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University of California
Berkeley, California

Norvel Smith

A LIFE IN EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

Interviews conducted by
Nadine Wilmot
in 2002 and 2003

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Norvel and Mary Smith

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INTERVIEW HISTORY—Norvel Smith

Dr. Norvel Smith's professional life took him through several seminal chapters in the City of Oakland's history, and unfolded against the changing cultural and ideological landscape of politics in the East Bay and California during the fifties, sixties, and seventies. Graduating from Berkeley with an EdD in 1956, he was the first African American Vice Chancellor in the UC System, serving as Vice Chancellor-Student Affairs from 1973-1982. He was President of Merritt Community College for five years, from 1968-1973. From 1963 to 1968, he entered the area of community development, as Director of the Oakland's Department of Human Resources and Deputy Director of the Western Region Office of Economic Opportunity. His community involvements, outside of his professional path, touched many major educational, philanthropic, and cultural institutions in the Bay Area.

Dr. Smith was one of a group of professional African American men, most of whom met politically in the East Bay Democratic Club (and included Lionel Wilson, Allen Broussard, Evelio Grillo, Don McCullum and Clinton White, among others) who were important actors in African American politics, the civil rights and black power movements, and East Bay politics more generally in the decades after World War II. While their politics were contested from the left as well as from the right, it is impossible to overlook their central importance in the larger political life of Oakland, Berkeley, and the Bay Area generally. Dr. Smith is a leading light within this group.¹

All six interviews took place at Dr. Smith's home in the Oakland hills over the summer and fall months of 2002. There are seven interviews total, including an interview conducted by Robert O. Self in 1999 as part of his dissertation research. This interview is appended to this one, as it goes more in depth into East Bay politics in the 1950s and 1960s and represents a valuable resource for historians. Thanks to Donna Murch, who contributed to my research for this oral history with regard to Dr. Smith's Merritt College presidency. This interview was recorded on minidisc, transcribed, and reviewed by Dr. Smith. The interview was lightly edited for accuracy of dates and names and readability. The interview was not videotaped.

Dr. Norvel Smith 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 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
October, 2004

1. Robert O. Self, e-mail exchange, August 1, 2002

INTERVIEW 1: JULY 29, 2002

- Wilmot: It is July 29, and this is interview number one with Norvel Smith. So, hello.
- Smith: It's Norvel, incidentally. [with emphasis on first syllable.]
- Wilmot: Okay, Norvel. We usually start at the beginning. I wonder if you can tell me when you were born and where you were born.
- Smith: Born August 31, 1924—I'm a good Virgo—in Lynchburg, Virginia, where my mother came from, and where she returned from Philadelphia to have me.
- Wilmot: What are your parents' names?
- Smith: My mother's maiden name was Jacqueline Davis, although I never got to know her family—maybe a distant cousin. I don't know my father's background. I never had any connection with my natural father, but my stepfather, who was married to my mother for sixty years, was named Russell Sheppard. He was a postman in Philadelphia. He was born, I think, somewhere down in the southern part of Maryland and came to Philadelphia as a young boy.
- Wilmot: When you say you know very little about your mother's family, do you have a sense of whether they were all from Lynchburg, Virginia?
- Smith: Yes, I sense that they were. She had a half sister or somebody who was still living that I met, and she had a cousin, and I made one trip back to Lynchburg in 1940, just a little bit before I went into the service and met a couple of distant cousins. In fact, one of them, interestingly enough, was related to Christopher Edley, who for several years was the director of the Negro College Fund, and whose son is now an illustrious professor in the law school at Harvard. That was one of the few connections with Lynchburg that I recall.
- Wilmot: What were your impressions of the place when you went there?
- Smith: Well, you know it was a small town, slight industrial base, when I went there in '40. I saw the house where I was born, and then I guess we went back again—Mary and I went back in the seventies, en route someplace else, and stopped off. It was a completely different town, built up and growing with motels and hotels, the main street was relocated and all of that. I don't have much identity with Lynchburg, and since the good Reverend Falwell of the Christian Coalition is headquartered there, I never even tell anybody that I had any connection with Lynchburg.
- Wilmot: Okay, so your growing-up years, they were in Philadelphia?
- Smith: Yes, my mother came back when I was a year old, I guess, or younger, and turned me over to a couple who were foster parents, that I think that she might have lived with when she was young girl. I think there was a connection there, and they were semi-literate working class blacks, quite a bit older than I was at that time. They were more the age of her parents. I lived with them for eight or nine years, until my mother married and then finally decided to take me back.

I never took the name of my stepfather, which I never understood. I was always left with this name of my foster parents, Smith. I would have loved to change my name from Norvel to Norman, and maybe from Smith to Sheppard. Norman Sheppard, that would be my name.

So, they married, I guess, when I was about six. I don't know much about her life between 1924 and 1930. And they lived not too far from me, just a few blocks away, across the street from the elementary school that I went to. The relationship was just weird. They should have taken me immediately, but they didn't take me for maybe three years. I guess they tried and didn't have children and that made a difference, too. Here was a ready-made child that they could relate to.

Wilmot: Your foster parents, what kind of work did they do?

Smith: She did house cleaning work. You're talking about people who were born maybe in the 1880s. He worked for a milk company where he was a handyman, maintenance person—one of the little neighborhood milk companies that delivered milk.

It wasn't a very pleasant experience living there. I didn't know much better until I got along into school. But it was a trying experience. We moved a couple of times in the 1930s when quite a few of the houses didn't have indoor plumbing. We had central heating with one big outlet that came up out of the floor between the living room and the dining room, burning coal, and you had to, sometimes taking a bath, have a little heater mechanism you would light with oil. I remember burning my butt once, backing into one. It wasn't anything like the background that my folks had. He was a postman, and that was a good job in those days. My mother never worked. Maybe when she was older, and he used to do some moonlighting as a catering assistant, she might have helped out, but she never really had a career or anything.

Wilmot: Did you have any siblings?

Smith: No, as I was saying they never had any kids.

Wilmot: What part of Philadelphia did you grow up in?

Smith: South Philadelphia which was overwhelmingly Italian. It was interesting because even though there were quite a few blacks moving into that neighborhood, the Italians never ran away. They didn't evacuate the neighborhood when the first black moved in. In fact, I think that on my block there might have been six or eight black families and twelve or fifteen Italian families. And the Italians were really there for the neighborhood commitment. They would fix up their houses and do some really wonderful things, because of the pride that they had in the neighborhood. But there was also a rather large Jewish population. I remember when I went to high school, maybe 60 percent of my colleagues were Italians, and maybe 30 percent were Jewish. I guess that I was one of about thirty blacks that went to high school in 1939, and three years later I was the only one in the graduating class. It wasn't because I was that superior. It was just that high school graduation was a real thing, and these kids, I guess, didn't have the stability or the interest and they just dropped out. It was really amazing, in three years to have that many kids disappear.

Wilmot: There was a lot of attrition.

Smith: One of my classmates, a year ahead of me, incidentally, was Marcus Foster who came out here in '71 as Oakland Superintendent of Schools and was assassinated. He was a year ahead of me. I never got to see him much. I don't know what he did in the war. He went to Cheney, the little black teachers college outside of Philadelphia. I was fortunate enough to get into Penn on the GI Bill. Our paths never crossed. I think that he lived in North Philly, too, and I lived in South Philly, and then we moved to West Philly a little later, which was kind of a step up. Not anymore, as the whole city is a disaster, physically. They've lost three, four hundred thousand people. Other than the university campus areas out there near the river and the downtown, which is typical of a big, booming metropolis, the three major neighborhoods are just a disaster. The last time I was there was when I went back for my fiftieth class reunion at Penn and drove through the old neighborhood, and it was really bad.

Wilmot: You've described your immediate community as being somewhat diverse, with Italians, Jewish and African Americans—

Smith: But there wasn't much interaction, I should point out. The kids knew each other; they went to school, but the families didn't relate. First of all, a lot of the older people didn't speak English, so there wasn't that much going on on the block. Most of us just went to the nearest church of our interest, which for me was Baptist at the time. It was seven or eight blocks away. That seemed like a long distance then—a short distance now—but it was almost the next neighborhood over.

That and high school playing in the band was something that I liked. I didn't go in for athletics very much. I used to think that I was a pretty good handball player, hitting the ball up against the wall.

I didn't have many close friends. Certainly, I didn't have any close black friends. The really bright, middle class kids went to the elite high school, called Central High in Philadelphia, which was just about that time moving out to the suburbs just barely in town. Then they had an elite girls school called Girls' High, so there weren't really that many bright, middle class kids that I would encounter. Certainly, at this Baptist Church there weren't, and in high school nobody really persisted for me to really get to know them. My social life was around the neighborhood to a lesser degree, and then high school was pretty much occupied, because for whatever reason, I took a year of biology, chemistry, three years of English and math, a year of French, in a ghetto high school, which is surprising you know. I think that I might have taken a couple of courses in bookkeeping. I didn't take any courses in shop, because I wasn't facile in that way.

But it was a good experience, but I never really met a single black who had gone to college until I went into the service. And here in this all-black infantry division were dozens of young blacks my age or a little older who had gone to college in the South, had a year in college, and if they were graduates, they were all master sergeants or something like that. That experience and the encouragement of one of our white officers really stimulated me to want to explore higher education.

I was fortunate enough, also when I was in the service after I took my basic training down in North Carolina, to be offered the opportunity to go into what was called the

Army Specialized Training Program, ASTP, which was a training program to prepare people in technical fields to meet the needs of the emerging army and its development. I was shocked to find that I had scored something like 120 on the AGCT [Army General Classification Test] which they gave the morning after I arrived at the depot when I first was inducted. We got in about midnight. At seven o'clock the next morning, I was taking the test that was going to determine my whole military future. Somehow, I did well enough, because 120—it wasn't equated to the IQ but 115 was the breaking point to qualify for officer candidate school. So, I ended up in ASTP. They sent me to Wilberforce, one of the five black colleges that had the program, and we were there with sixty soldiers and about 200 lovely young ladies. But it didn't last long. After four months, we were abruptly removed and put in the 92nd Infantry Division, which needed more intellectual manpower in order to qualify for combat. They actually had requirements of development for soldiers before they would let you go overseas.

So, anyhow, I went from the campus one day down to the bayous of Louisiana the next day. And just to finish that military part, we went back to our home base in Fort Huachuca, Arizona, and then went to Italy that September, 1944, and were there relatively late, because the war was over eight months later, and the German air force was all but knocked out. So, other than artillery fire and health problems, we were lucky if we had a mobile shower unit to come up once a month to give us clean underwear. I caught scabies, I had yellow jaundice. It wasn't serious enough to send me home—I guess they call it hepatitis now.

It was an interesting experience, and I felt lucky that I was able to go through that and come back safe and sound and intellectually stimulated. I was in division headquarters, in a section called G-2, which was enemy intelligence, processing paper for the most part, from aerial surveillance and from behind the lines operatives, and forward observers of the artillery. We were always four to five miles behind the lines, so I was never exposed to small arms fire, hand grenades or anything like that, just the artillery. We had to move periodically, when we figured they had zeroed in on where we were.

Wilmot: Did you interact with people outside the military such as the Italian people around there?

Smith: There were no Italians around the combat zone at that time. When the war ended—and it ended a week earlier in Italy than in Germany on April 29, 1945, the German Italian commander surrendered, and we were on the outskirts of Genoa, which is a lovely, big maritime center for Italy. And we did have some exposure there. We confiscated nice apartments in the area up on the hill where we had our command post, and that lasted about a couple of months. Then, of course, reality set in. We could meet some people there and try our emerging Italian, and eat at a decent restaurant once in a while, but it was still pretty shaky. The partisans who really helped tremendously win the war and who were almost all Communists, had a continuing fight with the so-called Fascists. Even as the war ended they were going around shooting each other. It took a little time before we could even convince them to turn in their weapons. So, it wasn't too nice a period, even though we were in this lovely, big town that had very little damage. I think back in '42 it had some British bombing. But, it was a nice place. I remember, subsequent to my being there, that it turned out that the headquarters of one of my favorite Italian composers, Puccini—one of the places that we stayed was in his

residence, in his family residence in the nice part of the town. Then, of course, we came back, and that was a fairly traumatic experience.

Wilmot: I have a question for you before we get to that. I actually wanted to ask you a little bit more about your fellow enlisted men in the 92nd Infantry. You told me that they all had college educations, or many of them—no, not all?

Smith: Not many, but remember, in ASTP now, sixty-five of us—probably a third of those young fellas—had had a year or so of college. We were all about nineteen. I think I was about nineteen when I was drafted. Then, when I went into the 92nd Division, out of about a dozen guys in my section G-2, the master sergeant in charge was an engineering graduate of Penn State. The second and third level guys were graduates of Virginia State and another black college. There were only about two or three of us who just were high school buffs in that unit. And it was a select group to deal with the kind of data that we had to process.

Wilmot: And the way you were placed in that unit was primarily as a function of the way you scored on that test?

Smith: To get into the ASTP program in the first place?

Wilmot: Yes.

Smith: Yes, that was really surprising to me that I could have done so well under the circumstances of taking the test. So, they put me into a basic engineering program, and we had about three months there—four months. I guess we were there just over the Christmas holidays when they were forming it, and we left in April. We were in basic engineering. I wasn't much of a math buff, but we were taking English, history, math and science eight hours a day, really crammed in.

Wilmot: To what do you attribute first that you were able to stay in high school and to do well in high school, and also to score so well on your exam? To what do you attribute that?

Smith: I never had any real knowledge of my capacity vis-a-vis anybody else. There weren't many black kids there and my Italian buddies that I socialized with in school, we never saw each other outside of school. A few Italian buddies that I had in the neighborhood were either younger or older, and they weren't particularly intellectually inclined.

Wilmot: Were you a very avid reader as you are now?

Smith: I wouldn't say so. I was so overwhelmed with all of the homework, I doubt that I read a book independent of my studies more than twice in all of my high school, if that. And as I said, my early home was an intellectual wasteland with two semi-literate people who might have gone to third or fourth grade, fifth grade, something like that, for that first six or seven years.

Wilmot: Beyond that, your mother and stepfather, did they—?

Smith: Yes, that was a step up, because both of them were at least eighth grade, ninth grade graduates, and had middle class friends pretty much limited to the postal group that they

were with. They also weren't churchgoers, so that was the beginning of my escape from the rather harsh discipline of going to this Baptist church with my godparents. So I got away from that. Didn't come back to organized religion until I got out of the service.

Wilmot: Your parents were churchgoers?

Smith: No.

Wilmot: So that was something that you took upon yourself.

Smith: I think that they might have been Baptists, but I never knew them to go to church right through their eighties and nineties.

Wilmot: It is so rare for a young person to take upon themselves that they are going to go to church every Sunday. How did you come to that?

Smith: Well, I was talking primarily about those first few years as a youngster. I guess everybody went to church in those days. Maybe among the black middle class, even then, there was less churchgoing. Although after I got back from the service, I thought almost all of the middle class kids, because it was a better neighborhood around us, were churchgoers, if for no other reason than that their parents insisted on it. Some of them were guys, twenty, twenty-one years old who still went to church with their parents. But there is the beginning of the independence that came from being a big veteran of the war and going on to college and all of that. We didn't have time for any religious b.s. Do you come out of a religious background?

Wilmot: Not at all. My father was a Catholic. He was raised Catholic, Jesuit, and then he got his freedom—you know how lapsed Catholics sometimes are.

Smith: Well, I became an Episcopalian for about two or three years. When I got out of the service, all the interesting young ladies were going to this one church, Saint Thomas, and it was a high church. It was like being in a Catholic church. I took instruction and I went to early mass, and I'd come home after early mass and take somebody's bottle of milk and Sunday paper and go home and enjoy it, because I had probably been out playing cards with the guys every Saturday night. When Mary and I married, I was an Episcopalian, marrying a AME minister's daughter. We complimented each other in the fact that neither of us had any interest in what we thought was bogus, nonrelevant religion that was, you wouldn't call it the opiate of the people, but it just never appealed to us in the pedantic style of the ministers and all of that. I think that we went to church for a year or two after we came to San Francisco, because there was one very interesting, interracial, sort of leftist church that we got identified with, where I met a lot of my longtime friends.

Wilmot: Which one was that?

Smith: It was called Fellowship Church. The famous black preacher, Howard Thurman, came out from Howard University during the war and then went back to Boston University to be the dean of the chapel back there. So, it was an interesting innovation. He started in the church in 1944, and I came out to California in '51, and he left around 1953 to go back to Boston, where he became a very famous black theologian. So, where are we?

Wilmot: I'm wondering was it very important to your parents that you do well in school, your mother and your stepfather?

Smith: I suppose so. No pressure—and again, here were eighth grade graduates who are a little more articulate. But they didn't know any college graduates, anybody that had gone to college even more so than my experience. They had come out of working class backgrounds. I wouldn't say impoverished, but certainly struggling backgrounds. They were lucky to go that far in school.

I don't remember getting any real encouragement, except perhaps, I was intimidated. I didn't want to goof up and really feel the wrath of not doing well and studying, and that motivated me. I guess I was around these Jewish and Italian kids who were very friendly and very close during the school day, and that was kind of an interesting environment for me. All of them did well. Maybe 20 percent of them were going on to college, not very many of them, but after the war, a much larger percentage went, on the GI Bill.

Wilmot: So, your community wasn't largely African American. Where in Philly was there a concentration of African Americans?

Smith: Oh, just six or eight blocks away. Where I lived, I guess my first two or three years, and where my mother had lived as a girl, I guess, was a completely black neighborhood, and only six or eight blocks away. I guess there was a gradual encroachment, except it just sort of stopped about where we were. Even in recent years, the blacks never went south beyond Tasker Street, or whatever those streets were. And then, as you headed further north, beyond that seven or eight blocks, you got into the heart of the black community around South Street, which was the center of black business and culture. Again, as I was saying, black professionals lived right in that neighborhood, because there was no other place they could go, so you always knew that Doctor this or somebody, lived right around the corner from the YMCA.

And there were some really good people who came out of that neighborhood, who succeeded. A young guy, who I met after I came to California, came out of that neighborhood. Japanese father and black mother, Rai Yukamoto, who went on to be a professor at Berkeley and who was city planning director in San Francisco—back in the seventies and eighties. And the famous grand old lady singer who lived right in that neighborhood, about eight or ten blocks from me. You know, Marion Anderson, the one who was famous because she couldn't sing at the Lincoln Memorial. She is long since gone.

Marion Anderson lived in that same neighborhood. I would guess of a little more middle class parentage. Two blocks away was this jungle on South Street, which has now become "chi chi" and highly developed by the new, young, white professionals. It is a good example of white gentrification. Do you know Philadelphia?

Wilmot: I don't know Philadelphia. Was all of that still called South Philly?

Smith: Yeah, South Philly was everything really. Here's the center of the city where City [gestures with hands] Hall and the commercial district was. Then that district spread out four or five blocks. Still some commercial and very wealthy people lived in that core,

and unlike today the wealthy people lived in the core of the city rather than the suburbs. Then about four or five blocks outside of City Hall, just about at South Street or Lombard Street, was the beginning of the black neighborhood. I have an interesting book here about South Philadelphia, written by an Italian American journalist. Everything south of there was South Philadelphia. It was one of the oldest parts of the town, because it was close to the docks and it was heavily industrialized down there.

Whereas the other neighborhoods, North Philly, which also became a black jungle and West Philly which was a step up, were newer developments. You could tell by the houses. In South Philly, you could see a little house about twenty, twenty-four feet wide and going back to a yard. You get to West Philly, it might be forty feet wide and have a little porch. Occasionally you'll see a garage underneath the porch. It was originally a largely Jewish neighborhood. The Jewish population moved further out towards the suburbs, and blacks moved in there in the thirties and forties.

Wilmot: I think that many people have described Philadelphia now as a very embattled place, including yourself, but I understand that there was this history of there being a very strong black community there that was very engaged and had some kind political power—

Smith: But that's since 1955 or '60. Before that it was a plantation politically. The Republicans had been in for seventy years until the first Democrat, Joe Clark, was elected mayor about 1955, and that was a very revolutionary move. And after that, blacks got involved and got judgeships and Temple and Penn hired their first couple of professors. So, things really didn't open up until after World War II. Then, of course, the phenomenon was that the progress didn't go very deep. So the middle class did quite well and filled all of those opportunities that were there for the first time, but the underclass fell even further back and were still concentrated in ghettos.

South Philly was less of a ghetto, because it was smaller and you would have some middle class houses there, and you would have some Italians over here, still a few Jews living over here, if you can believe it, in the forties. North Philly was really more like Harlem. It was three-and-four story row houses that were multiple dwelling units. Lots more crime, the policeman walked around in twos and threes. This was in 1941 or '42, before I went into the service and it became even worse when I got out in the fifties and sixties. Well, I was gone by the fifties, although I went back quite a bit when I was working for the city [Oakland] in community development. I used to go back to New York, Philadelphia, and Washington quite often.

Wilmot: So, you don't remember Philadelphia having a strong African American community?

Smith: Until after I left. I don't even remember a black on the city council and I was fairly active when I went to Penn. There were only about thirty or forty blacks on the campus and we were a tightly knit group. For example, long before the sit-ins and the movement in the South in 1947, some of us went ten miles, twenty miles over to Lincoln University, which was the black college, to protest the fact that those kids weren't being served in the drug stores. We went over there with some of our white radical friends. This was 1947.

And I guess I had got some of my social consciousness there. I had a fair number of white friends, most of them very liberal if not socialist. They introduced me, for example, to the magazine *New Masses*. I would sit up there and read it and it was the house organ of the American Communist Party, or something like that. I got a lot of stimulation, and it reinforced a lot of my awareness of the fact that there were still great disparities between not only blacks and whites, but also class disparities. I brought a lot of that with me when I came to the Bay Area. I was really quite interested in seeing a different type environment.

Wilmot: So you really located a political awakening in college?

Smith: Yes, I think so. I think at Penn, I did. As I said, there was a very small number of blacks there. I never got involved in a fraternity or social stuff like that. I just went to school like it was a job and came home at night on the trolley. I guess I did have a car for a short time, but I had to sell it.

Wilmot: What kind of car was that?

Smith: In 1946 or '47 I bought a 1940 Chrysler. I kept it for about a year and then I had to dispose of it. I couldn't afford it. I was getting about sixty dollars a month from my stipend, from the GI Bill. I guess the government paid for books apart from that and paid for tuition, which was very heavy. It must have been seven hundred or eight hundred dollars a year. In fact, what they did for people like me and others, was to shorten your entitlement and take more money each year. You probably had a fixed amount of money that they would pay you for a four-year education. Maybe that was five hundred a year. I might have lost six months of entitlement by having more money paid for my tuition than was allowed generally by my program. When I came to Berkeley, we applied at Berkeley and Stanford and were accepted at both. But Stanford was also up around eight hundred dollars, which was a lot of money. A full-time teacher might have been making \$3,000 to \$3,500 a year at that time.

Wilmot: When you say we applied to—?

Smith: Mary and I both applied. She was a graduate student for a year in educational psychology. I guess you'd say that she kind of made a sacrifice. She went back to work and I continued. Then we both took jobs in 1953.

Wilmot: We'll talk about that some more later. I just wanted to return one last time to Philly. When you graduated from school, you weren't drafted immediately?

Smith: No, I worked for a year. I had junk jobs. I worked as a clerk. Remember, I didn't aspire to college. I never gave it a thought, if I could afford it even. I had no role models. I worked for Sears Roebuck as some sort of shipping clerk, and then I got another clerical job working for the army in one of the big supply depots there. I was going nowhere, and when they caught up with me a year later, they cleaned out the whole neighborhood of guys—many of the guys were drafted within five or six months of their registering. You had to register on your eighteenth birthday, so I registered in August of '42. But I wasn't called until September of '43, which was an extra year. I wasn't going anyplace, so I guess getting in the military was the beginning of a new life for me.

Wilmot: It's interesting because I come from such a different generation and listening to you talk about this draft, I can't imagine what your response would be upon getting that letter.

Smith: Yeah, I still have it in there in the file, as a matter of fact. But I guess everybody was going into the service. I wasn't really frightened about losing my life. It was just not a bad option to get the hell out of going nowhere, to have some point to your life, and again, meeting very impressive young blacks in the service, who inspired me.

Wilmot: During that time, was Philly in a state of wartime America awareness? Was there a sense of the issues? Did people know what was going on in Europe?

Smith: Well, certainly the people that I hung out with weren't intellectuals. Probably read the daily paper, partly to find out what the numbers were for the day, so you could see if you won the daily lottery. You've heard of the numbers? There were two papers. The *Daily News* was the numbers tabloid and then, I guess, if you really wanted to be informed you bought the *Bulletin*, the good paper. But magazines, journals, books were not part of consciousness in neither segments of my life, with the Smiths or with my parents.

Wilmot: So when you went off to fight, were you feeling like you were going to fight for a good cause?

Smith: No, I didn't think that there was a good cause for black people. And I was in an all-black division, one of two in the country. It took political pressure, if you can believe it, to have the army decide that they would send us overseas, and that they thought blacks were qualified to be in combat. The same thing happened with that black Tuskegee air group, which went over about a year before we did. They went over spring of '43 I think. They had an illustrious career. But I just felt that, "I'm in the army, I have no control over my destiny, and I hope that I survive it." I guess I was really fortunate. I realized that a lot of my young friends who had been in ASTP with me were put right in line companies—machine gunners, and carrying rifles, and exposed to small arms fire. It was really a close call. I could very well have been in one of those units. I remember before we went overseas, everybody had to have a brush-up in infantry tactics. I had taken air force basic training. When they broke up the ASTP, they didn't send you back where you came from. They just put all of us in the 92nd Infantry Division. I can remember being assigned for about three weeks to live with an infantry company, intensive rifle range, and throwing hand grenades. Night infiltration was the most terrible, because you had to crawl maybe a couple of hundred yards with the machine gun firing over your head at about three feet, at night—not pitch black, but at night—those types of things. That's what these guys had as part of their basic discipline. But they had all of us non-rifle company guys have that exposure because you had to be certified when you went overseas in a combat outfit to be available for combat.

Wilmot: Did you know of many of those who were in ASTP with you? Did you know of any casualties?

Smith: Yeah, at least two. That was a long time ago, but at least two of the guys that I remember. One guy I remember named Edward Woodbury—I don't know why I remembered his name—from Ohio, I know was killed. And there was another guy. They were both in infantry regiments, the 365th regiment and they weren't my best friends, but I just knew via the grapevine that they didn't survive the war.

Wilmot: You mention your best friends. Who were your best friends that you made from that time?

Smith: When I was overseas?

Wilmot: Yes.

Smith: Oh, the dozen guys that I was in the outfit with who I saw—we worked ten-hour days. I was with them for a year, on duty ten hours, and off whatever, and living in empty apartments.

Our bath was to heat some water and fill up our helmet liner with lighted gasoline, which we then used as a clean-up device. Interesting thing was that we used to take gasoline out of a gas can, because there were vehicles all around, and a two and a half gallon gasoline can. We usually had one in each of the houses that we were occupying

And the headquarters, much of the time, was in what they would call a palazzo, a really fabulous place that we walked to. It was one of the locations. It was well hidden and that's where the general and all of the senior staff were. And the rest of us drones were spread out four or five blocks away. As you walked around at night, one of the things was avoiding gun-happy young kids [soldiers] because every day of the year they changed the security code word, every day. And if you didn't know the code word, or didn't know the person, or weren't recognized, it was really a risk. So, it might be "heaven" today and tomorrow it might be "chocolate."

Wilmot: They wouldn't just know that you were one of them?

Smith: Well, they would know you in the daytime, and I think that the codes only went in at night, and in daytime, visual observations.

As I said, the sanitation was really a serious problem. If you didn't take what we called the whore's bath out of your helmet, you really were waiting a long time to be able to take a shower. They had food brought up to us every day. The real heavy headquarters echelon was about twenty miles back of us, you know, quartermaster and all that stuff. So, we were really part of a combat unit there, and if there had been any breakthroughs by the Germans, we would have been exposed to it. But, every day they brought up supplies, and brought up food, and of course, the daily free pack of cigarettes, which most of us just accumulated and sold after the war, to raise a little money from the civilian population. They would even occasionally bring up beer, but that was rare. There were relatively few if any commercial places open. There were no civilians that were dumb enough to still be around there. They would move further south as we moved north.

The Germans were always controlling the high ground. That was the point where the Apennines come within about three miles of the coast. So there was just this short three-mile corridor to try to have some push through, plus the lower hills, and it was hardly worth sacrificing to do that, so it was kind of a long standing mile at a time type of thing, even though the Germans knew long before we got there that they couldn't win. This was 1944. D-day had already come in June and some of the troops in Italy had

been pulled out and sent into the south of France. So it was just a waste of time and lives that last six or eight months for the Germans, and for us.

Wilmot: Many people when they speak of that time, there's this sense that Americans didn't know about what the Germans were doing under Hitler's command to the Jewish people.

Smith: I never heard any of that stuff until after the war, and I was in enemy intelligence. But none of that really came through the press. After the war, when the first troops actually came across some of those places in Dachau, Poland, and others, then all of that publicity broke out, but the American press generally didn't focus on that. Our daily military newspaper or weekly was more concerned with information about what was happening in various combat sectors and maybe some little personal interest stuff that they would give you. But no, I never heard anything about that phase of what was going on. I just knew that the Germans were, as the Italians would say, "*Tedeschi sonno cattivi*," (the Germans are evil people). Then they would say, "*Americani sonno buoni*" (good people). We would jokingly say, "Well, it would have been nice if you came to that conclusion two years ago, we might not be here now, putting our lives on the line."

But the Germans were really fiendish. As I said, the mines, the booby traps, and as you went forward all the time, the filth and leaving bodies around. This was their experience also, but it was just even more hopeless for them, because there was no way to win. The German air force had been completely knocked out or neutralized. We never had to worry about planes coming over day or night, because the American air force completely controlled the skies. So that helped. I'm glad that we didn't go over a year before at Anzio, before they came up to Rome, after which the Germans really retreated rapidly. But they were very tight there for about a year, in late 1943, early '44. A lot of people lost their lives.

Wilmot: You've described your day-to-day, when you were working in the military intelligence office? Is that correct?

Smith: It wasn't an office. It was just a group of about a dozen people with information coming in all the time from a variety of sources. G-2 was enemy intelligence. Right next to us was G-3, which was plans and operations, which was developing what our troops are supposed to do, somewhat reacting to what the intelligence told us. Then there was G-1 which was personnel and logistics. This group of about fifty guys always traveled with the general and his five or six top staff, as what was called the forward echelon of division headquarters. Then the rear echelon was twenty miles back or something like that.

Wilmot: So you were always hearing breaking news as part of your work every day?

Smith: Yes, but we knew from standard sources, aerial observation, troops on the front lines who were there primarily to just detect the movements of the Germans and then send the word back. Lots of information coming back from behind the scenes partisans and OSS types of troops and operatives. They would come through once in a while. Then people in our unit that had attached to us interrogators who would interrogate prisoners as they were captured and brought in. That was an interesting thing. At one point, it was

really weird. We would always see these prisoners, and most of them were Germans, I guess, or Europeans. Occasionally, they would bring women. Some of these guys would bring women in for nefarious purposes and just say they were spies.

Wilmot: German women?

Smith: No, Italian women. They were just using their discretion to bring some companionship in and pretend that they were related to the Germans. Some of them were tightly related to the Germans.

But at one point, a batch of guys came in and they were Orientals. They had on German uniforms but they looked Chinese. I guess it turned out that they were from that section of Russia where there was tremendous mixture of Turks and Asians, and they had been captured and put on the front lines of the German army as a last resort. Here were these little guys and we didn't have anybody who could interrogate them. They were just sitting there smiling and begging for cigarettes. Really weird.

Wilmot: During that time was that an integrated military environment?

Smith: I was in an all-black infantry division, which meant that all of the enlisted men were black. We are talking about 14,000 troops, and I would say about half of the lower level officers, lieutenants and captains were white and the rest of them were black. And then very few so-called command staff—majors, colonels, and of course, one commanding general—I think that there was one artillery battalion that had a black full colonel. Each regiment had an artillery battalion attached to it. They called them a combat team and they had their own engineers and their own medics. They could operate in a sector, pretty much as an integrated activity. The division chaplain was a black man and he was a lieutenant colonel. Occasionally, we would have a major and quite a few captains who were in the regimented component of G-2, which were called S-2's. Each of the regiments then had their equivalent of an intelligence unit that communicated with us. They were right on the front lines or within a thousand yards or something of the front lines. But there were not many—the command staff was all white, let's just say, and half of the non-command level staff were white. In my unit, there was a full colonel who was in charge of G-2 and a major and two captains, along with us twelve enlisted men, and they were all white.

The commanding general was a notorious guy—Edmund Almond. He was from Aniston, Alabama, and a typical Southern honky type. The word was that he was a general because he was married to General Marshall's sister, the famous General [George] Marshall—the Marshall Plan? I sort of got a kick out of the fact that five years later, when the Korean War started, here after a couple, three months, the Americans finally made their attempt to take back what the North Koreans had taken. And they went too far. They went all the way up to the Chinese border and that brought the Chinese in, and they blamed it on Lieutenant General Almond, who stupidly went beyond what he was authorized to do and sucked in the Chinese, who had warned them, I guess, if they got within ten miles of the Chinese border. So, here was dumb Edmund Almond, still Peter Principle. He was lieutenant general by then, but I think that that ended his career with that massacre of the troops when the Chinese came in and trapped the guys way up there, two hundred miles into North Korea.

Wilmot: Was there discrimination? The commanding officers, did they discriminate against the enlisted men?

Smith: Most of them probably—I'd say maybe 10, 20 percent of them—appreciated the opportunity to work with black troops and they really were well motivated. But [for] the rest of them, this was just a bullshit assignment. They weren't in one of the white divisions. They weren't with the paratroops, the elite groups. So, most of them—a disproportionate number of them were Southerners, the notion being that Southerners know how to deal with blacks, and maybe two-thirds of all our troops were Southern blacks. The military was always a first opportunity upward for poor Southern whites. Two of the guys in our outfit—one had gone to military school in South Carolina and the other one had gone to Texas A&M. They came up through the military and that was their career.

I want to tell you one more thing about the military, which was most distressing to us. When the war ended—well, I'll give you a little history. The war ended there that spring of 1945. We stayed in Genoa for a few months. The war was still going on in Japan, in the Far East, and our division was moved back down below where we had been before, down below Pisa. And we were being prepared to go to the Philippines, in September, to be part of the potential invasion of Japan, the homeland, until good old Harry Truman dropped the bomb. Which was ridiculous. They didn't have to drop the bomb except to send a message to the Russians. But it certainly, we felt it saved a lot of potential casualties.

So then, when August came and we stopped our preparations, they started letting guys come home in large numbers. And if you had eighty-five points then you could come home immediately. You got a point for every month in the service, a point for every month overseas, and several points for every battle that you were in. We were in three battles, our division, so we had three battle stars. I only had about fifty-two or fifty-three points, so I couldn't possibly qualify, but a lot of the guys got out that September. But the army was really clever. They set up a GI university in Florence, where they brought over maybe thirty or forty stateside professors for the fall semester, and they taught regular college courses. I took three or four courses, English and a variety of things, to the point that when I got out of the service and went to Penn, I was a sophomore, because between the ASTP basic engineering and what I took over there that fall of '45, waiting to come home, I had enough units to start as a sophomore.

Wilmot: I was wondering how you got your BA in three years.

Smith: Well, it was three and a half, going twelve months a year. I went from scratch to master's in about three and a half years.

In any event, the last the thing that I remember that was so devastating, when I finally came home that February, as we were being gathered to come home, all of us were moved down to the big port in Naples. And we were in a depot where you were being processed to come back home. In that depot, Nadine, everybody was grouped by geography. So, I was there with all of these guys, black, white, or whatever from Pennsylvania and New Jersey. We were being processed because we were going to be demobilized from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Lo and behold, we get on the troop ship to come home, and as you got on the troop ship, they handed you a meal ticket. And the

meal tickets were coded, but the coding also indicated where you were going to be on that ship, and every Negro was in the bottom segment of that troop ship. Coming back after this service and putting our lives on the line, and they couldn't get beyond the last indignity of putting all of us in the bottom segment of that ship, regardless of where we were from. So, I never forgot that as my last memory of the service. When we were being processed and we got out in about two or three days, and we were offered the opportunity to stay in the reserves, I mean, everybody sort of smirked and said, "Are they crazy?" Some of the poor guys were conned into it, a little extra fifty bucks a month, and the poor suckers got called four or five years later and had to go to Korea, after having served two, three, three and a half years in World War II. So, that is my last memory of the service.

Wilmot: You said this interesting thing when you first talk about being drafted. I asked you if you felt that you were going for a good cause, and you said, "There wasn't a good cause for black people."

Smith: For me to identify with, no. I think that is true. It was an opportunity for many blacks, even more so for Southern blacks, to come out of really barren rural existences, and to have a chance to become educated. Many of us, like me, who had graduated from high school with a decent education and who had been in ASTP and all of that, it was sort of an interesting experience, but it wasn't the life and death between what these poor guys from the rural South had grown up with. For them, it really was a step up, even though they were going to expose themselves to possible loss of life.

Wilmot: The other thing I was wondering about is, in our previous conversation, you had mentioned that you had grown up very closely with Italian Americans in Philadelphia. I wonder what that was like to go from being in this community of Italian Americans to being in Italy.

Smith: It was fortuitous. I had picked up a little patois—I think that I told you that I went to this high school with all of these Italians, but they didn't teach Italian. They taught French, German, Latin, and Greek. So I took French, which gave me a little background in Romance languages to make a transition. But yes, I really liked Italians, but I wasn't really aware of the strengths and the intricacies of the Italian culture, which I then just became captivated by. I really felt that I was an Italophile. I came back to Penn and I took two and a half years of Italian.

Wilmot: You became an Italophile as a result of your time over there?

Smith: I think so. I think that getting to see the country after the war was over—I spent three months in Florence, going to this GI university, and living in a modern campus that had been built back in the thirties by the Fascists for some military purpose. You know, horseback riding, swimming pool. Just seeing Florence at that time was really critical and then Genoa. So, I had good exposures to two of the significant places—Genoa and Florence, in addition to all of those little filthy towns that we were going through. Mary and I went back for our fiftieth anniversary, our seventh trip to Italy, last year. We went in '61, '64, every three or four years. I don't think I need to go back anymore though, because I'm visiting for the second and third time the places that I'm interested in, and I'm not interested in long distance travel and all of the trials and tribulations of travel anymore.

Wilmot: When you were discharged from the military, did you come straight back to Philadelphia?

Smith: Yeah, I came back to Philly, and the timing wasn't very good, because I got out at around the middle of February and I missed the spring semester. So, I immediately applied to Penn and Temple, which you may know was a city university, a very good, strong city university, but not nearly the status of the Ivies. I didn't know the difference. I just applied to Penn and Temple. Penn took me in for the summer session, and Temple offered me the fall, so I took Penn, never realizing until I got there what a significant achievement that was to get into an Ivy League school, with my general background. So, I went all the way through in three and a half years.

Because of my limited perspective, I never considered anything other than being a teacher. I was in the school of education, but I had a great interest in business, so I took about forty units in the Wharton School, which I might have been able to get into, but never even aspired to getting into—you know, a very outstanding school of business. I took accounting and I took corporation finance and money and banking and insurance. I had a very good background, because I was then going to be a business teacher.

I took the national teachers exam, which everybody had to take in Philadelphia—a very difficult exam—and I came out, Nadine, in the top 5 percent of the people who took it in the Philadelphia area. But I couldn't get a job teaching in a high school. Now, I had done my student teaching at one of the better high schools out in West Philadelphia, Overbrook, which was then sort of transitionally turning black, but had been a very strong Jewish school. I did my student teaching there, but I couldn't get a job, so I started talking to the people in the placement office and they said, "Have you considered a job in a black college?" I said, "No, not really." They had listings there for two jobs, one at West Virginia State and one at Texas Southern, this new school in Houston, which they had just opened to keep blacks out of the University of Texas. So, there was an opening for somebody in what they called their division of business, and I went down there teaching accounting and general business, and I met Mary, who had a similar experience, graduating with a master's degree from Purdue—math and science background—couldn't get a job teaching in stupid Indianapolis, not even in a black high school, at that time. There were no openings. So she went down, teaching freshman math and I came two years later.

Of course, as soon as we got together, we knew that we weren't going to stay in Texas. We got married about six months later. I got tired of eating in restaurants in the Elk's Club which was the only place that blacks could eat. I got tired of the indignities of not being able to really be treated like a human being in the stores. Houston was interesting though. It was beginning to emerge as a more diverse town, because of the petrochemicals industry there. There were a fair number of Northerners there, and they had an excellent symphony and a little theater that we were able to go to if we wanted to sit up in the boonies, you know.

Wilmot: This was 1951?

Smith: This was 1951. So the first thing that we did, before we decided on California, was to apply at the University of Texas, which had been opened up a year or two. Texas Southern was no longer really that relevant. University of Texas had opened up to

graduate students early, and then they opened up that year to undergraduates. So, we applied and we were both accepted in the doctoral program at the University of Texas. We even went up and were negotiating for a part-time job with one of the little black colleges there—Houston Tilitson or something like that. Suddenly we just said, “Really, we need to make a break.” We happened to have befriended a woman who had done her doctorate at Berkeley. Texas Southern was a really good black institution, they went around and stole about thirty-five PhDs from the other black colleges. Other than Howard, it was probably the second strongest black institution in the country at that time.

Wilmot: This was at—?

Smith: Texas Southern. Originally it was called Texas State University for Negroes. They then changed it to Texas Southern. So, we talked to this woman and she told us about Berkeley and the Bay Area, and we got really turned on. She said, “I’m sure that you ought to go to the Bay Area, because LA is a big town like Houston and New York and other big cities, but the Bay Area is charming.”

Wilmot: What did she tell you about the Bay Area that had you both so interested in coming here?

Smith: She just liked it and she had cousins and relatives here. There are a large number of blacks in the Bay Area from Houston and from Port Arthur, and that area stretching on over to the Louisiana border.

So, we applied and were accepted to both schools, because of the high fees, we couldn’t even consider Stanford. So, we came out and got into married student housing out in Albany within the first week or ten days that we were here. We both took part-time jobs on the daily list of what they called job ops, you just checked in to see what you could do. Mary studied a whole year and then she went to work. She took a job at the childcare center or something like that. She had a master’s degree.

When we finally took the exams, both of us came out again very high in the national teachers. She got a job teaching math and science, and I got a job in business. I was first on the list in San Francisco. Another phenomenon. I was first on the list in business. There were five or six openings in the high schools. They put me in a junior high school. That told me something even about California at that time.

I was close to finishing my doctorate. I had all my course work and had collected all of my data by ‘53 when I went back to work. Over the year and a half of working, I finished the dissertation. But, that was really devastating.

But we enjoyed our time. We met interesting people. We were the only blacks in this cluster of this forty, forty-eight apartments in Albany. We met some really interesting people, a couple of whom are still our friends.

When we left, Nadine, and took the job in San Francisco and bought a little house, they put another black in our same university apartment. He was an interesting guy, because he was the first black quarterback that Cal had ever had, the backup quarterback, Sammy Williams, who went on to be an illustrious member of the bar and was the first

black president of the California Bar Association. But Sammy Williams was put in the same damn apartment that Smiths were in. I guess they didn't want to pollute any other apartments. I'm just saying that things were still not kosher.

Wilmot: Yeah, California has this myth for being—

Smith: Again, we are going back fifty years, where all of the blacks who came out were needed for the industry, but they became superfluous and nonessential, along about 1949, '50, '51. They started being ghettoized in Richmond in public housing. Even there in Albany, there was a public housing unit right next to us, called Codornices Village, that was about 80 percent black. In fact, at one point, just for the hell of it, I went over and they hired me part-time as a youth leader at night—scout master or something like that. I had never been heavily involved in the scouts, but it was a part time job.

Wilmot: I have a question for you, going back a little bit. You talked about really excelling in business, and how your choice was to go into teaching. Can you talk to me a little bit about how you decided to go into education?

Smith: Well, first of all, about half of the black students who were there with me were in the school of education. I remember, one guy was in architecture; one guy was in premed; and both of them were very bright kids from Washington DC. I'd say six, or seven of the thirty were blacks from Washington, DC where they had an elite high school that really prepared kids to go into Ivy League schools. Most of the indigenous blacks from around Philadelphia were in the school of education. Being a teacher and making four thousand dollars a year or something like that, that seemed like a reasonable aspiration. I had never seen any role models of any blacks who were in business or who were accountants, or anything like that. I never heard of anything like a black MBA. I knew a few black teachers who were teaching in Philadelphia.

Incidentally, I never had a black teacher, all the way from K to 12—good, solid, Irish-Catholic, Jewish teachers, who wouldn't tolerate bullshit. I think that might have been part of my good background, as I was always in classes with good teachers, who even with black students, pressed them and didn't take any bad behavior.

But that was my milieu. A social work career, I guess, because you could work for the Department for Public Assistance, or teaching which was a little higher level and summers off and all of that.

Wilmot: One thing that I notice is that you make this shift from teaching and being in the classroom to education administration. How did that happen for you? Did something change for you?

Smith: It was interesting. Before I left Philadelphia, while I was working on my master's degree, I had almost a full-time job, teaching accounting, general business or whatever the introductory courses were in an emerging new black school of business. It was one of the few opportunities that I had. I worked there for eight or nine months, and then I had a full academic year in Houston. One of the part-time jobs at Berkeley in that second year was teaching evening high school out in Richmond. And then the full-time year over in San Francisco. But, the critical thing was that one of my many part-time jobs was as a research assistant in a statewide study of school facilities. Every school in

the state had to be documented—condition, age, enrollment and all of that. So, I took that job—and I got it through the Graduate Division School of Education—and they assigned me to the Alameda County Superintendent’s Office, which you saw on my resume.

Wilmot: Alameda County School Department?

Smith: Yes, and I worked there part time, during my second year of graduate work. I guess I got to know some people there. And lo and behold, when I was near the end of my year in San Francisco, in that frustrating job, I got called and offered a job as a research assistant, at almost double my salary, from something like \$3,600 to \$7,000 a year. They helped me to get released, because it was still a month or two before the semester ended. So, I went over there and I was an advanced doctoral student. Here I was in this office doing administrative research—budgets, personnel and school facilities. As soon as I finished my doctorate, they made me their school planning consultant for the small districts that were building schools. So I had this very rich experience which went on for nine years. I had a doctorate from late ‘55 and I stayed there until a ceiling suddenly emerged. I was by far one of the most senior people with a doctorate out of maybe eight or ten. Most of them were in special fields like psychology or something like that.

The deputy superintendent for the county office position came open and I applied for it. I had worked hand in glove with the superintendent. I also had the job of being the reference person for the county board of education and for the county school board’s association of local districts. I did the minutes and did all of their administrative procedural stuff, so I thought that I had a pretty good chance for this job. Without interviewing me, they just hired a white guy, maybe a master’s degree, a principal in the Hayward school district. And that told me something.

Well, about that time, I was getting very involved with the black community here, with people like Lionel Wilson and [William] Byron Rumford’s organization down in West Berkeley. So these guys knew of me, and I had worked with them from about 1957 or ‘58, when I joined the club and got involved in political education and voter registration. I was part of that young black mafia at that time.

Wilmot: Young black mafia?

Smith: Well, the beginning of a real democratic organization which came out of that and lasted for thirty years or so.

So, Lionel and some of these other guys, told me about this opening in the city manager’s office. One of the guys was part of our group had the job but was moving on. He also encouraged me also to apply for the job. So I took this job, which was running a Ford Foundation-funded program out in East Oakland—a million dollars a year, for an educational program, health program, probation, recreation. It was an integration of all the services that had an impact on youth. It was a very progressive program, and Oakland was one of only five cities that was involved in it—Boston, Philadelphia, New Haven, Washington, DC, and they had a special project down in North Carolina.

So, I took that job, and that really gave me a big boost with the doctorate and nine years of staff experience, because although I had a full-time secretary, but I never had any staff reporting to me at the county job. Suddenly, I had a program where I had a personal staff of about eight or nine people, and I related to the departments that headed all of these special programs that were running out there. I guess I did a fairly good job. Ford rewarded us with some money for new projects that I was very instrumental in developing—one in pretrial release in the area of criminal justice. I was able to get a grant from the Rosenberg Foundation, where I ended up spending twenty years on the board; to start the first program for pregnant teenage girls in the state, that would enable them to stay in school and not just be isolated with the support from all of these programs that we were related to. That was an example of one of the early Ford programs.

