's every chance that those dogs will follow you home, that Afghanistan will be replaced by Iraq.

On the other hand, it's virtually impossible to stay there and make progress without a phenomenal increase in numbers. Some generals, ex military analysts have put the number at, at least half a million American troops in order to truly make progress in rebuilding and pacifying Iraq. If that is the case, the only way they can get to it, to those numbers, is through a draft. If they have a draft, you have people in the streets. If they don't have a draft, then they're going to have to get out. But once they get out, how do they guarantee the stability, or even worse, not leaving behind a fundamentalist Islamic state allied with Iran, which is on the verge of going nuclear. How do we avoid that contradiction? I think that this situation is so much worse than Vietnam. Not a single Vietnamese ever attacked the United States mainland. Not a single Vietnamese ever blew himself up in a car bomb in the United States. But if we do not leave that situation properly in Iraq, we could wind up facing all of that. So, I don't know what the solution to it is, but I do know that if the United States government calls for a draft, they've got major problems, America has major problems.

10-00:21:22

Wilmot:

Is there anything else that you want to speak to about your time in Berkeley?

Edwards:

No. It's been fun. I loved it. If there's not some controversy and some issues, I don't feel comfortable, especially given who I am, where I am, what I am, what I've been, the nature of the society that we live in. I've loved it. I love Berkeley. I love the students, the people that this place attracts. It's been a great experience for me.

I've lectured at over six hundred other institutions. I mean everywhere: Harvard, Stanford, Princeton, Yale, University of Alabama. I mean I've lectured all over this country, all over the world. Private, public schools, women's institutions. And all of the places that I have lectured, the one place that I continue to rank at the very top, in terms of student inquisitiveness, academic aggressiveness and curiosity, and just smarts—is Berkeley. I mean I love this environment. This is a place that was made for me to—this is where I belong as a teacher. The environment. The students. The action. The love of learning. The excitement of learning. The connecting the academic with the real life issues and challenges and problems. It's all here. And I absolutely loved it. And like I say in my autobiography, I'm going to make sure that my

ashes are scattered on this campus, so that I will indeed, just as I stated, be the last one to leave. I'll be here.

End of Interview