Lo and behold, along comes the War on Poverty. We were very well known and were immediately one of the target cities with big money. And instead of just East Oakland, we went citywide. So we had an East Oakland target area, Fruitvale, West Oakland, and North Oakland. By that time, I had a staff of maybe thirty people—program people, and evaluators, and liaison people—so that gave me a very significant boost in management.

And then, after about four years of that, there was this opening for the regional director of OEO [Office of Equal Opportunity], War on Poverty, for the eight Western states, so I applied for that. I was probably the best known community action director on the West Coast. I was here, and a guy named Joe Maldonado down in LA was also very well known, a Latino guy. So, I applied for that and I thought that I had a good crack at it, and then all of the sudden I had this invitation to come over for a special interview with a guy who was close to Sargent Shriver, who was the director of OEO. He was offering me the deputy job. He said, “We’ve already selected somebody for the top job who is very close to Sargent Shriver and had been a Peace Corps administrator, but we’d love to have you in the second job.” So, I talked to the guy, Larry Horan, who is still a very close friend of mine, and decided I could take it and we could work together. Because he was sort of the politician lawyer/operator and I ran the day-to-day operation. And that was a big operation. That was maybe a hundred and seventy or eighty people. With the Community Action program, the domestic Peace Corps, which was called Vista, and the big Job Corps program, which was really heavily invested in getting street youth into training programs. So, it may well conclude this segment.

But then after a year and a half there, there was the opening for the presidency of Merritt College. They finally had gotten to the point where “the Negroes are acting up” so, and the black consciousness was getting so heavy and the faculty was getting so anxiety prone that they thought that maybe they were ready for a black president. Some of the black students, in fact, talked to me and encouraged me to apply for the job. And I did—just for the lark, because I had left the education field for five years.

Wilmot: That seems to me that you did take such a departure from your training.

Smith: Yeah, so then I applied for the job, and I guess I was by far the best candidate. There weren’t that many black candidates with administrative experience and a doctorate from Berkeley. So, surprisingly, they hired me as president of Merritt College. And that was another turning point in my life, because I still had these connections with the Ford

Foundation people and I was a West Coast phenomenon. I was only the third black community college president nationally, Nadine, after black guys in the Bronx and Hartford, Connecticut, both of whom had long experience in black colleges as deans and as president. [I was also the first black president in California.]

When I left, five years later, there were twenty-two of us, because again, the urban phenomenon: when things get bad enough, just turn them over to blacks—superintendents of schools, fire and police chiefs, community colleges, principals, superintendents. So, just like that, there were twenty-two of us—three in Chicago alone, two in LA. So I was a pioneer there. I was the first black on the board of the national organization, American Association of Junior Colleges then, now Community Colleges. Two other guys joined me. We got together and formed a black caucus of all things, and that organization brought in all of these twenty-two people who would come to the annual meetings, and we would insist on program times, schedules for us, and all that. That was interesting.

So, I stayed at Merritt five years—a very significant job. Very sharp differences between all white faculty and a student body that wasn't all black, maybe only 40 percent black, but very involved.

The Black Panthers got started there. Huey Newton was a student there. He was kicked out of the Black Students Association for all of his gangster lifestyle, and because he didn't get along with the black nationalists on campus. He was a member of something called the Soul Students Association, which was a stone cold black nationalist, negritude, African glorification-type group. But he was into his bag, which was revolutionary socialism. He was hitting on gals and beating people up, so the Soul Students threw him out. He went out and most of the troops he could find were these young, street, high school kids. That was the genesis of the Black Panther Party. They never did reconcile with black nationalists on campus while I was there. So, anyhow, we had that phenomenon.

We had strong pressure to begin programs in ethnic studies, and Merritt was the first college in the state to get State Department of Education approval to have a Black Studies curriculum, and we made great progress in bringing about twelve, fifteen black faculty in, bringing in a Chicano assistant dean of students, all in that first two years.

And then, of course, the last three years was planning for the move to the campus which took place when I was there, and I stayed up there for two years out in the East Oakland hills. We had a lot of problems as we were leaving. There was this myth about the fact that we were leaving the black community behind, going out to this white area. They didn't realize that half the blacks in the city lived right down in East Oakland, closer to there than we were in North Oakland.

Of course, the other thing was that it was a diverse population, and much of the turmoil came from white radicals, some of them spilled over from UC Berkeley, just came a mile down the street to raise hell and be leaders in this community college. Very few of them got arrested, when I finally had to arrest some of the guys who were taking over facilities and being involved in assaultive behavior, but they were clearly behind a lot of the stuff that went on.

It was really touch and go. I had a police body guard in the office right next to me. I had police observance of my home, during the time of the move, because it got so critical. Black students took over the campus and threw me out of my office for two or three days, until the police and I went in at five in the morning to take back the campus. [chuckles] The motivation there was that the district computer center was on the Merritt campus, so that was another consideration. They couldn't go very long with having the possibility of the whole computer system for the Peralta district being trashed. So that plus just having to take a stand. We were going to move and they weren't going to stop us. We just had to do what we had to do. And that involved getting quite a few of the young guys arrested. Some of whom were ostensibly Panthers. One of whom, for example, was a kid out of New Haven, Douglas Miranda, who I later discovered had been very active in the Panther movement there. He came out here and he just fit right into the black student movement here in Oakland.

So then, to conclude, I thought I was doing a very good job. Merritt was the definitive college—it was a liberal arts college when it was the old Oakland City College, and Laney was trade and technical. After 1963, state law required that all community colleges be comprehensive, so we took on some trade and technical stuff, I guess primarily from evening high school programs. Laney had the big job of trying to develop a liberal arts program. But Merritt was the campus. They hadn't built Alameda then. They were just building it.

The guy who was chancellor, left to go down to the Peninsula for—not a bigger job, but a better location, so I applied for the chancellorship. There was no real competition in the district, I assumed I had good relations with the board, and for some reason, part of which was the white faculty who never really accepted my role and still held against me what they thought was a connivance with the black students, black power bullshit. Some of them still felt that way and they were active with the union. It turned out that the faculty group didn't support me, and for whatever reason, they brought in some guy from Miami, Florida, who had been the president of a little street-corner campus down there, and made him the chancellor of the district.

The same time I was applying for that job, a friend of mine at Berkeley who was in the EOP [Equal Opportunity Program] program, Emmett Scales, who just died, called me and said, “You know there is an opening for vice chancellor of student affairs here, and you ought to apply for that, because obviously you've got the kind of background that they need.” So, I applied and I got the job and that was the culmination of my career. I spent my last nine years there.

But everything—in most instances I'm saying to you, I didn't really apply for many things except for that job, at Peralta. The others just emerged out of contacts and experiences. Those white folks who remembered me for that six months when I worked in the county schools office in 1952 and thought enough of me to call and invite me back, a year later. That was remarkable. There were no other blacks in the office. There was one other non-black, interestingly enough, March Fong, who was the dental education person who had a doctorate from Stanford and ran for the county school board, then ran for assembly. And then she was an assemblywoman for years and then became the Secretary of State. Little March Fong, out of a Richmond Chinatown ghetto family. She and I were the two non-whites on the staff for the whole nine years that I was there. She didn't stay. When she ran for office, she had to resign her position.

It was interesting the way these things just sort of go from one level to another, partly by happenstance, but I guess I did have some preparation and everywhere I went I had a decent track record. I still wasn't confident enough to aggressively seek anything. Except I was indignant about this Peralta thing. I should have been the chancellor there. It's funny, when I left, one of the guys active in the black community college community was Don Godbold, who was president of the Community College of Denver and had had a good background coming out of the Detroit community college. So, I urged him to apply for my job, because he was interested in California. He got the job. Five years later, things had changed to the point where he became the chancellor of the district, the job I should have had five years earlier.

Wilmot: You attribute that to the white faculty who felt who you were in partnership with the black power movement?

Smith: Too black. Well yeah, and I was bringing in black faculty members and Latino faculty members. The faculty had a sinecure there. It was a very strong faculty. There were probably fifteen, twenty PhDs there, and a lot of the faculty were wives of Berkeley professors. They really had an elite thing going there. It was one of the strongest academic community colleges in the state. It was a first rate institution. It just happened to be caught geographically in the wrong part of town. But, it turned out—I later discovered that I didn't have their support for whatever reason. That disappointed me too, because I knew the board members quite well. It was essentially the same board that had hired me five years earlier. So, I moved to Berkeley, laterally more or less, a little more money, maybe six or eight thousand dollars more, but from 250 FTE [full-time equivalent] people in the college to 700, and \$30 million worth of programs in nine or ten departments that reported to me at Berkeley.

Wilmot: I think that we should come close to closing for today. I just have a couple—

Smith: And when we get started, then I want to give you some insight into the things that happened while I was at Berkeley.

Wilmot: I actually have so many questions to go back to from everything that you just said. It's a whole conversation.

Smith: You kept those in your head?

Wilmot: Yes, I did, and I have to think about them some more, but you touched on so many interesting things, and I still had questions about your college. You moved so quickly. I still had some questions about your college.

Smith: My college experience?

Wilmot: Yeah, I still had some questions there before we moved on. I just wanted to ask you—

Smith: Incidentally, I had in mind something that we skipped over. I didn't even talk, at any significant level, about my community involvement, about the years when I was at Merritt, when I was heavily involved with black inmates at San Quentin. It was just a variety of things that I got involved in—the ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union] board and all of that activity and most of it appears on the resume.

Wilmot: We definitely need to talk about all of those things. I wanted to go back to—there are two questions I think that we should close with. The first one was, was there a formal, organized unit, at the University of Pennsylvania that was a social group for black students?

Smith: Cohesive group?

Wilmot: Yes.

Smith: Not really. As I said, about 90 percent of them were commuter kids who lived around town. Ten percent who might have lived on campus—because they did have a sizable number of residential units for men, at least—were from out of town. One guy was from Connecticut who's still a good friend, was one of the guys in the Wharton School [of Business]. This other guy, I told you, from Washington, DC, was in architecture. But the group that was from Philadelphia—and there were five or six of us from West Philly, my neighborhood—who would come down on the tram together and who socialized on the weekend together, who knew each other, and were a reinforcing element. But there was no cohesiveness. I said that forty or fifty students at best, and maybe five or six of them were graduate students who were in law school or who never came in touch with us, at the undergraduate level.

Wilmot: Were there faculty there who you remember being extraordinary people, who you remember being great teachers or you really enjoyed or learned from?

Smith: Well, I can't identify with any, except my Italian teacher, Professor Vittorini, who was one of three outstanding Italian scholars in the Ivy League. The others were at Yale and at Columbia. I didn't realize what an icon he was, this old guy. Incidentally, his son, Carlo Vittorini, was in the class and got a D. Maybe I mentioned that to you. I discovered just eight or ten years ago that he had an illustrious career and ended up as the publisher of the *Parade* magazine that we get in the newspaper. I wrote him a nice letter and reminded him of this young kid who was in the class. The father used to always called him Carlo. He called everybody else Mister. The first semester there, it was Carlo Vittorini with a D. He said, "I never was much of a linguist, and my mother was English." So Professor Vittorini stood out, and then the guy in the School of Education who was my major professor, Ted Reller, who just at the time that I was graduating, while I was going to Texas, came out here to be the head of the educational administration program at UC Berkeley, which influenced the fact that when I came out I didn't go into curricular development or any of those phases of education. I chose to go into education administration, because I knew him and he was a nationally known guy, and eventually became dean of the School of Education. So, Reller was a strong influence on me and a strong supporter, and we had that University of Pennsylvania connection.

Wilmot: I was wondering about that, because again, that shift going from being a teacher in a classroom, standing in front of students to be an education administrator—they are just very different professions. I was really intrigued by this shift.

Smith: And I evolved by being for nine years in a staff position that gave me a lot of background and exposure and knowledge of the whole mechanism of educational administration, particularly finance and facilities planning. My doctoral research was in

the area of facilities planning, and the financial relationship to it. It was kind of leap-frogging, and I had never been a principal and I had never been a vice principal or a department head as it turned out. Evidently, that five years working in community development and surviving in the milieu of the City of Oakland, at that time, weighed heavily on the board at Peralta who hired me to be the president of Merritt College. They knew me and knew of my involvement that transcended community colleges, public schools, private schools—all of those things were part of the milieu of what I was concerned with while coordinating programs in the city manager's office.

Wilmot: I wanted to close with this last question. You mentioned briefly when you met your wife. Can you tell me how that happened?

Smith: Well, she had gone down [to Houston] two years earlier. We lived in a very nice section of town, a couple of blocks from the campus, which until three or four years earlier had been white, and then as the campus was developed and more black professionals came, the neighborhood changed. Many of the young people like me and Mary didn't own homes, so we simply were roomers in the homes of people. I was a roomer in the home of a dentist and right next door Mary was a roomer in a duplex owned by one of the senior professors there, who as fate would have it had known her father from Indiana years before. So, one morning, when I got back from my early six o'clock tennis match, because of the heat, with a young man who had gone to Penn with me—as it turned out was from Philadelphia and was in the art department—we were standing there at the curb talking and Mary came out, and I had seen her. I had seen this man who lived there and I had assumed that it was her husband, but it was her brother. So, from that day we sort of hit it off, and she started inviting me over for meals, so I wouldn't have to eat in the Elk's Club. In any event, we got married six months later. Her brother never forgave me, because he said, "You took my cook and my housekeeper. What the hell are you doing? You robbed me of my resources." [laughs] And then within a year he got married. So, we met and six months later we got married, and then had to make a decision three months later whether we were going to stay or go to Austin to the University of Texas. We chose to come to the Bay Area.

Wilmot: That all unfolded in Houston?

Smith: Yes, and we spent that first summer before we came to California in New England where I had worked for three summers as an undergraduate, up in New Hampshire. I still had some contacts there, so we both went up there and each of us was the bookkeeper for the two resorts, and we had a nice little room and tennis court and all of that, right on the lake. That was the closest thing to a honeymoon that we had.

Wilmot: It sounds like a good life, being at the resorts. Well, let's close for today and we'll pick up again on Wednesday.

INTERVIEW 2: JULY 31, 2002

Wilmot: Good morning.

Smith: Ciao.

Wilmot: Ciao. I wanted to ask you to begin, was there anything that we discussed last time that you wanted to clarify or that you had been thinking about further and wanted to add to?

Smith: Well, the army material I thought I sort of went over rather rapidly and didn't really make the point of what an impact the war and the 92nd Division itself had on my future leadership. I gave you examples of some of the people who were in the division who went on to illustrious careers, including Ed Brook, who was a young lieutenant and came back to Massachusetts to become the first black senator since Reconstruction.

Now just being eclectic, Roscoe Lee Brown, who was in my headquarters company, went on to become a distinguished stage and screen actor and is still functioning. I sort of vaguely remember one of our heroes, Ezzard Charles, who went on to become heavyweight boxing champion a few years later. Of course, being a black outfit, we excelled in athletics. When the war ended, they were just trying to keep us occupied there for a couple of months. Our division, I think, won the football, basketball, and track championships for the whole Italian military theater. I think everything except for tennis and swimming. We had a lot of really talented guys, again, some of whom went on to professional careers.

Then the other thing that I was going to mention that I was proud of, the fact that five years ago, the president decided to retroactively grant the Congressional Medal of Honor to five blacks from World War II. Two of them were from the 92nd Division, which didn't get a hell a lot of publicity. We were only in combat about eight months, but there were really some noteworthy actions that took place.

Then I mentioned a local guy named Charles Patterson who came out about the mid-sixties and went on to become the vice president of what was then World Airways in Oakland, and then finished his career as manager of the Oakland Convention Center. He was a young nineteen-year-old in our division and received the Silver Star for bravery, which he earned the first month that he was on line, back in September of '44. That was interesting to know him in later years—I didn't know him during the war.

So, it was interesting to be in that division and to survive it. Fortunately, we went there after most of the heavy fighting with the Germans had passed. I feel privileged to come back. Two other people who were in my own G-2 enemy intelligence unit, I wanted to mention as people I am proud of. Griff Davis, who had an illustrious career as a photographer for *Ebony* and other black publications and then finished his career of about twenty years with AID [Aid for International Development] in the State Department. Then I mentioned Lee Jett, a Morehouse graduate who I didn't see for years, but discovered was the first black warden of a federal prison. I ran into him down at Terminal Island in LA, about ten or fifteen years ago.

So, I was one of the younger guys in the unit, and I'd say only one of about three who hadn't been to college—most of these other people had been to college. Griff Davis had

already had a year a Morehouse. My best friend, Earl Green, had a year at Howard—almost all in black colleges. It was meeting these folks, as I mentioned to you, that stimulated me to want to take advantage of whatever opportunities there were, and along came the GI Bill, which was the turning point of my life.

Wilmot: Did you ever think of going to a historically black college or university?

Smith: No, I never thought about going to a college, and of course, when I got back and the opportunities were there to go to an Ivy League school like Penn, I jumped at it. I probably was inclined to go to some local institution rather than, at twenty-two and a war veteran, go to a campus and be involved in all of the undergraduate stuff that would have been typical of that time—living in dormitories and fraternities and all that.

Wilmot: There were two people who you mentioned who won that Silver Medal retroactively.

Smith: No, the Congressional Medal of Honor. As a matter of fact, I think they may have won the Silver Star—there was the Bronze Star and then the Silver Star, but they were upgraded. They finally were able to verify through records that white officers had discriminated against them in giving them credit for valor in combat for which whites had received the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Wilmot: Which two were they?

Smith: So, they upgraded them. Vernon Baker who is still alive, and I see on TV once in a while, and John Fox who was killed in action.

So, I guess that is all I wanted to say about my World War II experience. I told you about the ignominy of coming back on the troop ship and having to be in the bottom with all of the blacks.

Wilmot: Well, listen, it really seems to me that what I'm hearing you say is that being part of that unit was a really transformative experience for many people, and that they left that experience with a kind of a leg up in the world in some ways. Or, at least that people came from that experience and went on to do great things.

Smith: I think that they always had the potential, and I guess that maybe the cohesiveness of working with other, quote, "talented blacks" did sort of form the basis of some of their plans to go on and not just go to college, but to seek careers in relevant areas of activity.

I mentioned that, of course, my ASTP period was also very influential, meeting for the first time many talented young blacks, many of whom had had college. It raised my expectancy that you really have to go on to college if you want to have a good life.

Wilmot: I'm just locating my question list, which I've managed to misplace. Can you give me a second?

Smith: Uh-huh. [pause] Well, if it's still on, I forgot to mention for the record that another one of the guys who was in the 92nd Division was Ivan Houston who went on to be chairman and CEO of the largest black insurance company in the country, Golden State

Mutual out of LA, who graduated from Berkeley and I think, through my nomination, decided to accept a seat on the Cal alumni board for a three- or four-year term.

Wilmot: Did you maintain good contact with people from the 92nd Division?

Smith: No, I just discovered that Houston was. We never crossed. He was an undergraduate, getting out in '49. I didn't come until '51, but I discovered that he was a Berkeley graduate, and then communicated with him. We had dinner one night and talked about the bad old days. I think he sacrificed, at that time, to even be part of the Alumni Council board, but we had very few blacks, maybe only two up to that point ever. Of course, after that time, the door was open, and there were always two or more, or three, on the Alumni Council board, including a black chairman in the late eighties.

Wilmot: Were you very instrumental in reaching out to people?

Smith: Well, I helped form the Black Alumni Club at Berkeley in 1980, and that was one of our objectives: to get a broader participation in everything—staffing, administration, expanding the student body, which got up to about 1,300 blacks while I was there—and the Alumni Association, which was a prestigious way to be identified with the university.

Wilmot: I wanted to ask you this question about going to college at the University of Pennsylvania. It is a question that goes way back. Did you work while you were in school or did the GI Bill really allow you to focus on your studies?

Smith: Yeah. I spoke earlier about the fact that I was a city, trolley-going person who sort of treated it as a job, going in at eight and come home at night. I had a variety of jobs, because obviously the sixty dollars a month stipend—even though I was living at home—wasn't very generous. The most interesting job I had was at a Quaker community center up in North Philly, which was a very depressed area. They had, for a hundred years I guess, had this center up there named after one of the distinguished guys in the movement. The job was listed at the university bureau of occupations, and I went up and signed on as a youth leader, including being the Boy Scout head for the group, and I had never been involved in the Boy Scouts. So I worked there.

I spent three summers—I think that I might have mentioned—up in New Hampshire, working at a resort. That was kind of interesting, because somehow I met a guy who was a graduate of Hampton Institute at that time, and he asked me about summer jobs, and I said that I'd really be interested. It turned out that Hampton for years had brought black students—not all from Hampton—up there to work, because the owners of the facility were descendents of the last white president, General Armstrong—from the Civil War—of Hampton, after which they had all black presidents. So, I went up there and it was really a lovely place to work and a good experience. I think that I was a bookkeeper or something like that. Those two jobs stand out. I don't really remember anything else that lasted for a year or more.

Wilmot: So that was while you were in school?

Smith: Yes, so the summer employment was a nice shot in the arm for me. We usually would come home with a thousand dollars or something like that.

- Wilmot: These are the last two of my questions that reference our last conversation. I had a question about your parents which is, were they involved in any organizations?
- Smith: Not really. My stepfather also played the saxophone with a black saxophone ensemble of about twenty-five people. I remember going up to watch them practice at the YMCA, on Catherine Street. I guess, socially, that's about the only thing that I can recall. He probably had a social group that he played cards with, but the orchestra was the one thing that I remember his being involved in. And my mother, I never knew her to have any social involvement.
- Wilmot: Okay. I asked you, prior to turning on our recorder, if your family was at all impacted by the Depression years, economically.
- Smith: I think that you asked me that, and I told you that as a postman he was already twelve or fifteen years into what was then a very middle-class position for blacks, so I don't recall any real deprivation after I moved in with him.
- Wilmot: Well, when we closed our last conversation on Monday, we ended on the drive across country. You mentioned that you drove across country with your wife to California.
- Smith: Yes, from New Hampshire that summer of '51, right after we got married.
- Wilmot: I wanted to ask you a little about that drive.
- Smith: Well, those were hectic days, where for the most part, you had to have black contacts to stay in some of the larger cities. The Green Book and the YMCA were always a good prospects. So, we only made about four or five stops. We stopped in Indiana to visit her family, and then we stopped in St. Louis and Denver and Salt Lake City.
- My most fond memory was the interesting treatment that we got in Salt Lake City. We were able to get a motel, as a matter of fact, only about three blocks from the Mormon temple. But we were looking around for a place to have dinner, so we saw this very nice middle class restaurant not far from us and we went in. After a few minutes we were seated, way in the back of the restaurant, and then we sat there for about ten minutes, fifteen minutes without anyone coming to our table. Finally one of the waitresses, just in passing, with a tray, sort of whispered, "I'm sorry, we can't serve you." So then we had to get up and walk through the whole restaurant with everybody looking at us, and go out.
- We saw a Chinese restaurant, and we went into the Chinese restaurant, which only had a half dozen people in it, and sat there, and this Chinese woman never even spoke to us—never said "Hello," "We can't serve you" or anything. Just completely ignored us as if we weren't there. Then finally, just walking around, we stopped a black guy on the street and we said, in desperation, "Where can we get a meal?" He said, "Oh, the only place that serves blacks is this Japanese restaurant around the corner here a couple of blocks." So we went there and had a wonderful meal.
- Then, of course, we drove on in and we'd already applied for an apartment in the married students unit, here—well, it was in Albany, although they had another unit out in Richmond for people who needed two bedrooms. We got there in early September,

and I guess the former occupants hadn't gotten out, so we had to spend a couple or three days in a motel, which was really fortuitous, because we got in less than a week after we had arrived. It was a delightful place, about sixty units. We were the only blacks in the unit, very friendly people, from places like Los Angeles, Chicago—a very fascinating guy from New Zealand who became a very good friend of ours, who had served in North Africa and Italy.

In fact, one of the other things that I should mention—a young guy about my age—sort of thin, young-looking guy who walked around there, I got to meet and then discovered ten, twelve years later that he was Jerry Waldie, who went on to be an assemblyman from Contra Costa County. Jerome [Russell] Waldie.

Wilmot: And this was?

Smith: Well, this is 1951. It was probably 1963 or '64, before he as a young man ran for Congress. That was the same "kid," unquote, who lived in one of the apartments close by. And I think that I mentioned that when we left to move over to San Francisco, they replaced us with another black.

Wilmot: You did mention that to me. You kind of described that there were very friendly people, and I'm wondering what your initial impressions of California were beyond that.

Smith: Well, we still had high expectations from the reference that we'd gotten from this friend in Houston. You know, we certainly sensed that it was an open society. I mean, not only were the people friendly, but you could go anywhere. The campus was fascinating, although far, far less developed than it is now, I mean, you wouldn't recognize the difference. You could go all over the campus, through it and across it.

I think that I mentioned that we were again on a daily work schedule that first year until Mary got a job and I got this research job that eventually led to my first professional job. We met a few blacks, but not many. We primarily met people who were relatives of friends back East, so we had several friends in San Francisco that we got to know, and that's how we got to go to that Fellowship Church, the first multi-denominational and multi-racial church in the Bay Area. So, other than those contacts in San Francisco, we didn't have much contact with blacks on this side of the bay. There weren't that many on campus, and if there were, they were undergraduates. We might have met one graduate student. I think that in all of the time that I was there, I only met one other black in the School of Education. He was a guy from Georgia or something and was already on the faculty of a black college and went back after he got his degree.

Wilmot: Do you remember his name?

Smith: No.

Wilmot: When you went to Cal, were there faculty that stood out as really important faculty for you to work with, or people who really contributed to your education in a meaningful way?

Smith: Yeah, I may have answered that, although I might have been commenting on the University of Pennsylvania, which was a much more limited exposure. Again, Professor

Reller, who was my major professor and who had come from Penn, and who went on to become dean, was my principal resource, and I took a variety of courses. I met some interesting people. I took a couple or three courses in city planning and architecture, because of my concern in facilities planning. I took a very interesting course in literature. I had to take a certain number of non-education courses, so I must have taken eight or nine of them, in addition to twenty-three or four that I took in the School of Education. That gave me a broader experience than I had expected. It was assumed that I would expose myself to something outside of the immediate discipline.

I don't remember any faculty people that I could relate to. That was at the heart of the very controversial Loyalty Oath period, so a lot of people had left, and there was kind of turmoil on the campus there, until that was rescinded, I guess, in the middle of the fifties. I just sort of hung out in the School of Education, went there mornings, stayed until five o'clock or so, unless I had some field assignment. I never really got plugged into the social thing with blacks. I wasn't a fraternity person; my wife wasn't a sorority person. It was overwhelmingly a white experience, during the three years and three summers that I was on campus. Then, of course, we moved to Berkeley.

Wilmot: Did you have a good relationship with your fellow colleagues?

Smith: My colleagues in the department?

Wilmot: Yeah.

Smith: Oh yeah. I did meet some interesting people. Let me comment that that is an interesting insight, because there were only—let's see, of the people that were working for doctorates in education administration, which basically meant superintendents of schools or high level managers rather than academics, I would say that a third of them were like me—young people ready to go into a career. Two thirds of them were guys who already had the jobs. They were superintendents maybe in their late thirties, early forties. They were assistant superintendents. It was an interesting mix of experienced and novice students coming together. I made some very good friends who went back to their jobs—the superintendent of Napa school district; a guy who became superintendent down in Delano, which was in the heart of the lower [Central] Valley, a Mexican American guy. Then he came back—Bert Corona—and became superintendent of San Rafael. We stayed in touch for a long, long time, maybe ten years. It was interesting that there was this dichotomy of who was in the program.

And, of course, the other thing is that I got an EdD, because unless you are going to go into ed psych, or into history and philosophy, everybody else was practitioners, and EdD was the degree. Twenty-five years later, thirty years later, everybody was getting a PhD, but the EdD was the practitioner's degree, and the PhD was the degree, for people who aspired to being college professors or researchers.

Wilmot: You mentioned that there was only one other African American person in the School of Education. Were there others outside of the School of Education that you had the opportunity to interact with?

Smith: Not many, because none lived in my unit, and I just wasn't part of the social group of an out-of-towner, and I hadn't been there as an undergraduate. If I had been there as an

undergraduate, I probably would have attached myself to a dozen or so people through social clubs, through dances and parties and fraternities and all that, but I was never destined to become a fraternity member. So, I didn't really meet that many people.

One of the sources of contact—it is interesting that you should mention it—was an elderly couple who had known one of our friends at Texas Southern, Ernest Green, and he was already a man in his late seventies and she was maybe six or eight years younger. Interesting, because he was a retired army colonel, black, who had been in the service back at the turn of the century and was in Manila or someplace like that. So, we introduced ourselves and they sort of adopted us as their surrogate children, because they had two sons who were in the service, one of whom, Bob, is still a good friend. He had just graduated from West Point in 1950 and was sent right over to Korea. And then the older son who was a medical doctor was also in Korea, so they didn't see their sons very often. We became part of their social group, and they had a lot of parties—mostly older people. We might have met a couple of people our age who we related to for years. The fun with them was that they both played bridge. We would go over and Colonel Green and I would play the two women, because he refused to play with his wife. [laughter]

The other thing about it was that was the time that baseball was recognizing Jackie Robinson and others, and Colonel Green had this fantastic commitment to listening on radio to all of the Dodgers game, so whenever I would go over there, I'd have to find out first "Is there a Dodgers game on today?", so that we could not have to just listen to the radio all day. That was his way of identifying and recognizing the pride that all of us had. I guess that's why I became a National League man. I never could relate to the American League, because Jackie and all of the first five or six black stars came up from Brooklyn or the New York Giants.

So, it was pretty much a job, the time that I was here—

Wilmot: When you were in school.

Smith: —getting a lot of work out of the way. As I said, I got all of my course work out of the way. I developed my thesis dissertation plan, collected all my data, then went back to work and took about two more years to finish up.

Wilmot: I'm going to ask you about your dissertation in just one minute. You mentioned that it was the era of the Loyalty Oath at Berkeley.

Smith: Right.

Wilmot: From the vantage point of a graduate student, were there any repercussions that you could see in your department, in the Department of Education?

Smith: Oh no, ours was a pretty non-activist department. The guys who were really activists were in psychology and political science and, you know, really vital fields. Ours was sort of a moribund field, preparing school administrators and teachers going on to be curriculum development types. We were sort of out of the mainstream. We were in the same building as the School of Social Work, which was another moribund type of graduate school. I think that they had undergraduates, but they only took them in as

upper division, and most of the people there were graduates. No, we just read about it and heard about it and would hear tall tales about the Loyalty Oath heroes.

One of them incidentally, now that you mention it, I got to know later on, Nevitt Sanford. He was a distinguished psychologist and went to Stanford and stayed there for I guess the rest of his career, an outstanding guy who was part of the group that wrote this very significant piece called *The Authoritarian Personality*, by [Theodor Wiesengrund] Adorno, Sanford, and so forth. Well, lo and behold, he comes back to Berkeley while I was there. I always had an interest, when I was at Berkeley, in field studies, non-traditional experience for students. He was the president of what he had formed through his family resources, something called the Wright Institute, which became a doctoral program for practitioners in psychology. I got to know Nevitt, mainly because they had an interest in experiential learning, and I went on that board and stayed six or seven years, and got to know him very well. I just remember that he was one of the heroes of the Loyalty Oath. That was the only impact that I had years later.

Wilmot: You got to know him because you both were very interested in experiential learning?

Smith: Yeah, right, and the Wright Institute had a program at Berkeley, and we were developing a program, and I was sort of carrying the ball for getting programs like that. They finally hired a guy, a young guy from Harvard who came out, and for at least two or three years was coordinator of the program. Then I related him to what the Wright Institute was doing. I don't know if it ever survived, but it was very heavily participated in by students in the period 1970 to '80.

Wilmot: Can you tell me about your dissertation topic?

Smith: Yeah, I did a study of preschool units. These were small schools for little people. I looked at six of them in the Bay Area. They were called primary units or kindergarten to third grade units. They were distinctive because of the architecture and because of the organization of the school. It was focused very heavily on parent participation and on a more flexible type of instruction. It was an experiment, and there were people writing about it all over the country. We just happened to determine that there were several of them in the Bay Area. I think two of them were in San Francisco, one was in Oakland, two were in Albany, and one down in San Carlos. So, I did a serious analysis of the physical plant and the planning process and the financing of it and the staffing of it, and did a little survey of parent reaction to it, which was interesting.

I must say that as the state was exploding with new students, and schools were being built every month in Alameda County, almost all of these schools reverted from their original design purpose to become the nucleus of K-6 schools. Maybe one or two stayed as the one down in the Peninsula for many years, White Oak School stayed as a primary school, but the rest of them—Oakland, San Francisco—went on. I had an interesting set of dissertation advisors: Professor [Theodore L.] Reller and another young assistant professor in education administration, Howard Bretsh, but then I had two people outside of the department. I had a professor of architecture, George Simons, who also ran the largest school design firm in the East Bay, and had been a professor for years, and then—you may have never heard of him—but Francis Violich—

Wilmot: I've definitely heard of him.

- Smith: —who was the first head of the Department of Landscape Architecture, was on my committee. Let's see, there was a fifth guy. I guess it was a third professor in the School of Education. Three educators and two architecture and design people.
- Wilmot: Did you feel like as a committee they all operated to help you frame your inquiry well? Were they a good committee?
- Smith: Yeah, certainly Simons—I might have met Simons when I was doing this earlier survey—talk about overlapping. I knew his firm, and I visited many schools that he built. I think that I had gotten to know him apart from this, and that might have been a result of my talking about him and Reller recruited him to be on the committee. And Violich, I guess, just generally interested in this as a dimension of city planning. Reller, though, was the person who I think shaped this as an area of inquiry. There hadn't been many students who focused on facilities planning, and he was anxious to get someone going on that. Most of them were in finance, administrative, general administration, school personnel—just a variety of bureaucratic specialties.
- Wilmot: With whom did you work most closely? Was it Reller?
- Smith: With Reller, who was my chairman and who was a very well known professor. He probably would have been dean at Penn if he had stayed, but he came out here in '49 and I came out in '51. We stayed as good friends until he died. I think about a year before he died, I picked him up and brought him over here for lunch with two other former graduate student friends of mine who are still friends, but I don't see much of them. One became an assistant superintendent over in Marin, and another one became a principal, never went beyond the principal level down in Hayward. We had an awfully nice get-together. Sometimes I'd go over to his place, but he was really getting up there in years. By the time I got my degree at age thirty-one, he was probably sixty, and he lived to be close to ninety. So, we were almost, you know, real friends, more than just student and professor.
- Wilmot: I'm wondering if you can clarify something for me. When you say that your thesis was focused on facilities planning, that sounds like it's partially education administration, but it also sounds like this other dimension of spaces—designing good spaces for learning. I wanted to ask you what kind of intersection was there? Where were you more focused?
- Smith: I guess I was more focused upon the physical dimensions of the plants and how they were designed, comparing them with the facilitation of the education of young children and the financing of the schools. Then I leap-frogged over heavily to parental involvement and reaction to it. I guess I might have collected some data—it's been fifty years—on some impact of the program on the students, although, you know, for kids at that young age there wasn't much in the way of testing or anything of that sort. So, it was primarily what their community and the administrators thought of the experiment, and of the facilities, and what the parents thought. It really impressed me that parents—maybe because they were all in relatively middle-class areas—parents were extremely involved—not just with the Parent-Teacher Association—but involved with the faculty and with the principal. It was the beginning, I guess, of what could be considered the kind of relationship that parents ought to have, particularly at the elementary school,

and not just for the lower grades, but through sixth grade. So, those were the things that most interested me.

Wilmot: That data collection must have really brought you into different communities.

Smith: Yeah, I was dealing mostly though with someone in the superintendent's office about the planning, and then with the principal, and then with a representative group of parents. I actually think that I had a questionnaire that went to parents.

Wilmot: Right, you mentioned that. How did you come to choose this as a topic? What brought you to it?

Smith: You mean the thesis topic?

Wilmot: Yes.

Smith: Well, I mentioned that Reller influenced me, because he felt that there ought to be some breadth of the research in the field that dealt with facilities. Remember, I had had that whole year's experience running around all of the nine counties in the Bay Area—looking at, and recording, and documenting, and describing school facilities—maybe a thousand, two thousand classrooms, in over a hundred schools. So, that whetted my appetite for that as an area for exploration.

Many of the school districts—our school districts—had full-time directors of facilities planning or assistant superintendents for facilities. I guess I sort of thought that that might be a career possibility, either that type of specialized job in a big district, or dreaming that one of these days I might be a superintendent of schools in a medium-sized district. But I was ten, fifteen years too early for that.

Wilmot: That brings me to this question about your time at the Alameda County School Department—

Smith: That is an intermediary unit between the state and the local districts. You have the State Department of Education, you have the local districts, and then unfortunately, every one of the fifty-seven counties then, and may still, had an intermediary unit that dealt with such things as credentialing and curriculum materials, which many of the districts were too small to provide, and school planning. Believe it or not, I personally had to review the plans for every school that went up at that time, except in the three large urban districts that were exempt from it. But all of those districts out in Fremont and Hayward, Castro Valley, Livermore, Pleasanton—I got involved with. When they decided that they needed to build a school, I got involved as liaison between the limited number of principals and others, and the architects.

So, my job there, when I first went in, I was an administrative research assistant, collecting data on facilities, budgets and the like. The guy I was reporting to really was an old navy type. That whole office was infested with former naval officers, many of them from the same units, from the superintendent on down. I would say that a half-dozen of the top administrators and key people were World War II navy vets. This guy was one of them, and I guess he was transferred out to Pleasanton, where they had that

large curriculum materials center where he could do something logistical, because he wasn't very creative.

So, about two years later, they made me director of research and school housing. The research again was largely related to finance, personnel, and facilities. And then I was given the assignment of being the superintendent's liaison with the County Board of Education. It hadn't been too long before that they had gone from appointed boards to elected boards. But unfortunately, the county superintendents are still elected, so it was a touch-and-go relationship, just as it is now in Alameda County.

Well, I came to the conclusion before long that even though ours was a metropolitan county—and San Francisco was a city county—they didn't have a county operation—that the county school department, if not the counties, were an extra layer of government that we didn't need. Really what I thought that we needed—and a lot of people thought so—was perhaps eight or ten regional offices in the state. In the Bay Area there might be one or two: one on this side for three or four counties, one for Marin, San Francisco, San Mateo, or maybe one for the whole metropolitan Bay Area, because the problems were similar and we didn't really need the overhead—i.e. the extra superintendents, assistant superintendents, curriculum materials, research, et cetera but that reorganization never came to pass. Although, some of the small counties merged or attached themselves to districts up in the boonies. You might have a county with only 200 students, but there was a county superintendent of schools. Two hundred students in two little districts, but there was a county superintendent of schools, because the law required that there be one. So, it was an interesting experience.

I met a lot of interesting people, three or four others of whom were then working on their doctorates at Stanford or Berkeley. I told you that I met March Fong [Eu] there who was just finishing a doctorate in health education at Stanford, and was a health education coordinator for the staff, and then ran for the county board of education, and became an assemblywoman representing Oakland, and eventually became Secretary of State.

Wilmot: What kind of insight and perspective did doing this work give you on the way that different communities resource their schools, and how that impacts—

Smith: The disparity, you mean, between urban and suburban and rural?

Wilmot: Yeah.

Smith: Well, remember that the big city districts like Oakland and Berkeley and Alameda—I think that they were the only three—unified districts K through twelve, had a separate status. Most of what I dealt with were the twenty-five or thirty suburban and small rural districts that eventually became suburban, which were required by the State Department of Education to relate to the county school department. They were our constituency. We had relationships with Berkeley and Oakland, and believe it or not, our assistant superintendent for finance had the responsibility to oversee and approve the budget for Oakland, Berkeley, and Alameda, but our overall was largely a suburban-oriented responsibility.

There were still six or eight little two-, three-teacher schools out in Livermore and Pleasanton, that I used to go out and visit once a year, perfunctorily. I remember one was really interesting because they had two teachers and they had a full-time custodian, and that was because he was also a member of the board of trustees. But I worked very closely with districts like Hayward and Castro Valley. Fremont, at that time, had nine separate school districts—eight K to 8 elementary districts, and one overall high school district. I was involved in much of that explosion of fifteen, twenty schools. In Pleasanton, I worked with them on developing their third school. Sunol District expanded from a two- or three-teacher school to a full school or two.

It was interesting to be involved in the evolution of the whole suburban explosion during the fifties and sixties. And it was a good paper experience. Again, it was a staff position. I never had any program staff relating to me. I think that I had a secretary, and maybe at one point, a clerk or assistant to that person. It was enough, I guess, to want me to move on when I applied for the deputy superintendancy and didn't get it.

Wilmot: You did mention that.

Smith: And then it was fortuitous that at that time there was an opening in community development in Oakland. I knew people, and they knew me and I had, even while I was working at the county school department in '56. Fifty-seven or '58 is when I started getting involved in black politics, Democratic politics. So then, 1963 was when this opportunity with the city manager came along. They already had a black in the position, but he wanted to move on to something else.

Wilmot: So '58 was when you started becoming more involved in politics in the Bay Area?

Smith: Yeah, and I got involved with this Men of Tomorrow organization which you might have read about, which was the closest thing to a black chamber of commerce. Everybody who went on to be involved in any aspect of leadership came through that group. We met in a little ghetto restaurant, Slim Jenkins, down on Seventh Street, and we had retreats up in the boonies a couple of times, but everybody was there.

Wilmot: Where were the retreats?

Smith: Oh, we would get out of town once a year and go up to Lake County. But this was, I'd say, three-fourths professionals in law and medicine and ministry, and about one-fourth businessmen, which was supposed to be the core of the organization, but there were few black businessmen. Most of them were realtors, which was the growth industry at that time.

Wilmot: That is very interesting. Was this a natural progression to become involved with this group, to expand socially, or was there a specific catalyst, or someone you met?

Smith: Well, I guess that when I was at the county I had some exposure—you know, the only black in the area, and one of the few black administrative-level people. There were none in Oakland. There might have been one black high school principal, Ben Hargrave, and maybe one or two other elementary school principals who replaced him as he moved from elementary, but there weren't that many blacks in any visible positions. So I might have been recruited or invited to become a part of some of these developments.

I was also the first black to get involved with the United Way, which at that time was called Community Chest. I was on the board for the southern Alameda County unit, Hayward-Fremont area, then East Bay-Oakland, and then eventually the United Way for the whole Bay Area, which was San Francisco-oriented, where I met some of the distinguished white community leaders in the Bay Area.

Wilmot: When you became involved with Men of Tomorrow, what was the primary focus of the group? What were the goals?

Smith: It was a social group to get together and socialize and begin to talk about political development. It was an interesting group, but it was lightweight, you know—my third year there I was president. Some of the people, I guess, just chose not to be that involved, but that was the beginning of the spin-off of the East Bay Democratic Club. So the heavyweight guys like Lionel Wilson, [Allen E.] Broussard, and Donald McCullum, who was the longtime head of the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People], all gravitated to that operation after being president of Men of Tomorrow. All of them became judges. And the Men of Tomorrow didn't last during my period for more than five years. By '61 or '62 it was gone. Redevelopment came in and the facility disappeared.

Wilmot: Where was the facility again?

Smith: It was on Seventh Street, right across from what is now the big, massive postal facility. It was in that same block, across the street. And all of that area was either wiped out or it's still sitting down there boarded up, you know, undeveloped. And we used to meet in another little bar across the street called Esther's Orbit Room. You've probably heard of that. It's still there I think—that survived. For example, that's where Jerry Brown used to hang out when he was campaigning. He would always be down there and visible and available to talk to people, which was part of his M.O. that led to his getting elected, because he was really a person who was accessible. But Esther's was our location. It was a bar and a sort of a lightweight grill, and we all met in the back room, which I guess was set aside for parties or something. It was kind of our headquarters during all of that time. I don't think that we had another central place after that, meeting at homes. People became elected to office and we'd use their offices.

John George, for example. I got to know him very well from that same period, a lawyer who was in the same office with Don McCullum. He went on to be a supervisor. He has a psychiatric clinic named after him out in San Leandro. I think that he came along early with the Men of Tomorrow, but was more interested in politics, and then got more heavily involved with the East Bay Democratic Club. I was involved with them just generally for the first year. But then they really had a need for information. They were talking about things without any database. They really didn't have up-to-date information about registration of blacks and about city and county government, so I sort of assumed the position of political education chairman.

About every other meeting, they would give me some time to give out some literature and talk about what was the real structure of local government. Then that led me into being shifted over to something more critical, which was coordinating the voter registration for what was then the Eighth Congressional District, which was most of Oakland and part of Berkeley.

- Wilmot: What year was that?
- Smith: This must have been 1961 or '62. I was still at the county school department, but heavily involved with people in Oakland.
- Wilmot: What kind of strategies did you employ, as someone who was in charge of voter education?
- Smith: Well, it wasn't a strategy. It was just a matter of having some sort of planned operation to take advantage of money that came from state and county sources to get people registered. We had volunteers who would do what today I guess would be called the beating, you know, going around to houses. I was in the office there on Ashby Avenue, relating to all of the volunteers and also providing them with data, and liaison with the county registrar of voters, and that sort of thing. So I wasn't in the street that much. I was doing a little coordinating job in the office, but I related to all of these people who were on the street. West Oakland, North Oakland, and South Berkeley was the extent of our involvement. This was also the Seventeenth Assembly District, which was [William] Byron Rumford's territory.
- Wilmot: During our last conversation, you mentioned that you'd had this job in Cordonices Village, when you were working with youth. Many of those youth were from that community of African Americans from the South who had come here during the war and had been kind of rendered superfluous by the changes in the economy after the war, and I wanted to ask—
- Smith: They were living in public housing.
- Wilmot: Right. Was this the kind of community that you were working to mobilize?
- Smith: No, not really, again that was Albany, which was a little enclave of blacks in public housing, surrounded by 90 percent whites, upwardly mobile middle-class whites. Berkeley, I don't think had a similar development. West Oakland, down in deep West Oakland there were some public housing units, including some that were still on the site of the Oakland Naval Base, Harbor Homes—hundreds of apartments, that had a separate elementary school there for years, which was then closed down. But no, I was just a student. Now we are talking about '51 or '52. My involvement started six, seven years later, when I had finished my degree and had a little more roots in the community and had begun the communication with some of the blacks who would become leaders.
- Wilmot: I understand that that was a different time and a different community. But generally, the question is, who were you seeking to mobilize?
- Smith: I think that we were primarily interested in mobilizing the emerging black middle class who were going to vote, and who were anxious to bring about some changes and get better schools and all of that. We had very little involvement with hard-core, ghetto families down in the heart of West Oakland, which was kind of a jungle at that time. And East Oakland was just starting to emerge—that's where people who had jobs moved in the fifties and sixties. And then of course that became the same type of community deterioration that had taken place in West Oakland after the war. Before the war, I understand West Oakland was relatively stable and very diverse: Italians,

Portuguese and working class people who had lived there from the twenties on. That's where Lionel Wilson grew up. But, the hardcore ghetto, which was mostly concentrated in West Oakland, was not one of our targets. North Oakland, above MacArthur, that whole area, and South Berkeley, which was the black part of Berkeley. I don't think that there was that much going on in East Oakland at that time. There might have been some blacks living in what is now called the Fruitvale area, but the whites were still living in the area beyond High Street.

Wilmot: I understand that there was an older white power structure in Oakland at that time that was related to the Knowlands. I'm wondering how did that power structure relate to this group of young professionals that was working towards social change? Or that was part of Men of Tomorrow and the East Bay Democratic Club?

Smith: Well, of course, the difficulty was that we were all Democrats and they were all Republicans. I told you my friend Clint White for a while crossed over, played the game and then came back, but virtually all of the Men of Tomorrow's forty or fifty active members were Democrats. Finally, I think the Republican power structure began to recognize that they couldn't possibly survive with any stability in the community or energize black middle-class development unless they shared some of the governance. I think the first example, of course, of that was Byron Rumford who was elected about 1950, '51, in Berkeley, which was always considered a little more progressive. Berkeley had Democrats on the city council, although their longtime mayor was Republican. One of our members, Barney Hillburn, one of the few active Republicans in the community of Men of Tomorrow, was the first one involved. He was appointed to the Oakland school board, and for a long time he was the only black on the school board. An older man—really not very energetic near the end of his career.

Wilmot: Would you say his name again?

Smith: Barney Hillburn. And then after Barney, there began to be people who ran for school board. Again, Berkeley was in the vanguard—much more movement there—two city councilmen and the mayor long before there was such in Oakland—school board member Roy Nichols way back in the early sixties. The power structure began to recognize some of this, and that was why I was hired, I think, because the city manager, who was a local boy and a very progressive—Wayne Thompson, who had been the boy city manager of Richmond during the last part of the war and led them through the postwar transition, then came to Oakland, his hometown, about 1958 or '59. He was very insightful, if not progressive. He had already started relating to people like Lionel [Wilson] and Don McCullum. Then, I guess we might have begun to have some blacks moving up in the probation and welfare departments. By 1967 or '68, there was pretty good involvement in the whole structure—city council, county board of supervisors. We had one by that time, John George—1970, '71. City council—a fellow named [Joshua] Josh Rose who was the first black member of the city council.

Wilmot: Joshua Rose.

Smith: Yeah. His daughter was a reporter with the *Oakland Tribune* for years.

Wilmot: Was that Virginia Rose, or was that his wife?

Smith: That's his wife. His daughter [is] Mary Ellen Rose Butler. Incidentally, have you seen this book on Oakland? [shows book]

Wilmot: I have seen it, but I can always stand to look at it again.

Smith: Yeah, you really ought to look at that. She wrote, in fact, I think the section on the black community. [flipping through book] Mary and I were very involved with the woman from the museum who put this together. We gave her several references of people to write sections about the city. Brenda Payton we recommended to them, too. Bill Wong who had been one of Mary's students, we recommended him, too. Here is her name: Mary Ellen Butler, who wrote the piece about Elmhurst, but really I think was a resource on the whole black phenomenon. This is an excellent book that you can borrow when you have the time to go through it, neighborhood by neighborhood. And then I think there are some cross-neighborhood relations to blacks and Hispanics and Asians as groups. Brenda did the piece on neighborhoods, and focused primarily on black neighborhoods. This is something that came out about two years ago.

Wilmot: Yes. I saw this at the Oakland Museum.

Smith: Yeah, the museum published it, and one of their people who was a community coordinator was the editor and the person that put it together. So anyhow, that is the evolution—my version of the evolution of black participation. Then from these perfunctory board memberships, which for the most part were appointed before they could be elected, which is usually the case. Then we got to the point where there were two or three on each of these boards and one supervisor, so John George was a breakthrough when he was elected to the board of supervisors. The guy in Berkeley, Warren Widener, was a breakthrough when he was elected mayor. Then Lionel, of course, in '77 as mayor, and there had been a couple of attempts. Lionel had run for city council in Berkeley way back in the late forties, because he lived in Berkeley until he became a judge. Tom Berkley, who recently died, ran for city council way back in the forties, early fifties (unsuccessfully, trying to sort of latch himself on to Byron Rumford's coattails) but it never worked for another ten, twelve years. Then Lionel in 1977, after his political involvement led to his being appointed as a judge in 1959, by the first Governor [Edmund G., Sr.] Brown. He went from local judge up to superior in about two years. Some folks say that he was actually considered or offered a seat on the supreme court that [Allen] Broussard finally was offered and took. So, anyhow, it's twelve-thirty, do you want to get another cup of tea?

Wilmot: Do you want to take a break?

[tape interruption]

Wilmot: In our past conversations, you were telling me that it was through your connections that you learned of this opportunity with the City of Oakland, and through your connections with friends and colleagues at the Men of Tomorrow Club and the East Bay Democratic Club.

Smith: Well, the guy who was leaving the job, Evelio Grillo, had been a very good friend of mine for years, in fact, going back again to when I first came out to Berkeley in '51. He was a graduate student in community development in the School of Social Work, and

lived in a married student apartment. So we got to be friends. We went to that same church over there in San Francisco, so we had stayed in touch over the years, from '51 to '63 or '64. He encouraged me to look into it, but I think that it was Lionel who was then on the oversight advisory committee for the Ford project, and who really had the ear of the city manager and the confidence of the city manager. He just called me and said, "You know, Evelio is leaving this job and you are the best person for it. I want to arrange for you to meet the city manager." So, it might have been a *fait accompli*, based on my background experience and relatedness, rather than it was going to be a competitive situation. So, I didn't take advantage of that or assume that I had any protected status, but it did indicate to me that I had to be sure that I preserved my roots in the black community and not become, you know, a captive of the white establishment.

The program, as I mentioned, started as an East Oakland experiment that was based on this concept of associated agencies, all focusing primarily on aberrant youth—because those were the days when there really were some serious youth problems in the schools and the city—not murders, but a lot of youth problems that the police and the probation department at schools could not cope. Then the concept of the Ford people was that maybe they were not communicating enough and not integrating enough and not reinforcing each other, so that's how the project started. So, we started doing that—I think that I said that program, we expanded gradually into two or three other areas. The pretrial release program and the program for teenage girls kicked out of school, were the two that stood out. We then started our first program that related to manpower development. Then along came OEO [Office of Economic Opportunity], which liked the model and simply gave us the approval to expand city-wide as a part of the War on Poverty.

I only stayed there four years because I was getting a little worn out from the pace of things, and I was beginning to realize that it wasn't a War on Poverty. A lot of good things happened—I mean, maximum participation of residents, hiring people from the neighborhood, having input from the people on how the agencies that serve them did the serving, and really opening up the potential for more minority involvement in government. But the core problem of stabilizing households even then was adequate housing that people could afford, which I think was more critical than trying to jack up the schools, which were just symbolic of what the underlying problems of unstable families are. I just felt that there wasn't really going to be much further that we could go. Then after four years, I thought that there might have been the beginning of some retrenchment from the federal government, as we put up so many expectations in this structure. So, when the opportunity came to go over to the San Francisco OEO regional office as deputy director, I took it. I talked one of my long-time colleagues, Percy [Moore], into coming over and taking my job. He had been the head on the Council of Civic Unity in San Francisco. So, he came over and I thought that they were in good hands, but it turned out that he wasn't much of a politician or administrator.

Wilmot: Did that work really require you to have good politician skills?

Smith: I think so, because you are basically beholden to the constituency, and indirectly beholden to the structure within which you work. I liked the idea—we were one of the few community action programs, I should tell you, around the country that was actually operated within local government. Most of them were separate not-for-profit

foundations that were formed in Detroit, Chicago, Philadelphia. They had relationships to the mayor and the city, but they were not departments of government, which is what we were, beginning to be an institutionalized government in that department of human resources. So that held my interest for four years. The program continued off and on for another two or three years, but by 1969 or '70, for the most part the departments that participated—the seven or eight—had made a commitment to integrate some of these ideas of working with people in a different way, hiring some of them, having advisory committees of them, and at the same time, starting to see blacks on the council and boards and all that. So, I guess it served its purpose. It really shook things up for four or five years, but was never, as I said, going to be a real War on Poverty, because the country wasn't prepared for that. If you have a War on Poverty you have to seriously start looking at the distribution of income, and nobody really wanted to do that and talk about the disparities, and the fact that, as I used to say, the real problem in this country is the working poor, not the few that are on welfare, but the people who work every god-damned day and don't make enough to make ends meet.

That's a problem that nobody wanted to focus on, we still aren't focusing on it. This ridiculous little what—seven dollars an hour minimum wage? And now they are talking about ten or eleven for a living wage, whatever they call it now, the expansion of it. In the Bay Area, you are talking about fifteen to eighteen dollars an hour minimum for people to even aspire to being able to have a house and begin to have a family unit, and if not a used car, something like that. And yet, we are still hung up on trying to get the minimum wage up to a living wage, which is what they call it. That's again a joke—a living wage of only ten or eleven dollars an hour.

- Wilmot: I take it then that in some ways you really saw some limitations—that you saw the strategies that were at your disposal were limited.
- Smith: Right, and I guess the five years out of my field and dealing with more and more political aspects of the problem. I told you about the little experience when I applied for the regional OEO directorship, and I found out that a commitment had already been made to give it to one of Sargent Shriver's friends, who is a nice guy and I worked well with, but I didn't see myself as a career federal bureaucrat. A lot of guys who worked for me stayed there and put in their twenty-five years and had good retirements. If I had wanted to stay after OEO disappeared, I could have moved over to housing or to social welfare. But I didn't regret that I came back to education, and even there, at a significantly more important job as president of a community college.
- Wilmot: What did you think were the most—I have this question to ask in several different ways, but what do you think were the biggest challenges to you to doing this work?
- Smith: This community development work?
- Wilmot: Yes, and in particular I am thinking—this question has a couple different dimensions, and one is specific to being in Oakland. And then the other dimension is what you think were the biggest challenges that faced these community development strategies in general?
- Smith: Well, remember we started out with a pretty good base of two or more years with the Ford Foundation background. So we were a more sophisticated, relevant operation than

most of the antipoverty programs that were just sort of thrown together by politicians. The War on Poverty was a palliative, to say the least. I think that with the city manager and emerging black leadership, there really was a commitment to change the system. So that intrigued me, but then it didn't appear as if local county and city sources were going to even be able to institutionalize some of the things that we got started with the federal money, which was not going to continue indefinitely.

So, it was going to be another dimension of the community development effort, and I suppose that I could have stayed here and done something like that, but I always liked the idea of being in education. I didn't want to really waste those four years getting a doctorate to end up as some sort of social welfare or housing third level person. So, I might have stayed over there if the Merritt offer hadn't come, or the invitation to apply. I might have stayed over there a couple more years. It paid more than the local city and county. At that time, I think that I was a GS-18, which was the highest of the non-political appointees, and those folks probably make \$150,000, \$160,000, \$170,000 these days. It would have been a potential career for me that would have given me at least the same financial reward that coming into higher education would have given me. But, I'm not sure that I would have felt at home that much there. This was an experiment and an experience, but not a career. I guess that's the way to describe it.

Wilmot: What kept it from becoming a career for you in particular? What about doing that kind of work kept it from becoming a career for you? Which parts of it were work that you did not think was effective?

Smith: Well partially, as I said, wanting to come back to my chosen field, and secondarily, realizing that there were limitations to the fullest implementation and maximum impact of the program, because the feds were not going to be there for the long haul, and the resources at the local level were not that committed. Actually, as I said, after I left, in Oakland, many of the participating departments—health, schools, probation, police, welfare, social planning—did take the step of integrating at least, if not relating directly to the client population. They at least integrated with people who came out of the client population.

I wouldn't say I was that disturbed by it, but I just think that at age forty I wasn't going to spend the rest of my career as either a city or a federal bureaucrat. I could have done it, and might have done it if nothing had opened up back in education. I wasn't going back to the county school office. And then of course, I should tell you that the city manager, that innovative, courageous city manager left. He was burned out, I guess, after Richmond and Oakland for several years. He left and went into the private sector. He went back to be a vice president of Dayton-Hudson Foundation, which is Mervyn's and Target's owner.

Wilmot: This is Wayne Thompson?

Smith: Yeah, and he went back where he was born. He was born in Minneapolis and raised and grew up here. He went back to Minneapolis for the rest of his career and was very instrumental in getting their foundation to be in the vanguard of corporate involvement in community development.

Wilmot: During your four years at the City of Oakland as director of human resources—which, as we discussed, meant a different thing than what it would mean now—what were you very proud of doing there? What were your biggest successes?

Smith: Despite the rhetoric about my not being part of the group, and not being to identify with the problems—and I never talked about the background that I came out of, although I was tempted sometimes when people were talking to me about being an elite person. “You must have come out of an upper middle-class background.” I just let that go by. But I guess I was most proud of being able to relate to grassroots people, and have their confidence. And, of course, I was backed by the whole political establishment. All of that political bullshit about my living in the hills didn’t have anything to do with the leadership of the black community, because again, they saw this, if not as a role model, as an example of what an opportunity system can provide if it is there. And then I guess, I think that I had some influence on those six or seven county department heads, some of whom became my friends. The assistant district attorney, a Republican, Ed Meese, got to be a friend of mine even though he was a right-wing Republican. The guy who just retired as a federal judge, Lowell Jensen, was also in that office working on our pre-trial release program and was someone that I probably had some influence on.

Wilmot: When you say influence—?

Smith: Well, I mean that they could talk to me and really express their concerns about what was going on with without being paternalistic, and without feeling that they had to have a certain cover. We really could talk. We never were going to be great social friends, but—Dr. Jim Malcolm, who was an outstanding head of the health department and very innovative and on the liberal side, and I got along really well, stayed in touch for many, many years. So, my indirect influence now—I didn’t say they were taking their cues from me—but my humanizing of them and sensitizing of them to the problem, because although I was black, I had the background that they could feel respectful of, and so the dialogue was there.

And then at the same time, I spent a lot of time out in the neighborhoods, and I met activists like Paul Cobb and others. An example of what I’m talking about is that the school situation, Nadine, got so bad in the late sixties that three or four of my friends including Paul Cobb—who you may have heard of, he’s on the school board—went down and took over a school board meeting. They got up on the tables and took over the school board meeting—two or three of them, plus a white teacher who became a friend of mine, Dave Creque from the teacher’s union, and they were called the Oakland Five. Well, they were arrested. So, in the usual sense of the political times, we formed what was called the Oakland Five Defense Committee. I was the chair of it and Don McCullum was their free attorney, although there were some expenses outside of the pro bono. That was interesting—I think it gave us a lot of status. It wasn’t done as a gimmick. I just did it because I knew the school board was not being responsive. They were acquitted. I thought they went a little overboard, you know, in the way they did it, but they were kind of folk heroes in the community and I liked them. Now some of those folks joined me and others in being involved in Lionel’s first campaign in 1977, some of those same contacts.

Wilmot: When we initially talked about your work with the City of Oakland, you mentioned the program for pregnant teenaged mothers, which we just talked about, and also a program you developed, pre-trial release. Were these also things that you felt very proud of?

Smith: Yeah, it was kind of set up though. That was one of Ford Foundation's favorite programs. Whenever we would get together, the five cities, we always had to go down to lower Manhattan to see the Manhattan Bail project. That was one of the things they were most interested in seeing replicated. So, they had a model and we did it. The big job was selling the district attorney and the police chief and the probation officers on the fact that when people were arrested, if it wasn't anything violent, that they ought to have the potential, if they couldn't afford bail, to be reviewed to see if they represented a risk, and if not, letting them out on their own recognizance, OR, as they called it. Quite conservative guys, like Ed Meese and Jensen, working for a Neanderthal district attorney, Frank Coakley, and combined with the police chief, an image—all of that was reflected in some of those articles I wrote. It was a challenge to even get them to consider it. I think Wayne Thompson's presence probably helped, because he was the boss of a couple of them, but not the elected officials, like the DA.

So, then when we had the other project that I mentioned, the project providing an alternative to teenaged pregnant girls other than being kicked out of school, I think that was very gratifying for me. It introduced me to the Rosenberg Foundation, because I applied for money and a longtime wonderful old director who just died at age ninety-two, Ruth Chance, liked the idea and gave us some money for it. Then I had to, with the help of one of the women on our staff, relate all of this to the five participating groups. The YWCA assumed the coordination of it as a non-direct service agency, and then the health department schools—welfare, probation, health—if it was required—all were part of it. And the schools actually for the first time sent their own staff out to provide classes and counseling in the YWCA facilities. This was 1964 or '65.

Ten years later, I was invited to serve on the Rosenberg Foundation, by Ruth Chance influencing the board. One of the board members was one of the Haas family members, Peter Haas of Levi Strauss. I spent twenty years on that board. In fact, I could still be on it, but I just felt that twenty years was enough, and we had two or three other people who just were on indefinitely that I thought should have gotten off, so I went twenty years and resigned. I still relate to them, because they still bring all of the alumni members together once a year for a critique of what the priorities are and what their problems are.

Wilmot: During these four years, again, with the City of Oakland, when you were director of human resources, a.k.a. community development—just for my reference—what kind of relationship did you have with the Ford Foundation, and how did it affect the day-to-day implementation of your programs?

Smith: Well, I had a very good relationship. First of all, Oakland was the first of the so-called Gray Areas projects. They first got hooked on what Oakland was doing under Associated Agencies and then came into Oakland and shortly after brought in Boston, New Haven, Philadelphia and Washington, DC. So we were their early favorite people, anyhow. Then I got along very well with Paul Ylvisaker who was the vice president in charge of their Gray Areas projects. They also had something called the Great Cities School Projects, which started about the same time. So, I got along very well with them,

and Paul liked to come to Oakland and he was very, very impressed with the city manager, so all of that made it a good relationship. I must have taken twenty trips to the East Coast within about three years, which I wouldn't contemplate now, but we had meetings in each of these cities, and we had a kind of collateral relationship with Pittsburgh and, of course, North Carolina. It was just a wonderful group. I have a group picture in there that was taken around 1965 of the whole group.

Some of their other people on the staff went on to illustrious careers. Herb Winnick went on to be undersecretary of housing. One of their black guys, Christopher Edley, went on to be the head of the Negro College Fund, and his son is now a distinguished professor at Harvard. Another guy, Henry Saltzman, went to Europe and became a project director, like what Ford was pushing in Amsterdam or somewhere, came back and became the president of Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. So there were really some outstanding people. Paul Ylvisaker eventually left the Ford Foundation and went up to Harvard, where with a background in political science and public policy, they still made him the dean of the School of Education, where he spent the rest of his career. He died about six years ago. He was only two or three years older than I was.

Wilmot: I asked the question about the Ford Foundation partially because there is often this phenomenon where pressure of the funder of programs really impacts the directions of the program.

Smith: Yeah, it influenced, because you knew what they were interested in. That's why they would take you around to all of the cities, so that you could sort of cherry-pick the best programs. I'm sure that a couple of them cherry-picked our best programs. New Haven had a special focus and Washington, DC, which was a mild disaster. Philadelphia had a modest program. It is interesting. The director in Philadelphia was Sam Dash, the famous Sam Dash who was the counsel for the Democrats in the Nixon prosecution. He had been a crackerjack young district attorney in Philadelphia who I guess wasn't reelected or something and was available—a young man in his early forties, and Ford picked him. He only stayed a year and a half, two years, and moved on to Washington, where he became a distinguished professor at Georgetown. But really, a fascinating group of people that I dealt with. It stimulated me too, to know that I was part of a team, a family of people who were doing things around the country. And as you probably know, the Ford project was a major influence on the War on Poverty. A major influence.

Wilmot: Did you ever find it difficult to deal with the mandates that you got from your funder and to reconcile them with the needs of your program?

Smith: We never got mandates. It was just that they exposed us to ideas. They might have said something about imbalance, because we were heavily schools and health oriented under the Ford project, in terms of the amount of money and the amount of people who were employed. I think that they may have had some influence on broadening the scope, beyond health and education, to get into things like administration of justice, and meeting the needs of the unserved, like those young women. They liked that project. Although I got support for it from Rosenberg, we still expanded it under the OEO program.

Wilmot: I think both while you were working with the City of Oakland and when you came in as the deputy regional director of OEO—my understanding is that during that time

because of these resources coming into Oakland, there was a great deal of jockeying and factions of different groups who are all eager to have a hand in how these programs were implemented. Does that sound true?

Smith: I don't remember that there was that much competition or tension between, for example, the four target areas. My successor, I think, presided over the phase when the program did get a little bit unstable and political. In fact, they were pushing for going outside of city government and making it a non-governmental department, which of course, I would have strongly opposed. They made some efforts at that, but I don't think that they were ever accommodated. So, that may have been what they were talking about, that the so-called Oakland Economic Development Council, which was the advisory committee that oversaw the program and were appointed by the city manager or by the city council. It became a little bit unstable, shall I say. There was a little tension in the early stages, but OEO took care of that almost immediately by having some neighborhood people on it and not just Lionel Wilson and McCullum and the lawyers and ministers and other so-called black leaders.

Wilmot: In doing this work, to whom did you hold yourself accountable?

Smith: When I was working in the city?

Wilmot: Uh-huh.

Smith: Essentially two people—the city manager and Lionel Wilson. When the city manager left, the city replaced him with some conservative guy from Glendale, Jerome Keithly. But at the same time, I should point out to you that they had an interesting mayor at that time who was very sensitive and got along very well with blacks. He was part of the establishment, but was a poor boy from West Oakland, Irish American—

John Houlihan, and he was a lawyer. I related very well to him. As a matter of fact, I prepared a major report that we had to give to the state once, and he took me up there in his limousine to turn it over to the state director of finance, whatever that was all about. It was something that the city had to follow through on. But, he was a very interesting guy.

Unfortunately, he wasn't too honest with his dealings with clients and he ended up going to jail for ripping off \$100,000—was a lot of money at that time—from some elderly client of his. But he was a very, very good guy that we felt helped us along on the political thing. We used to say that, "He stole, but he had soul." [chuckles] Houlihan was an interesting guy. Fortunately, he recovered his career when he got out. He never went back into law, but he worked over here at the Claremont at the Institute of Local Self Government for about five or six, seven years. The guy that replaced him, of course, was very conservative, John Reading. Do you remember Red's Tamales? He was a former military officer, retiree, a really complete tool of the white establishment, and wasn't sensitive to our program. But that was about the time that I was leaving, I guess. We had dealings with him after I came back to Merritt. He was still there and part of the group to be dealt with.

Let me just mention one other thing and maybe we could stop. We had something that we called the New Oakland Committee, which I still think still goes on. Lionel and Don

and Evelio and I felt that one of the real problems we had as blacks was that we never really had the opportunity to sit down and have close dialogue about the city, its problems, and black people's needs for involvement with the power brokers themselves. So, we put together—and I drafted the original charter—this thing called the New Oakland Committee that was originally involving the senior Bechtel, and Edgar Kaiser—because, of course, the old man, Henry Kaiser, was either over in Hawaii or dead by then—and the head of one of the other firms, Clorox might have been here by then. There were three or four of these crucial guys and for about four months or five months we met with them.

We had some good dialogues, but then the thing, you know, got out of control. Labor wanted to know why they didn't have somebody, so we had to add the central labor council guy. The Hispanics wanted to know why it was an all-black dialogue; we had to have them. And then these three senior guys got a little weary of dealing with a potpourri of people—they didn't mind just having an occasional dialogue with three or four of us blacks. So they just started sending assistants. I stayed with that for three or four years. We hired our director—someone you would know—Ken Simmons, who was a full-time professor in architecture at Berkeley and had been there for some time. That was not his milieu. He went back to full-time teaching or whatever his other enterprises were. But that was another interesting dimension of my community involvement.

Wilmot: Was this while you were at—?

Smith: Where would I have been then? I probably would have been at Merritt College then, because it was after the OEO. So, while at Merritt, I had a continuing heavy involvement with the community, and I alluded to this three- or four-year involvement with black inmates over at San Quentin, which ended abruptly when the George Jackson shootout took place. The warden, Big Red, closed the door to all citizen and community groups from coming in and working with the inmates.

Wilmot: What did that involvement look like, that program?

Smith: Well, the reason that I got involved—and I was sort of recruited—was something that was called Self-Advancement through Education. These were guys, mostly younger guys in their twenties, who really saw that if they got out, they needed more education skills. They sort of started—I guess you would call it just a general education—liberal arts, history, English and all of that—program, coordinated by a black junior members of the staff at the prison, Nate Mohrland, who was a wonderful guy. So, they started inviting me over to talk to them about black studies, which we just started at the Merritt College, and to talk to me about community colleges and just to be kind of a role model and friend of theirs.

At the same time, they invited a black psychiatrist, who is still one of my best friends, Leonti Thompson, a West Indian New Yorker, and he had a thriving private practice and at one time was the director of mental health for Contra Costa County. Well, Leonti and I met over there and had some wonderful times with this group. Unfortunately, a couple of them came out and didn't do well. I tried to relate to a couple of them who just couldn't adjust. One of them, Paul Cooke, I gave some suits to, I tried to help him get a job. He got into an argument with one of his friends and stormed into the guy's house, and the guy just shot him in self-defense. This was a very interesting guy. He was a

graduate student in math at Berkeley, and he had one of these Muslim names, Malik something, but his real name was Crump. So, that was one of my heavy involvements.

Wilmot: Was Malik the one who was shot or—?

Smith: Who did the shooting. He shot and killed a young friend who had been one of the leaders of the program over there, out of the LA ghetto, and in the prison by nineteen or twenty. That was interesting, but the interesting follow-up is that about a year and a half, two years later I was called as a character witness for the young man who did the shooting, and the other character witness was Alex Haley, who had met him at Berkeley and knew him as a young black activist in the community. So here was Alex Haley and Norvel Smith sitting in the court room, testifying for this young guy.

One final, final on that part of my involvement. When I worked with these young guys—and you know, the prison trusted me. I would be in the room just with Mohrland and twenty guys or so, no guards, and we had nice discreet talks. But there was one older man there—much older than all of the rest of them. He sort of sat in the back, and then I suddenly got to realize that he had the respect of all of these guys and was really sort of a grand old guy. He had been sort of an early Panther—robbed a liquor store or something as a teenager, went to jail, had been in jail for thirty-five, forty years. Robert Wesley Wells. I don't know if you ever heard of Bob Wells. The Wells-Gorsham doctrine of incapacity was based on his case, where after many frustrating years before the parole board, he lost his cool and picked up a spittoon and threw it. And unfortunately, it hit a guard. And in those days if you assaulted a guard you had the death penalty, so poor Bob was in death row for years. [The doctrine established the fact that some perpetrators of violent crime are incapable of being responsible for their actions.]

In any event, he was an old fragile man, and that was another one of my ventures. I ended up chairing the Bob Wells Defense Committee with Charlie Gary and the wonderful attorney named Leo Branton, from Los Angeles, a very active community leader. We finally got Bob to do two things: to calm down with his anger and frustration, and to play the game with them psychologically. For whatever reason, he did that job, and they ended up transferring him to Vacaville. I used to go up on Saturday mornings and visit him. Every time I would go in there he would introduce me to two or three young guys who wanted me to do something for them on the outside. Well, Bob finally got out, and unfortunately I was in Europe that summer, '74. He got out and he was sort of taken over by the Delancey Street group, and didn't relate at all to most of us who had helped get him out, but he was very fragile. He might have been seventy-five and his body was like a ninety-year-old. He only lasted about a year. Maybe before we leave, I'll give you a copy of the tribute that I made to him at his memorial.

Wilmot: Why were so you concerned with prison issues?

Smith: Well, first of all, I was recruited, and secondly, you know, I was interested in the whole field of administration of justice. I had friends who were lawyers, like McCullum, Clint White, and others who were all almost full-time in criminal law, and I was just fascinated by that notion that these inmates, buried in that high security place, would want to start thinking about their lives when they got out. We had something called Soul

Day for about three straight years where we were able to get entertainers and educators, and a variety of people to come in. They would have a program there, and then a big feast afterwards. That was all that we were leading up to until the Jackson thing just ended all of that. You know, I didn't have any friend in prison. I was just sort of asked to come over and meet them, maybe by this fellow Malik, who had already started relating to them. Once over there I discovered this psychiatrist friend, and that was our group—Malik and the psychiatrist and me, working with Nate Mohrland. In fact, he may have been classified as a teacher, but that was his attempt to motivate and expand the horizons of these desperate young men, mostly under thirty.

Wilmot: Well, I have many more questions for you, but I am wondering how you are doing today in terms of your time?

Smith: We could go another fifteen, twenty minutes if you want to. It is two o'clock . We've been going for three and a half hours. Do you want to go another twenty, thirty minutes? Is this a good place to stop? You still have a lot of unanswered questions?

Wilmot: I definitely have many questions. How did the political geography or terrain in terms of the different constituencies that were involved, shift, once you went on to OEO as deputy director?

Smith: Well, in many ways it was less political, because other than the director, Larry Horan and me, being executive appointments, I guess you would call them—everybody else was civil service, and there really was very little pressure on the staff in any way. Once in a while we would get a response from one of the community action directors about something in relationship with a field representative, but that was internal political activity. None of it was really partisan politics from Washington. We may have once or twice gotten comments from legislative members in Washington, concerning the support or putting in a plug for some special program, but the programs were so precisely defined that either you qualified for them or you didn't.

Community Action was the only thing that was really locally based. The Domestic Peace Corps was just a national program that was decentralized to a small extent, but more like the Peace Corps, and not having every little community input into it, and the same thing applied to the job corps. There were only five or six big centers in the country and one of them happened to be out in Pleasanton—that was in our region. So, it was an interesting job: eight or nine Western states. We would get together very infrequently. I don't think that I made more than two trips to Washington during that fifteen-month period when I was there.

Wilmot: Following on that then, how would you describe the kind of political terrain and dynamic that existed when you were working in the City of Oakland?

Smith: Well, in Oakland, of course, it was more of a political relationship, because my whole being was related to the political dynamics out of which I had emerged into the job. My involvement with Democratic politics—ostensibly, there were no black Republicans. One exception was Barney Hillburn, in all of the years that I was around, and Clint White played the game for three or four years, and came back as a Democrat. So, it was always the same basic political constituency. Those same guys were those that I had known by then for six or eight years or longer, and with whom I worked even more

closely in politics when I got to Merritt, and we'll talk about that later. The politics was more relevant there, and certainly my protection from the politics came from Lionel and the other distinguished black leaders who were on the antipoverty oversight board. So, if I had any problems that I couldn't deal with, they certainly could. I don't remember any significant problems, because again we had black support and they all had credibility for the most part, and we had a very sympathetic city manager.

Wilmot: When you said that they had credibility, they had credibility with—?

Smith: With both—with the black community out of which they and their professions had come. All of them had roots. Lionel came out of a very poor, large family in West Oakland. Don McCullum came out of a poor family in Little Rock. John George came from a rural family background in Georgia. So nobody was that far removed from his constituent group. At the same time, these folks had achieved enough to be given credibility by the establishment.

Wilmot: That's interesting. It seems like a very interesting time.

Smith: Yeah, I'm not sure that we have situations today where people can bridge those two extensions of the operation.

[Wilmot: How did the Port of Oakland figure in economic development efforts in Oakland, as it related to the work that you were doing or your sphere of influence?¹

Smith: Economic development? This is apart from job creation.

Wilmot: Your focus was job creation?

Smith: Well, I guess, when I got there in '77, as Lionel's first appointee, the port was pretty much up to speed in terms of becoming a premier container port in the country, and certainly on the West Coast. But very shortly after that Long Beach/LA on the south, and Seattle/Tacoma on the north, passed Oakland in terms of percentage of West Coast tonnage, because with all of that merchandise from the Far East, they would either stop in LA and get rid of that before they came up here or stopped in Seattle, and put stuff on the train for the most part up there that would go to the Midwest. So, we were growing all of the time, but our share of the West Coast tonnage was shrinking. I think that it came down from 30 percent to maybe 18 or so, just during the time I was there. We had this tension between these port guys who always dreamed that they were an elite separate entity that was public, but really not beholden to the city, and the people in the city hall, particularly Lionel, and the new people who came in after him who felt that the city ought to benefit through the development of jobs and opportunity that the port represented.

Now, it was hard to do that with the aviation and shipping aspect of it, because so much of that was related to subcontractors—the airlines, the shipping companies that hired their own people—and many of them were highly technical jobs for which there wasn't much of a pool here. Real estate, I think, was the area that was most likely to emerge

1. Bracketed text inserted from interview 3.

and expand with all of that twenty miles of the estuary that the port controlled the land use of. So, the real pressure was on real estate I think, because they had the potential of building new hotels and restaurants and small businesses that could, in fact, have some impact.

But, the big crisis with the city was the fact that we were bound by state law that indicated that all of the so-called profits had to go into maritime use. The city managed somehow to arrange to get reimbursed for some of the special services that they provided us, like data systems at that time, personnel, and police, and fire. They probably got a half a million bucks for doing all of those things, but they wanted more. They were fighting deficits and lack of growth at that time. This was a very dormant period of Oakland's development there, the late seventies, early eighties.

So, there was this conflict, and I was sort of involved in it because I was taking the point of view of Lionel and the city councilmen that we ought to do everything that we could within the spirit of the law to provide some support to Oakland, by maybe finding a way to pick up some service that could be considered part of our charge and so forth.

But the real thing that brought it to a head—and I just saw three or four newspaper articles—was I was just appalled by the fact that we had \$100,000 travel budget for the port commissioners, flying all over the world, three and four at a time, first class, and always taking a staff person or two along to handle logistics. And of course, the director always went along. This was so blatant that I voted against the budget the first two years.

Wilmot: When you were commissioner.

Smith: Yes. I ended up taking two trips in eight years in 1982 and 1985. One year I was the president of the board, and there was always a trip, at least one, that went to the Far East, which was 80 percent of our business. I guess after that I went again when I was chairman of the maritime committee. But, we had people, for example, who every year would go to the Far East. We had people who found some transportation conference in Vienna—it had nothing to do with maritime—who went. We had another guy on the port who took a trip to Israel, even though we had no shipping relationships. It was just too blatant, so I spoke out on it, the press jumped on it, and it might have intimidated them to knock it down to maybe \$80,000.

The funny thing is that even Lionel called me up one day and said, "Why don't you get off this thing here," because once in a while, a city councilman would also join in those trips to Japan and the Philippines and Korea. That was my first shock with him, because I had been the point man in his effort to make the port more accountable, and he congratulated me on that effort, but here was an example of a little vested interest that caught me by surprise.

I would say, again, that real estate was the only real opportunity to provide new enterprises and jobs that could be competed for by the people in Oakland. The rest of the stuff was all subject to the hiring of the shipping companies, including the people who were in the unions that loaded and unloaded, and they were very heavily represented in blacks and always had been.

- Wilmot: The ILWU [International Longshore and Warehouse Union].
- Smith: At the airport, I guess there was very little involvement. Maybe they started to get some people in security, and I guess a few people in the cafeteria, but there weren't people working in the professional jobs at the airport, because they were the airlines' responsibility.
- Wilmot: I'm wondering again, during that year when you were deputy regional director at OEO—tell me if this question is off base, but how did the work that you were doing with the OEO compliment the work of the EDA at the same time? My understanding is that while OEO was focused on community development and job training, EDA was doing a lot of business development.
- Smith: Department of Commerce, you mean?
- Wilmot: Yes. Economic Development Agency? EDA?
- Smith: That wasn't much of an agency at that time. They had a one- or two- man operation that was financed by the Department of Commerce. I think they only had two people doing it—Charles Patterson, who was a friend of mine who used that contact to become a vice president of World Airlines and then finished his career as the director of the Convention Center in Oakland. A fellow young black from the 92nd Infantry Division, who died about six or seven years ago. Then there was another fellow who had worked, I think, for the Urban League or something. There never was a fully institutionalized department of economic development until recently when they merged that function with that of the physical redevelopment agency. I think for maybe seven or eight years, it's been a joint venture. Then, of course, our good friends on the city council designate themselves separately as the Redevelopment Agency for which they get another annual stipend.
- Wilmot: I think what I was thinking of was that there was a large amount of federal money that came into Oakland that was specifically parcelled up into business loans, so I was trying to see if those two efforts were coordinated.
- Smith: There were very few projects, other than the World Airways hangar, which was by far the biggest. I can't really identify any other project or two that could be attributed to that influence.
- Wilmot: Okay, I have two more questions, and one is, how well did you feel that the War on Poverty fulfilled its stated mission of maximum feasible participation of the poor?
- Smith: I think that that was one of its outstanding contributions, because it was pretty obvious that we were committed to bringing people from the user population in, not only to advise us, but to begin the whole movement toward paraprofessionals, where people could come in without the formal training and assist the professionals, and hopefully open up opportunities to go on to post-secondary education. So, I thought that it was one of the real contributions that still persists. Again, the notion that the serving institutions had to do some of the changing and modify, rather than just expecting the clients to always adapt or not be served.

- Wilmot: Was there a tension between OEO priorities and OEDC interests and priorities?
- Smith: Well, OEDC really came along at the very end of the community action War on Poverty. We started in '64 with two years background in the Ford project. By '67 when I left—they started this OEDC structure after I left, and I told you why. They seemed to be concerned that the new administration at city hall wasn't as receptive and responsive. When I was over there, it seems to me that even in my position I was beginning to recognize that there were problems of accountability and leadership in the new structure, and it was because I made a mistake in soliciting Percy, who turned out to have really serious personal problems.]
- Wilmot: Okay. I wanted to move on then to talk about Merritt. I may have some more questions about OEO later.
- Smith: Well, Merritt and UC are a lot of involvements, and as you see from my resumé, I picked up my involvements around 1964, while I was in the city, and even more so when I was at Merritt.
- Wilmot: You've described to me how you were invited to apply for the job at president, the post of president at Merritt—
- Smith: The funny thing was that I was invited by the leadership of the black students, who knew me from my Oakland days. I guess behind the scenes Lionel might have had something to do with that, but basically when I heard about the job, it was from the Black Students Union group who invited me, one of whom, Leo Bazile, was on the screening committee. And of course, Leo was one of my favorite guys. He went on to Stanford, came back to Boalt, and became an Oakland city councilman. You may remember when he got into shouting matches with a white city councilwoman from the hill area here, which impacted his career. I was dismayed because I thought he was very talented, very committed and had overcome some tremendous obstacles. When I met him, he was just out of the service, was married with a kid, working forty hours a week in Safeway and getting enough out of Merritt to transfer to Stanford.
- Wilmot: Yes, those are real accomplishments. Well, I want to know what was the interview or the selection process like?
- Smith: They had an interview committee that included some students, but then the crucial thing was when I made it to the point of being interviewed by the board. By that time they had pretty much made up their minds. When I went in to sit down with the superintendent, followed up by a meeting of the board, I think that he had already recommended me. I knew him indirectly, from some relationship, so it was more or less pro forma. I don't know if there were any—there might have been one candidate from inside the district which then just included Merritt and Laney Colleges. Alameda hadn't been built then. This so-called North Oakland campus out in Berkeley hadn't gotten started, so there really wasn't that much competition. There were several people there who had doctorates and had been there for years, but they either didn't apply or they weren't bureaucratic material.
- Wilmot: So the board then extended the offer to you?

Smith: Right, and I stayed on at OEO for maybe another couple or three months, and came over in August, 1968.

Wilmot: What was the environment at the campus when you first arrived? What was the mood?

Smith: Well, it was pretty devastating. First of all, we were on a little six- or seven-acre site, most of one square block with eighty portables on it. The old school, which had been the old University High, in a state of disrepair. It hadn't been a public school for years, and they just sort of pulled it out of the storage bin to turn it into Merritt. During the war it had been the Merritt School of Business, and then it became the Merritt campus of the City College. So, the physical facilities and the environment weren't very good. The surrounding neighborhood was a little volatile, but not really that bad.

The big problem was that this was the center of the emergence of black consciousness and nationalism, and eventually, unfortunately, the Panther movement. The young people white and black—they were only about 40 percent black despite the image. It was not an all-black college. You had 40 percent black, a handful of Asians and Latinos, and a good solid 25, 30 percent whites who were bright students for the most part—radical, but students who couldn't get into Berkeley, but could make a much easier transfer from a community college. At that time the Master Plan required the UC campuses to actually earmark a certain percentage of their admissions for transfer students. It was an interesting, diverse group and all of them politically active.

The prior president was an older man who had been an assistant superintendent in San Francisco, Ed Redford. He sort of knew me vaguely, but he had just been either driven out, or he just became an emotional case and he decided that he better retire to keep his mental health. Then he moved up to Oregon, or somewhere. Most of the staff who were Redford's boys just accepted that it was going to be different and never really stood in my way to making the changes to get more minority faculty and to follow through on this commitment to Ethnic Studies.

We had some trying times. Some of the young students—non-Panthers—once ripped off the bookstore, ostensibly getting books for the poor brothers who can't pay for them—a lot of that stuff. Then, as I told you earlier, when it got close to the point where we were moving the campus, I had to have undercover police in a couple of the offices there and surveillance at home, but once we got moved, they realized that we were going to move. They weren't going to intimidate us to stay in that old facility, with a brand-new facility. It sort of tapered off.

Wilmot: Was that the book exchange you mentioned, was that the book exchange program?

Smith: No, this was just a college bookstore. They just went in there and stole books and sort of gave them away.

Wilmot: Was there a survival program at Merritt that was the book exchange program? Was that at all—?

Smith: I never heard of that. A book exchange program?

Wilmot: Yeah.

Smith: No, not in '68 or '69. And books were expensive, and these weren't kids on the GI Bill. But there was no tuition, no fees at all. In fact, it must have been five years later that they finally came up with a nominal fifty or a hundred dollars a year fee. They couldn't call it tuition. Students were still bitching about that, strangely enough.

Wilmot: You mentioned the move, which we talked about in the first conversation. Who initiated the move to the Oakland hills from the Merritt campus?

Smith: Oh, by the time I got there, in '68, they had already passed a \$40 million bond issue, which was supposed to build three campuses: one in Berkeley; two in Oakland. The plans were already under way. I guess in my early days there, I might have had some discussions with the architect, but they had a full-time facilities planning guy in the central office, and the plans were already, if not complete, pretty far along. The site had been selected. I guess within a year or so, they started breaking ground, because it was at least two and a half, three years to build it, and we moved up in '71.

Wilmot: How did this move take place? How did it unfold?

Smith: Well, of course, it was traumatic. As I told you, just as we were about to move, some of the young Panther types sort of came on the campus and took it over. Rather than have the undercover police there get into a confrontation, we just accepted that. But it was critical because, I think I mentioned, that the district-wide computer system was there on campus, because Merritt was the center for teaching data processing or whatever it was called at that time. So, we let this go for a couple of days. Now, the police had already bugged the place. They knew everybody who was there and what they were saying and all that, so we knew that it wasn't that tightly disciplined an operation. We met with the board and the board agreed that we couldn't let it go on and asked me to work with the police in taking back the campus, so we did. As I said, we went in at around five o'clock one morning with about sixty or seventy police officers, and people were asleep and easily dispersed. Later that same day, we had six or eight big moving vehicles to start the move and the whole move was accomplished in maybe a day and a half, working around the clock with police protection.

Did I mention this little quirk when we were going out? A guy came by to pick me up at around four o'clock. We went down to headquarters where I got a very limited briefing. I met with the chief and the captain who was going to head this. We got into these vehicles and we were heading out Grove Street, and the guy had the radio on, and there was KGO saying that there is a police task force heading to Merritt College, at five-thirty, six o'clock in the morning. [laughs] That was really funny. It didn't really affect it much. Either they didn't listen to it or they were just—it may have been thirty people camping out in the new campus. But later on in the day, some of the street thugs, who weren't students I think, started coming around and throwing rocks at the police who had to arrest several of them. Wouldn't you know, on the evening news, what did they show? Not the rock throwers, but the police arresting the miscreants. But that sort of dissipated, and we got into the place. Real students said that this was a much better facility, and wasn't a joke of a campus, an old high school. At that same time, BART was being built, and we got out just before the BART construction really kind of incapacitated that whole neighborhood.

Wilmot: I have two questions that kind of come from what you said. The first is, how did you, as president, negotiate opposition to the move? How did you negotiate that situation?

Smith: Well, it was just a *fait accompli*—we were going to move. I couldn't pretend that there was any negotiating. It was a matter of keeping them informed. We might have taken a couple of groups of students up to look at the campus during the construction period, but I was, personally, mildly shocked that the group went to that extent. Although I was aware that there had been some kind of an infiltration of some of the Panther types who, as I said, were different from the black nationalists on campus, and more volatile people, spurred on and supported by some of the really hard-core white radicals from the Berkeley area.

So, I knew that and we gave them room on campus to have their activities and meetings. I thought that we had a good dialogue with them, but this was their last outburst, I guess, to make their statement. They never emerged as anything on the campus. I think that once, after about six months, when Huey [Newton] was out of prison temporarily, he and some of the Panthers came up to the campus. He was really very cooperative. In fact, when the move took place, he had just gotten out and I had two conversations with him. I think he helped by just sort of spreading the word that enough was enough, you know, not because I was a black president, but this was nonproductive behavior, and that the new campus was a *fait accompli*. Then he came on campus maybe a couple of weeks later and walked around in his glory, and students liked that.

Wilmot: On the new campus?

Smith: The new campus, yeah.

Wilmot: What were those conversations like?

Smith: With him?

Wilmot: Yes.

Smith: Well, he was pretty much preoccupied with the vanguard position of the Panthers and the pigs. And so we talked about the campus. He reminisced about his days on the campus—you know, he had been there maybe for a year or two. He was not an outstanding student. I looked at his transcript which was locked in the safe with a sign from the president that said, "This file is not to be opened, except with the approval of the president." [laughing] And there was Huey's and some other files in there and things, and that was part of my office complex. He was just overwhelmed by his frustration and anxiety. He got thrown out of Tech High School for assaulting other students—he was a rough young man. And by this time, he was twenty-two or three.

I visited him twice: once at the apartment of one of the white radical women in Berkeley, Elsa Knight Thompson, who was also a famous white commentator on KPFA, and then once when he was living in one of these super apartments down at 1200 Lakeshore. One of my colleagues and I, Fred Ivy, went over to chat with him about the crisis with the takeover. Out of that meeting came his spreading the word, I guess, that enough is enough. And then, don't forget that his brother, Melvin, was on the faculty by

that time. At the same time, he was treasurer of the Black Panther Party, wearing the black jacket, which he got away from that soon after that.

Wilmot: So, to me it sounds like in response to the opposition to the move, you kept—and tell me if this is right—that you kept dialogue open and you attempted to keep people informed at the same time as moving ahead on what was on the move.

Smith: Yeah, we had a lot of dialogue. We had open assemblies, and I stood up there and got called a motherfucker, and people were yelling and screaming, but they were a tiny portion of the three or four hundred people who would come to the meeting. Of course, it didn't hurt that part of what I did was to bring people like Alex Haley and some other black nationalists on the campus to speak at programs. So, my credibility was pretty good with the mainstream of black students, but these ranters and ravers and juvenile delinquents, you couldn't rationalize anything with them. You just had to tolerate the physical abuse, but I never felt threatened by any of them. I had a good relationship with four or five of the non-Panther leaders, including a young man who was the president of the student body, Fred Smith. Another guy, Isaac Moore, of whom I was very proud, went on to go to Berkeley and became an engineer, who I still see around town. So there was always some sense of rationality around there.

Let me tell you one other little interesting story about the Panthers. At that point their headquarters was just three blocks away on Shattuck. And, you know, I got to know Bobby Seale, because most of the time Huey was in jail, and we would talk. He lived a couple blocks away. He came from a rather middle-class family, in fact. His sister was an actress down in Los Angeles. He had been an air force sergeant or something, and then came out and got into the radical stuff.

While I was president down on the OLO campus, I was visited by two black college presidents whom I had met nationally, because I was also involved in national things that brought me in touch with black educators. These two guys—one from Fisk and one from Tennessee State, both from Nashville—came out and were on the West Coast, and they came by to visit me, just as the campus was about halfway done. So I took them up to the campus and they were very impressed, but they wanted to talk about the Panthers. So, we kept talking and I said, "Well, would you like to meet them?" They said yes, oh they were just thrilled. So I called and talked to Bobby's assistant—or guard or whatever. He said, "Yeah, Bobby's here," and he called me back and said, "Come on by." So we walked those three blocks over there, the gated entrance and all of that. We went in—everybody in view was white. And not only that, [laughing] they forced us to stand against up against the wall to be frisked, before they took us in to talk to Bobby, the ostensible leader of the movement. That was something that I'll never forget.

Wilmot: Norvel, do you know for a fact that Huey Newton was expelled from the Soul Students Association?

Smith: I was told that by two active members of the group. I think their motivation was to let me know that they were a different animal than the Panthers, who were in the headlines every week at the time.

Wilmot: I've neglected to ask you, did you see any good in the Black Panther Party's political platform and ideology?

Smith: I might be stretching it, but I would be willing to say that this group of young revolutionary blacks operating in a confrontational way encouraged the rallying of a broader cross-section of the community against the longstanding oppression of the police department. That might have been indirectly a contribution. I thought the Panthers might have contributed by bringing into the movement a lot of older, middle class blacks who got the missionary spirit and became involved in the community programs, who wouldn't have if it hadn't been for the young revolutionary blacks.

Wilmot: Had you heard at that time of Ron Karenga's US group? What did you think of them and their brand of cultural nationalism?

Smith: I heard about Ron Karenga but never met him and my general impression was that the US group's main focus was on something that was very similar to what the young black people at Merritt were involved in. I admired the fact that they were involved in the same kind of black consciousness that I was seeing take place in Oakland, Berkeley, and the East Bay, generally. But my general reaction is that they went too far in their aggressive confrontation tactics like the Panthers did, and that limited their effectiveness in the broader black community.

INTERVIEW 3: AUGUST 5, 2002

Wilmot: This is interview number three with Norvel Smith, and today is August 5. So, good morning. The last time we spoke, we were just in the middle of your tenure as president of Merritt College. Was there anything from our last conversation that you wanted to elaborate on or clarify that you had thought of over the last couple of days?

Smith: Well, I guess, I have to say, at my age I really don't recall how many specifics we talked about. I think I said something about my selection and some of the dynamics that were going on with the black students. But I don't know what else we talked about.

Wilmot: Well, we had left off talking about the move of Merritt College from the Grove Street campus to the hill. I just wanted to ask you to if you could compare and contrast the campus in the east Oakland hills to the Grove Street campus. How would you say that they were different from each other?

Smith: Well, there is no comparison. You are talking, on the hill, about a modern functional campus on fifty acres, compared to one city square block with seventy or eighty portables on it, and a core building that was seventy years old, something like that. There was just no comparison. The only shortcoming was that we didn't get a full campus. We got about three-fourths of the campus, either because of price escalation or because a decision was made to build a complete Laney as the core campus for downtown. I think that the Redevelopment Agency had something to do with that. Maybe they got more money from the feds for the downtown core campus. But it was after I left before we finally got a complete campus. I think that we got the gymnasium and one other student services building before I left. I was there for three years.

But the place on Grove Street was a disaster. It really was hardly suitable. But you know, as I went around the country and talked to colleagues, particularly those other twenty-two black community college presidents, I found that many of the colleges had started in facilities like that, old high schools or whatever, before the community was willing to put up bond money to build functional facilities. The pressure, I guess, came to give those black neighborhood colleges the same quality of facilities that the white suburban colleges had.

Wilmot: You were responding to that. The initiative was actually a response to that pressure to have better facilities?

Smith: Yeah, I think so. When I went to Merritt, there was just one other community in the county that had a community college—that was Chabot out in Hayward. And then the two in Oakland, Merritt and Laney, and it was years later that Fremont got a campus and Livermore got a campus. So there wasn't a hell of a lot to compare with at that time in our county. But Contra Costa, for example, had had two community college campuses going back to the early fifties. Those were good comparisons with the campus out in Diablo Valley and the other one out in north Richmond.

The facilities were not only functional, but they were less depressing. The buildings had light, they had plenty of parking, and it was just a delightful change for us. As I told you last time, very shortly after the move was completed, we began to get fewer and fewer complaints about the old argument that we left the black community to go up there with

all of the white folks, because right down the hill in East Oakland was the majority of black people in Oakland, from High Street on out. They had good bus service up there that didn't make it too difficult, compared to some of those kids coming all across town almost to Berkeley to get to the old campus.

Wilmot: You mentioned that you had had some interaction with a student group called the Soul Students. Were you familiar also with the Merritt Student Union?

Smith: Well, the Soul Students were, in fact, the Black Student Union. They called themselves those two things. I don't know how they arrived at that, but—I think, as I indicated, my contacts didn't really pick up until I got there. A couple or three of those folks knew of me, and as I told you, they encouraged me to apply for the job. One or two the key people on the selection committee, including Leo Bazile and I think another fellow who went on to Berkeley and became an engineer, they were interested in having a serious black candidate for the job.

Although I had no direct experience in community colleges—I had that general administrative experience and knowledge and rapport with the cross-section of the community. So, I felt confident that I could do the job. Other than the latter stages just before we moved when there became kind of a physical crisis, and I felt threatened and I had police protection, and all of that—but that didn't last more than a couple of weeks. I went into it with my eyes open and knew what the challenge was and tried to make the changes that I thought should be made by a sensitive black president.

Remember now, despite the image and the location, only about 40 percent of the students were black. I would think that maybe half of them were part-time evening students. Relatively few blacks, maybe a quarter, were the full-time day students, preparing to transfer to a four-year institution. We still had a big chunk of white students and almost no Latino or Asian students at that time. So, unlike most of the colleges that my black friends became presidents of, it was not a “ghetto” school, except the image of black consciousness which was very strong there, the later image of the Panthers who got started a year before I arrived, and the fact that there were relatively few [black] faculty there, and no administrators. Did I tell you about some of those changes, the integration of the faculty and staff?

Wilmot: You did mention it, and I actually wanted to spend a little bit of time with that as a discrete question. You mentioned that you brought in a new Chicano assistant dean of students, and also you hired black faculty, but I wanted to get to that in a couple of minutes. It's interesting when you are describing the makeup of the school, and its history, because it brings me to this question. As president of Merritt, what did you consider your mandate?

Smith: My mandate?

Wilmot: Yes.

Smith: Well, my mandate was the mission that the state Master Plan called for in community colleges, which the Peralta board had accepted, and which I accepted. It was basically to give leadership to an institution that, as I used to say, serves all the people's children. It was an open access campus, no fees at all at that time, which I think was overkill, and

the mandate of the law said that we had to be both college prep and career training oriented. So, Merritt came into this very strong, because it had been exclusively the academic liberal arts campus, when there were two campuses in the old Oakland City College. It became one of the stronger community colleges in the state. I think that's what attracted some of the white students who either couldn't get into Berkeley directly or knew that transfer was an easier hurdle than going in as freshmen.

Interestingly enough, one of the things that I did, because I had good relationships with the campus at Berkeley, was to get them to accept what we called a concurrent enrollment program, which allowed at one time up to 100 of our students, overwhelmingly black, to go on the campus and take one course a semester, which did two things. It stimulated them and raised their levels of aspiration, and it also gave Berkeley the beginning of a larger pool of the black students who might want to come to Berkeley and would be inspired to do well in the community college. That program lasted about two or three years. By the time I got to Berkeley in 1973, as vice chancellor of student affairs, the pressures from the strong conservative members of the faculty had caused that program to shrink. Because at first, we had access to maybe eighty or a hundred courses. You could go almost any place except for professional schools, engineering and planning and so forth. But, almost all of the liberal arts beginning courses, the so-called College of Arts and Sciences, which at that time was twenty of the thirty thousand students, were available.

By the time I got there—and I used to talk with the academic provost about this—they had shrunk the number of classes down to maybe only thirty or forty. That made it difficult for students to really have access to courses, and I think that it was the beginning of a change in the attitude of Berkeley and other four-year campuses to just ignore the Master Plan, and face up to the fact that they much preferred dealing with the brightest kids coming right out of high school, eighteen-, nineteen year-olds, rather than twenty-two- or three-year-old transfers who had worked and perhaps were married, had families, and came out of family backgrounds where they were the first to go to college. So, I was disappointed in that, but that sort of turned me on to my sensitivity to what Berkeley was going to be all about. We'll talk about that later.

But this was quite a successful program. I may have even written an article about it in one of the journals. The Berkeley people were really very pleased. Then about that time, two years into it, they had a change of provosts. He came out of a harshly academic background, a Caltech graduate, a botanist. The new one represented the more elitist attitude. The old provost had come out of social sciences or something like that. He and I talked about the efforts to get more minority faculty there, and had a pretty good dialogue.

Wilmot: Well, I would like to ask you a little bit more of that.

Smith: We had a Latino assistant dean of students, Gene Osegueda, who I had recruited from Tech High in Oakland. My wife knew of him and thought he was really a strong person. He came over. I guess we didn't have a black person at that level for at least two or three years after I was there.

Wilmot: How did you go about recruiting black faculty?

Smith: Well, recruiting might be the wrong way to describe it. I didn't go out and talk to people in other colleges or in high schools. Most of them were really people who heard about the campus, knew I was there, and felt free to apply. At least two of them, as I said, came from Tech High, in Oakland. So, our biggest source were experienced master's level and up high school teachers. The other source were people who were already at Merritt, but part-time and not full-time. Maybe some of them were practitioners, social workers, like Melvin Newton, who was a full-time social worker in the welfare department, and taught black history or black sociology at night for two years, and then quit his job and came full-time. So, part-time people were already in the system, Laney or Merritt, and applications from some strong high school level people.

We recognize now that the first year of community college is where college access orientation is, at best, a step above a strong academic high school. We were teaching high school math and we were teaching English composition. Even at Berkeley you had to test for English comp or you had to take the course. So, it was a good transition for strong academic high school teachers who would have otherwise have never even felt comfortable applying at Merritt. I would say that 75 percent of the white faculty there had also come out of high school teaching backgrounds.

Wilmot: That's interesting. How would you describe the structure of governance at that Peralta community college system?

Smith: Well, it's mandated by the state. The board were all lay people. I don't know whether it was mandated that they be elected by district or not, but most of them were, rather than at large. We had these seven people from around the district, and the district was overwhelmingly Oakland and Alameda with maybe 50,000 at that time—Berkeley with about 100,000 people, and Piedmont and Albany and Emeryville, which between them might have been 20,000 or 25,000. So, we had a district that was maybe 70 percent in Oakland. So, the seats were set up that way. There was a person who had Berkeley, Albany, someone else who had West Oakland and Emeryville. The big dispersal was out in the far east area: two out in far East Oakland, Fruitvale, and one person from the hill area. Not too different from what they have now.

When they became a separate district, they recruited an experienced community college guy from up in Oregon who was kind of a small town conservative guy, but I thought responded well to the urban challenge. They passed over a guy that I guess most people thought would have gotten the job, who had been for a long time the assistant superintendent of schools in Oakland, which included the so-called city college at that time. Quite a few of the big cities had K through fourteen districts. This guy didn't get the job, and I think never really recovered from it. He, Clem Long, was more of a fiscal guy than a program guy. He stayed there until after I left. So, there was that little friction on the staff with the new guy having to win over the loyalty and support of the grassroots people on the two campuses. Let's see, there was just one black and no Latinos and no Asians on the board during the entire time I was there, and he was from far East Oakland. He was a county probation officer and well known and respected, but a little bit oriented towards micro-managing, surprisingly, more than the whites who came out of backgrounds where executive responsibility was delegated, and you didn't meddle with it, but you just oversaw the function and evaluated and maybe stimulated emphases, but not getting into minor detail.

One guy who was on there, and represented Berkeley, Stanley McCaffrey, was a very prominent UC Berkeley alum who had been the director of the Alumni Association at Berkeley. He went on to become president of University of the Pacific in Stockton. He was very influential and very friendly towards me. He was sort of proud that a Berkeley doctorate had got the job, and we were quite chummy, but he only stayed around for two or three years and went to Stockton. The rest of the people were very affluent, hoi polloi types—white women from Piedmont and the hill area. We're going back thirty years now. I can't remember. It was a representative group with one black. The only other person who stood out to me was Stanley McCaffrey.

Wilmot: It almost doesn't sound representative—you mean representative in terms that it represented each in the district.

Smith: It was geographically representative. Oakland had four of the seven districts. There was West Oakland, North Oakland, far East Oakland, and Fruitvale, which I guess was attempting to identify with something very similar to the War on Poverty regions which didn't come up above Highway 580. I think those areas, West and North Oakland, had been combined to allow for a hill area spot in addition to Piedmont, Berkeley, and Alameda.

But it was, I thought, a good board. They interviewed me and as I told you, the superintendent had already made his selection, and they went through the process of interviewing me.

Wilmot: Do you think that they supported your innovations, your ability to innovate?

Smith: Yes, I think they did. I never sensed that there was any sensitivity on their part that I was moving too fast. They knew what had to be done. The image of the school and the focus upon the black community, in particular, they knew had to be done, and they were pleased that some of the friction was gone. My predecessor had a hell of a time. He was an older man, and he had been an assistant superintendent in San Francisco, came out of a long-time background as a secondary school administrator over there, but he was just worn out by these young students who, I wouldn't say terrorized him, but really didn't make his life very comfortable. So, he was sort of glad to get out of there. And they knew that Ed Redford was no longer the person for the job. I guess that they were pleased that someone who was younger and contemporary in experience, and who happened to be black came in and—as I used to say—I saved the institution. I really did. It was really deteriorating.

And, I think if I hadn't been there with the support of the board to bring some stability, first of all, we would have had a fairly mass exodus of white faculty, because by that time two or three other campuses were being built around the Bay Area and Alameda County. They would have just have left. The void would have had to be filled by a small pool of relatively inexperienced blacks and Latinos and Asians. I felt that one of my contributions was, for whatever reasons, I got along with them. I had a little group—

Wilmot: You got along with—?

Smith: The white faculty. Eight or ten of them, with whom I really went on to become social friends. Two or three of them are still my social friends after all these years later. But

they were the exception, and they would serve as a buffer for those really conservative folks who couldn't really bring themselves to think that a black president would be anything other than a Panther-type radical, who was there to placate the black community and who really shouldn't have been there. I think that the attitude softened during my five years there. Part of the problem was that by contrast we were doing very well compared to Laney which had a white president, but a guy who was kind of flighty and had some lifestyle problems. We were a little less of a problem, and developed a positive image. And that program with UC really caught their fancy. The fact that I was able to go to the Rosenberg Foundation, on my own knowledge and experience with them, and get the grant to provide the first childcare program on any campus in California, at Merritt College in 1969. Some of those innovations caught the eyes of the board and the faculty, I guess. All of the status that the UC concurrent enrollment program gave us gave the faculty the feeling that their hard work could be rewarded by students who really applied themselves. The childcare program really was a hell of a movement in the field of women's rights. And some of the quasi-radical white faculty there really thought that was very nice. Some of them even volunteered to be advisory to it, although it had its own staff.

Wilmot: Did the board of trustees for the Peralta district operate to support you during that time when there was a lot of chaos on campus and you were under a lot of duress?

Smith: The time of the move?

Wilmot: Yes.

Smith: Well, I think I told you that the last-ditch effort of these radical guys was to take over the campus. They came on campus. The police decided not to confront them at that time. Although I had my police guard next door, we vacated the premises. I mentioned to you that the crisis was related to the fact that the district-wide computer system was there. But I had two or three dialogues before the decision was made to come back and take the campus and take the risk of police action and all of that. One was with some of the black leaders in the community, and Lionel [Wilson] was very prominent in that—he and four or five of the black ministers, and Paul Cobb and all the folks I had worked with in the black caucus met with me and agreed with me, "You can't sacrifice your damn career for these crazy folks, and not do what you should do, which is to move the campus and arrest those that are acting criminally." And I was pleased to see that they agreed with me, because at that time Reagan was the governor and he got the legislature to put through some legislation that was really very harsh, and that held school administrators, like me, and principals and superintendents personally responsible if they didn't control violence on campuses. That was an outgrowth, of course, of the Berkeley thing, a few years earlier.

And then, secondly, the board met with me one afternoon, and I think just about all of them were there, and Lionel, I think, came—was invited as a special guest and he had a lot of status. The black deputy police chief was there, and we just said go, and I think, either the next morning or two days later, as I told you, at five o'clock in the morning, we came on the campus.

But, I thought that I had good support in the black community, which I didn't have to go out and recruit to come and bless me. They came on their own. That was gratifying.

Oh, incidentally, then when I got the new campus for the first time I formed a campus advisory committee, including Lionel, including, well, about five or six people. It only lasted about a year, because I guess they weren't that interested or we didn't have that many things for them to discuss that weren't really policy, that was really the prerogative of the board. One of the persons who I got in touch with and who agreed to serve was the daughter of Robert Gordon Sproul, the long term president of [University of California]. Her name was [Marion] Goodin. In fact her husband, Vernon Goodin, just died. She was just so excited about coming there and seeing this different kind of institution from what she was used to. She and Lionel, I guess, were the key people who brought us some status. As I said, it didn't last very long, and I doubt if they ever really institutionalized that concept, but I felt that we ought to have some community input.

Wilmot: In some ways we've already been talking about them throughout the course of this conversation, but can you tell me about some of the challenges you faced as president of Merritt?

Smith: Facilities, inadequate financial support—and that continued even though the building was built with bonds, but the operating funds were dependent upon a taxing structure that was, in those days, still very, very sketchy. People were still outraged at the thought, more than they are now, of raising taxes. We got about \$35, \$40 million to build three campuses. So the facilities were there, but for three of my five years there, facilities were a nightmare, and the support that we got was, I thought, insufficient. I was always taking a chance in going to the board when we'd have meetings with the superintendent of the district, and telling them that I felt concerned that Laney, which was still a far less significant institution, and had about the same number of students as we have, was getting more per capita than we were getting. I just felt that that was an inequity that was really never addressed. Again, because Laney, with redevelopment support, had some sort of city pressure to make it the main campus, even though they were struggling to come over on the side of academic programs, after their trade and technical heritage.

Other than that, I guess personnel wasn't a problem because we had such a bureaucratic structure there. I had to technically approve all appointments, but the only people I really interviewed were those who were either reporting to me or at the second level of the administration—deans, coordinators, and the like. The faculty apparatus, through department heads and assistant deans and the two deans—instruction and students—were still pretty much on their own to screen and interview people. I felt a little bit concerned about that, but I think that's just the bureaucratic situation. I couldn't possibly have interjected myself into interviewing individuals. I continued to remind them, though, of the progress that we needed to make. If we hadn't, in that first two years, added eight or ten minority faculty, we might have had a conflict. But they were responsive to what they knew was the new game. So, I don't think that I had any other problems that I can think of. Just as I said, the facilities, inadequate funding, and the constant stress between Merritt, Laney, and the district to get resources.

Then about that same damn time, they decided to build that third campus over in Alameda one mile from Laney, and there was another competition for the limited funds, because I don't think that we had an increase in the tax rate, and yet we had to operate three campuses. I should add though that probably half of the core faculty at Alameda came from the two existing campuses, and that was interesting, because four or five of

these guys who were very conservative and just wouldn't begin to give me the benefit of the doubt, jumped at the opportunity, and I was glad to get rid of them. They jumped at the opportunity to go to Alameda and start over, opportunities to be promoted and all of that. So that was another dynamic—that the new campus reduced some of the stress on campuses.

Wilmot: I have some questions again about the different black student groups on campus. You mentioned the black consciousness movement at Merritt, and I wanted to ask you—

Smith: Contrasted with the Panther movement, which was basically off campus but highly visible.

Wilmot: Well, I wanted to ask you about both of them. First, what was your opinion of the black student movement on campus?

Smith: Well, the core movement was the Soul Students, and people from their organization, like Fred Smith and Elvoyce Hooper, ran the student council. There were no Panther types there any more to be heavily involved. Most of these folks, as I said, were black nationalists, Negritude and nation building and all of that, which was not a revolutionary thing. Berkeley was experiencing the same type of thing. There were these three or four guys who were very prominent lawyers, for example Don Warden, Henry Ramsey, and the guy who worked for Dellums for years, Don Hopkins. These guys were very active in the movement, and they were around the campus a lot, giving lectures, talking about the whole black condition around the world, but not talking about violence or about confrontation, as such. They were simply, I think, doing a good job of sensitizing people about the problem, and trying to build some cohesion in the black community.

The Panthers, when I got there, of course, were already gone. They formed in '67 and they were already out, and I think by that time Huey was in prison. But they still had some harassment responsibility, and I had a couple or three parents come and talk to me about the fact that their sons were being harassed or beaten up by Panthers. I will always remember one woman who had three sons, and her oldest son had been part of the Panthers, and had gone to Sacramento with them. But the two younger sons just weren't into the Panther thing as much, and as a result, both of them were accosted, as I recall. The mother came to me, and I said, "File charges with the police. You can't tolerate that." I don't know whether she was intimidated into not doing it or not, but the youngest son was very serious about his education. He graduated in the field of radio TV technology, and within four years was a camera man at Channel 2, and may still be there, now a man in his fifties. The Panthers would have a program once in a while, and I was flexible enough to recognize them through the student council, to let them use facilities and to provide the audio-visual equipment for them. I remember, Bobby Seale, who I told you was an older, less volatile guy, and had been in the air force, married, had a child—he lived two blocks away. I had a meeting over there with him when he was really quite anxious to have this meeting on campus. Maybe even the lower administrators had agreed to their having use of the audio-visual through our operator, and I remember one time having to overrule somebody and saying let them have the meeting on campus. But they were pretty much gone from the campus by that time. My relationship with the black students who were there was a good one.

We also had a national championship track team during that period, which gave us some status. Two or three or four of those young men went on to be outstanding college athletes—four-year college athletes. We were able to schedule some really prominent black intellectuals to come to the campus. I remember John Killens, who was one of the real giants of the Black Renaissance, came once. Our friend who wrote *Roots*, Alex Haley, came twice. The funny thing was when he came, they wanted to have him talk about the book that he wrote on Malcolm X. He talked mostly about that, but the second time he came he told us that he already had another project in mind that related to Africa and that went on to become *Roots*. He lived in the Bay Area in an apartment in San Francisco for quite a while.

Wilmot: I didn't realize that.

Smith: He was a part-time faculty member in black studies at Berkeley. I told you that he and I ended up as character witnesses for this young man who got involved in a shooting. That was a young man that Haley had met at Berkeley when he was teaching a course in black history, I guess.

Wilmot: Do you recall—there was an exchange I think between the Wall Street Journal, where you wrote an editorial?

Smith: Yes, I guess I was reacting to the article that they had written, which I thought was even worse than the one they in *Ramparts*. I'm trying to remember the details of it. I have it around somewhere, but I don't know whether they sent somebody here who then went back and wrote this story, that again gave the impression that it was this radical Black Panther headquarters, and didn't say anything positive about the things that were happening. We also had some publicity with the *Chicago Tribune* when I was an anti-poverty director, which sent Nicholas Von Hoffman out to do a hatchet job, but turned around, and turned out to be quite supportive. I do vaguely remember that. Do you have it or you've seen it?

Wilmot: I don't have it, I've seen it—

Smith: Yeah, I probably have it back there somewhere.

Wilmot: I was wondering about media coverage during that time and what a challenge it would be to kind of lead an institution like that when you were getting media coverage which focused so much on the negative?

Smith: About that time, my second or third year there, I hired a person who was the public affairs person. He was an interesting guy, a young Latino who had worked for me in the city program. He had a good background. He had formerly been a high school teacher in Alameda, and had been a part-time reporter for the *Alameda Times Star*. And he stayed there for three years, and then after I went to Merritt, he came over. Felix Elizalde, who is now chairman of the county board of education, a longtime friend and colleague. So, Felix began to make the moves to get the press in some sort of neutral, if not positive mood about the institution, at least the local press. There wasn't much you could do about the *New York Times* or *The Washington Post*, if they suddenly decided to do something sensational, even they came out and talked to me it would have been

negative. I really don't remember that *Wall Street Journal* person coming on campus. It was then and is still a very conservative publication.

Wilmot: The *Wall Street Journal*?

Smith: Yes, the worst.

Wilmot: I was thinking about that media perception of Merritt College being this unruly—

Smith: —jungle. The college in Chicago—the first black community college president in Chicago who was about two or three after me in sequence, Charles Hearst at Malcolm X, had that same image to deal with when they were on the old campus. Then they moved to a modest, but brand-new campus, oh, I guess close to downtown. His situation was even more critical than mine. I went back there to be on his accreditation committee, Nadine, and he showed me this automatic pistol that he carried with him at all times. And he had police protection. He'd come out of a rather tough environment at Howard University where he had been in the English department. He showed me this magnum or whatever the hell it was, and I couldn't believe it, but he said, "I keep it here. I drive home with it." So, we were never that bad, but there were these colleges that were emerging in the midst of very volatile urban critical situations, like the South Side of Chicago. Detroit and St. Louis had a fairly urgent situation with their first black community college presidents. Southern California I never heard much about, but I'm sure that it was a mouthful to try to be president in Southwest [LA], right in the heart of Watts and in Compton, which then was overwhelmingly black, now overwhelmingly Latino, if you can believe it.

Wilmot: It sounds like a very difficult situation to kind of survive in politically.

Smith: Well, I think that you needed two things that I had. Because of my experience all those years in the black community, politically and running that program, I had very strong support—black establishment, political and grassroots. And the board was very supportive. I just never thought that we would get to that point, except for that one little one-week period when things got out of hand during the move. I was pleased to find that of three or four guys that we had arrested, only one was a student of the campus.

Wilmot: It also sounds difficult to me because if you are there to educate and to support education, and at the same time, you are in a situation where you are under siege, that part of it sounds very difficult.

Smith: Well, we grew up with some of that same experience at a high school like Castlemont, which was, and may still be a jungle, with the neighborhood being what it is, and with the family support system being what it is. I wouldn't want to touch a job like that today. McClymonds, interestingly enough, was much more dormant. For some reason, the only people left down there were the old folks, a few of the children and grandchildren. They only had about six or seven hundred kids at best to start the year. So, they were sort of off the beaten track in terms of any activism or violence or whatever, although their neighborhood was also extremely depressed.

Wilmot: What was it like being the first black president of a college in California?

Smith: Well, I hadn't really given it much thought when I took the job, but I soon appreciated the fact that it was real pioneer move for anybody in my position. I felt confident that I could do the job. Very shortly thereafter, I was just consumed by all of my involvement with the movement. Within a year, I was on the board of the Junior College Association. I had written a couple of articles. I was asked to serve on an accreditation committee. I get a hell of a lot more attention than probably a white president would have gotten. But it didn't weaken me, it really strengthened me, because it gave me that extra status. It was a good living. We were able to do quite well financially. It was a good time in my life. My only disappointment was that when the chancellorship opened with John Dunn going down to the Peninsula, I was shocked that they brought in some guy from Miami with far less experience than I had, and who didn't know the district.

Wilmot: Right.

Smith: That was the last bad taste that I had. Fortunately, the Berkeley vice chancellorship was open at the same time, and I was able to make an easy transition. I could have stayed there indefinitely as president, I suppose.

Wilmot: We talked a little bit about what you consider your greatest successes as president. We've talked about them at some length, but I'm wondering if you want to kind of summarize those?

Smith: I think that the greatest notoriety that we got under my leadership was being the first campus in the state to get the Department of Education to approve an Afro Studies Program. I had to go to Sacramento and testify on that. A little aside, that was the time when we had a black state superintendent of schools, Wilson Riles, Sr. I had known Wilson for twenty years. When I went up there I was shocked at the break in the agenda when he came over to me and almost got me in a corner and he said something like, "What the hell are you doing up here pushing for this black studies bullshit?" Later, it turned out that he was a very conservative guy. He voted, for example, when he was on the Board of Regents to raise the academic minimum requirements for admission. Here was a guy who had come out of the religious movement. When he came to Sacramento, he took a job that I had been offered, back in '63 when I was still with the county school department. He came up from something called the Council on Reconciliation, and took a job to be a statewide recruiter of black teachers. Out of that grew his promotion, and finally he became the state superintendent of schools. Anyway, I was amazed. That was one of the few negative voices I ever heard, that this thing was just a black hustle and I shouldn't be involved with it. I was disappointed.

But anyhow, the emergence of black studies as a legitimate course of inquiry—I don't think we had a major as such, and the integration of the faculty and administration while I was there, and the concurrent enrollment program with Berkeley I thought was a real contribution. Those things stand out.

Wilmot: Can you tell me a little bit more about the emergence of the black studies program?

Smith: Well, when I got there, there had already been a course or two in black history. I think one of my friends and colleagues—Kenneth Goode was already teaching an evening course there, and there might have been one or two others. It was just at the height of the pressure coming from the black students, and indirectly the black community, to have

the study of the black experience be part of—not just what black students would take for an easy grade, but what would hopefully be exposed to all of the students on campus. It just evolved as more black faculty came in, as more sensitive white faculty were willing to consider this. Within the first year, I think we went from about two courses to eight or nine courses. I think that second year, we also brought in a Latino guy from Texas, who started teaching a course in—whatever, he taught two courses, I think, related to the Chicano (as we called it then) experience. So, after about two years, we had enough experience and a core of courses that emerged from interested faculty, including some new black faculty, and from the interest and pressure, I guess you would call it, to have a nucleus of courses. By two years after I got there, we were ready to get it recognized, and that was when I went to Sacramento. It was before we moved to the hill.

It got to be interesting too, because there was quite a different dynamic at night. I remember we had this guy who was a black psychologist—I forget his name. He came on, teaching part-time, and then became a full-time teacher, but he liked the fact that he could continue to be related to the older evening people, offering them some exposure. He taught an evening course in black psychology. But, wouldn't you know it, that same year Eldridge Cleaver and Kathleen decided that they were going to come on the campus and be auxiliary instructors. They would come on—this poor guy was trying to keep order or discipline, you know. And here was Eldridge Cleaver, coming and just sort of taking over the course—fifty students instead of fifteen or twenty in the class. That went on about a month or so, until they got their kicks and stopped coming there, or the students just told them, but poor Joe was dealing with that for maybe a month or so. That was an interesting dynamic. I think, though, by the time the program was accredited for community colleges, probably half the courses were at night—to recognize the fact that that the full-time day students were still not turned on to that as part of their core interests, because they were trying to get into four-year institutions, and that was not even a part of the course requirements that they had to meet. So, the core of the interest were part-time evening students or part-time day students. There were a fair number of students there who were part-time and not full-time who worked odd hours.

Wilmot: This was the core of the interest in the black studies program?

Smith: No, I think the core were that small cadre of black students who were perhaps 25 percent of the full-time day students, but maybe 40 percent of the evening students. Their leadership was still quite anxious that it be part of their legacy. In fact, one young man, Fred Smith, who had come out from Ohio, but was a very sharp, responsible young guy, transferred to Berkeley and became the president of the student body at Berkeley, and had a big part in getting Berkeley to move to the establishment of a department, and the hiring more black faculty members. This would have been around 1971 or '72, before I went there, or just as I was coming there, so the Merritt experience was sort of a model for the Berkeley experience.

The Berkeley people, I guess, were at least as receptive or more so. They said that it was going to recognize some kind importance of the black, Latino, and Asian experiences. Very shortly after that, an Asian program started. Then a Latino/Chicano program started. The black program soon spun off from ethnic studies, which was comprehensive and went whole hog for being an Afro-American Studies program. It got

approved by the College of Letters and Science, as a legitimate department. Today, the other three are calling themselves ethnic studies, and have never seen fit to go to the mat to get full recognition as academic disciplines in the College of Letters and Science. That's an interesting development.

Wilmot: Can you talk a little bit about the attention that the black studies program got nationally, if you recall?

Smith: Oh, I'm not so sure we got much nationally, except for what I was able to bring it to the attention of the people I worked with on the Junior College Board and the emerging group of black presidents, all of whom, I think, might have seen Merritt as some sort of model. But nationally I don't recall that there was much. In California, of course, it was a phenomenon. It also then trickled down. Some of the high school kids wanted courses in it. Some of them would come to Merritt, because we had a program. I'm not sure many of them were serious, academically oriented kids. At Oakland Tech, where Mary was a math teacher for years, they had a little emerging program in black history or something else like that and the students got excited about it—sometimes too excited, again attempting to take over the campus or have some sort of march through the school for more courses and that sort of thing. Some of those same young guys came over to Merritt and they were among the more irresponsible young people, compared to the twenty-, twenty-one-year-olds and older who had gotten over that phase of their expression of resistance to the system.

Wilmot: In California, the black studies program, did it get a lot of positive feedback from people?

Smith: In the local community, oh sure, it got a lot of—here in Oakland and Berkeley. About that time San Francisco State brought this guy Nathan Hare out from Howard University, and Nathan and I became good friends, and he started a program that took about three years before they gave it departmental status over there, but they had some very volatile times over there, if you can read about it or remember it. I don't remember San Francisco City College having that much involvement, but San Francisco State had a very heavy movement towards having a discipline in black studies.

Wilmot: Were there concerns about black studies being a legitimate discipline?

Smith: Oh, yeah, and there still are concerns. First of all, from the white faculty who, I guess, realized that if we had black studies, they weren't going to teach the courses, and secondly, from some of the black faculty who were in traditional disciplines—music, art, history, English—who were a little concerned that the faculty would be lighter, academically. As I said, some of them came up through the ranks of part-time evening people who had less status and were paid significantly less. We might have been paying today the equivalent of thirty dollars an hour for part-time people, whereas for people who were full-time contract people, their pay was fifty dollars or sixty dollars an hour or more. So there was that little friction that these were lighter people and that they were attempting to use this as an easy way to get into a community college.

I was always interested in seeing if we could attract the blacks who were in the traditional departments to come over and teach a course, like this psychology guy who came over and the person in English, and there might have been somebody even in

music who became involved. But, the hard core of it were people in the social sciences—history, sociology, psychology, and behavioral science. We didn't have any architects or city planners on the faculty at that stage, but I am sure as they got to Berkeley, these students were probably looking for some approach to black architecture and building on the tremendous history of Egypt and all of that business.

Wilmot: How did you see your tenure at Merritt within the context of your larger career?

Smith: How did I see my time there?

Wilmot: Within the context of the other kinds of work that you did?

Smith: I think that there were two basic turning points in my life. One was the GI Bill, which gave me this tremendous opportunity to realize some of my potential. Secondly, I think that the hiring at Merritt was a real breakthrough, because although I had had these bureaucratic jobs, this was recognition of my general talents and gave me a lot more status than, for example, working with the anti-poverty program. And then those nine years that I was out in the county school department, I was strictly out of the mainstream. That was a white job, but I happened to be black. So, I felt that Merritt was a real turning point that contributed greatly to my being considered for the job at Berkeley, which was another big jump, to go into a four-year major research institution at that level was a big jump. So, those were the three things. The opportunity represented by the GI Bill—and I might say, surprising myself by being able to get into an Ivy League school like Penn. That was all a part of that wonderful transition from the old life to the new, brought about by the military service. Well, I guess coming to Berkeley as a doctoral student was also another turning point, because if I had been given a job teaching at a high school in Philadelphia, which is what I aspired to, I might have stayed there the rest of my career. So, they gave me a break by not hiring me. Mary had the same experience. They gave her a break by not hiring her in Indianapolis. So, the GI Bill and getting into Penn, deciding to make the sacrifice to go for a doctorate, and changing the whole venue to come to California—that was another turning point. Then a minor one, having my white friends who remembered me from that little year's research in school housing bring me over to the county job, and then jumping into a much bigger job working for the city, basically because of my political and community involvement. But, I would say the three things: The GI Bill and Penn, Merritt, and then the further jump to Berkeley.

All of my twenty community involvements, all of these boards grew out of the fact that I was where I was. I had relatively little involvement in any of those things before 1965, '66. I might have had a few—well, the anti-poverty program, I was on this national board of the National Association for Community Development, and a trustee of the College Entrance Board.

Wilmot: What strikes me when you are discussing this trajectory is that in your professional career, it seems to me that you've frequently moved from one very politically charged environment to another one, real hot spots in some ways. I'm wondering, how did you make those moves, and how were they different?

Smith: Remember the background and the dynamic here. It was very clear to me that I wouldn't have gotten the job at Merritt without the pressure of the black community

and without the beginning of something called affirmative action. I was qualified, but there were a lot of white guys with doctorates who were more qualified and who were in the system. My theory was that as things evolved in the urban setting, whenever the institutions became really difficult to manage, there was a willingness to turn them over to blacks—police chiefs, fire chiefs, superintendents of schools. I was ready to be a superintendent of schools way back around 1956, '57, '58. But the first one wasn't selected in Oakland until '73—Marcus Foster. It was just that notion, and I think that it prevails in a lot of the cities. They don't call it affirmative action now, but it's just—first of all, the white professionals just sort of disappear. You have a difficult time finding a white superintendent of schools who will take on an urban superintendency these days. That's not their thing any more.

So, I felt that either affirmative action or the recognition by the overall community that things were going to have to change led to my opportunity at Merritt and the opportunity, I think, at Berkeley, although by the time I went to Berkeley, I had a pretty good reputation. I may have mentioned to you that while I was at Merritt and at Berkeley, I was on the board of this national higher education black think tank, back in Washington at Howard University, which included Clark Kerr, one of the three whites, so Clark knew me well. I've still got thirty copies of all the reports that came out of his Carnegie study back there, or most of them. So, I had a pretty good background and reputation when Berkeley hired me. I wasn't that much of a risk for them at that time, and I had management experience.

Wilmot: It's interesting for me to think about moving from one kind of job in the city of Oakland or as regional deputy director of OEO. There's a certain kind of political environment that you would navigate. Then, moving to another place like Merritt, where you encountered another political environment with different pressures, and you went forward in a time when there was just a lot of social change, yes, but also there was a lot of tension to navigate and move around. That's what I noticed.

Smith: Tension, to move around?

Wilmot: It seemed to me. Yes. I know that I said that very vaguely, but what I mean is that there were these political environments, and you had to move in them to get things done.

Smith: I guess I was always somewhat political in terms of all the things I have done around Oakland, and it was that political background that really made me really livid with the way that I was treated on the Peralta chancellorship job. Without that general experience in the community, I might have said, "Gee, this is a fine job, and I'll stay here as president indefinitely, and don't worry about it." But, that was so egregious that I felt that I had to leave. I would have eventually left anyhow. I also applied at San Francisco State for the presidency, which was open, and it was a time of real turmoil, after President [Samuel Ichiye] Hayakawa, and they went into their control bag over there. I guess I might have been one of the four or five finalists there in '72 or '73 and I went all the way down to Los Angeles, flew down there one night for an interview with the State Board of Education's screening committee. They were very nice, but obviously that would have been a big jump for me to be the president, just as it would have been out of the question to consider anything more at Berkeley more than what I got, which was vice chancellor of student affairs. The opportunities were really opening

up. I think as I said, by that time, there was a black president of Sacramento State, so it wasn't out of the question that San Francisco State might have hired a black president.

Wilmot: Let's take a break. [tape interruption] I wanted to ask you a question. In the past you said that you noticed a trend where white leadership would turn situations over to black leadership once there was already a crisis in the situation. Did you notice that when you came to work in the City of Oakland around the different poverty programs there?

Smith: Yes, remember I came a year before OEO and Community Action were implemented nationally. I came to be the director of a pilot Ford Foundation program just in one area of East Oakland. My predecessor was a black man, and I'm sure that again the whole concept of crisis, appearing to be affirmative action when they bring people in, but really doing almost as much for the establishment as it does for the applicant, because it takes pressure off of them. Now they have a black person there, a scapegoat or whatever you want to call it. So, I think that in the City of Oakland, there were absolutely no black administrators at all, except in this Ford project, although the crisis was in aberrant youth behaviour. If you look at the police, they didn't have a senior black officer. The school district had nobody in a leadership position. I'm going back now to about '61 or '62. Probation had a lot of black probation officers, but nobody in any leadership positions. So, all of these guys who got together with this interagency project that Ford funded were motivated, in that they were looking for some relief and some help in dealing with some of their problems in relating to the black community. So, my predecessor and I probably profited by affirmative action, in that we got the jobs that we might never have ever gotten except from the fact that whites didn't feel like they could deal with the problem and were looking for somebody to share responsibility.

Same thing, I think, happened at Merritt. The situation there was getting really critical, if not chaotic. I think that they probably would have kept looking for some time for a strong black candidate, although at the community college level, I told you, that there were only two black presidents in the country at that time. Berkeley might have been a little less. I think that there might have been just a little more sensitivity on their part to the evolution of what was becoming a newer constituency for them, because I think that when I went to Berkeley as the first black University of California vice chancellor, there might have only been six or seven hundred black students. When I left, there were thirteen hundred, so I'm sure that had something to do with their willingness then to open the doors to black and Latino students.

Wilmot: I have an aside question to ask you. This is just one quick question to ask about OEO and the Ford pilot program. I've noticed that in a lot of the literature from that time, both program materials and media, it seems that people really saw these programs as having the ability to defuse potentially violent situations. The way people talk about Oakland at that time was "the potential next Watts." They felt that there was a potential for rioting in Oakland, as a result of people's poverty and desperation.

Smith: Then the guy [Amory Bradford] writes the book, *Oakland is Not for Burning*. I guess that the case was made that there was something unique about the beginning of the involvement of black leadership in the community. It might be also that despite what we think of today as a serious problem in East Oakland, relative to the big ghettos of the East Coast and Midwest and even Los Angeles, that the deprivation was comparatively milder here than it was there, that it wasn't as explosive as it has become. Remember

now, without the phenomenon of narcotics, Oakland had been a relatively stable black community. It's just the emergence of the dope thing that caused homicides to triple.

Wilmot: You mean cocaine?

Smith: Yes, and the attempt to engage in crime to feed the habit. That was just not a part of Oakland's milieu, before about 1980. There were people who were underclass, untrained, and underemployed, and I guess there were fights and there were people who were intoxicated and becoming problems to their neighborhoods. I'll bet you that we would have had a more stable community in Oakland the last twenty, twenty-five years.

Wilmot: That was just an aside, because I was very interested in the way that people imagined the problem of poverty and the way that they, as a result, imagined the solutions to poverty. That's kind of where the question came from. I was just really by intrigued the way that all of the media of that time was like, "Oakland is a powder keg waiting to explode and the only way to quiet it down was to give people jobs." I thought that it was an interesting construction of the problem. I just wanted to check in with you around that.

Smith: Of course, by the sixties the relatively good life that blacks had been introduced to during World War II was becoming a less common commodity, because there was the beginning of the decline in manufacturing in Oakland. And it really explained why the advent of criminal behavior picked up after about 1980, because there wasn't much hope for people around Oakland to find a way to make ends meet. Of course, on top of that, I'm quite concerned about this old jive business of minimum wage, which is such a ridiculous thing to think that people in the Bay Area could come close to surviving off five, six, seven dollars an hour, or even the nine or ten that it's gotten to now. So, I'm encouraged by the movement towards a living wage, but even that is far, far below what it would take in the Bay Area to have a chance to survive, unless both parents, both members of the family (which is another good argument for nuclear families, which don't seem to have a lot of support these days), were working for thirteen, fourteen dollars an hour—

Wilmot: Two people in the family?

Smith: Yes, because if you pay ten dollars an hour, you double that and add a thousand, so that's twenty thousand. So, assuming you are going to buy a house and have a car and do anything besides barely survive, you're probably talking about \$40,000 minimum. So, you would have to have two people, both having jobs at least ten or twelve dollars an hour, and jointly using those resources.

Wilmot: The other thing was that right before we took our break, I had asked this question about your career trajectory, taking you through different political hot spots. I've realized that political is kind of the wrong word. I was just noticing that you were moving through these different environments that were highly charged and required really good interpersonal skills, for lack of a better word, because of the different constituencies and different factions that one had to pay attention to.

Smith: Yeah, I think that's a better way to describe it, because political still has a nefarious connotation, that you are doing things for political reasons and that politicians are

influencing you unduly and all of that, so it wasn't political. There were political aspects to the decisions that had to be made, but it would hardly describe my personal relationship as president of Merritt or even less so at Berkeley, where the governance is really in Sacramento with a Board of Regents, and you never see anybody in that structure unless there is an extraordinary reason. Whereas at Merritt, the Peralta board was meeting twice a month, and each president was kind of there on the spot when issues came up and people were out in the audience ranting and raving. When I went to Berkeley that was quite a change. I went to a job that was three times as big, and they didn't have that on-the-spot accountability. In any event, you were certainly not exposed to that day in, day out, week in, week out accountability on crisis problems.

From that point of view, Berkeley by that time had sort of moved beyond the stage where the big issue was revolution instead of evolution. When I got there students really had decided not to sacrifice their careers for the movement. So, we were dealing with fraternity-sorority drunkenness and variety of old-style problems in terms of relationships with students. We still had some students with revolutionary instincts, but they were by no means in the powerful positions that they were eight or ten years earlier.

Wilmot: Let's talk then about your move to Berkeley from Merritt. You mentioned that you had a good friend that worked there, but I wanted to just to learn about how that hiring process went for you. How did you come to Berkeley in 1973?

Smith: Well, I guess that the literature in higher education had carried information about this opening, but I wasn't really that much privy to it. I don't remember it being in the *Journal of Higher Education* or whatever we all read, but I did get this call from one of my friends with whom I had worked for years in the community, reminding me of it and sending me a copy of the announcement. So, I applied. Again, I was looking for a change because of my concern with not getting that Peralta chancellor job. So, I was really quite interested. I didn't contact any of my community resources to put in a word for me or anything like that. They might have checked me out with the equivalent of Judge Wilson and the equivalent of some of the people who knew me at Merritt. I was just invited, I guess after about ten days or two weeks. They were getting close to the deadline for making the appointment. I was interviewed by a screening committee that had two or three high level administrators, including the provost—the number-two person on the campus, a couple of faculty, and a couple of students. Evidently, the interview went well, and within a day or so I was called and told that I had the job, and we started talking about when I could report.

For about two or three weeks I continued at Merritt, but would leave at around 3:30 or 4:00 and would go over there and put in a couple of hours, getting to know the structure and going through reports and all of that. Then I think in August, I made the transfer. Again, it was an interesting situation. I seemed to be well received, but there were some underlying things that really were not too receptive or supportive of me. Actually, when I left Berkeley in 1982, I summarized all of these things and made a presentation at their request to the black faculty. Maybe twenty-two or -three people showed up to listen to me tell them about my experience at Berkeley. Maybe I should start by just indicating what I think were some of the contributions I made. And then talk about what the problems were trying to get the job done.

Wilmot: I'm wondering if I could ask one quick question beforehand, which is, when you went into the post of vice chancellor of student affairs, what was your jurisdiction at that point? What did that mean for you?

Smith: It meant that I was the day-to-day administrator for a dozen or so programs, starting with admissions and registration, financial aid, counseling and psychological services, housing, food services, career planning and placement—700 FTE [full-time equivalent] and about \$30 million. I left Merritt with about 200 FTE, and maybe with \$5 or \$6 million. So, it was everything that really impacted the life of the student, including foreign student services, which were offered in the International House. The International House director reported to an independent board, but almost all of his counseling and referral staff were part of my responsibility. Even athletics, it included everything except intercollegiate athletics, sports clubs, intramurals. It was quite a large responsibility, and I think it's interesting to note that at UCLA, two people had that responsibility. Shortly after I went there, they brought in a black guy, Chas Wilson, and he and another fellow, Norm Miller, who had been there for years, split the job. So, it was an interesting development.

Wilmot: And Winston Doby?

Smith: He came much later. Charles Wilson who preceded him was really very politically and otherwise active and he left after about three years or four years, and Winston Doby came in just as I was leaving.

So I fit right into the structure. At that time we had the eight campuses in the Pacific Coast University group, before they added the two Arizona campuses, so we got around to the two in Washington, the two in Oregon, the two in Southern California, and Stanford here, and then finally Arizona. That was quite an interesting dialogue from all of my contemporaries as to what they were doing. Some of the smaller campuses had people with the title of vice chancellor, for example, at Riverside, which only had about 3,000 students. We've got thirty, thirty-one [thousand] at Berkeley. Little UC San Francisco, which is a professional school of nursing, medicine, all of that, only had about 2,700, but they had a full-time vice chancellor.

So, what I'm saying is that my load was rather exceptional. There were a lot of problems that had to be dealt with. That first year, I made a fantastic number of changes. After consultations with the people in the departments who were sort of anxious to have some change made, but the old structure never provided it. Before I went there, the student services, student affairs was sort of lumped into the responsibility of the vice chancellor for business and finance. He was a businessman's type. Other than his interest in housing and food services, he really didn't have much interest in anything else. They created this job, so there were a number of changes. For example, we had a separate admissions office and a separate registrar. It made so much sense to merge them, and it happened almost immediately. We recruited a new director of what we called admissions and records. We didn't have an office of relations with school, which was a liaison with all of our feeder institutions—community colleges and high schools. I created that office and transferred the young man who was then the Upward Bound director, Lynn Baranco, who is retired now, and is on the Peralta school board, incidentally. That was I think a very strategic move, and they were working very closely with admissions, which really didn't see their mission as reaching out. They simply

dealt with the applications and the paper, and they were almost completely dominated by what the faculty wanted and expected.

Then for some reason we traditionally had two placement services—one for business and industry and one for education. The one for education was tiny with two, three people. So, we merged them into one. It turned out that the guy who was the director of school placement had a doctorate and more experience, so he became the director of it. We changed the name to career planning and placement. That was widely received well by people in the field. Then we had a mish-mash of counseling services. We had a counseling center, and then up at the health service we had psychiatric services, and then they had this thing called EOP, Education Opportunity Program, which was kind of a ghetto program. They had counselors. So, I merged all of that under counseling and psychological services, and brought in a woman from Barnard to direct it, and she stayed for many, many years. In the counseling office, we had one or two people who primarily were concerned with learning difficulties and with facilitating learning, and so I spun that off as a small unit—two or three people—and we called it the student learning center, and it went on to be a very significant part of the operation. It started a linkage with the programs for the people who had to take remedial math and remedial English and all of that and started doing research every year on the profiles of students, which still is done.

Then finally, as I might have implied, I dissolved this Education Opportunity Program, which had three or four parts, and simply assigned each of those ten or twelve people to one of the mainline units. A couple of people went into admissions, a couple went into financial aid; one or two went into counseling and psychological services. I thought that it was something that made sense. There might have been a little, small amount of flack at the idea that an organization, one of the few on campus that had a black director, would be dissolved, but that worked out very well. Two or three of those people became assistant directors in the units that they went to.

Wilmot: What was your thinking behind that decision?

Smith: Well, the notion was that students who came in as EOP, came in by affirmative action, most of them didn't meet the minimum requirements. So they came in as a separate class of student, and they sort of lumped them together, and other than the courses, their whole academic life was centered around these eight or ten people who counseled them and tried to open doors for them and relate to faculty for them. But I thought it was just a paternalistic operation. I have always felt that evolution is a much more meaningful approach to change than revolution. EOP had come out of the whole black movement of the sixties. Now this is '73, and I do think that making that change contributed to the doubling of the black enrollment by the time I left. The times were good and the outreach from relations with schools, and the fact that there were black people who were out in the field, role models and all of that, I think, made a real difference. But EOP was kind of a joke. It was a scapegoat for the white campus, not really doing much to change their way of operating. It sort of insisted that the client population had to do all of the changing rather than the institutions that served them.

That was true in my time in the City of Oakland too, and the dramatic example of what OEO community action brought about, changing that concept of who was responsible.

So, all of these things worked out well. I had a good staff. By the time I left, we had three or four blacks in leadership positions, and I guess I could have stayed around a little longer. But, let me give you an idea of some of the problems though that I encountered, and I'm going to try not to refer to names, especially for something that's going into a public document.

First of all, when I was appointed, the regents' action that described my appointment said I was to have an adjunct assistant professorship in the School of Education where I had gotten my degree. And I was going to be kind of specialist in community college administration. But for some reason by the time I reported a month or so later, somebody downgraded that to lecturer. I wasn't going to get any more money for it, because I was full-time administrator, but that was the first example of what I thought was the expression of an attitude. I'm not even sure that the chancellor even knew about it, but somebody—probably the guy who was in charge of all of the professional schools, including the School of Education, must have made that decision without consulting me or consulting the people in the School of Education who knew me well and had a good relationship with me. Let me just say that all of these other administrators, like the guy in business and the guys in the other areas were not academics, but they all had adjunct professorships—School of Business, School of Public Administration, whatever—although they were clearly not academics in that sense any more than I was an academic, as opposed to being a bureaucrat, which I've always contended was my role.

Secondly, for the first few years of my appointment, they designated me as associate vice chancellor, although my responsibility was more than two of the other vice chancellors, and all of my colleagues around the system were full vice chancellors. It took me several years to have them explain to me why I should not be a vice chancellor. They eventually came around to it, but that was rather interesting. As I said, little Riverside, little Santa Cruz, little Irvine, UC San Diego just starting, all of them had vice chancellors and all of them were white.

Thirdly, when I first got there, I was made a member of the chancellor's cabinet. The chancellor met weekly with all of his senior advisors. The chancellor, Albert Bowker, was a good guy; I had gotten to know him when I was at Merritt, because he was interested in community colleges. He had come to Berkeley from being the overall chancellor of the city university system in New York, which was both four- and two-year community colleges. He was a very positive and well motivated guy. I started out meeting with them—oh, I was not originally made a member. [chuckles] I was not invited to those meetings, until again I asked what the reason was, and they eventually added me.

Then another situation happened. They had a turnover, and they had a new vice chancellor of academic affairs who I had known and thought I was a good friend of, because he had been involved in a number of little projects in Oakland as an expert in his field. So, for the first couple of months in his weekly meetings with the provost and the graduate dean, I was invited to be a participant, but suddenly a few weeks later, he actually personally asked me not to come to the meetings, because he said that, "The truth is that my academic colleagues don't feel comfortable talking about academic affairs around you." I guess that meant that I might be a black advocate, or I might really have more interest in what the students' needs were than faculty needs, which

were to perpetuate their academic enterprise and research. So, that was another real turning point.

Then, the final one that I pointed out was the fact that they moved me out of what was called California Hall where all of the six or eight senior people were. On the bottom floor was all the Graduate Division. They moved me over to Sproul Hall. Now, that might have been justified in terms of the fact that three or four of my units were there—admissions, student activities was there also, which I forgot to mention as a major activity that I was responsible for. So, they moved me over there into a decent office, but I'm no longer in the chancellor's office. I guess the assumption is that there's no need to have that regular weekly, daily relationships with me.

So, here's the crowning one. All of the time I was there, the senior staff every year at commencement was asked to march in the procession. And of course I had my own robe and all of that stuff, and I was willing to do it, and I thought it would be fun. But, every time I went for the first three or four or five years, I found that the procession had all of the vice chancellors and the major deans up in the first fifteen or twenty slots. And I was way the hell back, about twenty rows further back. It wasn't explained. I went to Bowker and I told him that I refused to march any more. It was just outrageous. I'd be back there maybe with some guy who was a dean of one of the community colleges or principal of a high school or some shit like that. It really was unbelievably blatant and—oh, here's one final one.

We always had visitors on the campus, and sometimes we'd have assemblymen and political people who were quite important to our operation. Whenever they had a person of color there they would always make sure that I was there. I would talk to Regent [Vilma] Martinez when she came and all of that, but we would also have distinguished people from around the world come, and it was interesting that when Queen Beatrix of Holland came and spent a day on the campus, I wasn't invited to the luncheon. So, I don't think that any of that's really being overly sensitive. I was sensitive. But I couldn't believe that in the 1980s at a liberal institution like Berkeley, in a community like Berkeley, that these folks would be so blatant.

So that was a very stressful experience for me, in many ways more stressful than the five years at Merritt. Again, I have never discussed this with anyone except the black faculty who were a little concerned about this as I was retiring. They may have spoken to somebody. You always had a black faculty member who was a special assistant to the chancellor for affirmative action. That type of thing. I spoke to them. I was leaving, and I doubt if any of them did anything about it, but I just wanted them to know what to expect when a senior black person was appointed at Berkeley. So, that's my Berkeley story.

Wilmot: I have several questions. It sounds like you got a very mixed response from the administration when you came to Berkeley.

Smith: At the chancellor level, I don't think that there was any problem. Again, I knew him, and we communicated on a variety of problems. He encouraged me to follow through with the Merritt program for concurrent enrollment, for example. In fact, he and I jointly met with Clark Kerr and his Carnegie research board. But, I think that those second and third level guys really were, first of all, insensitive; and secondly, so

overwhelmingly identified with their academic self-interests and that of their colleagues. And they really had very little interest in undergraduate students. You can imagine how much they had in underrepresented minority students. It was again a paternalistic thing. They were liberals, they ran as Democrats, they were active on school boards and all of that, but they were not really ready, I guess, to engage in what would be considered collegiality with me or someone like me in that position. And yet, there were two of them on the screening committee and two faculty members, and they recommended me for the job.

So, as soon as we could afford it, after nine years, I figured, “Well, let’s get out of the rat race.” Again, I could have stuck around for another two or three years. So, the day after my fifty-eighth birthday I just walked away, and Mary walked away from her job at the Lawrence Hall of Science, where she could probably have stayed two or three or four more years.

Wilmot: So, you retired at fifty-eight?

Smith: Yes, at the age of fifty-eight. Twenty years ago.

Wilmot: Okay, I have a question about how when you arrived at Berkeley, I understand that there is kind of a social environment that occurs.

Smith: Well, I got invited to some of the cocktail parties and a couple or three dinners.

Wilmot: Yes, was there a group of faculty and administrator wives who maybe took up your wife to go around with them?

Smith: No, no, there was nothing like that. I think that one of the vice chancellors for whatever reason was just more outgoing, and he made an effort to be a good friend, and we socialized a couple or three times, at his house. But then he became the chancellor at Santa Cruz, and he left two years after I arrived. The rest of them, I certainly never became a part of their social circle, and I didn’t aspire to. I had my own friends, three-fourths of whom were white, and a fourth or so of whom were black. Many of them interchanged and mixed, so I didn’t need any stimulation from these elitist academics.

I think part of the problem was that they really had never dealt with anyone with an administrative background, except that business guy. But, I had this background—administrative organization, planning, personnel, facilities planning—and maybe they just didn’t feel comfortable around me, because all of them had gone almost directly from classroom professorships to assistant deans, to being vice chancellors. The guy who was vice chancellor had been professor for years in the school of law, probably had never had a full-time secretary, but suddenly he was made the vice chancellor. When I left, the guy who ostensibly took my place, although they divided into two parts—the housing and food services, which was a big chunk of responsibility, went over to business—and most of my stuff went to one guy who, believe it or not, was a professor of botany whose buddy had been the provost for years. So, there was a real buddy system.

Now, just before I left they had a black guy, Bill Shack, who became the dean of the graduate school, and who died about two years ago. Shack, I guess, was kind of given a

little bit more acceptance. He was the first black in anthropology and out of Chicago and really, they felt it was important to socialize with him, I guess. And he was a very sociable guy. He smoked a pipe and wore English suits and all of that. He had a pretty good acceptance after replacing a guy who had been the dean for twenty-five years. I think that even Shack realized before too long that, first of all, the job was largely titular. The graduate programs were still controlled by the various deans in the schools. And his was almost like a graduate student personnel office. They did have a small amount of money for so-called graduate minority scholarships that he administered, and he had a small staff, four or five people. So, that wasn't really a senior management position, but it was a prestigious one, to be called graduate school dean at Berkeley.

Wilmot: When you came to Berkeley, did you get a sense that people understood your background, that you had come from your time as being president at Merritt College—did people understand where you had come from?

Smith: I think they knew that, and they also knew my five years in community development.

Wilmot: I'm wondering if your background as someone who had gone into a somewhat tempestuous time at Merritt, I'm wondering if that weighed in with people at Berkeley.

Smith: I think that they were still of the opinion that no black could quite be competent for such a high-level job, and that no black could be anything other than overwhelmingly pro-black in his position. And, I think that that startled some of them, that suddenly that there was going to be a black, the first black vice chancellor in the whole state system, and that he would be in Berkeley instead of down at Riverside or some lesser campus. They also knew that I had very good community credibility. I guess they recognized after we moved to the new campus at Merritt that I had done a respectable job of saving that institution and transforming it into a legitimate post-secondary institution. So, they should have been aware of that, but I'm not sure that too many of them had interests that extended beyond Berkeley. As I said, several of them were active Democrats, and I had known them in another context, but I'm not sure if any of them really knew or gave a damn about what was happening in Oakland.

There was no [Peralta] campus in Berkeley. They were supposed to have a third campus in Peralta, but the Berkeley City Council at that time, just couldn't agree on anything except foreign policy b.s. We waited two or three years for them to agree on a campus location. We felt sure they were going to approve a campus down there near the waterfront, out there on the other side of the freeway where they built several restaurants and other facilities. It was a big twenty-five, thirty acres undeveloped, and they finally pulled the mat on that. And the Peralta board was so pissed; they just said, "Look, we've got this campus site offered to us over in Alameda." It had been military and had been transferred and given to the university and the university had no use for it, so [Peralta] bought it. It was available and it was cleared, so Berkeley lost its chance and never did get a legitimate campus. They have a little half assed operation in some downtown office building on Milvia. In later years, they suddenly said, "You owe us a campus." But they should have had their campus. Imagine building Alameda one mile on the ground from Laney, in the Peralta district of 650,000 or 700,000 people. They built a second campus a mile from Laney. They should have held their cool, and said, "Well, eventually maybe we can get the Berkeley constituents to get on their case and force them to make a decision about a site." Without a site you can't start talking about

building a campus. Although some preliminary planning had already gone into the organizational structure. So, these folks at UC were pretty much in a cocoon I think, even the high-level people.

And secondly, as I said, all of the Berkeley managers had suddenly emerged from being faculty members. I'm convinced that two or three of those folks that were at the top level had never had a full-time secretary, because they hadn't been deans or assistant deans, but they were active in the Academic Senate. Talk about politics. Two of them, I'm sure, got their jobs, including the vice chancellor, got their jobs as a result of being very active members of the faculty senate.

Wilmot: When you arrived at Berkeley, it was in 1973, which means it was right after there had been a push for African American Studies, then called black studies, and the emergence of ethnic studies on campus. I'm wondering, did you get there as it was just starting?

Smith: It was just starting. They had a black studies program that was not recognized as an independent department in the first two or three years. They brought in a young guy to head it, Bill Banks, who really had limited background, but very few people would take courses with all of the turmoil that was going on and all of the rabble rousing, and ranting and raving about it. So, Banks came in as a young guy with a doctorate, I think in counseling and guidance from somewhere back East. He took the position, and the chancellor gave him background support, and he survived all of that flack and ended up with a legitimate department. I think he didn't stay there more than five or six years as chairman. He's still there now, or he just recently retired.

Wilmot: He's still there.

Smith: Have you heard of him?

Wilmot: I've heard of him. I've read his book on—he has a book on black intellectuals. So, I read that.

Smith: You know the Caribbean woman, I guess, who was the department head who died about two years ago.

Wilmot: Do you mean Barbara Christian?

Smith: Yeah. The head now is Charles Henry, a very interesting guy who worked with us in the U.N. on one of our projects where we were paying tribute to Ralph Bunche, because he's written a book on Ralph Bunche.

Wilmot: He's actually on the advisory committee of this project.

Smith: Oh, is he? I got to know Charles there a year ago when he was the introducer of the Bunche film, and gave a little bit of background of the history of Ralph Bunche's career. He's a little bit critical of it, I must say, if you read his book. But, he was there and I enjoyed getting to know him. In fact, we were supposed to be playing tennis, but shortly thereafter I injured my arm. Then there was a Caribbean guy who was there who must have been head for seven or eight years. Percy—

Wilmot: Percy Hintzen.

Smith: From Guyana, I think. Last year he was on leave. I got to know Percy, because just before I left or just after I left, we actually opened a Black House there on Channing Way. They took over an old house and remodeled it to accommodate about eight or nine, ten black students. Percy was the liaison person who worked with this project. I guess I was still there at that time because I was involved, interestingly enough, in seeing the black house develop and in seeing the Italian house develop, because of my interest in Italian. I knew a couple of the professors there, so that was an interesting side part of my job.

Wilmot: So, when you arrived, what was the atmosphere on campus?

Smith: Well, I said that it was much calmer than it had been four or five years earlier when the campus revolution was at its height. All of those guys had gone, because they go back to '65, '67, '68 and Bowker had been there as chancellor for a couple years as a stabilizing factor. As I said, they were reverting back to traditional types of problems. The student body was not terribly active, except for that one year, when Fred Smith, the black guy from Merritt, became president. His main thrust was trying to get black studies going so it was rather a calm time. For example, I had no problem recruiting people for the two or three jobs that I filled—the new director of admissions and records who came out from Chicago, and the woman from New York who came out to be the head of counseling and psychological services. The new guy at the student health service, Jim Brown, who became a very close friend of mine, had been involved with some community project over in San Francisco in public health, was a graduate of Johns Hopkins Medical School, really first-rate guy, all part of the new team. So, there was no negative image of Berkeley at the time. It was a rather calm time, in fact, in fact it's been calm most of the last twenty years. So, it was a nice contrast for me to come from, as I said, almost a weekly accountability for the governance of Peralta, to being at least one, if not two steps away from the real policy makers—the regents.

I think I might have gone to two or three regents' meetings before I retired. I don't know what the subjects were. They used to meet off and on regularly in San Francisco, the old UC campus there, up on upper Market Street. They had a meeting room there. They've since stopped meeting there, and meet in office buildings around the state.

Wilmot: Did you find while at Berkeley that you had the opportunity to connect with African American faculty, and did they support you? Did you feel supported, or was that an place where you could get support?

Smith: I guess by the time I left there might have been twenty so-called ladder faculty—assistant professor or higher—and maybe seven or eight full professors. They knew me. I had a personal relationship with only a couple of them. Harry Morrison, in physics, was an old friend, and we were old black nationalists together way back there, and I think I told you that we started something called the Alain Locke Society to have dialogue about the black experience. So Harry was a good friend, but you know, as the only black ever—and still ever—in the physics department, he was pretty much preoccupied, but his experience was interesting. When he came out, they wouldn't offer him a job at Berkeley. He had to work out at the Livermore Lab for two or three years before they brought him in as an assistant professor. He was a rather distinguished guy

and had come here from the air force academy where I think he may have been the assistant head of the physics department. So, Harry and I were close.

The guy in music, Olly Wilson, and I got to be very close. Olly Wilson and Morrison were the only black faculty that I invited to my fiftieth anniversary party. But, all of the rest of they guys are pretty much in their own thing, and their social lives were not related to my social life. I went to a few parties at some of their houses, but very few of them, if any, came here—that I felt close enough to invite here, except for Harry and Olly. When I had that down-the-Jesus meeting with them before I left and told them about my experience, they all seemed to have known this was going on, but nobody ever said anything about it. Nobody, I guess, was willing to talk to his department head or to talk to the provost about this being something that shouldn't be replicated in the future.

Incidentally, I guess after my first replacement, [Watson Mac] Laetsch, left, the second guy in line after me I think was Russ Ellis, who was there for two or three years. Of course, the last three or four years they've had a black person in as vice chancellor administration and finance who again, strangely enough, came up out of a faculty position at UC Irvine. I think his field was not business, but he's been there for four or five years, and I guess doing well.

Wilmot: What kind of advice would you give your successor in that position, based on your experience there?

Smith: If it had been another person of color?

Wilmot: Sure.

Smith: Well, I certainly would have briefed them about the experience I had. But nine years later, the institution probably would have been more willing to adjust and more willing to compensate for what had happened in the past, so they would be reaching out more to a new person than they reached out to me, I'm sure. But, I would alert to them the fact that it was still a very strongly faculty-controlled organization, and that faculty's interests weren't always equated with student interests and needs and concerns, and that anybody in my position had to be the advocate for the students. Therefore, there was this natural friction, tension with people who were really faculty spokesmen and leaders. Short of having a union, that faculty senate was really a tight organization.

Wilmot: Am I correct in thinking then that efforts that were focused on bringing more students of color to Berkeley's campus through the admissions process and outreach were based with that position?

Smith: Yes, right, because admissions is part of it, but this new Office of Relations with Schools is also part of it.

Wilmot: So, in the time that you were the vice chancellor of students affairs what did your strategy look like for outreach and admissions for students of color?

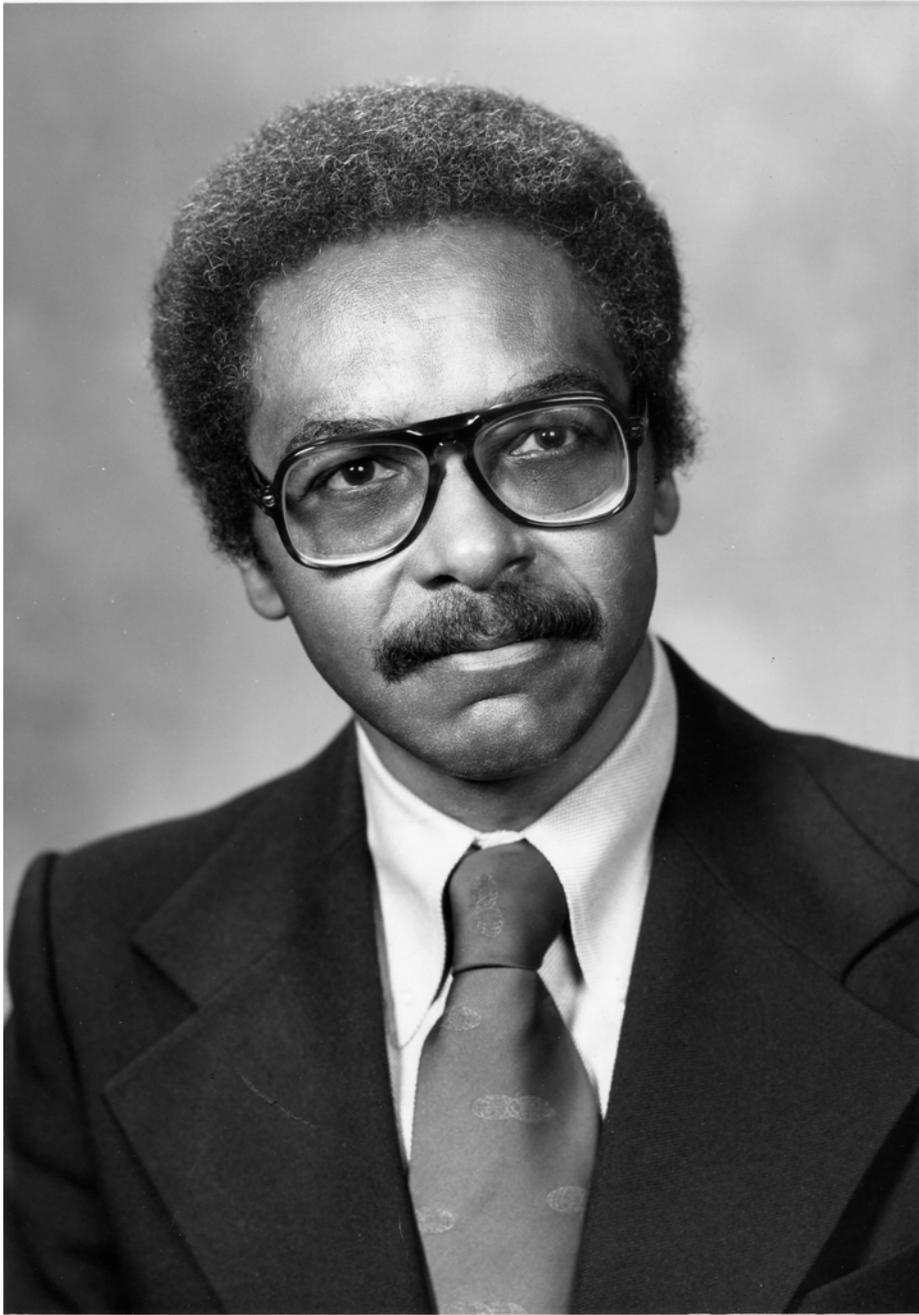
Smith: Well, of course, the first thing was to get people in those positions who were sensitive and had the same commitment. The guy who came in from Chicago had been in an

urban environment. He was University of Illinois, Chicago campus, and he was certainly committed. I think I gave him one of the good black people when we dispersed EOP. Financial aid, same thing, an old line guy—John Danielson who had been there for years—and I put Emmett Scales in that office with him. Emmett eventually left financial aid, though, and came over to relations with schools where he did a spectacular job with outreach. My only concern with him is that he was so anxious to expand that he would go out of state, and I would have to tell him, “Emmett, I don’t think our mission is to be bringing bright students from Washington, DC, and Atlanta and from Chicago here. We need to milk the pool of qualified black students in California. That’s our constituency.” Part of that dramatic increase was the fact that he was so effective in bringing kids here from all over the country.

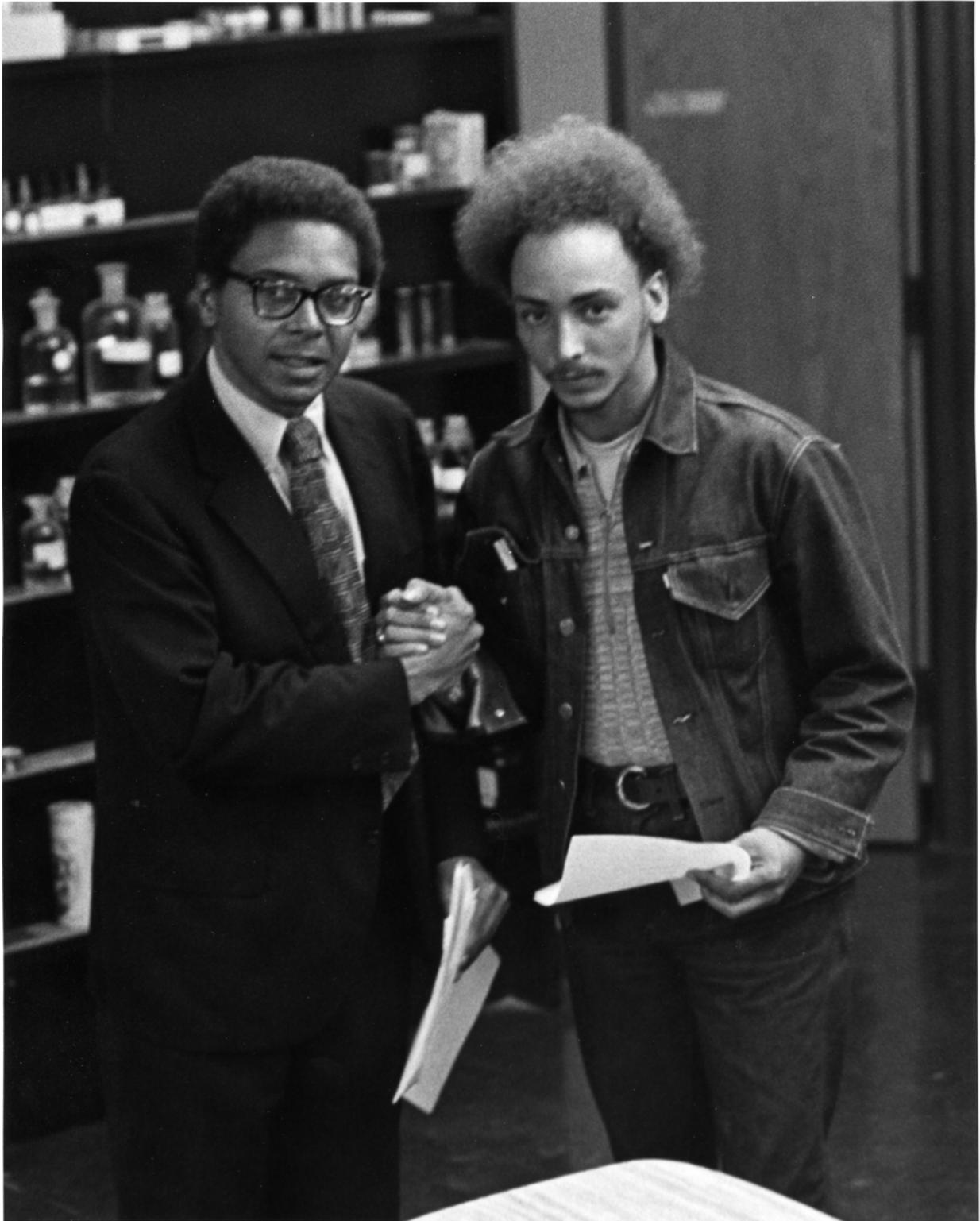
So, it was the people who were put in leadership or quasi-leadership positions, I think, and just the knowledge that people knew of me, and I had this exposure as being the only black in a senior position in the whole UC system. I would think that UCLA had the same type of experience with Charles Wilson and Doby coming in there. Doby was quite a remarkable guy, because he had been an outstanding high school teacher who had been responsible for getting a lot of kids into UCLA, and then UCLA hired him in something like that outreach responsibility that we had up here. Then he became an assistant to Wilson and took Wilson’s place. He had done all of his work there, bachelor’s, master’s and doctorate there.



G-2 Section, 92 Division HQ, Italy, August 1945. Row 1: Griffith Davis, Harry Waters, Harold Goring, William Meek, Henry Grace. Row 2: Clarence Dockens, Earl Green, Lee Jett, Norvel Smith. Photo courtesy Griffith J. Davis.



Norvel Smith, 1978, photo courtesy Arthur Odell



Merritt College, 1969



Community Development national conference, 1966, Durham, NC.

L to R: Joseph Slavet, Wayne Thompson, Bernard Lashbaugh, George Esser, Mike Sviridoff, Paul Ylvisaker, Henry Salzman, Christopher Edley, Cliff Campbell, James Banks, Sam Dash, Norvel Smith, William Pincus, David Hunter



Student Affairs Committee senior staff retreat, Asilomar, 1979

INTERVIEW 4: AUGUST 8, 2002

Wilmot: Today is August 8, interview number four with Dr. Norvel Smith. Today I was hoping that we could talk some more about Berkeley, and then about some of your many community involvements and commitments, serving on different boards of directors and trustees. So that was kind of what I was hoping that we could do today. To begin, the past few times we've talked, we've been sitting here in your lovely Eichler style home, and I wanted to ask you what year you built it.

Smith: I told you that I'll sell it to you when I go to the nursing home. [laughs]

Wilmot: Okay. [laughs] I wanted to ask you what year you moved here, and if you could tell me how you came to build this house, and why you wanted an Eichler home?

Smith: Yeah, well, I was working over in San Francisco just for a year and then I got that interesting surprise offer to come back over and be a research assistant in the county schools office. I put up from '54 to about '57 with that heavy commute, even though it was a reverse commute. The traffic, even then, was starting to get heavy. The office by that time was out in Hayward in a new county building. I lived way out in the southwestern part of San Francisco, near City College, so we started thinking about the fact that my career obviously wasn't going to bring me back to San Francisco. The East Bay seemed to be where we wanted to live. Certainly, from that point of view, Montclair was clearly the preferred place to live.

There had been a major influx of blacks in the so-called Lakeshore district of Oakland. Almost every one of these black guys that I related to in *Men of Tomorrow* and in politics lived in the Lakeshore district—Mandana or Lakeshore—going back to the late fifties. There might have been a half dozen blacks living in Montclair, including this lawyer, George Vaughns, across the street who was the first, and Bill Dixon, I showed you, who lived down the hill a little bit. No blacks could even be shown houses except by some subterfuge. The Fair Housing Act had passed in '53, under our former assemblyman, Byron Rumford, but four years later, as we walked around and visited real estate offices, nobody would show us anything, or they would say, "Well, that's been sold." It was very blatant. I think that one of them decided to show us two lots up at the top of Broadway Terrace, which were just extreme drops down. I wouldn't have put my pup tent up there. They were dirt cheap.

But anyhow, we decided that that wasn't going to work, so I got this good friend of mine who had been a graduate student and who lived next to me in Albany at married student housing, Bob Browdy, to do the transaction. In those days, I guess you could just buy it, and almost on the spot do a transfer of the deed. So, we did that and this was one of the lots that we had looked at, interestingly enough. It was one of the few in this area that was both wide and relatively level. It isn't just a drop off. We liked it and we liked the area. We would have preferred something on the other side of the street, looking at the bay, but that just wasn't available.

So, anyhow, we also had a good friend, Bill McElhinny, in architecture, who we also met when we were graduate students. He was an undergraduate, but a guy about our age. We knew that when we were going to build the house that Bill would design it for us, because we were very close friends. So, he did design it, and I think that I mentioned

one of the interesting events. When we came up with him for the first time that summer of '57, he and Mary and I came up to take a close look at the lot, and the guy across the street, a white guy, came storming across the street and he completely ignored me, but he yelled and cursed at my architect. I guess he thought that he was a realtor. The architect was about a guy about 6'2" and a hundred and ninety pounds, so he literally chased him back into the house. It turned out he was some sort of midlevel official for the *Oakland Tribune*, so I said, "Well, that's interesting." By the time we had built the house and moved in a year and a half later, he had long since sold his house and moved. So, that fall of '58 we got a good contract. In the meantime, Bill moved to Palo Alto, because he married a Palo Alto girl, and he did all of the design, but we had to get a local architect to supervise and get the bids for us, because Bill just wasn't that accessible fifty miles away, working in San Jose.

That was an interesting thing too, because we hired a Japanese American guy, Hachi Yuasa, who had built almost all of the Berkeley co-op stores, and I was very active as a co-oper at that time. He is still alive, in his nineties. He got the job through. So, anyhow, it was an interesting project.

We knew as soon as we got here that we would like it, and I must say that the neighbors then started really being reasonable. On either side we had nice neighbors, a young lawyer, thirtyish, over here and old couple getting ready to move to a retirement home over here, an Englishman who worked for some trading company across the street who was a fascinating guy. They were all welcome neighbors. Next door to him was a retired air force colonel, and he was kind of conservative and not very social, outgoing.

We have been here forty-four years, and have really loved it. Now, of course, there are a lot of new people. I would guess that there are at least one hundred or more blacks in the greater Montclair area. Part of it is Montclair. On the other side of the park it is called Piedmont Pines. It's treated all together, but Montclair is this area, between Thornhill and Park Boulevard.

So, just another experience that didn't surprise me. Nineteen fifty-seven was not exactly a vanguard year for human relations, and we didn't even have an approach to equal opportunity. That came along a little later, and of course, then was replaced by affirmative action, which meant a hell of a lot more. Equal opportunity says that we don't legally discriminate, but it's a level playing field, go for it. Affirmative action says that the level field is not level, and that there was a compensatory responsibility for groups like blacks.

This 1957 was about the same year I got started in politics with the East Bay Democratic Club, and that was a parallel movement. I knew that we still had a lot to do with the East Bay Democratic Club in terms of change and opportunity.

Wilmot: That must have been a really interesting time to move to this area. Did you find in your circle of friends, was that kind of a common practice of locating a friend who you trusted, who was white, who could buy your home for you?

Smith: Oh, exclusively. Lionel Wilson's wife, who was a white woman, was active in this, and she must have performed this service for at least five or six of Lionel's friends, including the judge across the way. There were a couple of other people that I know,

who have always been involved politically with blacks, who would do it. There's nothing to it, because all of the protective covenants in the documents couldn't be enforced after 1953 or 1954.

I also had an interesting development in getting the financing. I was waiting to get my nerve up to go down to Montclair Bank of America to inquire about getting financing. But, before I did, I may have mentioned to you, when I lived over in San Francisco, we were out in the outer Mission which was a heavily Italian area, near Ocean and Mission. We did our business with a little branch of Bank of America, which had almost entirely Italian staff, and I used to joke and talk with them in Italian. When I told the guy that I was moving to the East Bay and building a house, he urged me to let him finance it. He knew me and I'd lived there for five years. I don't know how much of a runaround that I would have gotten. I got just a typical 5 percent loan, which may have been a point lower than an FHA at that time. The only thing lower was something called vets loans, which the state had and they might have been 4 percent. And of course, we built the house for an unbelievable twenty-two dollars a square foot at that time.

Wilmot: I also just love that it's designed around these Eichler principles of design, and the airiness and openness of it, how peaceful it feels.

Smith: Eichler, of course, was our model. I guess if we had moved some place out of Oakland, we would have looked for an Eichler. The closest ones, and the only ones in the East Bay were out in Castro Valley. All of the rest were on the Peninsula and Marin County. It was a revolutionary movement in housing.

Wilmot: I have one follow-up question about your time in graduate school. When you were at Berkeley, as a student, what was your sense around—what did the scene look like in terms of African American faculty at Berkeley?

Smith: Obviously there were none until about '54 or '55 when the old guy in statistics came as the first. I don't mean just tenured, but nobody generally was around here in any capacity like that. I'm sure there might have been a couple of Asian professors in engineering as early as '51, but I never saw anybody of color even doing custodial work on the campus at that time. And I would go every day for two full years and two summers, I would go there every day around eight o'clock to get a parking place and stay until about five. It was like a job. It was a completely different world. It was a carryover of pre-World War II. It wasn't until the sixties when there were some breakthroughs. It wasn't until the seventies when there was really a breakthrough. I bet between 1960 and 1970 Berkeley probably went from three black faculty to fifteen or twenty. But even there, a lot of them were adjunct, and I would say only half, maybe ten, were on the ladder to full professor. As I recall, at one time there were only two full professors there. I keep forgetting the name of the first guy.

Wilmot: David Blackwell.

Smith: Blackwell. And [Reginald] Reggie Jones who was the head of Afro-American Studies in the eighties, came up here from Riverside as a full professor. Then, I guess [Bill] Shack made it in anthropology. But it was very slow, very slow. I think that even when I left, in '82, there probably weren't more than eight or nine black full professors at Berkeley.

Wilmot: Did people talk about when someone like David Blackwell came to campus, was that an awareness that people on campus had?

Smith: Remember, I was gone by the time he came. He came in '54 or '55 and I left campus, really, in '53 and while working I took another year and a half to do my dissertation.

Wilmot: I think that he came on in '54.

Smith: Was it that early?

Wilmot: But he might have been away for a semester or year, and also, if you were off campus by '53 then—

Smith: He came '54 from Howard as a tenured professor?

Wilmot: Yes, that is my understanding.

Smith: Some of them, as I was telling you, like Harry Morrison and others came and were sort of farmed out to Lawrence Berkeley Lab or Lawrence Livermore, before they actually offered them ladder positions in the departments.

No, it was a completely different world in 1951, with a handful of students. Maybe there were forty or fifty, but at the graduate level, I doubt if there were more than eight or ten. The possible exception would be the law school, which was a self-contained community. You never really ran into anybody in the law school.

Wilmot: I wanted to ask you some more questions about your time as vice chancellor of student affairs at UC Berkeley from 1973 to 1982. In our last conversation, you described the EOP as being a program that the university used as an excuse to not change essentially, that the university relied on its student pool to change, in particular its students of color pool to change. I just wanted to you to ask you a little bit more about that. During your tenure at UC Berkeley, did you see the university, as an institution, become more willing to change, during those nine years?

Smith: Remember now, that the big changes came in my areas of responsibility, and with my position. I think I outlined for you that I made six or seven changes that first year, including the dispersing of EOP staff into three or four of the mainline units. Other than the student services programs, I don't know that any department was doing anything differently. For example, a significant number of students, white and black, needed to take bonehead English, but nobody institutionalized that activity with a broader concept of a learning center, until we started one, and then started linking with the English department, which just sort of used TAs to do this quick and dirty one-semester thing. I couldn't tell you of any other movement. Before I left, more white and Asian students than blacks were using the learning center to bring their B's up to A's.

In the Graduate Division, maybe you could say there was a change that was recognizable. While I was there, something called the graduate minority scholarship program was announced with a small amount of money, maybe a grant, run by the dean of the graduate school. They actually limited that money to minority students,

mostly black, because there were not many other scholarships on the campus. I think that Bill Shack really took it beyond the limited place where it was when he came in.

But I had some issues with that, because it was a limited amount of money, but they were overwhelmingly giving it to the law school students, many of whom were from out of state and had a higher tuition. As I told you, that was one of the problems with aggressive out of state [recruitment]—especially for law school. I'm sure that they could get the best black students they could find anywhere and compete with the Ivies. It took a lot of money, and I would have preferred, as I did at Head Royce School later, to have seen that money dispersed among a number of disciplines, and particularly to seek to further integrate the arts and sciences programs at Berkeley, which were very, very light in blacks. We may have had one or two people in sociology—in fact, one guy got his doctorate in sociology, and I was on his doctoral committee. Maybe there were a couple in anthropology like Shack, and another guy that I can't recall.

There were very few [black] doctoral students, outside of the professional schools. I don't even remember any in your school [College of Environmental Design], during that period. Ken Simmons was there on the faculty, and for a while they had another Asian architect friend of mine who was there before he spun off his private practice, Rai Okamoto, from Philadelphia.

So most of that change came about through the opportunity they gave me to do what I thought was an essential move. I guess in some ways, the senior management was relieved that they didn't have to continue this operation of what they thought was a marginal bullshit program, EOP. There were no protests from any of those four or five unit heads when I put those people in to integrate the activity. Maybe everybody was happy. I thought that it was more effective to mainstream the people and to sensitize their whole staff to serving this group of students in a different way. I think that the chancellor and his people felt relieved, "Jeez, we don't have that black, second-class program any more."

Wilmot: So, your strategy deepened the institution's commitments in some ways, it spread it out.

Smith: I think so, and then it extended up into the Graduate Division. Incidentally, in addition to EOP, they had a rather successful Upward Bound program. You know the concept? They had two or three really top well-respected members of the faculty who were on the advisory committee, so that really sent out a message too. There was a guy in sociology, there was another one in math and one in chemistry—full professors who didn't have to do this—who worked with Lynn Baranco and really set the tone for the rest of the campus departments, that this is a program that's really going to bring us a more diversified student body, at no sacrifice of quality.

Wilmot: It was essentially making Berkeley as an institution more able—remaking the institution to have more capacity and interest in outreach and admitting students of color.

Smith: And counseling and advising.

Wilmot: What did your support look like in this work? Did you have partners, or were there people that you relied upon? You mentioned the faculty before that maybe weren't that

helpful, but what kind of support did you get from the chancellor's office? All of these are questions that I'm very interested in.

Smith: Well, I think that we got a fair allocation of resources to do all these things. I had a large responsibility, 700 FTE. If you take out about third of that for housing and food service, you are still talking about 400 people in these eleven units. And those were the key people, I mean, they accepted my leadership. Of course, I replaced two or three of them with outside people. One guy was promoted from inside and he was the new director of career planning, but the big support came from those largely, almost entirely white professionals in the departments like counseling and placement, and admissions and registration, and health service.

Incidentally, health service is interesting because when I first came, it turned out that they had at least one, if not two, part-time black physicians on the staff there. There was an orthopedist, Walt Morris, who I got to know quite well, and then there was an ob-gyn guy who I got to know quite well, Maynard Driver. He did all of the abortions. He went on to become a rather prominent guy, and joined me on the Alta Bates Hospital board before he died prematurely of cancer.

I must mention Cowell Hospital, as it was called then, although it was really just a student health service because they had long since ceased using most of those thirty beds that they qualified to have as a hospital. We tried to sell the bed authorizations at one time to make some money. Herrick and Alta Bates expressed an interest. At that time, we could have worked a deal with the state to have them pay us maybe ten thousand dollars per bed for the right to have more beds in their institutions. But, it never came to pass. I think that the money became an issue with them. They were starting then to have money problems. In fact, Herrick all but disappeared. It was absorbed by Alta Bates and made a separate campus of Alta Bates.

I guess that is about all I can think of. Athletics, you know, there were a fair number of students involved there, almost exclusively in track. The basketball transition didn't come until much later, the late seventies, eighties. Now it is virtually all black.

So, I'm not saying that I was the sole innovator and the sole mover and shaker, but from my perspective there weren't many other structural changes, except this creation of the graduate minority scholarships program.

Wilmot: That there weren't any other structural changes that didn't stem from your office?

Smith: Yes, right. That is the only structural change I can think of. The so-called bonehead English office, which was an offshoot of the English department, but had no real faculty there—they were all TAs. They actually, after about a year, started to have a linkage with our student learning center, because we had two people on that staff who were really outstanding. They came from ed-psych backgrounds, but their interest had always been in the learning process rather than counseling in the formal sense of people with problems. So that was also a possible additional linkage that hadn't been there.

Wilmot: When Chancellor Heyman came in, in 1980, did you communicate your vision for a diverse student body? Did he support your efforts? Did you get a lot of support from Chancellor Heyman's office?

Smith: Well, remember he came three or four years earlier as vice chancellor, which was a provost position that really ran the day-to-day academic enterprise. I would say that—I don't feel comfortable talking about personalities, but he was a guy who had come out of his early years as a super-liberal supporter of civil rights and all of that. I never saw him as being much more than just another bureaucrat, during the time that I worked with him. It was under his regime that some of those things took place that I thought were rather blatant slights. I think the chancellor who hired me, Bowker, was much more sensitive because again he had come out of Stanford, a distinguished guy in statistics, and then had about eight years structuring the new City University of New York, where he obviously knew the skills of dealing with diverse staff and student bodies. I thought in many ways Mike was the epitome of what I talked to you about—the guys who were very strong active members of the faculty senate who then just leapfrogged up to senior management positions without ever having managed anything.

Wilmot: When you came in 1973, how would you describe the community of African American faculty and staff that existed there?

Smith: Almost nonexistent. In '73 I think I might have met Blackwell, and there might have been two or three other people. The black studies program was just getting started. Bill Banks was there as the head of black studies, but he was still, believe it or not, listed as an assistant professor. Within a year, he took so much flack that they went out of the way to accommodate him. He went pretty rapidly up to associate professor. I guess three or four years later, when somebody replaced him, he made full professor. His discipline was educational psychology, which is interesting, not the traditional disciplines out of which you would think Afro-American scholars would come. And there were already two or three other blacks who were there as lecturers, maybe one more assistant professor. But other than four or five people, mostly entry levels in Afro-American Studies, I guess there might have been only three or four others. I don't think that Olly Wilson came until about 1978. Shack may have just come in the early mid-seventies, and the guy in sociology, Troy Duster, was the grand old guy in sociology. He is the son of a very prominent black politician in Los Angeles. Originally he is from Chicago. Troy might have been there. So, Duster, Blackwell, maybe Shack, I'm not sure. I was pretty sure that Wilson hadn't come.

Then there was another black guy who was really sort off the beaten track. You never saw him, and he was in botany with these guys who were all part of the upper level. He died many years ago, O'Neil Ray Collins. He had a stint of about a year or so as the person coordinating that graduate minority program, but part-time. He was still a professor. I could name maybe six people, plus the three or four that I knew nothing of in Black Studies beyond the head, Bill Banks.

Wilmot: Was there such a thing as community then among these six people you've mentioned?

Smith: I guess some of the five or six people may have gotten together socially, but there was no structure on campus. I doubt seriously if, being sensitive to being pioneers, they sat together for lunch in the Faculty Club. I can't imagine that they would do that. All of them seemed to be very highly integrative type of guys. Now, I'm not saying that negatively, but they were hardly well identified with the black community in that sense, in 1973. I still don't know too many of them who got too involved. Russ [Ellis] might have, because he was active with Democratic politics. My friend Harry Morrison who

must have come about 1965—that's right, he was already there by the time I got there. In physics, he had quite a social group, but very few of them were professors. They were other people.

He and I and others were interested in black consciousness and Negritude and we formed this group I told you, called the Alain Locke Society. But Harry didn't have much activity either. He had a difficult time for the first few years as the only black ever, including now, in physics, unless they've hired someone in the last year or so. But there wasn't much of a faculty community on the campus.

Wilmot: Can you talk a little bit about the Alain Locke Society?

Smith: Well, I had never heard of Alain Locke, but it turns out that he was a very distinguished black professor at Howard. Harry Morrison, who grew up a so-called country boy across the river from DC in Alexandria, Virginia, went to high school in DC and then went to Catholic U. He knew about Locke as a prominent person and he suggested that we name our group after Alain Locke. We'd been meeting informally off and on for maybe six or eight months or a year before we decided to institutionalize it. It wasn't too highly structured. We might have talked off and on for a couple of years, two and a half years. We had at least one very memorable conference down at Asolimar the same weekend as the jazz festival. That was fun. I don't remember any papers coming out of it or any publications, by any of those folks.

Wilmot: Who was involved in the group?

Smith: Mostly people from the community. I think that Don Hopkins might have been. He hadn't yet gone to work for Ron Dellums, but he was a young nationalist. Don was on campus before I got there as some sort of special assistant to somebody. Do you know who Don Hopkins is? He's since retired—but Don, along with Henry Ramsey and another attorney, Don Warden, was really heavily into the black nationalist stuff. They were, I think I mentioned, always around campus at meetings in Berkeley, stimulating the whole black consciousness movement. I give them credit for that. So, at least one of them, I think Don, was part of it. Harry, of course. Two or three of the black nationalists in the community, like Sarah Fabio who was sort of the mother of the Panther movement. I don't know if you ever heard of her. Sarah, at one time, was a part-time person in Merritt, and either didn't stay or didn't really have the interest in becoming a serious academic. She was a poet and was really the spiritual leader of the women in that movement. We might have got as many as fifteen people together, and some of them were students, now that I think of it. One or two might have been students. This is before my Berkeley days. This is '65, '66, '67, while I was working for the city.

Wilmot: Wow, what kind of issues did you talk about in the group?

Smith: I guess today you would just call it the black experience, fairly heavily oriented towards leaning on the curse of racism, and rather heavily oriented towards nation-building. If I had a problem with it, it was the fact that very few folks at that time saw the significance of focusing on infiltration as opposed to confrontation. These were still largely confrontational days—the black caucus, sit-ins in the Bay Area, and some rather horrific police experiences at that time. The police were still in a very, very fascist type mode, I guess you would call it. So, we talked about those things. I'm sure we talked

about the beginning of the teaching of black history if nothing else, and the fact that there was a lot about the black community that black folks didn't even know, in terms of history and sociology and the like. It was what we call a rap session of young adults in our thirties and forties. I was forty, I guess, by that time, in '65, '66.

Wilmot: Did your wife participate in this group with you?

Smith: Not really. She may have gone to that conference, because we were going to be down there anyhow for the jazz festival, but no she didn't participate in that. This is about the time that she was heavily involved in the beginning of the MESA [Mathematics, Engineering, Science, Achievement] Program, started in '70. That just took all of her time. She was working desperately to replicate the program from Tech High, to Berkeley High and Kennedy High in Richmond. By this time, it was a statewide program with about seventy or eighty high schools and ten or twelve colleges and universities. That was not something that she could either find the time or interest to be involved in.

Wilmot: I look forward to talking to her about MESA more. So, would you characterize the Alain Locke Society as a discussion group?

Smith: Yes, it was a relevant dialogue group for the early sixties. Since that time, I told you I tried twice to get modern versions of that dialogue—once about seven or eight years ago with six or seven people, including Harry Morrison and Evelio Grillo, one of my long-time colleagues and associates. But it didn't hold up, partly because none of the other people wanted to take responsibility for giving leadership, to set the agendas, and preparing materials for any serious discussion. I gave them two years and about four years later, I tried the same thing with a group that was primarily black physicians, because one of my good colleagues, when I was working on that county hospital interim board, Jim Jackson, felt strongly that very few of his colleagues really were giving any attention to what was happening outside of their own practices and their own parochial interests. So, he pulled together five guys, and I pulled together two of my colleagues, a West Point graduate engineer and Ben Yerger, who worked with me at Merritt and had gone on and gotten a PhD seven or eight years ago. But that group also just wasn't disciplined enough. And, you know, they weren't really ready to make the sacrifice in time or attention. We would only meet every quarter for an afternoon on a Saturday, one to four, but people would get there late and they'd leave early, they hadn't done their homework. So, two years of that, and I gave that up too. And, you know it was in a lovely setting up on the top floor of the Kaiser Lakeview Club, looking out on the bay, and drinks and all of that, but it never produced much.

I think that the best thing that we had happen was that Ben Yerger took it upon himself to pull together a tremendous collection of data on the prison system, the federal, state and local prisons and jails. He ran that by us, but again, there wasn't much real focus upon it. I think that I still have that stuff back there. It's fascinating.

Wilmot: We got started talking about this because we were talking about community at Berkeley among African American faculty and staff, and we started talking about Don Hopkins.

Smith: Yes, I forgot Don was there, and there was another black guy there, Andy Billingsley. I think that he was one of the early professors who was there by 1965, '66, '67. He

became an associate dean of letters and science without the title of being the black studies person. It was his job to try and create an African American studies program. He had left already when I had got there and gone back to be president of Morgan State College in Baltimore. I had forgotten about Andy being there and Don being there for a short time. But they were not in line positions, they were staff positions, assistant to somebody. Billingsley was then a fairly well known sociologist and had written a classic book on the black family by then. He subsequently wrote a sequel to it. He was, I'm pretty sure, an associate professor. I doubt if he was a full professor.

Wilmot: So, when you first arrived on Berkeley's campus as vice chancellor of student affairs, how did you go about the business of learning the terrain? Did you have any help in that regard? I'm speaking of that terrain that is not the formal terrain, but the informal terrain that is sometimes more important than the formal—

Smith: You mean the internal workings of the organization?

Wilmot: Yep.

Smith: Well, remember now, I prided myself on being a bureaucrat. I'd worked in three separate bureaucracies, four if you count that year and half at OEO—dealing with structure, personnel, finance, organization. So I guess, I used to go up there for about five or six weeks before I reported. I'd go up there at the end of my day at Merritt around five o'clock and work about three, four hours looking at files and reports and all of that, so I had a pretty good notion of what was happening. I had had a number of liaison experiences with the university. I mentioned that concurrent enrollment program, and I knew two or three of those senior white faculty. So, my job was to learn the mechanics of the units that reported to me, and I made a rather hasty assessment, by the time the fall came, of the changes ought to be made. It took us maybe six or eight months or a year to get two of those positions filled with the two out of state people: the gal from Hunter College, but somewhere in New York; and the guy from the University of Illinois that we brought out for admissions and records. I didn't feel that I needed any tutorials on how to function in a large bureaucracy that happened to be an educational enterprise.

Wilmot: Okay.

Smith: That was perhaps one of my problems. I was a bureaucrat and most of these other guys were faculty activists who used their activism to become senior members of the staff. Some of them had never been department heads, had never been deans. I think that's true, for example, of Mike Heyman. But there were other people like Rod Park who was there for many, many years as the number-three person, the academic provost for letters and sciences. They were about the same age, born in 1930. Twenty years ago they were men in their fifties, getting near the peak of their careers. When Mike Heyman retired, everybody assumed that the job would go to Rod Park, but it went to [Chang-Lin] Tien who had been for one year a vice chancellor of research or something down at Irvine. He went down there, almost in preparation for about a year, year and a half. Everybody later found out, he was sort of handpicked by the president of the system who just sent him down there to get a little paper record, and brought him back, and Rod, I'm sure, was crushed by it. He retired shortly thereafter, and then was lured by Colorado to be the chancellor of the main campus in Boulder. He has since retired a second time.

I forget what your question was now. We talked about my getting acquainted with—

Wilmot: —the lay of the land essentially. I think that the other thing that I am wondering, this relates again to the community of—I keep saying community when you've just expressed that it wasn't a community—but the group of African American faculty and administrators at Berkeley. I was really wondering if there was an old guard, the group of one or three people who had arrived prior to much of the student unrest that had birthed the black studies department, so if there was an old guard and a new guard of African American faculty?

Smith: Remember, now, there were two student movements, revolutions. The white students' took place in '64, '65, '66, and then things were rather tranquil, and the only real stimulation came from ethnic minorities who had finally gotten enough numbers by the early seventies to have a voice to be heard on campus. I guess they really didn't have much of an issue, except ethnic studies. They weren't really focusing on the lack of black faculty across the whole spectrum of the campus. They weren't talking about getting more resources or more scholarships. They were really hung up, I think, on black studies and Chicano studies.

Wilmot: Ethnic studies?

Smith: Yes. Remember, they started out as ethnic, but within a year, the only ones who appeared to be seriously pointing towards integration were people in Afro studies. About two year later they became a bonafide department. The others stayed together, and may still be called ethnic studies without being established departments. They have a program, but black studies has a department that gives degrees.

Wilmot: So, my question is, if there was a kind of tension between the faculty who had arrived before that—?

Smith: Black you mean?

Wilmot: Yes—and the faculty that arrived after?

Smith: I don't sense that that was the case. I think that the three or four or five or six old-timers were very supportive of the newcomers, although maybe half of them were ethnic studies. These old line people in botany and sociology and statistics and anthropology. I doubt whether any of them ever considered teaching a course in Afro-American Studies. One or two of them, in later years, were hired with joint appointments. For example, this fellow who was the department head just as I was leaving or a little after, Reginald Jones, had been a full professor in psychology down at Riverside or Irvine. So, they gave him the joint appointment in psychology, but he was sort of captured and spent virtually all of his time trying to make something out of Afro-American Studies. First of all, other than Blackwell, there wasn't that much time difference between the first of the old guard and the beginning of the new guard. You are talking about early and mid-sixties and then early and mid-seventies. [pause]

Wilmot: I think that in some ways you have addressed it before, but again was there any kind of dialogue between yourself and the faculty that you've mentioned around issues of diversity and broadening access to the university?

Smith: I think the only place where there was any real involvement was with the [office of] relations with schools, which had the overall responsibility for outreach, and had a very close working relationship with admissions and with financial aid. There might have been occasional black faculty members who worked with Lynn Baranco and might have even made some contacts with their alma maters about black graduate students, but there was no core of black faculty who identified and attached themselves to the major needs, which was expanding the enrollment, expanding the faculty, and expanding the curriculum in the mainstream of academia. Those were the three challenges.

How are we doing on time at UC Berkeley?

Wilmot: Oh, when are we going to be done with this topic?

Smith: Well, it just seems as if my oral history is going to be mostly focused upon my Merritt and UC experience, which is all right, except that it is a small portion of it, and it doesn't touch on the richness of these extracurricular activities.

Wilmot: Well, I had one more question. If I've asked this, again, just say, "Nadine, you've asked this already." I think that I have asked it in some ways, but broadly speaking, how did you see the university change as an institution with regards to providing access to persons of colors and African Americans in general, during the decade that you were at Berkeley?

Smith: During the time I was there?

Wilmot: Yes.

Smith: Well, at the undergraduate level, I think the principal change that I noticed was the fact that we would bring a lot of students in under special admissions, who were not exceptional students, and some of whom had gone to high schools that weren't that demanding. Many of them would be brought in at the 2.7, 2.8, 2.9 level with a low potential for making it at Berkeley and graduating. I think that the white faculty for the first few years sort of tolerated that, and then before I left there really was a difference. We could notice fewer departments accepting people who had been recruited unless they were 3.5's and 3.6's like the white students were and 3.8's and 3.9's if they were in the sciences and engineering. Now, I'm of the opinion that the difference between a 2.8 and a 3.2 could be relatively insignificant if the person could cut it at Berkeley, because if you go back to the forties and fifties when all of those white kids were coming here exclusively, a lot of them were 2.6's, 2.7's and 2.8's who would never have considered getting into Berkeley in the seventies and eighties, but went on to be judges and surgeons and leaders in the community. So, I think that Berkeley, UCLA, and maybe Davis in the later years, really—and particularly after the cases, [*Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* and the other one, *DeFunis v. Odegaard*—sort of backed off of what they considered to be risk takers with somewhat marginal students. I think that might have resulted, for the most part, in that tremendous drop from where we were around 1980 down to where we were three, four, five years ago—I guess that we might have had a 50 percent drop. So, it was that and then, of course, this attitude of the present regents about not wanting to provide any kind of affirmative action, because it discriminated against white students or Asian students, which is so hard for me to contemplate.

I guess we've sort of moved away from what I said was my point of view, which I think was the university's point of view twenty-five years ago—that there was such a tremendous need for leadership in black and Latino and Asian community that you could afford to take a risk with a person who was not the typical profile of the high school valedictorian, straight-A or something like that, because you never knew whether that person would make any contribution. And you knew if he was white, he wasn't going to have much of a contribution in Third World communities. I think that they moved away from that willingness to take risks with additional supportive services, so we could bring many of those people through. Now, not many of them, as you know, graduate in four years. In fact, I don't think that we even kept statistics on less than five years. They sort of moved away from recognition of what a tremendous influence a college education at an elite school would have on the next generation of black leadership.

Wilmot: It must be very interesting for you, as someone who held this position and had the kind of influence you did at Berkeley, to see the impact of Proposition 209 on the university.

Smith: I guess I was disappointed but not surprised because I don't think the politicians on the Board of Regents would have moved aggressively, unless they felt that they had most of the white faculty behind them, and that the white faculty also was still yearning for having the best students. Their faculty records were based on not only publications, but how many of their students went on to the best graduate schools. In a pool of fifty top white students, maybe forty of them would go on to good graduate schools. If you got forty blacks, you would hope that twenty of them graduated. Now, there were some blacks who were legitimate 3.1's, 3.2's, 3.4's, but not very many. Unfortunately, a disproportionate number of those were from out of state. I don't know why we weren't able to tap the California pool. Maybe it was just an indictment of California's public schools during that time. About 80 percent of the black students came from predominantly black high schools, and those schools just were not the equivalent of the 90 percent white suburban schools. Maybe that's all we could have expected.

Wilmot: My last question about Berkeley is, you mentioned that when you were serving again as vice chancellor of student affairs and you would look for allies or assistance, when you were facing different adversities in doing your work, you at one time approached the special faculty assistant to the chancellor, is that right?

Smith: No, we had very little, if any, relationship, I knew the persons who were in the position, but I had very little, if any. Their constituency was the white faculty, and they were the liaison between the chancellor and the white faculty that gave the impression that he was going to bridge the difference between the administrative attitude of liberal outreach and the conservatism of the faculty, so I never thought any of those guys had much impact on their colleagues in the mainline departments. I really didn't. I thought it was somewhat showcasing. If you talked to them, they agree that they didn't see much movement in their departments and schools and colleges that they came from.

Wilmot: The position that I was speaking of was once occupied by Olly Wilson, and it was the position—

Smith: Yes, those are the positions that I am talking about. As I said, they were not career appointments. They were usually one or two years and then they would turn over. You

always had a backlog of people to run in there. I guess that they helped them with their careers, because most of them, when they went back to their departments, moved up in the structure. Olly became department head of music. He also had a nice assignment for two years to be the head of the UC's overseas campus in London. So did Blackwell. I remember that I went to London the second time in 1974, and we had lunch with Blackwell, and I remember just trying to find him. It was just something that you couldn't imagine with the lack of communication, his almost not knowing where the hell he was located. We stayed at Brown's Hotel, which was then one of the really good, old hotels. His office, it turned out, was just three blocks around the street, so we went around there to meet with him once. We tried to get together with him for dinner, and both experiences with him were rather hectic. As I said, Olly had that assignment too.

Wilmot: Okay, I wanted to just stop and take a break for a minute, and then we could move on to the rest of our interview today.

[tape interruption]

Wilmot: I was thinking that for the remainder of today's interview, we would just shift away from Berkeley, and talk more about your very numerous community involvements that you've been involved with over the years here in the this community in the Bay Area and in Oakland in particular.

Smith: Okay.

Wilmot: I'm wondering if we could first talk about the Port of Oakland or if you'd like to start in a different place.

Smith: We talked a little bit about it in one of the other interviews.

I hadn't been following the port that much, but after I co-chaired Lionel's election committee in '77, I was his first appointee to anything. He appointed me about two weeks after he was sworn in, to the port commission, which was at that time all Republican with the exception of Tom Berkley who was, in fact, kind of a conservative Democrat, who supported Nixon at one time. He was a guy who really got along very well with the Republican power structure. Lionel just wanted to bring about some changes, so after he appointed me, and he appointed a Latino guy, Henry Rodriguez. He was a guy who had been working with the black community in political activity. So, there were two of us who were Democrats and knew a lot of people. Of course, our role was to try to sensitize the port to the fact that, although they were legally a separate entity operating under the maritime laws of the state, that they were still part of Oakland's economic development and the part of Oakland's responsibility. So, Henry and I, and then another guy who came on the next year who is still one of my very good friends, Doug Higgins, began to put a little bit more pressure on them to relate more closely, keep the city more informed. At that time, there had almost never been a dialogue between the port director and the city manager. The port director was a powerful guy, made more than the city manager, I think. So, for the first four years, my first term, I got a lot of experience. I chaired the maritime committee, and I chaired the aviation committee, and then in '81, I was appointed president. It was sort of my turn. But, in the past they had had indications that people would just stay on for two or three year terms, because they knew that they were going to get reappointed as they were so

embedded in the structure. By the time I got there it was kind of understood that if you were the senior person and you wanted to be chair, you could be chair. I was chair in '81. I took two trips to the Far East in eight years, in '82, just as I was retiring, and then in '85 before I went off the board.

I told you that I was critical of the board. I have all kinds of correspondences in there and articles in the *Tribune* that really got on their case for having \$100,000 travel budget, first class, multiple people going to the same places every year, staff going along, all flying first class. That kind of got me in a little trouble with some of my colleagues, but I didn't really give a damn, because I thought it was so blatant. I told you that even Lionel called me one day and asked me why I was continuing to press them. I said, "Well, I am being accountable to you and the city. We want them to be more responsive to the city's needs. And if we are going to blow \$100,000, we ought to be able to find a way to have the port pick up something that the city is doing and relate it to maritime or aviation."

I stayed on a second term, and then I expected to be reappointed, because Lionel had been complimenting me, writing me letters about keeping the pressure on. He was very critical of Tom Berkley, Tom's term expired and Lionel just let him hang out there for a year without reappointing him or replacing him. Finally, he resigned, and Lionel appointed another one of his good friends who was then just leaving the US attorney's office over in San Francisco and was tied in some way with Lionel—Billy Hunter. That was a surprising appointment.

But by the time I left, we really had a good core of about two blacks and one Asian and one Hispanic out of nine members, and we were starting to have more communication. When I was chairman, I instituted for the first time ever a joint city-port committee with three of our commissioners and our executive director meeting with three city councilmen and the city manager. That went on for about a year. I must admit that one of the people the city nominated was really not very interested or disciplined, Marge Gibson, for example. She barely came to meetings. After a year, it was evident that we hadn't really made a breakthrough, that people weren't willing to really sit down and work together, and after I left the chairmanship, the committee was eliminated.

I don't know what else to say. The port was then in a very dramatic growth mode in terms of maritime, and the airport was just beginning to get rolling. It was before the second airport terminal, the Lionel Wilson Terminal, was built. There was beginning to be some flack then and I guess there had been some earlier, this would be early eighties, late seventies—from people in West Oakland who never could see any impact on their community of the port's tremendous, big operation and national reputation, except for the big, noisy rumbling trucks. That was all they think they got out of it.

It was at that time that I think that some of the shipping lines tried to get training programs going, but as I recall when I left there wasn't very much going on. We had an affirmative action guy on the staff who was more of a communicator and a liaison person than anything else, Jose Duenas, who is now the director of the international trade center down there, one of these regional commercial operations with people here and people in the Far East.

Wilmot: Can I ask a few questions about that?

Smith: Yes.

Wilmot: You were one of Wilson's appointees.

Smith: Yes, his first. Appointees meant that he nominated and the council approved.

Wilmot: I'm wondering, how did the presence of yourself and other persons nominated by Mayor Wilson change the priorities of the Port Commission?

Smith: Well, that was the idea that we were going to have something that tried to bring the city and the port closer into a working relationship, and that would make the port more sensitive to the city's continuing needs. I think, as I indicated earlier, during that period, there was some slight expansion in the arrangement whereby the city, which had for years been providing personnel service, police, fire, all of that. The port finally recognized that it was a legitimate thing for them to reimburse the city for these services. That probably brought the city and extra half million dollars that first year.

But the constraint was still there in terms of everybody's interpretation of what the state would allow. At one time, Willie Brown was talking about legislation that would make an overall port authority for the whole Bay Area, that would be out from under the restrictions of the state maritime laws. That never flew. The people in Oakland couldn't conceive of it, because by that time we were about 90 percent of all the Bay Area tonnage. San Francisco's port was a disaster. Of course, now it's great, because they are developing it for non-maritime purposes—real estate and commercial. So, I think that between the three of us who were close—Doug Higgins, Henry Rodriguez, and I were communicating quite a bit, and we were still in a somewhat adversarial position with the rest of the guys who were gradually being replaced by Lionel, but who were still there in the majority, even when I left. They were pretty powerful guys. George Vukasin, the longtime head of the Coliseum Commission, who owns Peerless Coffees, was there on the commission. This grand old man, Chet Soda, whose estate gave the university about fifteen million bucks for a new engineering center, was there.

It was really the power structure of Oakland at that time, until we guys came in with a different background and commitment, because we didn't have any distinguished, experienced, big black businessmen. Tom Berkley was the closest to it, but even he had a small law firm—two, three lawyers. He wasn't really practicing law and he had the newspaper. So, he was the closest thing to a business executive in town. That is all I have to say about the port experience.

I should add that I expected to be reappointed and then, for some reason, Lionel started getting disconnected with some of his old friends. The first thing that came up four years after we were appointed was that he didn't reappoint Rodriguez, which was really shocking to everybody, and just devastated the guy. And he replaced him with a young, inexperienced, Latina lawyer who had been his law clerk the previous year. That didn't go over very well.

When my second four years came up—even before that, when my turn came up to be president after four years, there's a piece in the *Tribune* about it—he was holding off on making reappointments. So, I had breakfast with him down here in Montclair. I said, "What's happening?" He had been quoted in the paper saying that he still hadn't made

up his mind. And this was maybe three months after he had written me a strong letter of support. So, I sat down with him, and said, “What’s happening?” He said, “Well, I’m still trying to make up my mind.” I was really pissed, so I brought my whole file, with my campaign checks, with commendations for co-chairing his campaign committee, with the letter that I wrote to get the son of one of his law partners admitted to Berkeley, and I said, “Well, if it is just a matter of being close to you and supportive of you, what else can I do?” Well, he became really agitated. He didn’t like having to face that, so he reappointed me, but our relationship wasn’t that close for my second term.

Then when the term came up, and probably I should have been reappointed or expected to be reappointed, he appointed the widow of one of his best friends, George Scotman, one of his sports and horse racing buddies. He appointed this woman who everybody knew had cancer, and she died within about a year and a half, but he appointed her to replace me. Then Lionel generally began to disassociate himself from a lot of his friends, and was sort of doing things with people who were virtually strangers of the community, but with whom he had relationships. There was a guy, George Smith, I think his name was, who was really a questionable businessman, who was always being investigated, and yet Lionel was one of his biggest supporters and sponsors. Doug Higgins ended up being appointed for a second term and chairing the commission, but all of us were pretty much disillusioned. Of course, we attributed it to the fact that Lionel was getting old. He wasn’t necessarily senile, but he was really getting very testy and a very difficult person to get along with. As I said, he always had a hell of a temper that I was able to avoid, except that one morning at breakfast, when I laid out my credentials and said, “What more can I do?” He didn’t like that.

Wilmot: It sounds like it must have been a really interesting role to play on the commission at that time—that role of both trying to be a credible asset to the port, at the same time as being a liaison and asset to the city.

Smith: Yes, and on the verge of becoming president. This would have been the first Democrat president ever—let’s see. Tom Berkley, who was a quasi-Democrat, had been president. This was Lionel’s first appointee to become president. I became president and Henry Rodriguez should have been the next President. The next year Doug Higgins should have been president the following year. We really had made infiltrations into the power structure of the port.

Wilmot: What did it mean to be a president of the Port Commission?

Smith: Oh, the president is very strategic. First of all, he or she has a very close relationship with the executive director, and chairs the executive committee, which is three other officers, and appoints all committee chairs, and pretty much dominates the determination of the agenda.

Some guys really live it up and play the big deal. I never will forget that I was so disappointed in Tom Berkley, because he would go around the country telling people, “I run the Port Commission.” Some of them thought that he was the manager or the general director. He was one of nine members who were appointed by the mayor. During my time, very few of the guys who replaced and followed me got off on that kind of trip. They were low key guys. One guy was from the labor council. Doug Higgins was just an independent businessman with a medium-sized rubber products

business. Henry was a successful lawyer. You know, Lionel didn't reappoint Henry and replaced him with a former law clerk. And then he begrudgingly sort of appointed me. Henry has never spoken to me since, and that was 1981. We used to play tennis together. Our wives went to the same hairdresser. We were really good friends, and he just assumed that somehow I was party to his being dumped. I said to Henry, "I just barely got reappointed myself. You know damn well that you were right behind me to be the next president. There is no way that I would have been party to that," but he was so turned off and took it personally. As my longtime colleague, I was surprised at his response.

So, anyhow that was the Port Commission. It gave me some visibility in the community, but I was already nearing the end of my career. I retired in '82, the year after I started my second term, but I still had these six or seven things going, as you can see, until the early nineties.

Wilmot: Can I ask you one more question about [Walter] Abernathy? He was the port executive director.

Smith: Yes, he was the second director after the old man, Ben Nutter, who was given credit for building the port.

Wilmot: Who left the same time that you came on.

Smith: Yes, he retired and was doing consulting. Abernathy had just been a young kid, about twenty-five right out of the army from Nashville, and stayed out here after the army, married a local gal. He sort of walked into this job as a gofer, kind of an assistant to the executive director. And then, although he had no background in either aviation, finance, maritime, or real estate—the three big functions—he was a good communicator and got along with people and when the old man stepped down, they appointed him director. And he stayed on for ten or eleven more years. Of course, he used that experience. He went from there to doing some consulting, and then he became a vice president of Bechtel, and he was in their London office for years. He is now back and working for some other major company. I can't remember which. He was out of the country for several years, but I saw him recently at a party for a retiring staff member. He was an interesting guy. I liked him. But again, an example of an opportunity that blacks never had, to become the personal assistant of somebody who would just bring you up off the street and keep giving you expanded responsibility.

It was extraordinary for anybody to be director who had not been at least the assistant director for maritime, real estate, or aviation. I think most of the subsequent guys—right after Wally left, the guy who headed maritime became director, and he'd come here from the Port of New York Authority with a very deep background in maritime.

And then Chuck Foster was the director of aviation before he became executive director, and had been in Oakland, I think I told you, fifteen years before, and left us to go to San Jose. I was really pissed with him about that. I wasn't too enthusiastic about him coming back, but he certainly ended up doing a good job. Another former military guy. The place was full of retired military types from World War II or Korea.

Wilmot: How did that impact the atmosphere there?

Smith: Well, I guess it was military. They talked military. The one before Chuck Foster, the black guy, was Charlie Roberts. Here is the classic example. He was an army engineer, and when I first met him in '77, he was the Bay Area chief of the Army Corps of Engineers. He retires from that and he becomes the executive director of BCDC [San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission]. He retires from that and he comes to the port sort of casually. I guess I thought that he was going to only work part-time as the chief engineer. Within about three years, he was the director, near the end of his career, and already an aging man with illness. He did a good job, too, and he at least had tremendous background and respect. I think he probably contributed to working with the Congress to get extraordinary help on dredging the channel and continuing to be competitive on the West Coast.

Wilmot: Do you follow port activities and politics now?

Smith: Well, yes, more or less. For a while, they were sending out a newsletter that I got periodically, then they stopped doing that, but about a year and a half ago, with some pressure from Doug Higgins and me, Chuck Foster institutionalized something that he said he was going to do every six months. He brought in all of us old farts who had been on the Port Commission, and there were probably fifteen or sixteen living people still in the community who had been on the commission. I think about six of us showed up. That was the last time I saw Tom Berkley, who was in very bad shape, and died about four months later. So, we had this nice luncheon and tour of the new airport developments, and they had just gotten the first of two large Chinese cranes, and we had a nice day and a nice lunch and looked forward to another. He had all of the assistant directors make a brief fifteen-, twenty- minute report to us, and answered questions. So, I thought that was going to be really good, because a lot of these people, including myself, had a lot of background and some status in the community. It would have been important when he came up with new innovations and recommendations to have this group informally, at least, in back of him. But I haven't heard anything from the new guy who has been there for about a year, former maritime director.

Wilmot: While you were there, were there any major issues that you think of that came up at the port while you were a commissioner?

Smith: The maritime thing pretty much carried itself. It was evolutionary. We built new facilities, we would attract new shipping lines. They would go from being small to medium, to large. If they got large, we built a terminal exclusively for them. So, that was sort of an evolutionary, natural growth of the maritime. Although, as I told you, as we were growing, we were still losing market share, because of the tremendous growth of LA/Long Beach and Seattle/Tacoma. The airport was sort of critical. We were then only about seven or eight million a year, and in real competition with San Jose. It was kind of touch and go until we built the new terminal and people started realizing that we were more convenient than fighting the traffic to San Francisco.

The big crisis, if I could call it that, was in real estate, because we had lots and lots of underdeveloped and undeveloped land that was our responsibility. The territory was the whole length of the estuary, which may be twenty miles, with all of the inlets, from the Bay Bridge all the way out to San Leandro. I don't know how it got to be twenty miles, but it is, including Alameda waterway and all of that. Beyond the basic core area of Jack London Square, there was almost nothing. You go out to Fourth or Fifth Avenue, there

are still a lot of junky old buildings out there. They built something out there called a break bulk terminal, which was non containerized for small ships to come in, and that's what the whole port was before about 1963 or 1964. Other than that, we never really developed anything, but kept talking about moving all the way out. They did put some development out there near, if you know where it is, along the estuary about Seventeenth, Eighteenth Avenue. There are a couple of office buildings and a couple of new motels out there. And that old, old restaurant, Quinn's Lighthouse—that was always a gathering place for people.

So, the focus became pretty much on continuing to expand as much as we could from the core at Jack London Square, and the biggest hindrance to that was Jack London Village, which was—I don't know if you remember—just a bunch of one- and two-story old buildings, crumbling with less than half occupancy. A long-term lease by some guy down in LA who would never do anything to fix it up. That continued from the time I was there to just a year or two ago. They finally bought that guy out or his lease expired and they turned it over to a new developer. Just beyond that was the two blocks that included KQED. That was something that happened during my tenure. On the lot between new KQED and Jack London Square, we had wonderful plans way back in 1981 or '82 to build a first-class hotel of ten or twelve stories. We wanted to go twelve, but the navy, at that time, was stupidly still flying combat planes down the estuary to land at the naval air station, and they told us that they would never approve anything over eight or nine stories. Well, the guy that we put all of these plans together with, Enimoto, who had been somewhat successful in San Francisco, just really sort of self-destructed. He never really got the financing and misled us. We wasted about a year and a half on him.

Wilmot: He was a developer?

Smith: A developer and architect. The place is still sitting vacant. Half of it, I think that they finally built some apartments on. There is still room there for the hotel, which I understand is still under consideration. They've given that piece of land to the same developer who has all of Jack London Square, which is about three or four blocks long and from the water all the way back to the tracks. So, real estate was the problem. I think that they finally got a bonafide real estate guy or woman there, too, in the last six or eight years. The real estate guy was retired navy who worked with somebody else, and may have had some background, but was not a big-time developer and had little credibility. So, now, if they ever get the Jack London Village thing going—and thank God they are not seriously considering any baseball stadium down there—then, I think that the challenge is to keep moving east, at least out to High Street if not all the way out to the airport, with pedestrian access and with all kinds of things complimentary to water use out there.

When I was on the Port Commission, now that you remind me, we had a planning exercise with five or six people from the UC School of Environmental Design, to design something for that site that Enimoto never built on. We had sort of a charette, and went through all of that business. I may still have a copy of the report back there, although I think that I gave it finally to the guy who was the city planning director who was a friend of mine, along with the master plan from Grand Avenue all the way down to the port, which was developed largely through port initiative. But you know, those things

have not moved very rapidly. Real estate has been the poorer third cousin to maritime and aviation.

Wilmot: Yes, though it seems to me that it is transforming with all of that activity down on Jack London Square.

Smith: Yes, well, that's Mayor Brown's initiative, and a lot of that is not on port land. That's beyond Second and Third Street, which is in the port area, but the port's ownership or control of land use I don't think comes more than a block, if that, above the railroad tracks. The train station might have been a part of their purview, but most of it is between the tracks and the water.

Wilmot: I'm wondering, as a port commissioner, was it actually viable for the City of Oakland to get some share of port profit? Was that actually a real possibility or was that kind of a dream?

Smith: Well, it was more than a dream. It would have been a reality, but the big problem was that every time the port expanded, it took on some debt, and the combination of the debt repayment and the continued growth, pouring money back into airport new terminals and all of that, and you had to build them before you could get income from them. There really wasn't much left to provide the city, certainly far below the expectations and hopes of Lionel and the city council at that time, who took a long time to come around to realizing that we were a long way from being profitable in the general sense, where we could give general fund money to the city to spend for whatever they wanted, or give money to the school district to help reform the schools. We just couldn't do that while we had all of this growth and outstanding debt. It was still the issue of whether—unless they changed the legislation—the maritime laws that went back to the twenties or thirties, that would permit a port authority to give money to the city rather than perhaps turning it into the state for the further development of maritime statewide. That was one of the things that was speculated. If we ever got to be a profitable enterprise, the state would take the surplus over the actual cost of operating. We were really a designated operator by the state authority, that also had a relationship with the city, which was the nearest local government.

Wilmot: Did you ever, as a commissioner on the board of commissioners, experience any torn or divided loyalties, because of your work with the commission at the same time as you had an allegiance to Mayor Wilson and his agenda?

Smith: Well, maybe it was sixty-forty, city and port. I was sensitive as an operating member of the board to these problems that kept us from doing all of the things that the city wanted, but emotionally I was still chafing at the fact that here was this big wonderful, luxurious operation of flying these damn fools around the world first class, while the city had all of these problems. I couldn't be insensitive to my fiduciary responsibility as a member of the commission, but emotionally I certainly identified with the city.

And that was what was so devastating for me to understand—how Lionel, who had been aware of that could not see my contribution. In fact he wrote a letter, I think, once to the newspaper and sort of complimented me while attacking the other guys. He was just volatile like that. But there was never any doubt. Remember now that these were times in the later stages when I'm at UC Berkeley and pretty much absorbed in the university

and these other three or four things. I didn't have a hell of a lot of activity going in Oakland except for the port at that time. I'm trying to think of what else might have been going on in the late seventies. Rosenberg Foundation, with a twenty-year tenure, San Francisco University High was another seven or eight years, but nothing really critical in Oakland. Alta Bates Hospital was in Berkeley. The rest of it all came after I got off the Port Commission, in 1985, and the bank we should mention, because that took a hell of a lot of my time—thirteen years. [It was] the first black bank in Oakland.

Wilmot: Let's talk about that. Let's move to that then. One last question on the port. Have you noticed the relationship between the city and the Port of Oakland, in the years you lived in Oakland? You've lived in Oakland for forty-three years, so have you seen that relationship that was very adversarial change at all?

Smith: I think that there is certainly much more communication between the city manager and the port director. I think that, in many ways, the port directors, the last two of them have recognized that they have to be concerned with the city. I think that the city manager probably is the stronger of the two partners. When I was there, there were two separated entities, and they didn't give a damn about each other, speaking frankly. If they ever got together it was rare. Now, some of their colleagues would. For example, the port always had its own attorney who was a black man. One of the first things that happened when I went on the port was the hiring of this guy Stan Hebert, who had been some sort of high-level executive, not vice president, with Bank of America. He, with some of our encouragement, always had a strong working relationship with the city attorney, at that level. At the policy level, talking about future planning and priorities, I think there's more of it now. Clearly, with the executive mayor and with the strong city manager that they've kind of got the port pretty much under their control and influence.

You know the new mayor has made some dramatic changes since he had been in. He cut out all of this stuff of letting people hang on for two and three years in between their terms, serving until they are replaced. Maybe after three years they then get another four-year appointment. He backed them all up to the last time they are appointed and indicated that the end of that term was the end of their service, because he wasn't going to reappoint them. I think that the port is, perhaps, a little more responsive now. I wouldn't say intimidated, but a little more responsive now, than they were in my time.

Wilmot: Let's move on and talk then about First Enterprise Bank.

Smith: Let me say that I was actively involved in two financial institutions. I'll just speak briefly about one of them. One of them was the Twin Pines Savings and Loan Association, which was the Berkeley co-op's financial institution. As you can see, I served seventeen years on that board, and saw them through a small one-office operation to something like four. Maybe we expanded too far. That was interesting, because I guess I was not the first black on that board. There was a very prominent black painter and activist named Clint White, another Clint White, who talked to me about it and nominated me for it. I enjoyed that. Most of those people were liberal Democrats, and we had a strong bond.

We were separate from the co-op, but we got caught in the same thing that the bank got caught in which was deregulation, under Reagan and those guys, where savings and loans were no longer restricted to making loans to individual home owners. They then

allowed them to go into commercial ventures. That's what got a lot of them in trouble, these billion-dollar bailouts, were the outgrowths of the change of the character of savings and loans. We, at the savings and loan in Berkeley, were making all of our loans to individuals to buy homes, so we were stuck with all of these 7 percent home loans, but by that time we were having to pay 12, 13, 14 percent to get the money, because of the competition with banks and all of that. So, they just came in one Friday night and closed us down, although we were on the verge of being acquired by some other savings and loan.

In any event, that was an interesting personal relationship, but a sad experience after all of those years to see that institution die. But then the bank was interesting, because Don McCullum and John Williams, the redevelopment director, and Lionel and I, had been talking for some time about a financial institution, and we were starting to gel our ideas to the point where we were going to put together a proposal.

There was no black bank in Oakland, and you had two sources—federal or state charters. Just about four or five months after we had begun serious dialogue, we suddenly read in the paper that this other group of five or six guys, mostly younger blacks with two white guys—a strong Catholic and a strong Jew in the business community—had already filed for a charter with the state. So, we were sort of taken aback, but we wished them well. After giving it some thought we decided that probably there was little likelihood that there would be two new banks, black-controlled, in the same town of Oakland. Then the other guys came to us trying to talk us out of it, and they offered to give us two seats of their seven on theirs and merge our efforts. I was the only one to accept it—none of the other guys. I don't know whether they figured that they weren't going to put any money in it, or they weren't going to put the time on it, and Lionel, I guess, was a judge at that time, so he probably couldn't have been directly involved. So, we worked for about a year or so, and then opened our first branch at Seventeenth and Franklin Street, a large building, two stories, much larger than we needed and were doing well, but our basic survival was always dependent on federal agencies using us as their depositories for funds. So that kept up pretty well.

There were relatively few black businesses that we were able to finance to grow in that sense, and the white businessmen weren't going to come to us for loans. Despite that, we were still growing a little on paper. We might have gotten up to \$30 or \$40 million in assets, not equity. Then we opened a branch over in San Francisco, which was a disaster. We opened this fancy branch, over there in the middle of the commercial district on Post Street, right across the street from a big new office complex and shopping center.

Wilmot: What year was this?

Smith: This must have been 1973 or 1974. Then we opened a third branch in Berkeley out on Shattuck, at Shattuck and Vine. Big hullabaloo and a lot of publicity, but it was obvious that we were marginal and undercapitalized. Then again, when deregulation came along it just blew us out of the water. Again, we thought that we had a sale to a small bank over in Marin County. We still had about \$300,000 equity—I mean net worth in the company, but we were closed.

That was interesting, because there are a lot of people who liked the idea of a black bank, but there was no real mobilization of the community to make use of it, and relatively little clientele that could use banks. We were not very heavily involved in real estate and individual mortgages, and most of the people who had houses were, by that time, getting them financed by Bank of America or by large savings and loans. So, we never really found a niche that would have enabled us to survive. We were dependent upon continuing to get that federal deposit money—some of it overnight, but on paper it showed us as being viable.

When we finally were closed, we had a fairly long period of litigation, in terms of the examination of what happened—nothing on fraud or that, but there was some question about reporting and all of that, and we had a three-director turnover. The original guy, who was a Jewish guy, was on the board and was the president of the bank. He left, and then one of the black guys on the board who had had some limited experience with a savings and loan ten years earlier became president. Then finally he stepped down, as things were really getting bad, and a white guy who was in the number-two spot was moved up to president. It went down very fast after about six or seven years. It was a noble experiment.

After that, another group with which Lionel had some contacts, this fellow George Smith and a couple of other people, opened another bank called the Oakland National Bank on Fourteenth Street, but it didn't last two years. Again, the same reason—no constituency that was willing to use it as a commercial bank, and relatively little business and mortgage loans.

Wilmot: Can you tell me a little bit about how you forged that connection with the federal entities to get the federal funds?

Smith: I can't tell you the details of it. I guess this is just something that the president knew about and had been the bellwether of most black financial institutions, which were opening and closing almost every year at that time.

At one point, *Black Enterprise* published an annual list of the top black banks, savings and loans, and insurance companies in the country. At one point we were twelfth or thirteenth in the county—if you can believe it or not—with that little operation of ours. Despite the terms of the implications of how unstable we were, we were in the top twelve or thirteen black banks in the country.

Wilmot: With a value of?

Smith: With assets of, I don't know, \$20 million, \$25 million.

Wilmot: It is interesting to me also, because this brings back for me how you said that originally you were really good in business, when you were at the University of Pennsylvania.

Smith: Yes, I had a decent background. That didn't mean that I knew much about banking. I had courses in money and banking, corporate finance, economics, insurance, way back in the forties. But I never pretended that I was professional. I just had a good head and I gave time.

The first five or six or seven years, all of the board members worked without a stipend. Then, as we seemed to be making a little progress—and I wasn't completely sold on this idea—the movement got going so we felt that we ought to pay ourselves a stipend after all of these years of working. So, then we started to pay ourselves a \$10,000 a year stipend, which with a seven-member board was a big nut to crack. I'm not saying that that led to our demise, but I think that I would have preferred being more conservative, and just assuming that it still wasn't a viable enterprise, and until it was, we shouldn't be taking money out as if we were insiders with some special hold over the bank.

So, I was as knowledgeable as most of the guys. This one guy who became president, Lloyd Edwards, had had maybe five, six, seven years experience with a black savings and loan. Then he changed careers. He went to work for KSFO as an announcer. I used to hear his voice. I thought he was a white guy, and this was Lloyd Edwards. This was always his dream, to have a black bank in Oakland. Then another guy, Lewis Barnett, had a deep business background and he was the business manager for that cluster of black medical people out on Market Street, in North Oakland, and moonlighting on the side for twenty years, as a very successful Triple A insurance salesman. So, he had a good background. There was a Chinese guy who was an entrepreneur, mostly overseas connections—Fred Mok—and was really making inroads with Taiwan. He joined us for about four or five years, but I don't think he contributed much. We were being diverse but we never had a Latino. I think that the Latinos were starting to talk about their own savings and loan at that time, rather than a bank.

So, it was an interesting time. It was probably premature, but it showed, I guess, that we could legitimately operate. Our problem was that we didn't have stable leadership and we were undercapitalized and overextended. We might have made it with one downtown Oakland branch with about half that space, and with building more and more of a constituency and a relationship with small white businesses that might have used us out of their social consciousness. But to go to Post Street and to go to Berkeley with operations long before we had stabilized the original one, I think is what led to our demise. Well, that's the sad tale of most black financial institutions—undercapitalized and not being able to compete for mainstream business. So, it was a good experience. That's twenty-five man-years of financial institution experience.

Wilmot: You know, I wanted to ask you a question about—the boards of trustees of both University High School, in San Francisco, and also Head Royce School, which is my alma mater. I might be overstating this, but I think that they are the two preeminent private high schools in the Bay Area. I'm leaving out College Prep.

Smith: Yes, but certainly they were the preeminent co-ed. You also had Mt. Tam over in Marin. The site of University High had been a girls' school for fifty years, and I guess that the elite in the community finally decided that there ought to be a first-rate co-ed high school.

It is interesting how I got involved. One of these other things that's on here, which we haven't talked about, and may not talk about, is the Wright Institute. Maybe I mentioned it, but it was right across from the Berkeley campus. They were very interested in the experiential learning and field service experience. I got on that board, and after about five or six years, who should come on the board and become chairman, but Steve Swig of the Swig family, you know, the Fairmont Hotel chain. Steve was one of the young

guys who helped put together the package to form University High, raising money and getting clearances and all of that. He was still a bachelor and wasn't married for seven or eight more years, so he didn't have any kids in school, which was what most of the board members had in the early days, but not nearly as much as Head Royce, which is almost exclusively a parent board.

So, he asked me if I would be interested, and I said, "I'll think about it." I went over and talked to the guy who they just hired as headmaster, who incidentally had a wonderful second career. After about ten years there, he became the president of the James Irvine Foundation from which he just retired. So, I talked to Dennis Collins and we hit it off, and I accepted an appointment to the board, and I still have something on the wall as a founding trustee, back in 1975. I stayed on it for six years. I was getting a little weary of the time involved in long board meetings at night, and one or more committee meetings. So then I went off after five years. I could have stayed on indefinitely. Then they called me back about two years later, when they were having real problems getting their accreditation report together, and they brought me in basically for two years to work on that project with the committee, as an experienced old trustee. I did that, and then shortly thereafter, of course, I had the call from Paul Chapman, asking me if I would consider serving on the Head Royce School board.

Wilmot: This is Paul D. Chapman?

Smith: Yes. He had been the assistant head over there for about three or four years.

Wilmot: At University?

Smith: Yes, and had just gotten his doctorate at Stanford, and was a promising young administrator, so I came over and spent six years on that board. Or was it seven? I think that I committed to two three-year terms and then as I was about to leave, there were going to be no blacks on the board, so they asked me to stay on one more year, because they had difficulty recruiting blacks. One time there were three of us, and then when I left, I was the only one about to go off. I stayed on another year, and they were successful in bringing on two more blacks. That would have been an embarrassment after all those years to find yourself with no blacks on the board, just as the commitment to diversity was starting to pay off. They always had a least two Asians on the board. I think that I nominated the first Hispanic on the board, a woman who had worked with me at Berkeley. She served for a number of years.

I had mentioned the difference between the two boards, that over there, there was a high powered businessman's, corporate, rich-old-ladies board with few parents—maybe a fourth parents. Over here it was overwhelmingly parents, and it was just a different style of operating, because those San Francisco folks, unlike current parents, were never meddling in day-to-day operations. They didn't have kids coming home and telling them about problems on the campus like they did at Head Royce. In many ways, it was a more satisfying experience.

Wilmot: Head Royce was the more satisfying experience?

Smith: No, at University High.

The Summer Bridge program was my idea, and was based on the fact that during the last four of five years of my tenure at Berkeley, we conceived of this program that we called Summer Bridge, and almost all of the minority students and others who were interested were urged to come on campus for a six-week prep session, before their freshman year. We thought that it was pretty good and pretty effective, and then as I was talking to Dennis and others—maybe Paul—they were really facing a serious problem of outreach. There were very few blacks and Hispanics—a number of Asians—who could afford to come there, first of all. So, we conceived of the fact that we had to build our own farm mechanism. We decided to focus on the junior highs, now called middle schools. We identified five or six of them and had some pretty good outreach. Faculty members were participating, and before long we had a summer program.

We originally thought that it would be like Upward Bound, that we would have activities all throughout the year. We did have a little bit of that for the first couple of years, bringing kids on campus maybe twice a month, on Saturday, but the big stress was that six-week program in the summer. The emphasis was hiring some of our seniors and former students to come back as teaching aides. We then developed the whole program as a national program, I guess it is now, focused primarily on recruiting young people into the teaching profession. I got a lot of good publicity out of that. They still occasionally send me a notice of some program that is going on. They gave me an award before I left, too.

Had you ever heard of Summer Bridge?

Wilmot: Very much.

Smith: The Head Royce version of it here, I guess, was called—what did Paul call it here?

Wilmot: Heads Up?

Smith: Heads Up.

Wilmot: Yes, I just wanted to check in with you about University High. You said it was maybe a quarter parents who were on the board of trustees there. I wanted to ask you, what is it that brings people who are not parents at that high school to want to serve in that capacity, as a board member?

Smith: What is it about them, or how did they get to be on the board?

Wilmot: How did they get to be on the board? Why do they want to do that work?

Smith: First of all, the average person would have been fifty, fifty-five, instead of thirty-five, forty. Many of them had been parents. There were a few wealthy wives of businessmen who I guess were chosen to be the family representatives on this new venture, and they were big money givers. The head really reached out to get a good cross-section of the corporate community. Swig, for example, who chose not to work in the family business, was with one of the largest Jewish law firms over there, which had all of the hotel chain's business, but he chose not to, like his brother and nephew, be in the actual business. He was very powerful young man—only thirty-five or so at that time. One of the senior vice presidents of Levi Strauss was on the board. One of the guys who went

on to become one of the two or three top guys in the country in providing investor capital.

Wilmot: Venture capitalists?

Smith: Venture capitalists, down in Palo Alto—he was on there, a big money giver. Ray Dolby, the Ray Dolby from the sound system was on there. I think that his kids were older. He was already in his early fifties, but he came on just out of interest. He also wanted to stimulate the development of an improved system of technology there and was on the technology committee. People like that were on the board. Over here there were parents, and there was nobody in that top stratum of the East Bay's corporate world.

Wilmot: No Bechtels?

Smith: There was a Bechtel, Laurie Dachs. She was the granddaughter of old Stephen and the daughter of Steve, Jr., and the oldest child. She had a brother, and she was a housewife, but her husband was a young guy who went to work for them and became a senior vice president. Then her younger brother, Raleigh, actually became the CEO and chairman, replacing Steve Bechtel, Jr., who is my age. So, it was the old guy who would be about a hundred and five or six now, old Steve Bechtel who identified entirely with Oakland. And then Steve, Jr., and his son who may be fifty at best. The daughter was very, very effective, but not many people knew who she was, and she played it low key, but I'm sure they gave big money, and she had two or three children in the school. They lived in this big mansion out in Lafayette and often hosted parties at the end of the year. She was the closest thing to being identified with a major corporate entity or family. She never played off the Bechtel name at all.

Before I left we got a guy who was a vice president of Pac Bell who had just come out here from New York. He had a kid in school and sort of jumped at the preparation of being a member of the parents' club and was put on the board for his financial expertise. That's interesting. They insisted, of course, upon putting me on the minorities affairs committee they called it. I was chairman of that as well as the finance committee and the academic affairs committee.

Wilmot: How does somebody invite you to join? How does that communication occur?

Smith: Well, when I was appointed, I had a luncheon with the chairman who was a small businessman himself, an oil man who lived up here, but his family's enterprise was down in Bakersfield. He was an interesting guy. When I went to talk to him about the nomination, he expressed concern about the fact that they weren't making the progress that he thought they should make, and asked if I would serve and I said, "Yeah." When the time came, he nominated me to be the chairman of the minority affairs committee. At that time there was only one other black board member, Ed Blakely, who had been on a couple of years.

Wilmot: Yes, I went to school with his daughter.

Smith: Oh, did you? Ed, back in 1965, was a young research assistant in my human resources department, and then went back to graduate school, at UCLA, I think, where he got a doctorate in education. Ed was, at that time, floating up here. He was a member of the

Berkeley faculty. He had served on the board for about three years. He chose not to serve on minority affairs. He was on the academic affairs committee, which was fine, and really wasn't at all related to any thrusts that related to minorities. I wasn't surprised at that, incidentally.

Then, I served on it with two very liberal Jewish women who volunteered and had a real commitment. I wouldn't say missionary, but they really were serious people interested in affirmative action. Two other white women served on it, so at one point I was the only male and the only black, and there were about five or six women on the board. So, after two years of chairing it, I told the then chairman of the board that I thought that having me as chair didn't send strong enough message, that one of the white members ought to be chairman of that committee, but I would continue to serve.

In the meantime, my real interest beside that was finance, so I was on the budget committee for about three years. Then, I actually served on the academic affairs committee for maybe three years. Typically you were on two committees. For one session, I was on finance and budget and on academic affairs, while serving all the time on what became, I guess, the diversity committee instead of minority affairs committee.

Did you know the black woman who used to work with us who was the college advisor?

Wilmot: Sharon Johns? [now Cravano]

[tape interruption]

Wilmot: Can I ask you one question quickly about University and Head Royce? So, the benefit for representatives from corporations or old families—can you tell me what is the benefit for representatives?

Smith: Well, I think that it was a very prestigious, new enterprise and many of them had contributed money to get it started, to buy the building and to modify it. So they had a vested interest. Some of them had gone to Eastern prep schools and they wanted their children—their sons and daughters—I guess to go to a co-ed prep school. As I said, even the younger ones who were all corporate types who were not likely to be active in the parents' association at all. Women were overwhelmingly represented in the parents' association. Maybe a third or half of them came up through the parents' association. I guess at one time every parent association chairman sort of automatically ended up serving on the board. As I said, I thought that the advantage was that these folks really had a broad view of their responsibilities and never got involved in haggling little details, which I think that many of the people over here at Head Royce did, because they were still active parents. Whenever there was a crisis on the campus, Paul had to have a closed-door meeting with three or four parents who had kids who were directly or indirectly involved, whether it was smoking dope or whatever. Then he had to play it by ear with some of the really bad heads being the children of board members. If you had your druthers, you wouldn't want to have that many people on the board who were parents.

In addition to that, in San Francisco, this indicated what a community-wide image and outreach they had. Over here, we never could get any—other than that one Bechtel woman—Kaiser, Clorox type, not that there were that many in the nineties.

[tape interruption]

Wilmot: Well, now just to return, since we are now recording once again. I think that it would be great to start off—we were just having this interesting conversation about the Oakland Museum. Do you want to start there or do you have the different place you'd like to go first?

Smith: I probably expressed most of my feeling in there, but I'll say a few things about the Museum Association Board. I did spend quite a few years on there, in two stints. As I had said earlier, when they opened the new museum, this presented a golden opportunity to have it finally become a total community resource. That meant, at that time, having black identification. There were relatively few blacks who went to the museum. There were more white elementary kids from Lafayette and Orinda there than there were kids from Oakland, black or white. We convinced the first director who was a very fascinating guy who didn't last long though; he was too liberal. He went over to become director of the California Historical Society. He agreed with us that there ought to be a new presence, so he gave us the authority to screen and recruit for him and we picked this fellow, Ben Hazard, and brought him down from Nevada Reno University. He had been in Oakland and had a decent reputation as a sculptor, but he had no bureaucratic experience, so we had to really work closely with him and make sure that he didn't stray away from ideas like consultation and advice and base-touching, since we were largely a grassroots organization.

Even though I was the first chairman of the Cultural and Ethnic Affairs Guild, we had people from all over the city who were not bureaucrats and not high-profile people on that first board. My wife Mary was on it. Ruth Beckford, the dancer, was on it. So, after about a year or so, two years, we decided that we ought to do something special, and we started what we called Soul Day or something like that—Black Experience Day. That went on for about three or four years, and it was really an extravaganza. We took over the whole outside plaza, and it was really quite nice.

Then it became evident that film was a great interest to some of the people. Mary hadn't been heavily involved in that, but she became very interested in it. We found out that we couldn't do what we wanted to in that structure, so they created this Black Filmmakers' Hall of Fame entity and spun it off, but still with a close relationship with the museum. Still, today, when they have previews for emerging young screenwriters and the like, they still use the facilities without charge.

So, I was there during that evolutionary period, and then I went off to other things, and then eight or nine years later they reconstituted the Oakland Museum Association Board. That's what I was on. They reconstituted it in recognition that the city manager and the council decided that the director not only ought to report to the city manager, but that the so-called board was not really a board, but was advisory, and they appointed a super-commission that were all politically connected. So, I sat in on it for two years, and it was clear to me that that wasn't at the level of my interest. Port director Walt Abernathy served on it with me, incidentally, for a couple of years. Since that time, we've stayed in touch—Mary especially, since she came in to such heavy involvement about five or six years ago on the museum women's board.

We go to a lot of affairs. As I've said, we've made a will bequest to them and to KQED, so we get invited to every damn thing. Any time anyone is pouring cocktails, and doing anything at either of those two institutions, we get invited. That's nice. We don't want to overdo it. Every time they open a new show, for example, they have a wine tasting reception. We've been to several of those already. When they finally dedicated the new Shorenstein office building, the museum had a reception in the lobby for the whole community, but primarily for the museum people, and that was nice. I think that the museum is in pretty good shape. I really like the new director who came up from Santa Barbara. They've had some turnover. One of my favorite people is a guy who was there for twenty-five years as the history curator, Tom Fry, and he finally retired about three or four years ago. We had a common interest in Alfa Romeo sports cars.

But, I think it's relevant to the community and I think if you walk around there, you see a fair number of black people. There aren't many blacks in higher manager positions. I think that there's a woman who has something to do with human resources that I met recently, but in terms of the four major departments—art, history, education, and the social science areas—we haven't had a curator since Ben Hazard, and that was fifteen years ago. I enjoy working with them and will continue, primarily through Mary's involvement on the women's board.

Wilmot: Am I correct in saying that you were working on making the museum an organization that is more reflective of the Oakland community as early as 1970?

Smith: Yes. In 1968 when I went to Merritt, I just naturally gravitated towards more of that kind of black identity in the community. Not because I was at Merritt, but Merritt stimulated my interest in that phase of community development. Of course, I had had the stimulation for five years before. So, I was ready, and we had a black caucus, and I told you that I was a member of that, and was chairman of the defense committee when some of the guys acted up and got arrested for a school board sit-in. I had a pretty good leg up in terms of being recognized as somebody who had a track record. I'm not sure that I personally went out and did anything, other than this contribution of bringing Ben Hazard here. I continued to be involved as one of the few blacks on the museum board at that time. That was always the case. I told you that in some instances, you get appointed to the board of institutions when they've reached the point where they are becoming disasters, and others you get on when there haven't been blacks and you are appointed to kind of give the white power structure some feeling of comfort in finally not being criticized for being all white. I'd say my experience was about fifty-fifty.

But, the museum, as I said—getting Ben. And then being chairman for the first two or three years of that new entity, the Cultural and Ethnic Affairs council as we called it, which was the equivalent to each of the other departments, which also had a council—the art council and the history council, etc.

Wilmot: I wanted to ask you a little bit about your time with the Rosenberg Foundation, and I'm wondering if you can tell me how you came to be involved with the foundation while you were there. You were there for twenty years, as a member of the board of directors.

Smith: Yes, and chaired it for two years.

Wilmot: I'd like to know more about the work of the foundation and what you did while you were there.

Smith: Yes. I alluded to that briefly, but generally speaking, I was aware of the fact that this was a very prestigious, small, risk-taking foundation. It was because of that that I agreed to serve. I put together a proposal back in '68, fall, when I first went to Merritt to get a grant for what turned out to be the first college campus based childcare center in the state. In 1964, I got the first grant from them to start what we call the SAESIS program, the program for teenage pregnant girls, with five agencies coordinating their efforts, primarily through the YWCA and health and schools and recreation. So, this wonderful woman who was director for about twenty-five years, Ruth Chance, knew me. With those two projects behind me—and she thought that they were quite successful, and really were examples for other communities. When an opening came up in 1974, she nominated me as the first black member. She was really influential. It was a really powerful board. Really top people in the corporate structure, including Peter Haas of Levi Strauss who was on for about eight or nine years with me. I could mention four or five of those names. The wife of the president of Stanford, Jing Lyman, was on there. For almost twenty years, the current dean of Boalt Law School, Herma [Hill] Kay was on there. I was the first black, but before I went on there, they had a Latino, Herman Gallegos, who had been on for about a year or two. He was a very influential and important guy in the community. He helped found the first statewide Hispanic institution, equivalent to the NAACP. He went on to a wonderful career on corporate boards—Pac Bell and two others. I saw him a week or so ago, and he's retired now and having some physical problems.

So, then I came on and he was on, and for a long time we were the only two minorities. He went off because he went over to the San Francisco Foundation, much larger. Now, this was a small foundation started in the 1930s by Max Rosenberg's brother and family. Max Rosenberg never married or had a family, but he ran the largest dry fruit business in the country. So, when he died in the thirties, they formed this foundation and made a commitment fundamentally to the underclass, and to correcting some of the ills of society with a primary focus on health and community org and, in later years, administration of justice. Then, of course by the time I was on, they had a very heavy focus on childcare and a variety of things.

Ruth Chance, of course, was a real innovator. She started her career back in '45 or '46 with the newly formed Ford Foundation. A distinguished woman, the first [female] graduate of Boalt Hall and was first in her class, and married a man who was second in her class. That was interesting.

Later on, we added Cruz Reynoso when Herman left. He, of course, was at that time a member of the state supreme court, until he was recalled in that big turmoil over the woman who was chief justice. Two people who were friends of mine got recalled as a result of [Chief Justice] Rose Bird being given the position. I think that Jerry [Brown] would tell you today that it was a mistake. She had never been anything but a public defender down in Palo Alto. He not only puts her on the supreme court, which would have been a fantastic move, but makes her the chief. She just didn't have the management skills, personal relationships. It wasn't long before it was clear that she was vulnerable.

Unfortunately, when they put the item on the ballot to recall her, they also put the other two liberals whose terms expired at the same time—Joe Grodin, who is one of my tennis-playing buddies and teaches over at Hastings Law School in San Francisco, and Cruz Reynoso, two outstanding guys who were wiped off the board. Allen Broussard would have been, except his term didn't expire at that time. He stayed on for another two or three years, but he got tired of being the only liberal on the board, so he finally retired. He probably would have been recalled if he stayed. This is Reagan and post-Reagan, Deukmejian time, and it was not a good time for the state.

So, anyhow, it was a prestigious board and very innovative and creative. They took on an early interest in the development of the Latino community, more so than urban and black communities. I challenged them a little bit on that direction. But they were known throughout the country by Ford Foundation and others who hadn't got their feet wet, as the example of a foundation that really took risks and that did interesting things. Back in the thirties, when it was first created, one of the members of the board was the niece of Rosenberg, and she evidently was very heavily involved in progressive leftist events. She got called up before the House Un-American Activities Committee in the fifties. Everybody, I guess at that time, was worried about the image that that would give the foundation, but they survived it and went on to even greater recognition. It was small. I think when I left they had only \$50 million. They have \$70 million now with that thrust, or they are back down to \$50 million. The same year I went on, they appointed Kirk Wilson as the director. He's been there for twenty-eight years. He was a young guy who worked on a rural health development programs down in the valley. Ruth knew him and the board knew of him, so he was an excellent selection. My only problem with him is that he should have left a long time ago and applied for the San Francisco or Irvine jobs, one of the big foundations, where he could have had a greater impact. But he is a nationally known person in community organization and rural health and development.

Wilmot: So, I thought I heard you say that while you were on the board of the foundation, you kind of tried to push the funding priorities closer to urban communities of color.

Smith: Yes, they had an urban thrust, but it was the poor generally in the underclass, which included a variety of people. American Indians was one of their interests. I'm trying to think of what they did that was specifically black. It is difficult to remember anything that wasn't just in Oakland, focused on Oakland with some indirect effect upon blacks. As I said, they got involved with childcare, which had some impact, but there weren't that many black organizations applying. That was about the time that the Chicano community was really getting organized. When MALDEF [Mexican-American Legal Defense and Educational Fund], their NAACP, got started with outstanding leaders that first ten years, they started really moving in the foundation field. Just as I was leaving, Rosenberg got heavily involved in immigration matters. When the first legislation went through about 1987, '88, allowing all illegal immigrants of a certain status to become citizens, the first authorization, we must have made \$5 million worth of grants to organizations throughout the state, to help those folks prepare themselves to become citizens and to learn the mechanisms that had to be dealt with.

One of the interesting things was that we had made two grants down in San Diego on the border with San Isidro, and the director decided one day that after all of these years of talking about it, we should go down and see what was happening, so all seven of us, I think, went down one night, late afternoon. We met first with the two or three agencies

that were giving support to these new immigrants. Then, at about eleven o'clock, they took us out in the dark with a group of border patrolmen and went over to the area where everybody sneaks in every night—something like a hundred every night would come in, and they would let them go and they'd be back three or four days later. That was my first experience with this device that would allow you to see things in the dark. They really had high tech equipment. The shocking thing was that the night we were down there, about fifteen Asians came across the border from Mexico. We were given a breakdown, and there were Chinese and Iranians and people who clearly weren't Mexican who had simply come into Mexico, easy access, and then infiltrated the north. The next day we spent the whole day again with the agencies, but that was one of our most interesting treks.

Wilmot: While you were at the foundation, were there other projects that stand out in your mind?

Smith: Well, I think that childcare was one of my favorites, since I had been a pioneer in that effort. During that time, they funded this most popular group—maybe you've heard of it—called Bananas. Bananas got its first support from Rosenberg way back thirty years ago.

Some of the programs that we thought were critical enough we gave long-term support to, like Bananas. We might have given recurring grants for maybe ten years. There was something called Radio Bilingue, the first Mexican radio station in the state, down in Fresno. We gave them money for maybe ten, twelve years. Now the guy who is the director of it is on the board, a Harvard Law School graduate who came back to get this entity going. Now, of course, they produce Spanish language things that go all over all of the state, and some of which go into Mexico to find out what is happening with the Mexico community here. So that was one of my favorites too. And childcare.

We made very few grants to black organizations or individuals and the one that we made, to Oakland public schools for staff development and support, disappointed me. We made it in the wake of Marcus Foster's assassination, partially to help the administration deal with the trauma of following an assassinated superintendent of schools. I wasn't in the position to speak out against it as the only black on the board, but I did force the director to finally give us an accounting for what happened, since part of the grant was not spent.

Wilmot: I want to ask you one general question. I think that we have to close for today. I know that we are close to your time.

Smith: I've got to eat.

Wilmot: I know. [laughs] I look at the range of the community engagements and the contributions of time to these different organizations and the variety of them—

Smith: Averaging maybe three or four or five during that period from about 1972 to 1982 when I retired.

Wilmot: If you can tell me, what is the thread going through these? I'm really intrigued by what seems to be your philosophy around civic engagement, because you are incredibly

engaged, incredibly connected to this community, to Oakland, and also to the larger Bay Area. I wanted to ask, what has this meant to you? Why did you pursue these?

Smith: Well, first of all, I was apprehensive as being designated as a community leader. I like to work behind the scenes, going back to that little assignment with the East Bay Democratic Club. I never was going to run for office; I lived in Montclair; I didn't live in any target area. But I also would remind you that all of these opportunities came to me. The only thing that I ever applied for, incidentally, was when there was an opening on the board of AAA, and I applied and got an interview, and the CEO appointed one of his service club buddies.

But all of these other things just came to me and that gave me stimulation that I really was seen as somebody who could make a contribution. Many of them were the old pioneer—first in this board and first in that. I didn't mind that as long as—I never was likely to flaunt it. Then there really was kind of an interesting metamorphosis. The big change was leaving the county schools office and going to work for the city manager, and then from there to OEO, Merritt and Berkeley.

All of these were really expansions of my experience in trying to be helpful in enriching the black experience. I think I can say that. I took some risks with groups that were a little radical and irresponsible, but even there I felt that I should do it—San Quentin and the black caucus and even jumping into the maelstrom of trying to make this black bank work. I didn't need any of those things. In fact, I lost about \$60,000 in the bank as it turned out. Although I had a tax write-off. I could write off about \$4,000 or \$5,000 a year, so I had a nice ten- to twelve-year write-off of losses.

That was one of the few things that I was disappointed in. Even the sixteen years at the Berkeley co-op's institution was more satisfying to me, because it was more of a family. This other one was just these six guys who decided there ought to be a black bank, and we went in and I wouldn't have recommended it if I were calling the shots. But my other three guys who were working with me on a possible other venture encouraged me to go, because none of them were going to take the time, and Lionel was a judge and Don McCullum was a prominent attorney and John Williams had his hands full, running the Redevelopment Agency. It was not too long after that that Williams got ill and died in '77, twenty-six years ago. He was one of my best friends. I was sort of godfather to his four daughters. One of them graduated from Berkeley in architecture. She was with Skidmore [Owings and Merrill] for about twelve, thirteen years. I was surprised that she left Skidmore as a senior planner and went with a small firm that was opening an office in San Francisco.

I guess my consciousness was always being expanded every time I took on a new responsibility. At the same time, my awareness of how unsolved so many of the problems were was what motivated me to continue wanting to be involved. I guess that is just what happened. Before I knew it, I had 120 man-years of service in all of these twenty activities. [referring to his CV]

Wilmot: I'm concerned that we haven't talked a great deal about the University Students' Cooperative Association (USCA).

Smith: Well, the portion of it that I was involved in was the Twin Pines Savings and Loan. I was a member of the co-op. My number was 3491, and they opened in 1939, and by 1951, they still only had 4,000 members. By 1970, they had 100,000 members. It was a thriving institution with six stores. Then we spun off the savings and loan. There isn't much to say other than what I told you about being committed to the traditional and real purpose of savings and loan, which was to fund single-family housing for working people. I never sought to be on the board of the co-op or to serve on their committees, but was recruited. They were sort of overwhelmingly a Berkeley progressive group during that time, so I trusted them to look out for my interests.

Wilmot: [laughs] I have a question for you. When you say that each of these experiences really expanded your awareness about how unsolved these problems in society really were, at the end of having done all of this community work and your professional career, which is very much embedded in the welfare of this community, do you feel that you've learned things about what are good solutions and strategies for dealing with those unsolved problems?

Smith: I thought a big step was taken when OEO came along with this concept of maximum feasible participation, which opened the doors to new careers and having the client population say something about the service agencies. That was a very important move.

It didn't accomplish a hell of a lot because in many ways, the agencies dragged their feet for years before they made any significant changes. Some of them hired blacks and Latinos almost right away on their lower level staff, but it was years after that. I guess that we could take credit for it, even though it was fifteen, twenty years later that you would see blacks in positions like the head of the probation department, three or four straight superintendents of schools, two or three straight police chiefs. I think that the stage was set for it back there in the mid-sixties, when first of all, there was such an oppressive white establishment and such an insensitive group of public service agencies from schools, to police, to probation. Health was about the only one that I had respect for, because they had an outstanding director, Jim Malcolm.

Then also, I hadn't mentioned but, I served for ten years on the board of the United Way, which was then called the United Bay (Council). The beginning of some cooperation between the private institutions that I got to know so well came through that crusade, and the fact that in our Ford project we began to involve some of them in working relationships. I'm saying that there were still so many unsolved problems of structure and of motivation of people, even though the opportunities were starting to appear. Some of them, like education, just sort of really depressed me. I think we made some progress at Merritt, but I was still impressed with the fact that the raw material, even coming to Merritt, an open access community college, from the high schools in Oakland was just horrendous. And at Berkeley [High School], as you know, there are two schools: there's this elite school that sends people to MIT, and then there is that black school that is still way off the track of adequate performance.

So, I continued to be confident that there was the making of a movement—not revolutionary, but evolutionary. When all of these people who took advantage of education—my generation coming out of World War II with educational opportunities and with the state universities and the Cal campuses really starting to reach out—I was a little bit confident. But I never, even when I retired, felt that many of my specific goals

for what should happen had been achieved. I guess that I held my hopes too high that some of these things would be overnight successes and would open doors.

I am impressed with how many people in the black community are of middle-class status now. I recognize the image of far East Oakland and West Oakland is not any longer the standard by which you can judge the black community. I also am sensitive to the fact that a lot of middle-class people who struggled themselves to get out of the ghetto, and to get away from unstable lives, are just not inclined to look back and go back and work in those communities. Fifty years ago they had to, because they couldn't live anywhere, except among their people. Now, as soon as they can get out, some of them move. I'm impressed with the fact that some of them are starting to come back to Oakland. We have had two or three friends who lived out in Orinda and Lafayette who came back to Oakland in their fifties, but they didn't come back before their children were out of school and in college. So, it has been a wonderful ride.

Wilmot: Definitely. Well, for today let's close.

Smith: Yes, I'm going to be interested in seeing how you cover so many of those nuances and details, while not forgetting that the *raison d'être* is my life experiences, rather than the detailed expressions of what my participation were. I'm saying that because I have read three or four of these oral histories, and I don't think that any of them go into anything like the detail about the life experiences of these folks. Almost all rather are homey indications of how they emerged and became professionals with some of the difficulties and roadblocks were, and how they overcame them. Lionel, for example, doesn't go into great detail about the structure of the judicial system, the changes that took place during his ten years on a local court. I guess that you and Gabrielle Morris have different styles. All I'm reading now is the little sixteen-page summary.

Wilmot: I've read some of Gabrielle Morris's interviews in depth, the volumes, and she spends a lot of time—especially with the Lionel Wilson ones—

Smith: On details?

Wilmot: Yes, especially with the Lionel Wilson one. She actually was really asking very pointed questions around the judicial system.

Smith: And he responded willingly to them?

INTERVIEW 5: AUGUST 29, 2002

Wilmot: So, today's date is August 26, and this is interview number five with Dr. Norvel Smith. Can you say a few words for me, please?

Smith: [sings] You didn't know I was a frustrated singer and radio announcer, did you?

Wilmot: Well, you have a very distinctive voice. You could very easily be a radio announcer.

Smith: Yeah, if I'd thought of it earlier.

Wilmot: What was that you were just singing?

Smith: An Italian aria from Puccini. It just came to me—funny.

Wilmot: There was a question I wanted to ask you. What benefit to you was it to serve on the boards of trustees of foundations and private schools?

Smith: Well, first of all, I have to admit that the examples you just gave were prestigious. I mean, University High was the place where the elite of San Francisco was prepared to send their children, now that they had a co-ed facility. The board members were an illustrious group of civic and corporate leaders, so I felt privileged to be part of that group there. And again, in the early stages at least, the only black—so I thought it was recognition on their part that the city had a little diversity, and that they should at least have some nominal amount. The other one—you said Rosenberg?

Wilmot: Uh-huh.

Smith: Well, Rosenberg, of course, was also very prestigious, and again, I backed into that. I think that for both of these boards I was nominated by colleagues who were seeking to bring some diversity to the two boards. I would never have had any direct access to Rosenberg, even though the director had made two grants that I had proposed. I was known, but I'm not sure in those days not many grantees were put on the board, because they were trying not to have conflicts between the interests of people who had received and might receive money in the future. I had left both of the job sources that produced both of those grants—the city anti-poverty program and the job at Merritt College where I got that childcare grant.

So, prestige, and being recommended by good friends who I have respect for, with whom I had worked on other matters. I think that I mentioned University High. I was recruited by Steve Swig, who is now the fifty-two- or fifty-three-year-old son of the famous Swig brothers, with a real estate empire in San Francisco. We were on the board of Wright Institute. I had been on for several years. He was a newcomer. He came on and we sort of hit it off. We weren't social friends, but he told me about the new University High venture, and he also was anxious to get somebody on who was an educator, because they were all businessmen and some parents. There was no one at that point who was a practicing educator, except for me and the director, Dennis Collins.

I felt that both of them were gratifying experiences, otherwise I wouldn't have stayed on Rosenberg for twenty years. I thought about staying on, but I got to the point that they

really need some new blood. In addition to that, there were a couple of other people who had been on longer than I had, and I was trying to send them a message that maybe it was time for them to step down, too, and let some new blood come on after twenty years. I also, incidentally, knew the director who had just come on the year I was appointed, as well as knowing the famous director who had made those grants to me.

Wilmot: When you speak about new blood, in what ways did you feel that the agenda needed to shift?

Smith: Well, I just felt that it was sort of clubby, you know—people who had been together and we had all expressed our points of view, and we were all over fifty. And by that time we had a fully diverse board. We had a Hispanic former [state] supreme court justice, Cruz Reynoso, and we had an Asian, Bill Hing, who was a professor at Stanford Law School. And we had a majority of women at the time that I left—maybe six women out of eleven.

Wilmot: I wondered if you could talk to me a little bit about your work with Alta Bates Hospital where you served on the board of trustees from 1976 to 1988. How did that occur?

Smith: That was one of my longer stints. It was interesting too how it evolved. When I went to Berkeley in '73, the student health service reported to me, and of course, it had always been a part of student affairs. I also had one or two involvements with some people from the law school. I don't know what the project was, but one of them, a grand old man who had himself retired and been on the board for maybe eight or ten years, called me up and said that UC Berkeley had always had somebody on the board, an administrative staff person. He was leaving and asked me if I'd be interested in serving. I said I'll think about it. I told him that I was a life long Kaiser member, and hadn't had much experience with private medicine, but he thought that that was okay. I went on there again as the first black member until maybe six, seven years later, when they merged with Herrick [Hospital], which was always seen as the black or minority hospital compared to the white Alta Bates. When that merger took place, mainly because Herrick was failing financially, two more blacks physicians then came on the board. When I left, I guess that there were at least two, if not three. The chairman of the medical staff was a black obstetrician who I got to know fairly well.

It was interesting. I was having some relative experience by that time dealing with the student health service at Berkeley, which always had a hospital, which we didn't need. Cowell Hospital was still called the hospital instead of the student health center. We rarely had any inpatients, because if there was anybody who really required inpatient care, we had a contract with the two hospitals in Berkeley to send them there. At the same time, we were registered with the state for something like thirty-five or forty beds, which we didn't need, but which we controlled. At one time there was some talk about Alta Bates actually buying those beds at something like \$10,000 a bed, because they reached the limit with the state in terms of what they were authorized.

So, it was interesting. There were some other overlaps. All of the senior members of the staff at the health service were either Alta Bates or Herrick people—but one or two of them were also people who were still serving on the board of Alta Bates, so I had that kind of relationship. It was very collegial. I had great interest, and of course, I was also stimulated by the fact that these folks were so anti-Kaiser. You know, they were still

talking the old bullshit about socialized medicine and no real interest in patients. Of course, I knew better because I had been, by that time, a member for twenty years. I would sit there, listening to all of that stuff, and quietly fuming sometimes. It got a little better, but the medical staff in particular, if not the lay people who were half of the board, always saw Kaiser as a threat, because if there was ever a successful HMO in the country it was Kaiser Permanente.

The interesting thing is that twenty years later, just a couple of years ago, Alta Bates was struggling when Kaiser was told by the state that they had to replace that Oakland hospital in eight years, and they decided to farm out the OB-GYN and the live births to Alta Bates, which had a good program. Well, that bumped them up from about 65 or 70 percent occupancy to about 90, you know—it really saved them. I always got a kick out of the fact that their old nemesis ended up saving them twenty years later.

I was heavily involved with the community advisory committee, which dealt with a very active group of people around the hospital who were very concerned about the continued growth of the hospital facility. Julie Shearer was the leader of that Bateman Neighborhood Association, as they called it. I think that there were two of us who were on the Alta Bates board who were the liaison with this group, who would rant and rave and really raise hell. I remember going to a couple of the meetings where it just got so outrageously hostile that I decided right then and there that our paid—very highly paid—executives ought to be sitting there taking that flack rather than the members of the lay board. In fact, I got up one night and said, you know, “I belong to Kaiser. I’m not really related to this hospital, except as a university representative, and I’m sixty-five years old and I don’t have to take this crap.” So, I walked out. I subsequently got off of that community relations committee, and staff had to start sending their people in. That’s what the people wanted anyhow. They didn’t want to deal with anyone who didn’t live in the neighborhood or really had no management responsibility. So, they didn’t want to deal with anybody who was just a cosmetic representative of the board.

But, it was interesting. While I was there, they created one of the non-Kaiser HMOs, which was started, I guess, around 1980. It was called HEALS, which was Herrick-Alta Bates. It was a fledgling operation. There were two or three others about the same size in the East Bay. I was one of four members of the board who were also serving on the HEALS board of directors. That was interesting, but stressful, because for the convenience of the physicians they always met at seven o’clock in the morning, because they wanted to leave at nine o’clock. I didn’t mind being there at seven, except I was still working, and I was already putting in a nine-, ten-hour day. So, I guess that’s all I need to say about Alta Bates.

You mentioned one of my prize involvements, the Oakland Ensemble Theater, which Mary and I and a couple of the black faculty at Merritt started, including the guy who was the black drama person.

Wilmot: What were their names?

Smith: One of them had been a teacher at Tech High, where two or three of our faculty members came from because they were good people, and the age differential wasn’t that great. A hell of a lot of the students from Tech came to Merritt. In fact, all of the young Panther types came from Tech High. Ron Thompson was his name—Ron Stacker

Thompson. He went on to be rather professionally successful down in Los Angeles, and spent about fifteen, twenty years down there. Then about two or three years ago, he was recruited by Maya Angelou to come to Winston-Salem, North Carolina, where she has been for ten, twelve years. He is now teaching black drama, not at her university, but at the black university there, Winston-Salem State. I guess he's enjoying it. He is now a man maybe in his mid-sixties and I suspect he will probably come back to California.

In any event, Ron was interested in doing something in the community. I was interested in doing something in the community to tap this reservoir of black artistic talent and interest. So, we got ahold of one of those old buildings that are now part of Preservation Park. At that time there were only about six of them there, and then they brought in another six or eight and made a cluster of them. This one was there just a door away from the new black museum, right there on the corner of Fourteenth and Martin Luther King, Jr., Way.

And it was really an old piece of junk. I don't know—the city, I guess, owned it. We raised a little money, fixed it up. The city put a little money into fixing it up, because they saw some interest too, in having an indigenous residential theater. At that time, this thing over on Alice Street didn't exist. Other than the white drama groups, there really was nothing. So we got started, and Ron put in a lot of time on it. His wife was an actress and worked with him. He brought in people like Danny Glover, who was just a young guy out of San Francisco State who was acting around San Francisco, very marginal. I remember the first thing he did was one of Athol Fugard's plays about South Africa. So he came over, and there were two or three other young people who went on to professional careers. None of them, of course, achieved the fame that Danny did. My Mary is still pretty close to Danny. He's on the board—honorary board of Black Filmmakers' Hall of Fame. Last year he put up ten thousand bucks, when Black Filmmakers was doing a preview of this terrific new film on Ralph Bunche's life. They had the privilege of doing the West Coast preview over in San Francisco and he subsidized it, ten thousand bucks for it.

Wilmot: The director of that film was [William] Bill Greaves?

Smith: Yes, a friend of Mary's in New York who was involved with her for years in black film affairs. He's a distinguished guy. He's probably produced forty or fifty of these documentaries.

Wilmot: I was wondering who the second faculty person was from Merritt who helped put together Oakland Ensemble Theater. You mentioned two.

Smith: Yeah, I'm trying to think of it, too. I'm not sure that anyone else played the leadership role. There were three or four members of the faculty that joined us as volunteers cleaning the place and being stagecraft assistants and all of that, but nobody played the role that Ron played. There was just this one person in black drama at that time. OET went on for about six or seven years. We had a little board of directors that I chaired for two or three years, and brought in some of my friends, a lawyer—young lawyer who gave us some pro bono help and who is married to one of Mary's cousins. I guess we had one white person on the board, I forget, an Oakland school teacher. It looked like it was going to go very well.

About the same time that it was starting, a black theater started over in San Francisco, which still exists, named after the black playwright Lorraine Hansberry.

But both theaters have been marginal and neither of them had a space that they could call their own. Shortly after that, we were sort of ushered out of the building because they were starting to finalize the concept of Preservation Park and turning it into commercial office and community space. But in the building that we were in, they still have their largest auditorium that might seat a hundred, a hundred fifty people, sort of like we had. It wasn't theater in the round, but it was small, and I guess it was below the minimum that you have to have to be considered a professional operation.

So, it was very gratifying; we got a lot of publicity, and I would say that every year or so, we would have a really bang-up production. Not all of them drew a lot of people, but the things on South Africa did, and we did some black adaptations of Broadway show plays. I really enjoyed it, but like everything else that is marginal, under-financed and relying entirely on volunteers, it was vulnerable. We never had a stipend to pay a director, and if we did we wouldn't have been able to afford anyone full-time.

Wilmot: Why was it one of your favorite commitments?

Smith: Well, because I had this longtime interest in helping it develop and improve the Oakland environment. It changed the image of Oakland. It was following up really on my activity and interest in the Oakland Museum. This was maybe three or four years later—no, about the same time. The new museum I think opened in '69, and this period was '67, '68, '69. They were running on my same stream of interest.

Wilmot: Last time we talked, I asked you this question of why have you been engaged in the way you've been engaged in this community. You gave me a response, and your response was about enriching the black community. That's where your response was focused. I had a question which is, when you think about where you are going to commit yourself, how do you choose organizations that would be—how do you choose which organizations make it into your life? What are your criteria for what are good vehicles for impact?

Smith: Now, remember, if you look at my resumé, I was recruited for almost all of these boards. Oakland Ensemble Theater was one of those where I, with Ron's encouragement, really took the leadership in putting the program together, getting a board of directors and negotiating with the city to have use of the space and all of that. So that was kind of one of my babies. I can't think of any other. The other thing that you realize is that I was really stretched. Many times I was doing six or seven things at a time while carrying on important management responsibilities at Merritt College and at Berkeley. I think that one of the criteria that I used was that I couldn't really get too heavily involved with fly-by-night operations that didn't have adequate staff and that didn't have viable boards of directors. Now, both of those I violated by getting involved with Oakland Ensemble Theater, but all of the rest of them had professional staff and a track record of boards that really were, in fact, the governing boards of these organizations. The UC Young Musicians Program was another one that I got involved in, and they had staffing from a full professor in the school of music. Head Royce, Monterey Institute—yeah, they are a fantastic group of organizations that had tremendous track records and—except for the financial institutions—still today are very

vital. The Museum Association, the Rosenberg Foundation, University High, the Port of Oakland—all in the vanguard of those fields—Alameda County Retirement Board, one of the big three or four in the state and successful Monterey Institute, an international institution, and of course, Kaiser Permanente Senior Advisory Committee, although my involvement there is nominal. The outstanding example of a not-for-profit HMO, and the institution that I attribute my good health to after all of these fifty years as a Kaiser member.

Wilmot: It seems to me that you live a pretty healthy lifestyle as well.

Smith: Well, Kaiser probably had something to do with that, because their focus was on living and eating right. I gave up cigarettes way back in '59, partly because they were getting expensive, but also because I got really crocked one night at a New Year's Eve party. I didn't get sauced, but I had a couple or three drinks, and the people who gave the party didn't serve any food until midnight, so I was sitting there for three hours with no food on my stomach and smoking. I felt so bad that I just gave it up. I never smoked another cigarette. Somebody—I think my Italian teacher—gave me a present of a little package of Dutch Panatelas (cigars) for Christmas. Well, I let them sit around there for a month or so, and then I decided to try them without inhaling, and I got hooked on them. So, for about ten years I got these little Dutch Panatelas shipped to me from a specialty house in Tampa, Florida, but I basically didn't inhale. Then, when I got to Berkeley I had to give that up, because I would try to smoke in a staff meeting or something, and they were ready to run me out of the meeting room, even if I was the head of the unit. I finally gave that up, I guess about twenty years ago.

Wilmot: That's good. I wanted to ask you a question. When you mentioned Merritt, it brought back to me the issue of black studies. I just read your piece on it.

Smith: I didn't realize that I had written anything on that.

Wilmot: You wrote a piece and you gave it to me.

Smith: I was invited, I guess, to some organization. The image was that Merritt was in the vanguard and might just be cesspool of black studies, so I had an obligation to point out that it was becoming a legitimate discipline. Oh, it was the Western Institute of Higher Education.

Wilmot: It really focused on kind of some practical aspects of bringing a black studies curriculum to a place where there wasn't one before, and I thought that was very significant.

Smith: Of course, I always saw it not as a specialized avenue to a professional career, but as essentially as part of general education. It started with the tremendous interest of black students, but I aspired to having it—maybe not all of it—but two or three of the strong courses made a part of the social studies and the humanities curriculum. I think we made a lot of progress towards that, but then it reverted back into just being kind of a crutch for some black students who weren't disciplined enough to see that black studies wasn't going to give them a career. It might enrich their lives and it might help bring some of their white colleagues along with a greater understanding and concern for the black condition, but they had to go mainstream.

When I got to Berkeley in '73, it was about seven or eight years after the start of the whole black consciousness movement around the Bay Area, and the start of the program at Merritt that fall of '68, spring of '69. By 1973, of course, the programs were just proliferating all over. Berkeley, largely as a result of the impetus of Merritt, and with a lot of the young Merritt students who somehow with our encouragement—I told you about this concurrent enrollment program—got linked up with Berkeley and were admitted, and became sort of the vanguard for wanting black studies. And Berkeley was responding really defensively. For two or three years, it was kind of a joke. Then they started getting some real scholars in there. Even today, it's the only one of the minority program disciplines that is recognized as a legitimate major in letters and sciences. The others are all lumped together under something called ethnic studies, because they never really saw the advantage of going mainstream. They used it more as a crutch than the blacks did. The Asian students, I don't know why, because they didn't need any crutch with their high performance and motivation. The Latino students I think for quite a while were hung up in that crutch, and I was never impressed with too many of the faculty members—one or two maybe, but the rest of them, I think, were never going to make mainstream professorships. Two or three of the black studies people had joint appointments, and maybe even more now have joint appointments. That was another problem at Berkeley. As they started to expand the black faculty, getting some of those genuine, legitimate black academic types to even want to teach a course or become identified with African American Studies was difficult.

Wilmot: Why do you think that was?

Smith: Well, I suppose you could say that all of them, if they qualified to come to Berkeley as a ladder professor, had strong academic backgrounds in white major universities and their experience was such that it turned them into Oreos. You know the Oreo cookie?

Wilmot: Yeah, I know the Oreo cookie.

Smith: That was a very common term. Turned them into black white men, who maybe rightfully saw that their careers were never going to be facilitated by anything as lightweight and as unrecognized as African American Studies. For example, I doubt if the guy in physics, or the guy in mathematics that you are talking with, or the guy in sociology, or the guy in anthropology who was graduate dean, or even Harry Edwards who was just sort of a pop athletic type figure on campus. I doubt if any of those ever taught a course in black studies.

Wilmot: For many of them it would be difficult to, because their disciplines were entirely science—

Smith: Well, they might have been an influence, though, in convincing the head of the Afro studies department that they should be seeking out people who, first of all, could carry their weight in their discipline, but who had an interest, and who shared the basic purpose of ethnic studies, which is to become a part of general education for all students, and not career training.

Wilmot: Do you remember having conversations with Harry Morrison about this?

Smith: No, I never talked to any of them about it. I just am remarking that as I think about it—and with Morrison, no one could have been more possessed by the whole concept of negritude and blackness than Harry. He's a good Virginia boy who crossed over to DC to get a decent high school education at one of the three black high schools, and went to Catholic University all the way through the PhD. He was a professor at the air force academy before he came to Berkeley. When I first met him at a social event, we started talking black stuff. Maybe I told you, he and I, and three or four other people started something called the Alain Locke Society. That was basically his idea, and his knowledge of Alain Locke as a distinguished humanist at Howard University, at the time he was over at Catholic U.

You would think, though, that the guy in sociology who was by then at least an associate professor, if not full, could very well have rendered a service by teaching a course within that context. Teaching it like it was his regular course, but giving some status to it as being taught by him, focusing on the black condition, but using all of the tools of academia to make it a mainstream presentation. And certainly the guy in anthropology. I think that maybe now there is a guy who has a joint appointment, John Ogbu, who is in anthropology, but also, I think has an appointment in African American Studies.

Wilmot: I just wanted to return to Merritt and ask you a question of—one of the things that you addressed in that speech that you gave was about how you kind of create a black studies department at the same time as kind of navigating resistance of the existing white faculty to a black studies concentration in black studies faculty. I wondered if you could speak to that a little bit.

Smith: You mean how you overcame the natural resistance of the white faculty, the overwhelming white faculty?

Wilmot: Well, if they were white, yes.

Smith: I knew of no black faculty members who defended black studies, and we have black faculty members other than in African American Studies—three or four in library science, English, psychology. But the white faculty were divided between those that had learned something there in that volatile environment in the midst of the Second Black Renaissance, if you call it that—the whole black consciousness movement of the early sixties—and who were willing to be, if not supportive of it, tolerant of it. And then there was always the hard-line group of people who just thought it was hype, and who thought my appointment was hype, and who thought that the creation of the department was hype. We just had to ignore those people. A good solid third of the white faculty were supportive of me, and a lot of those that weren't supportive had the wonderful opportunity when they opened the College of Alameda to get the hell out and go over to Alameda and get away from Merritt, which didn't bother me at all. But we had only one white faculty teaching a Afro-American course, John Dascarolis. I don't know if the students would have stood for that in the first place, but it would have been interesting to have some white historian on the faculty, maybe jointly teaching or giving a seminar with one of them, but history was the very first discipline that infiltrated the curriculum, going back maybe to the early sixties when a guy who was at Berkeley for a while, Kenneth Goode, who wasn't a faculty member, but he was some sort of functionary management person (he might have had something to do with EOP) wrote a book and was teaching a course on black history at Merritt as early as '65 or '66.

Wilmot: In the pamphlet, you were talking about how Melvin Newton, when he became the director of the black studies department—

Smith: No, I don't think that he was ever director during the time I was there, but he came in the second year I was there, he came on as a part-time evening faculty member. You know, he had a career. He'd already had six or eight years as a MSW social worker in the welfare department, but he may have eventually become department head, or maybe even division head when he moved to Laney ten, twelve years after that.

Wilmot: I may have read that wrong.

Smith: But he was important because he gave us the linkage with the most radical group in the community. And I think handled himself well. He even stopped wearing the black jacket after a while. When he first came he was a professional UC graduate, but he was also the treasurer of the Panther Party. I think he eventually moved away from that.

Wilmot: Where did you look for models for a black studies department?

Smith: Then or today?

Wilmot: Then.

Smith: Well, obviously I'm biased. I would have looked for a good, strong, mainstream black person in one of the disciplines like sociology or history or English literature to come in—maybe not leaving their regular job, but taking one course a semester and teaching something that was adapted to the new interests and the new awareness, while not completely divorcing himself from his or her department. That would have been my approach. The other thing that we had going for us was that at the high school level, for two or three years before Merritt's formalizing a program, there had been good strong teachers who had taken it upon themselves to teach something about the black experience in their courses. I don't think there was ever a course called black history at the high school level. There might have been at [Oakland] Tech, where the Panthers got started. We recruited two or three good people from tech high schools—Ron Thompson was an English instructor, but also taught the course in drama, and then adapted that to a special course in black drama. He had quite a track record when we hired him. So, some good, experienced, strong high school faculty would be a source, and trying to identify somebody on the faculty who was mainstream who could bridge the two disciplines.

Wilmot: At this time, was your wife Mary working at Oakland Tech?

Smith: Yes.

Wilmot: So, she also kind of witnessed the emergence of—

Smith: Yes, she went through some volatile times during that period there, during that period '67, '68, '69, when the Panthers got started and the kids were running around raising hell in the hallways. She always was fortunate that she always had a rather serious group of kids who really were into math. When the problems would take place around the campus, she would, I suppose, round them up and make sure that they were in her classroom rather than running around the campus getting in trouble. She put me in

touch with a couple of these good black faculty members that I'm talking to you about. She had been there since '62, so she had six or eight years of background there as a mainstream math and science teacher.

Wilmot: What role has she played in your career?

Smith: In my career? You mean my professional career or not my life?

Wilmot: Well, you can speak to both if you like.

Smith: Well, obviously we were very compatible and fifty-one years together, and tolerating all of the little problems that enter into a relationship. We've been successful in doing that—respect for each other and enjoying many of the same elements of our lifestyle. We like cinema, we like tennis, music. I suppose she wasn't quite as interested in a lot of the overseas travel that I sort of forced us into.

But, in terms of my professional career, first of all, remember we came out in '51 and I spent two years and three summers full-time getting most of my work out of the way in being advanced to candidacy. She came with an MS and dropped out after a year. I don't know whether it was because the program in ed psych wasn't that much of interest to her, or she sensed that we needed some income to keep us going. I was also working part-time on any number of small jobs. So, she made that sacrifice and encouraged me, and always felt that I had the capacity and the potential. She never discouraged me from any of these things that came up. She was having a successful career after that, over in San Francisco, where she stayed for almost ten years, from '53 to '62, and then came over to Tech High School for her last twenty years or so, with the last three being up at Lawrence Hall of Science on leave from her assignment at Tech, where the MESA program got started under her direction. She's always seemed to enjoy the role of being involved indirectly with the things that I'm involved with. We went to a lot of conferences together. When I was on Rosenberg, almost every year I would go to the national conference of the Association of Funds and Foundations. She would go with me around the country. We had so much in common, and we were so compatible that I never really had any strain in trying to deal with all of these little fingers that I stuck into these various activities.

Wilmot: It sounds like she very much supported you.

Smith: Yeah. And then, of course, when I retired, I continued on four or five of these boards, but about the time we retired, her career really took off with this expansion of the MESA program, and she has served on the statewide MESA board for twenty years or so. She actually served for a couple of years up at Lawrence Hall of Science as the program director under a guy who was executive director and handled all of the logistical and fundraising and all that, but Mary was the person who related to the teachers and the counselors in the field. And I think it would have been interesting if she had had the interest and taken the time to do some writing on this. But then she got involved with the Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame program, and likes to play tennis, and the last five or six years with the business at the museum, and serving on the boards of a variety of other programs. She served and chaired the board of the Junior Center of Art and Science in Oakland. She served on the board of Potluck, the first dramatic program of getting food from restaurants and purveyors that could be turned over to

homeless serving organizations. Her resumé would be a pretty rich one also. Of course, as I said, we sort of took turns serving on the Oakland Museum board.

Wilmot: I have three more questions for you for today. The first question actually goes back to—I was just thinking about this and I realized you were in graduate school getting your degree in education administration at the same time that in 1954, the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision was handed down. And I wonder, how did that impact your horizon and what you saw for the field of education broadly. It's kind of a broad question, but I'm wondering about that.

Smith: Well, I never really related to that. In '54, I had just taken that job back over here in the county school department and all of my time and interest and energy went into that, while at the same time taking two years to write my dissertation. So, I knew what was going on, and I guess, like many people in California never saw—never thought—that it was relevant to California. You know, we didn't have *de jure* segregation, and blacks by that time, ten years after World War II, were really making progress and getting into decent jobs, and going in large numbers to colleges and universities. If I gave it any thought, I would have seen it as a Southern phenomenon, rather than something that directly impacted California. Therefore, it did not enter into much of my consciousness.

I was always aware of the fact that—starting with my one year down in Texas, even before the '54 [decision], there were two or three admissions cases that related to colleges and universities, including the University of Texas—the Sweat case—and one in Oklahoma. So, three years before the elementary/secondary action, there had already been some college precedence set, and I was aware of that. But, I didn't really become that involved, Nadine, I guess until about '57 or '58, after I had been working in the county schools office for three or four years, and started having some relationship with other young and middle-aged professional men, primarily through this group called Men of Tomorrow, which I told you about. They were so lightweight that I was chairman my second year. At that time, of course my focus then shifted to local grassroots politics, working with Byron Rumford's organization, and being involved, as I told you, in political education, which I took on as an assignment for our little action group, and voter registration where I got rather heavily involved for a couple of years. So, by that time, then you're talking about 1960, '61 or '62 when the sit-ins in the Carolinas started the second evolution of civil rights developments for blacks. I wasn't moved or identified at all with what I thought was a Southern problem. I'm not sure if I were still in Philadelphia at that time I would have seen it, because I had never known a segregated school. I had never had a black teacher, even though the three big ghettos were pretty tightly structured as all black around the town, but blacks hadn't really made any progress in getting into teaching and social work and those other things until after World War II.

Wilmot: I'm wondering then also, you were vice chancellor of student affairs at Berkeley in 1977 when the *Bakke v. University of California* decision was handed down. And I'm wondering if that had any reverberations in your work as someone who is concerned with access and outreach?

Smith: First of all, it was pretty much focused on graduate professional schools. There hadn't at that time been any bringing of it down to the undergraduate level. In addition to that, I already knew a half dozen or so black friends and colleagues who'd gone to Boalt, and I

just assumed that with that cadre of alumni and Berkeley's liberalism that it really wasn't going to affect Berkeley as much as it did Davis. The earlier case was up in the University of Washington, the *De Funis* case, which was maybe two years before the *Bakke* case. I guess those were also the years when our expansion of black and Latino enrollment was blossoming. It doubled or tripled in the nine and a half years that I was there. By the time I left in '82, we hadn't had our good regent friend in Sacramento's brilliant leadership to bring about the white revolution in higher education. You know, our friend Ward Connerly, who was in back of all the efforts to eliminate affirmative action and to pretend that it is a level playing field.

He is married to a white woman and was president of the student body at Sacramento State. There's a classic case of an Oreo. He would, I guess, have you think that he got where he is because of his talent. He went to Sacramento State, was one of the few blacks that got involved with the Republicans, and they completely absorbed him, and put him in the business as a consultant with statewide grants. He would never want to admit that today—that he was an outstanding example of affirmative action on the Republican side.

Wilmot: My last question for today—and if you have anything else you want to talk about, please raise it. My last question for today, for this session, is kind of a broad question of, how would you enumerate the influential people in your life? Who are they? Who are the people to whom you attribute the most influence in your life?

Smith: In my life? Well, that isn't very difficult, actually. I think some of the bright young black men that I met in the army, many of whom had gone to black colleges, and sort of introduced me to higher aspirations. It was rather encouraging to all of us to do something with our lives as a result of the opportunities after the war. That was the first influence.

The second, I guess, was meeting an even larger group of talented black students who were at Penn when I was there. There might have only been thirty or forty, but I was really impressed with the breadth of their interests from architecture to medicine, although half of us were probably in the school of education. But that sort of gave me a feeling of camaraderie with a group that was different from the group I had grown up with.

And then thirdly, the inspiration—when I first got out of the service, and took the admissions test at Penn and Temple, even the whole phenomenon of being admitted to an Ivy League school was a hell of a boost in my self-esteem and my confidence. Then, going on, I guess I had a little setback after graduating from Penn and getting a master's degree and scoring in the top 5 percent of the national teachers exam—I really was depressed that I couldn't get an assignment as a high school teacher in Philadelphia, and soon after left.

Meeting Mary was important not only as my future life partner, but because this small black college that we both had gone to because we couldn't get jobs in the North, had a talented group of people, thirty or forty PhDs and a lot of state money. They were trying hard to pretend that blacks could get a good education there, that they didn't have to go to the University of Texas. By the time I had got there, they had already opened up the University of Texas to graduates and undergraduates. But that was stimulating to me,

being around that group of really interesting people. And one of the people that we recently had lunch with in Los Angeles was a young guy with whom I'd worked and had only seen, he reminded me, twice in the last fifty years, but we've stayed in touch through cards and telephone conversations.

And then, I guess the next big leap was coming to California and finding how encouraging this guy was who headed of the Education Administration Department. Theodore Reller had been at Penn and had come out here a year or two before I came out. But he was very encouraging. I was the only black in that group of graduate students in the school then. I don't think there were more than two others generally, that I came across. But he was very encouraging, directed me towards a special interest in school facilities and finance, and served as chairman of my doctoral committee, Theodore Reller—went on to become the dean of the school seven or eight years later. He was very important—and he was an interesting guy. He was Pennsylvania Dutch, and came from some little town sixty, seventy miles out of Philadelphia. He was very bright himself, went to Yale and graduated at age twenty, and then got a doctorate at Columbia in his twenties. So, he himself came out of a rather modest background.

So, that brings me up to the people at the county education office, who gave me a chance to become something other than a teacher—a professional person, I wouldn't say administrator for the first couple of years. And even all of the time I was there I was there, it was a staff position. I never had people reporting to me, but I was a specialist.

And I guess that I got a lot of inspiration from all of these black guys that I told you I started hanging out with in the late fifties and early sixties, politically. I got sort of caught up with them and I never really aspired to political office, partly because my jobs were too demanding, and secondly because I was just not a political type to be going around being that ingratiating or whatever you call it. So, I never got off on that track.

I was inspired by this wonderful woman, Ruth Chance, at the Rosenberg Foundation, who before she nominated me to serve on the board, had been confident enough in my ideas to give us those two grants that I told you about, and who remained a very good friend of mine, even after she retired in '74 and until she died last year at about age '95 or '96. For a long time after she retired—she was a young chick in her seventies then—Mary and I would get together with her at least once a year, over at North Beach, where she liked to have seafood. She was a very good friend and inspiration to me, and sort of gave me the impression that you have no reason not to do almost anything you aspire to doing. I guess that by that time, by '74 or '75, I was beginning to feel that I was in to the latter stages of my career, and I'm not sure that anybody I met after that had much of an influence on me.

Wilmot: Are there people who you feel that you've influenced?

Smith: Well, I think so. There were two or three of the faculty members at Merritt, who I may not even be able to name now, but who were really not just close to me, but really looked up to me and thought that I made a difference at the school, that would have made it more difficult for them if there hadn't had been a black president. Then, two or three students that I got to know. One went on to law school. These are all guys who were part of the student council that I met when I first got there. Another one, Leo Bazile, you may have heard of, who was on the screening committee that picked me,

and was an activist on the council. A married twenty-five year-old veteran with a kid—working forty hours a week in Safeway while going to Merritt—and did well enough to transfer to Stanford. He graduated from Stanford and then came back to Boalt as a lawyer, and of course was a longtime Oakland city councilman. So, Leo was certainly one of my protegés, so to speak. Another guy who went on to get an engineering degree from Berkeley, Isaac Moore, and has been working, I think, for PG&E for about twenty years. He is still an Africanist. We saw him recently and he had on his garb and it reminded me of the old days when we were all wearing dashikis. So, those two guys stand out, and there were others that I am a long time removed from.

Two of the young black women who were my interns while I was at Berkeley also went on to illustrious careers. I don't know how much I contributed to it, but one of them went on to be the legal counsel for the California Teachers Association—Beverly Scales. Then, another woman, [Angela] Blackwell, was an intern with me while she was at Boalt, and she went on, of course, to become the head of one of these big study groups here in Oakland, and for a while was a vice president at the Rockefeller Foundation or one of the big foundations. Her brother, David Glover, was the longtime head of one of the community development programs here in Oakland.

Wilmot: Was she Angela Glover Blackwell?

Smith: Yes, she married Blackwell, but her family name was Glover. I think that she's back here now doing something, but she started one of the so-called black think tanks here about ten years ago. She didn't practice law very much, if at all.

Wilmot: It was Urban Strategies Council, and now she is the head of Policy Link.

Smith: Yes, and in between she was in New York for five or six years.

Wilmot: At Rockefeller.

Smith: Rockefeller or one of the others. It wasn't Ford. In later years, I guess the important thing is to have had some personal friends, some of whom I came across as the result of my jobs. One of the two guys I'm having dinner with, Lloyd Baysdorfer, was a young assistant dean at Merritt that I appointed. He went on to become academic dean, and we've been friends all of these thirty some years. He's a good German American from Nebraska. We still get together quite often. He had a little second career. For a while he went into the travel agency business, and I gave him quite a bit of my business. Then the other fellow that we are meeting with, Doug Higgins, served with me for about five or six years on the Port Commission, and was the one really permanent friend that I made during that experience. We're all retired now. Both of them are on to second wives. I still haven't found mine yet.

Wilmot: No, you're lucky. You're very lucky.

Smith: Well, we stretched it to five hours. I didn't think that we would need more than about three.

Wilmot: Yeah, we did.

Smith: Well, I'm glad we didn't stretch it out for five months. I've seen Lionel's [Wilson] oral history and a couple of those other guys that I recruited for the Black Alumni series. I think Lionel took almost a year, and I think Broussard took close to a year. Either they are too busy or they never were turned on by it.

INTERVIEW 6: MARCH 17, 2003

Wilmot: Norvel Smith, follow-up interview, March 17, 2003. There were several areas that both you and I had noted in the transcripts could either be covered more fully or were gaps, and so I wanted to go back and cover those today. I'm wondering if we could start with talking about the Oakland Five Defense Committee, which you mentioned briefly in your transcript, we talked about it. Around what year was this?

Smith: Before I went to Berkeley, I would say it was '68 or '69, while I was at Merritt, I'm pretty sure.

Wilmot: Can you describe to me what happened?

Smith: Well, both directly or indirectly flowing out of my East Bay Democratic Club experience which went back to '58 or so, I got to know a lot of these activists around town. They included Don McCullum, who was the longtime chair of the NAACP, and Paul Cobb, who was a young guy who came back out of college just as I went to work for the city. And we had something called the black caucus, it might have been eight or ten people, not very organized but we would get together and keep an eye on some of things around town. And Paul and two other guys including Elijah Turner, who was another very active guy, and a white labor leader, David Creque, I think it was just three of them, they were really on the case of the school board, which was terrible at that time, had one token black Republican on it who was over the hill when he went on. And they got carried away one night at the school board meeting and just sort of physically took over the meeting, I mean, stood up on the table and said the meeting wasn't going to go [laughs] along unless they discussed some of their issues, and so they were arrested. And I guess they were considered felonies.

[tape interruption]

In any event, it was sort of a revolutionary stance by some young guys who really had no resources to defend themselves, and I guess they were hoping that the charges would be dropped, but they weren't. So Don McCullum and I got together and I agreed to chair the defense committee, which just meant raising some money and sort of trying to sensitize the community to the fact that it wasn't that urgent a crime. And Don agreed to be the attorney, without compensation. We had some expenses. In any event this went on for about three or four months before the charges were dropped, they were able to plead down to some nominal plea. But this did give me a lot of exposure in the community and really helped, because at that time I was working for the city manager and running the anti-poverty program, so it sort of took some of the activists off my back who thought I was just a bourgie member of the establishment. And they didn't know anything about all my ten years before working with the Democratic Club. So it was kind of an interesting diversion from my image of being just another bureaucrat, driving a Jaguar.

Wilmot: It strikes me when I hear you talk about this that you occupied this moment in that time in your life when you watched a black political agenda shift from one that was kind of more integrationist to being more nationalist and revolutionary.

Smith: Yes, confrontational. Remember, this was '68 or '69, about the same time as the Panthers got started, I think in '67 they went up to Sacramento. And the whole black consciousness thing had moved from where it had been in the early '60s to a more confrontational type of thing. These guys were certainly not identified as being Panthers or anything, but they were just activists. And Paul, who is still an activist, you know, he is one of the mayor's appointees to the school board, and he is the guy that Mary and I depended upon to get the mayor there at the [Oakland Museum White Elephant Sale] opening on Saturday.

And David Creque is an interesting guy, he was an activist with the teachers' union. And ten years later he and I served on the Port Commission. Lionel appointed both of us, it might have been a year after I was appointed. So there were probably some other things like that that took place, but I think that's the one that got most of the publicity, other than the Panther-type stuff with a suggestion of violence or armed opposition. This was sort of more in keeping with a sit-in or something like that in the South, except I guess they went too far or the school board was really pissed with them and decided to file charges. It came to mind because I was just going chronologically through some things that happened at that time.

Wilmot: Yes.

Smith: I do remember that we had a good cross-section of people supporting us. There might have been ten or twelve people on the committee, and Don and I were the most active in following through, but we had a good cross-section of white and black, and maybe even Latino. At that time there was a very, very strong Mexican American guy, Bert Corona who was in town, and interesting too, because he was a very successful interior decorator, but he devoted most of his later life to Mexican American concerns. He was one of the founders of MAPA, the Mexican American Political Association. I don't know, Bert wasn't at the event, but I'm sure we had some support. We were in the midst of the early days of partnership with Mexican Americans.

Wilmot: As a result of the actions of the Oakland Five—Paul Cobb, Elijah Turner, David Creque—

Smith: There were two others.

Wilmot: And two others, was there a change then in the composition of the school board, or—was there a change there?

Smith: Well, I guess there weren't any dramatic changes until they hired the black superintendent in '72 or '73, a couple, three years after that, and at that time we also had this black caucus group, which was a larger group than these people who took over the school board. And I remember that when the superintendent candidate came out we had a little conflict with him, it turned out he and I had been in South Philadelphia High School together. He was a year ahead of me, but he didn't remember me and I didn't remember him. But he came and spent the whole day with an elite group of whites and a couple of blacks including this black guy on the school board, Barney Hillburn, and Tom Berkley and a couple of others. We sat and waited for him for a couple of hours to meet with us as planned out at the Hilton Hotel, near the airport. And then when he came we were shocked to find that he was intoxicated. It was just unbelievable. And of

course the group really sort of raked him over the coals, but I don't know whether he really knew what the hell was happening. So we were never close to him even though he was a change and I guess got a lot of publicity in terms of his charisma and public affairs skills.

Wilmot: I wanted to shift now. I'm wondering, when did you meet Carlton Goodlett, when did you form a relationship with him?

Smith: Yes, let's see. I met Carlton, believe it or not, back in '51 or '52, because one of our good friends that Mary and I knew in Houston was related to his wife. And so after about a year that we had been here we got in touch with her and used the name of our friend, and that got us an invitation over for dinner one night. This is '52, let's say, so he was a man then about forty-five or forty-six, and a very prominent activist and publisher of the newspaper. I never knew what the quality or nature of his medical practice was. So we met him then, and then our paths kept crossing, and during the time that the East Bay Democratic Club was emerging, he was doing some similar things in San Francisco. I don't think they ever had a very large grassroots base. But there were four or five distinguished guys over there. The guy who headed the first savings and loan, Jefferson Beaver, and everybody's favorite dentist, Dan Collins, and there were six or eight of them who were really the people that the establishment accepted as being the spokesmen for the black community.

And so we overlapped a little bit, and then I forget whether it was—it must have been '68 and '69 or something like that, he talked to me about helping him with this leadership project. Maybe he was just giving me the experience, because I'm sure he could have gotten resources; I'm not sure if he could have gotten many black resources, though, who were interested and had some organizational skills. So we worked on two of the conferences. One was at USC in Los Angeles, and one was in Fresno. And I took care of the logistics and I think may have kept notes.

Then growing out of that close relationship, maybe three or four years later, he decided that it was time that we had a Black United Fund, so he got me and another half dozen black guys involved in forming it. And I served on that board for about three or four years, but first of all the leadership was questionable. We never really had anybody who was experienced enough to do the job. We had people who had some United Way experience, but it got to the point where after three or four years—and I chaired the development committee—where I just sort of got tired of asking white folks for money. Because the concept was that we were going to really appeal to this rather large middle-class black population and get them to give some nominal but continuing support. We felt we could raise at least a couple of million dollars from the black community by the time we got organized. I doubt if we ever got more than half a million. Then we got about another half a million from white agencies including the United Way. So he was a little disappointed in that and I was, and he stayed on it, but I told him that I just didn't think it was going to be viable.

Wilmot: What were the philanthropic priorities of the Black United Fund?

Smith: We were to become a black version of the United Way. And to have a planning staff and a fundraising staff. And we were modeled after them. And they were very supportive. I mean, I guess they looked forward to the day when some of the black agencies in the

city would be coming to us instead of to them because they had two or three agencies that were getting substantial money from them, the Urban League and a couple of neighborhood centers and all of that. And at that time or just before, coincidentally, I had served for about four or five years on the executive committee of the United Way of the Bay Area, San Francisco-based.

Wilmot: Were you able to kind of leverage those connections and also your other philanthropic board connections to bring money to the fund?

Smith: Yes, I think so, and that was the source of my being able to get that whatever it was, half a million dollars for two or three years. But it never worked. And there were three or four or five others around the country, I think the first one was in LA, and in fact it was started by a guy from Oakland who had been a recreation worker out in East Oakland in the project that I directed, Walter Bremond. He was there at the time Ruth Love was there as a young teacher. I didn't know that Walt was that involved, until he went to LA and found a larger group of interest, I guess, and they formed the first Black United Fund. But by the time we got started there were a half a dozen or more, Detroit, Chicago, and all of them were following the same model. There might have been some that said they just wanted to get out from under the paternalistic influence of whites, period, and I doubt if many of them did any better than we did in getting the hardcore—I'm trying to think of what we determined there was—maybe 20,000 blacks who were making the equivalent today of \$50,000 or more, or maybe a little higher. And we, you know, reached out to some of the community organizations, fraternities and sororities, but it just never came up as a viable thing. And Carlton, his name and his image in the community made a difference, but not that much of a difference.

And of course he went on to become one of the all-time great black leaders in California, ran for governor, right after that, I think, in 1970 he went on to run for governor.

Wilmot: Yes. How did you come to see him as a mentor? How did he mentor you?

Smith: Well, I used to go over there on Sunday afternoons with a couple or three other people and just discuss developments in the Bay Area, and of course he had the newspaper and he was always pressing to get some input into the paper. As I may have said, I felt I was a protégé of his, that he handpicked me for these two favorite projects of his, to work as sort of unpaid staff involving a black person with some professional background. He had other whites working for him, I remember there were a couple of—a white guy, and a couple of women, in fact I think his secretary, long-time, twenty-year secretary was a white woman. And of course Willie Brown came along as one of his protégés too, Willie is now seventy, and Carlton would be ninety, so he was in his late forties, early fifties when Carlton was at his peak.

Wilmot: I wanted to move now back to UC Berkeley unless you have more to say about Carlton Goodlett.

Smith: No, I would just assume that you knew the reputation he had.

Wilmot: I did.

- Smith: Yes. He was one of the founders I think of this national black publishers organization, and led it for several years.
- Wilmot: Yes, I know also of his work with the Muni bus drivers and integrating that transportation agency, the employee body of that transportation agency.
- Smith: I forgot to mention that I was an owner of a black newspaper for about a year, [laughs] the oldest one in the west, the *California Voice*, which was eventually bought by Carlton. The old guy who had started it was getting up into his eighties and it was floundering, and Paul Cobb and I and a couple of other people foolishly took on the task of buying it and trying to save it. Paul, in fact, I think, became my editor for the first few months, and I'm trying to think of the other guy. There were about four or five of us. Three of us were young, youngish I'd say, in our late thirties, or younger, and then there was this older businessman who put the package together. But it never worked, and I was lucky to get out of there without any real financial damage personally. But I thought I'd just mentioned that, and Carlton eventually bought that paper. And at one time, when she came back from Chicago, I think Ruth Love was the editor of that paper.
- Wilmot: I wanted to return to UC Berkeley because there's an area that I need to ask more questions about, and that has to do with affirmative action and the crafting of affirmative action. You were at UC Berkeley from 1973 to '82, for nine years.
- Smith: Yes, about nine and a half years.
- Wilmot: And I wanted to know kind of as someone who was the director, not director but vice chancellor of admissions, essentially, undergraduate admissions, were you, did you kind of watch the genesis of affirmative action as a formal policy?
- Smith: Well, by affirmative action I guess we're talking about some aggressive outreach to unrepresented students and then an aggressive supportive system once they came in.
- But you also have, you know, affirmative action that's also going on in terms of integrating the faculty, and I suppose I might have been an affirmative action hire, not having been in four-year institutions, and five years in a community college, but in any event, you're talking about the student affirmative action.
- Wilmot: I'm really talking about affirmative action admissions.
- Smith: Oh, about admissions, well.
- Wilmot: Yes, in terms of having a formal policy that says, you know, so-and-so who is of either African or a Native American, or a Latino, Mexican, Latino descent comes from this kind of academic background, but can still come in with a GPA that's less than white students, a formal embracing of that policy.
- Smith: Yes, I think at that time when I was there, believe it or not, the GPA for transfer students from community college was down at 2.5, and I'd say that the average black student who was recruited to come there was somewhere around 2.8 or 2.9, but certainly not as competitive as the whites, and the Asians had just started coming in large numbers, but I can't say that I had anything to do with articulating or writing a policy. First of all,

remember that although admissions and records reported to me (the registrar and admissions were two units that were merged) and the real admissions oversight came from the faculty committee, it always has and always will. So I was in charge for the logistical things, but the academic vice chancellor and the faculty admissions committee was really the group that met with the half dozen or so admissions officers, I mean with the director and the assistant director and three or four people at the operational level to provide oversight. Now, I assume that there was no question that we were committed to bring about more diversity. And we weren't, unfortunately, we weren't just talking about economic diversity, we were talking about racial and ethnic as well as economic. I think that's sort of what led to the revolt, and to our friend in Sacramento's having a door opening. It was a fact that many of the students that we recruited were upper-middle-class students, including maybe 20 percent from out of state, which I never was too supportive of, who should have been competitive, and should have come in without special consideration. But they were brought in because we needed blacks. You know, they weren't disgraceful, but they were certainly not 3.5, 3.6, and 3.7's. And of course a large number of them went into the social sciences and the humanities. Very few were in the hard sciences, physics and math and chemistry and engineering—which is one of the reasons that MESA program was started.

So the people that I relied upon were in the admissions office, who I had hired and promoted to be with the new directors. They talked with me and kept in touch with me, but certainly during the period I was there black students went from, I don't know, maybe 400 or 500 up to 1,200, 1,300. And there were no limits on the extent to which we had flexibility in the admissions office to bring in people who were not competitive. But I said the problem was that you know, the sons and daughters, who themselves had been college graduates, and who should have been pushed to exceed their parents' level of academic development were just not hard core disciplined academic black students, and as a result, the average admit was probably a 2.8 or 2.9. I doubt if there were many below that.

And also that meant that the economic diversity was not really bringing in many students who were economically disadvantaged, because most of them were trapped in schools that weren't making them competitive, and with little motivation, role models and all of that. So we still had a pretty middle-class, bougie group of black students. And there was another problem at the graduate level. The graduate dean had an assistant, always a black guy for several years, rotating, who was the equivalent of an affirmative action officer, but was primarily just sort of an outreach and recruitment type person trying to get students to come to Berkeley who were very competitive but wanting to come to Berkeley rather than going to the Ivies and that sort of thing. Bill Shack, for example, had that job before he became the graduate dean. Olly Wilson had it for two, three, four years. [O'Neal] Ray Collins, a guy out of botany had it.

Botany, yes. The connection there was that he was in the same department as Rod Park, [laughs] and Rod Park knew him quite well. But did you know of him?

Wilmot: Yes.

Smith: You know he died ten years ago.

Wilmot: He passed already, yes.

Smith: Yes. But, so I can't say that in any organized way, other than the communication with the staff in admissions—and remember, I also created something called the Office of Relations with Schools, which sort of took some of the outreach responsibility from the admissions office, and really was sort of an extension of the admissions office. I guess if we'd had our druthers, it would have been nice to have that be a subdivision of admissions. Except, you know, this was a chance again to put a competent, experienced black person in, and we were primarily reaching out to minority students, so the image of having a director should be somebody they could take seriously.

[tape interruption]

I had some problems with that graduate minority program too, and I had some minor input in. Because at that time it was just too large a portion of the campus' own money going into this program, which was about 80 percent law students, and was taking so much money off the top that there wasn't really that much left. I would have preferred either saying that the law school could have a third or something like that, of the slots, and continuing to push more aggressively for people in the sciences.

Wilmot: That's really interesting, and I wonder how that priority got established. I wonder—

Smith: Larger pool.

Wilmot: Larger pool, and also just the idea that, I read recently in this book that I've got and which I'm going to show you, a fascinating book. But I read recently that Judge Thelton Henderson, who was a graduate of that program, he had this whole idea that if you—the more you kind of integrated the classroom in the law school, the more that the justice system itself would be integrated and the more fair justice would be served, which was very interesting to me.

Smith: Yes, you'd have the typical white moderate or conservative person at least rub shoulders with blacks and get over the hurdle of thinking that all blacks are inferior, because he would know that anybody who graduated from Boalt couldn't be inferior. I think Thelton was there before that though, Thelton goes back to about '53 class, law school, probably no later than '56 or '57.

Wilmot: Yes. Who was the director of admissions that you hired?

Smith: Robert Bailey. When I got there they had sort of an acting director, I don't know what had happened to the other person, and we had a longtime old guy who was a registrar, who most people agreed couldn't really handle the merged operation. So we opened it up for national recruitment, and we ended up picking a guy from the University of Illinois, Chicago campus, Bob Bailey.

And he was there the whole nine years I was there and stayed there for another six or eight years until he got into some problems of having his personal consulting business interfere with his responsibilities, and he may have even been prosecuted. And then he had a strong right-hand man whose name doesn't come to mind, who I think was perhaps the most significant person there. He got along very well with minority staff, and he was somebody who had their respect as really having a commitment. But the director was more of a bureaucrat, and of course he had the combination of registration

and admissions, and perhaps registration needed more attention. So I don't remember Bob in the early years at least being too involved or ever coming to me to ask for advice or anything of that sort.

Wilmot: Do you remember the name of the person who was second in command to Bob Bailey? I can probably find it, as well.

Smith: Yes, I may think of it, but he had been there maybe ten, fifteen years, and probably put in a twenty-five, thirty-year career there.

Wilmot: Yes, okay. So was there a general sense among the admission staff about the justification for informal affirmative action, before it became formalized?

Smith: Well, I'm not sure it ever became formalized. Affirmative action, when I got there, simply meant supportive services. They didn't have any organized outreach. There may have only been one black, woman in admissions at that time, and it was not considered a significant task. They were starting to come in for whatever reason, some of the programs, Upward Bound maybe, and the word getting out that Berkeley and UCLA were really looking for minority students. So I'm not sure that there was any written articulation of a policy, because even then I suppose there was some sensitivity about any suggestion of quotas. And the quota thing didn't really come along as you know, until the Asian students that [laughs] when I left were 30 percent of the incoming freshmen class, aspired to 40 percent, and it was through their efforts that the whole challenging of the concept of underrepresented minorities became a serious policy issue.

So when I came, I first of all made that decision that a small ghettoized staff of about fifteen people didn't make much sense, and they weren't having much success, and they weren't having much impact. I'm trying to think if at least one or two of those folks I think went into admissions. I'm not sure they were at the level of where the three people were who did the intensive evaluation. But once we got Relations with Schools going, and it had a director with a very good background Lynn Baranco, who had been the Upward Bound director, and who had a rather significant core of six or eight of the top faculty, science, engineering, whatever, who worked with him and were really quite anxious to see a more representative group in college, so he brought that reputation, and he brought that contact group with him. Baranco is now on the Peralta community college board.

So I would guess that the process was that Relations with Schools, focusing primarily, as I sort of insisted, on California, would have these conferences and meetings with groups at high schools and really doing outreach for the first time on an organized basis. And when they brought in a group of fifty students that they had critiqued and thought were good prospects and had checked out in the schools, I would guess that the admissions office rarely turned one down. So the combination of Relations with Schools office, and a sensitive group of people in admissions, and the fact that that was just the beginning of the real expansion of blacks on campus.

When I got there in '73, Fred Smith the president of the student body was a black guy who had been Merritt student body president.

Wilmot: Fred Smith, I remember Fred Smith.

Smith: In other words, you know, there were these parallel things going on in the academic field, that was about the beginning of the development of Afro American Studies. And I think [William] Banks was the first guy who is just being hired when I got there.

Wilmot: Yes. I wanted to move now to talk about the Black Alumni Club, is that okay? I understand that you were the founder.

Smith: One of the founders. Yes, I would say that the principal motivation for it came from Len Jones, who was a graduate around 1949 or '50, had been a football player, went on to a successful career in the financial field. He had run this black savings and loan, Transbay [Savings and Loan], before it disappeared, and then he went to work for Citibank or one of the others after that. But Len had the advantage of having served on the Alumni Council, one of the few blacks who had ever served, I guess. And so Len started talking to the people on the Alumni Council. There was already a viable Chinese alumni club, and I guess Hispanics didn't come until after we got started. And so Len Jones and one of the women maybe in the admissions office—a black woman, or financial aid, one of the two—and Lynn Baranco, and I decided that if we were going to really have any influence on the council, which you know is a strong independent body, not regulated by the regents, that we had to build a grassroots constituency, both to have input directly to the administration and to begin to infiltrate the board of the council.

So we formed a club, had a pretty good response. Bob Abbott, who had graduated in '53, got a database for us, and I think at one time we might have had 400 or 500 names of people who had graduated from Berkeley in the last thirty years before 1980. Then every year, you know, a handful, another 200 or 300 were graduating because of the influx. And we, I guess one or two of our early events, like having a brunch on campus at the time of the big UCLA or USC game, whatever was there that year, following the pattern of the alumni association. Then the alumni association let us use one of their meeting rooms, and they cooperated to the extent that they would do the mailing for us, and we would get our material to them. And that worked fine for a while, but then we decided that we needed our own newsletter.

Did I ever show you the newsletters? Because I was the editor of it for the first three or four years, I'll give you some samples. And we had pieces that talked first of all about activities around the campus, we always had an article or two about role models, graduates who had done well. And I remember one of the last articles that I wrote was on the occasion of the, second and third blacks to make the varsity tennis team. Then we would distribute copies to the Bay Area people. We identified maybe 300 people in the immediate Bay Area who still were here.

And as a matter of fact, we were instrumental in helping to get a LA club started. Two or three of us went down there a couple of Saturdays. There was a retired superintendent of schools in LA, and a young lawyer, who I remember being the prime movers of it—he eventually went on to be chair of the Alumni Council. And they had a group down there. It wasn't as large as the Bay Area, because you know, probably three-fourths of the blacks who went to Berkeley stay in northern California. So they had a couple of meetings down there, and I guess their newsletter wasn't as regular as ours was, and they also focused largely on a big annual event at the time, the football game.

And so the Berkeley club is still going, and I still get literature from them, but part of the problem was that after about five years there began to be a little rumble of concern by the younger members that we four or five older guys were making too many decisions. All we were doing was filling in for what needed to be done. And that sort of pissed me off for a while, Len Jones and I were both concerned, and he was always the treasurer. So after about five years I dropped out, and I think I may have been to two events since then. I continued for about three or four years into my retirement years.

So I think it's a viable organization now. I guess through that activity no less than a dozen, fifteen blacks have served on the Alumni Council in the last twenty years. We incidentally were instrumental in getting a very famous black, the CEO/chairman of the big black insurance company to accept the nomination to the board.

Wilmot: Golden State?

Smith: Yes. He had been a graduate of Berkeley. His brother had graduated around '42, and then he graduated around '49. He was also in the 92nd Division with me.

I think I mentioned it before, and I can't think of his name right now. But he came up and served on it for about two years and found that it was just too much time consumed from his other boards that he was on. He was not only running this business, was on a couple of corporate boards. But I think that was also a real statement when a guy like that, with that reputation came and served on it. That sort of opened a lot of eyes.

Wilmot: Was there fundraising for scholarships that took place?

Smith: By the club?

Wilmot: Yes.

Smith: Not really. I guess the notion was that the important thing was to mobilize enough people to have some impact on the institutions at the university, whether it was admissions or financial aid. But the alumni council of course has for a long time had a scholarship program, but they have a very small pool. When we changed our wills for the last time, I talked to them before I made the decision that we could get a response like we wanted from the admissions office in a designated scholarship for needy black undergraduate residents of California.

Wilmot: Did they allow you to do that?

Smith: Yes, I was surprised. I talked to their lawyer, and we tried it about five years ago, and I guess things opened up, and they had to make a decision to allow earmarked scholarships because they were all over the place, not necessarily race related, but indirectly white related. So we're leaving about 20 percent of our estate with them. But they have a very small pool for the alumni association. They might give one black scholarship out of twenty a year or something like that.

Wilmot: What kinds of issues was the Black Alumni Council trying to impact through its representation on the Alumni Council?

Smith: I guess that they were trying to get more of a response from them on outreach. At one point I think several years ago they got to the point where they actually created with the Black Alumni members a relationship with kids in high school, and they got a little more reinforcement of what had been the old concept of the program that Lynn Baranco used to direct. And they made a big effort to get themselves involved. I don't want to overemphasize this relationship with the council. That just sort of legitimized them and gave them some resources and put them in touch with key people. For example, when they'd have the annual banquet for the alumnus of the year, we would always during that period make sure that we had five or six of our people over there over in the San Francisco hotel.

Wilmot: Well, do you want to say anything more about the Black Alumni Club?

Smith: Well, I guess I would just say that I was pleased that we created something that still survives, but I never really felt that we had, in the Bay Area, an active constituency. We had a board of maybe fifteen, and at any event we might get sixty, seventy people to turn out. But remember, we're talking about a spectrum of from sixty-, seventy-year-olds down to twenty-five-year-olds who have just gotten out, and I would guess we weren't very successful in dealing with the folks above fifty. For example, one of the spin-offs of our group was in the field of MBAs. One or two of the people on our board were graduates of Berkeley MBA, and they went on to be very active in the formation of a national black MBA association. So there was some spin off. Let me get you a copy or two of that newsletter.

[tape interruption]

Wilmot: My question is, when it came to affirmative action and admissions and support and outreach, who do you recall, or do you recall anyone who was core, any individuals for whom that agenda was very important and front and center in the administration and faculty?

Smith: I didn't sense that any of our senior six or eight people on the chancellor's cabinet were particularly concerned about that. Maybe the graduate dean was a little more concerned, and the fact that he created this position on his staff and continued to bring in a different minority member every couple of years was an indication of his commitment.

Wilmot: Was this Sandy Elberg?

Smith: Yes, Sandy Elberg. But the only people that I sensed as a group were quite active, missionary type or other were eight or ten or a dozen of the white faculty in some of the really elite areas like math and chemistry and physics and engineering who were really the mainstays of the Upward Bound program. The real breakthrough came when it was decided that Berkeley, with a lot of other colleges, ought to have a formal outreach entity. I think that was a real breakthrough and that those folks had a lot of respect on campus, and some of them even became involved in some other programs, creating MESA and other special programs at the undergraduate level. But there certainly was not any individual. I never heard affirmative action mentioned or anything about the diversity of the campus at any of the meetings that I went to. Now, I, the whole time I was there I went to chancellor's, vice chancellor's meetings. But then the provost, or the vice chancellor, I guess they called it, and his two provosts for graduate and

professional schools, and for letters and science, and the graduate dean met separately—they might have met once a week—the chancellor's group might have met once a month, which included me and the fiscal guy, and the public affairs guy.

Wilmot: Okay, well, let's close for today.

Smith: Okay.

APPENDIX

Appended is an interview with Norvel Smith conducted by Robert O. Self, author of *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Post War Oakland* (Princeton University Press, October, 2003). This hour long interview, which took place March 1, 1999, was not originally intended for public consumption, but simply for research purposes. Because of its complementary and focused emphasis on East Bay politics and history, both Dr. Smith and Dr. Self were asked to consider appending it to Dr. Smith's oral history and they agreed. The transcript of this interview was edited by Dr. Smith. Some portions of the interview are inaudible, and are indicated as marked.

INTERVIEW WITH NORVEL SMITH

INTERVIEWER: ROBERT SELF

[Interview 1: March 1, 1999] [Tape 1, Side A]

- Self: So, those papers have been interesting, and there is a file in one of the boxes of correspondences between [Huey] Newton and you while you were at Merritt.
- Smith: Yes, Huey, as it will come out in the discussion—I indirectly hired Huey and Bobby [Seale] to be neighborhood workers in the North Oakland Center, namely because the people in the neighborhood recommended that I should hire paraprofessionals and people from the community. They must have worked there a couple or three months before they went to Sacramento, but then that was too much even for the largely black group in North Oakland and they were also quite concerned that they brought weapons to the center and had military drills around the center at night. So, they took me off the hook by telling me that they had to go. So it was interesting to point out that they were actually on the city payroll for a short time.
- Self: My understanding is that they even wrote early drafts of the Ten Point Program while they were at the center.
- Smith: Yes, their entrée, of course, was that they came in as the saviors of the neighborhood in developing some plan for traffic control on Market Street, where, I guess, kids had been injured—a couple of kids had been injured in a school just down the street in Sacramento Street. But, of course, I had met Huey at the campus. He was already gone—had been expelled—from the Merritt campus, by the time I got there. In fact, when I first got there, I looked in the big safe in the president’s office, and there was a file with a note from my predecessor, saying, “Not to be readmitted without the personal approval of the president.” [laughs]
- Self: Well, that’s a story we can get to.
- Smith: That’s not the *raison d’être*, though, of your Oakland book.
- Self: No, the Panthers are certainly a part of it, but in any event, it would be good for me to tell you the scope of the project so you have a sense as where all of this ends up. The timeline is really the end of the war through the election of Wilson in ‘77. There are really kind of two ideas: one is that in the period of the forties, that activism in Oakland, largely around community forums, questions of wages and unions, then you have a kind of incipient or early African American political movement, and my project is to trace the development of that political trajectory over the course of the three decades.
- Smith: You don’t go back to C.L. Dellums’ time with West Oakland being an early headquarters of the black sleeping car porters?
- Self: I use that as background—
- Smith: I think that was the beginning of the political consciousness, just before the influx of all the Texans and Lousianans into the war industries.

Self: I use that as a background, as a way to contextualize, because a lot of the civil rights energy in those early years also came out of Dellums' {inaudible}. He, of course, goes on to be one of the principal architects {inaudible}. So, that's part of the trajectory. Then, the other part is this metropolitan story. I'm quite interested in a way that politics—both African American politics in Oakland, but also politics within suburban communities surrounding Oakland, and then white politics within Oakland as well—feed into questions of how the metropolitan as a whole develops. So, redevelopment of West Oakland, for example. I'm interested in, as I'm saying, how San Leandro industrializes and creates this kind of booming industrial enclave in the fifties and sixties, while Oakland is slowly losing jobs and declining, if you want to use that word. So, politics, on the one hand, and then a kind of economic development and what we might consider a spatial development of the metropolitan area.

So, of course, the War on Poverty, both as a political and a social response to poverty in Oakland, is also {inaudible}. Maybe a place the place to start, Dr. Smith, is where you started, both in the schools and then I'm also very interested in some of these initial efforts—the interagency project and its leading into the Ford project. So, that might be a place to start with your experience, and how those projects developed and what kinds of social issues or social problems those programs were designed to address.

Smith: Okay, well, historically of course, I came out in '51 to work on my doctorate. I went over to San Francisco for a few years, but came back in '54 and started working in the county school department while I was finishing my degree. Shortly there after, I guess about '57 or '58, I first got involved on two levels: in the white community, I got involved with the Community Chest, and I got involved with that and stayed with it for years all the way up to the Bay Area Crusade [Board] in San Francisco. That was one minor streak, but my major involvement started with a group called the Men of Tomorrow. That really was, not just the social, but the political arm of the black community. It was made of black professionals and businessmen. That's where I met Lionel Wilson and Don McCullum and Byron Rumford and Evelio Grillo. All of those guys were part of that group. I joined in 1957 and was chairman for a couple of years—that said something about the leadership, after one year I became chairman. But, that very quickly spun off to the East Bay Democratic Club, which was Byron Rumford's organization and which was sort of headquartered right there on Seventh Street. Slim Jenkins was the bar where we met for the social stuff, and across the street was Esther's Orbit Room, at that time—it has since relocated—which I understand is the hangout of the new mayor.

Self: Oh, yes.

Smith: We had a rather interesting development there, and then from that beginning, and meeting DG and looking into the broader East Bay community, I got involved with voter registration and what was then, I think, the Eighth Congressional District, the old congressional district, [Jeffery] Cohelan's district. I got involved with that for a period that lasted maybe six, seven years, and through that, of course, I met all of these guys. Now, after being down in the county school department for nine years with a doctorate, and being passed over for a couple of appointments, I was starting to look around at the time that a couple of these guys—Lionel included, I guess and Don and people who were starting to establish a relationship with the prime mover at that time, Wayne Thompson—you know about him, he was a boy wonder in Richmond during the war

and became Oakland city manager. They had this opening all of a sudden with the Ford project. Evelio Grillo spearheaded it and conceptualized the notion of interagency cooperation, at that time focusing on youth, which was his specialty area. They asked me if I would be interested, and I said, "I'll look at it, it's a change from my field." Then I found out that a big chunk of it was dealing with schools, and probation, and recreation—sort of a youth emphasis. So, it was just sort of a *fait accompli*. They said, "Go talk to the city manager, he'll hire you." That was the beginning of some demonstration to me of some clout that we had in the black community.

[tape interruption]

Self: Could I ask you comment in a little bit more depth about some of the things that you just described? One of the things that's very interesting to me is that I sort of trace the politics of the East Bay to the development of this tight-knit group of professional African Americans—you named all the ones I know of: White, Wilson, McCullum, Grillo—around the East Bay Democratic Club?

Smith: There were a few others. Believe it or not, we had a couple of Republicans. White, in fact, was a Republican at that time, he was going back and forth.

Self: Was E.A. Daly in that group?

Smith: No, you mean the guy who formed the newspaper? No, he was probably, at that time, in his late sixties, early seventies, and the paper was floundering. That was about the beginning of Tom Berkley's paper, and the *Sun Reporter* over in the city, which were the only real voices of the black community.

Self: And Tom Berkley was associated with this group?

Smith: Yeah, but he was kind of Berkeley-oriented. He was always kind of independent. He was a maverick, independent Democrat. I think there was some friction between him and Lionel growing up together. Both of them having run unsuccessfully for the Berkeley City Council at that time. Lionel, I guess, even then was still living in Berkeley in those early days, but then he moved into Oakland. But, I thought that *Men of Tomorrow*, which came out of the idea of two or three really older guys who would be almost a hundred now, including my neighbor across the street, George Vaughns, who was the first black attorney in Oakland, back in the twenties. He goes back so far that little Saint Mary's had a law school at that time.

But, he and two or three other guys who were primarily Republicans because the whole establishment, white establishment, was Republican, and I guess that a lot of the guys started as Republicans, but then saw the futility of that and changed over. Although Lionel I'm pretty sure and Don McCullum who spearheaded the NAACP were always Democrats, and I was a Democrat. But we sort of joked with the Republicans and we used them whenever it was possible to relate to people. But the establishment never gave them recognition until the Democratic group came in. Lionel and all of us then started really being able to have access to old man Bechtel and to Edgar Kaiser, whom we worked with in forming this New Oakland Committee back there in the early seventies.

Self: So, it wasn't really until the late sixties that you're talking about, that pressure group was able to—?

Smith: Yeah, I think before that, it was pretty paternalistic and right-wing. These were the days of a police chief from Florida who was pretty repressive.

Self: Charles Gain was his name.

Smith: No, Gain was the liberal, the Texas liberal, who revolutionized the department. No, this was earlier. Gain didn't come in until about '65 or '66. He was a captain or something {inaudible}.

And then, of course, this was also about the time that our two professional groups got started. The Sinkler-Miller medical group, and the Charles Houston Law Club here in the East Bay, which went on to be much more powerful than their affiliates in San Francisco, because the black population was by that time maybe triple the San Francisco black population, by the late sixties.

Self: If we go back to this earlier period—let's say late fifties, early sixties before you really get the Democratic group together and you have access—was the Berkeley political system more open and more accessible to what the East Bay Democratic Club was trying to do than, say, the city council in Oakland?

Smith: I think so, but only by three or four years. I think they had their first non-Republican mayor about 1965 or '66, when they had a very progressive white minister. That was sort of the beginning of it. Then they had their first black school board member a year or two year before we did, Reverend Roy Nichols, who still lives here. He became a bishop in the white Methodist church and came back about seven or eight years ago, and I think they had had two or three blacks come close to winning seats on the city council there, but that was the beginning of the black-liberal merger in Berkeley, which went much faster than here, but not as far. They got some surface involvement, but everybody sort of continued to feel that the hill liberals in Berkeley were still calling the shots, and really just paternalistically sort of, having some showcased blacks. But then they, of course, went on to have a mayor before we did—Warren Widener, who I guess, lasted two terms. It was an interesting development, because Berkeley, as I understand it from the old-timers, was always the first step up after Oakland. You came into West Oakland, the heartland of black West Oakland, and kind of moved into North Oakland, and then if you really kind of made it with a civil service job or something, you bought a house in South Berkeley. So, the Berkeley people always saw themselves as being more advanced than the old Oakland people were, of course the war brought in a whole new mixture.

Self: And this is really where William Rumford, the pharmacist, lived, in South Berkeley. So he followed that trajectory.

Smith: Yeah, and I think that he might have been the first black UC pharmacy graduate, really a pioneer. Of course, he was also successful in running for the assembly, after Tom Berkley, maybe even Lionel, ran unsuccessfully.

- Self: Back to the Interagency Project, I've read quite a few of the documents of the early planning stages—
- Smith: Where did you get access to them?
- Self: The Institute of Government Studies at Berkeley. This is actually one of the most amazing things about putting together this project; this institute has collected a tremendous amount of material. This is how I know—how I've been able to follow your career, in a way, through that.
- Smith: It gives me an idea of where I should dump some of my old files.
- Self: Listen, they would be a perfect place to leave it. One of the things that they talked about—and I'm trying to read between the lines, because of the nature of these public documents, sometimes it's hard to get it—but when I go back to, say, '57, '58, they are just starting to move in, just starting to put together the program. And they are talking about wanting better cooperation between the schools and police departments, probation, and so on. When I read between the lines, what I'm reading is that there's conflict in the schools between black and white youngsters, and police are racist and not dealing with the situation in a way that's professional. But, that's just reading between the lines. Now, am I reading too much of that, or do you think that that's an element of what *was* going on?
- Smith: Well, I think that even Evelio would admit that the whole notion came out of a need for a control mechanism for troublesome youth, and that was a special interest in his background. He's an MSW from UC Berkeley. We were registered at the same time. I think that that's what brought it out, and he, being a well-trained, knowledgeable black, somehow got the ear of city manager Wayne Thompson in those early days, and Wayne was kind of his sponsor and Evelio was kind of the only black really in any kind of leadership position in Oakland. There may have been a black lieutenant in the police department, which was the very beginning of developing a handful of policemen and firemen, but Evelio was the first professional, I think, that appeared on the scene. Of course, he had problems because he was dealing with a very reactionary group of department heads at that time. And he also had this fellow, Al, a white guy, as his assistant who, I think, everybody realized was pissed because he didn't get the job and was sort of indirectly undermining the project. {inaudible} But it was clearly, I think from Oakland's point of view, it was the way to get on top of this juvenile control problem. But, the scheme itself was enough to attract Ford and they financed much of the work—new delivery system, centralizing services, and opened paraprofessional opportunities for people, all of which then became the cornerstone of the OEO program.
- Self: When you look at Oakland in this period, the Interagency Project, getting the first Ford Foundation Grey Areas grant, and all of that, it's a small city and yet it is getting—it's kind of a pioneer in some of these programs, and I'm wondering how much of it is really just Thompson. What was his vision? What was he like to work with?
- Smith: Well, I guess the Ford people had some involvement with Oakland prior to this time with what was called the Great Cities project, which was an educational scheme that had ten or fifteen cities. I think that Oakland, for some reason, was involved in some limited way in that, so they knew about Oakland, and everybody sort of thought that

Oakland was a Newark West, you know, and waiting for it to blow up. So, we got a lot of attention. This was even before the Panthers, obviously. But Oakland and Berkeley, even when I came out in the early fifties, was beginning then to be kind of the center of the black consciousness movement—young lawyers, Don Warden, Henry Ramsey, you've probably heard of, and guys who were around Dellums, including Don Hopkins, who incidentally worked for about fifteen years with Dellums as his Oakland chief of staff here; he was one of the leaders of that early black consciousness movement. But, I sense that all of this was part of the attraction of Ford.

Wayne was certainly a dreamer. He was a hometown boy. He grew up in North Oakland, and I think about ten years ago his mother still lived right near Mosswood Park, in the ghetto. He had a real vision for Oakland. He was very resentful of all the attention San Francisco got. He used to order us never to refer to the "East Bay" unless we wanted to call San Francisco the "West Bay." "It's Oakland. It's Greater Oakland!" and he was really a booster. He was very sensitive too. He went to UC Berkeley during the late thirties, about the time that Lionel and another handful of blacks were there. He may have even met Lionel there. I think that they were both class of '38 or '39. He had the experience of growing up in North Oakland, which was beginning to be an integrated area after having been heavily Italian, and German, and Irish. So, I had no problem relating to him. He wasn't paternalistic. He was energetic. He was accessible to all of the leadership of the black community, and then the son of a bitch [chuckles] picked up to move to Minnesota long before we had a chance to really solidify the momentum, and was replaced by a very reactionary guy, Jerome Keithly, who came up from one of the LA suburbs.

Self: I take it that Thompson was, in a way, unique at that time in terms of not being paternalistic, and in terms of accessibility.

Smith: I might say we also had a mayor, John Houlihan, who despite all of the problems that he got himself into was very sensitive, and he and Wayne were quite a team. They were both local boys from working-class backgrounds, and Houlihan, I thought, made quite a difference, because he took all of the flack from the establishment guys, giving Wayne a chance to do some things. In fact, that OED plan that I wrote was interesting, because when I finally got it together and got approval for it, he and I got into the mayor's limousine and drove all the way to Sacramento to hand it over to Hale Champion, who was then the director of finance for the first Governor Brown.

Self: I didn't know that about Houlihan, that that was a characteristic of his.

Smith: You know that he got into serious problems.

Self: Embezzling, right.

Smith: He went to jail.

Self: Right, Reading succeeded him.

Smith: Right. He was an old line, small businessman, Red's Tamales or something.

[tape interruption]

Smith: So we went from Houlihan—to dramatize it—you went from Houlihan and Thompson, almost overnight to Reading and Keithley.

Self: And this is like '64, '65?

Smith: '66 or '67. I came in '63. By about '66, Wayne was still on. The last couple of years of my tenure here—I left in '67 to go to OEO—were under the new regime.

Self: And, you think that, from the inside where you were observing, you feel that transition was crucial in terms of the things that happened in, say, '68 around the murder of Little Bobby [Hutton] and the boycott and all that and where the administration simply got out of hand and overreacted? Do you think that that sort of thing could have been prevented by the liberal Wayne Thompson regime?

I think that it would have made a difference. Again, the same police chief was there and stayed on. And then Charlie Gain came on, and Gain, in the eyes of the leaders was too liberal. He was just a reformer from the word go, and he didn't last very long. But, I think that that was part of the dynamic, that these two leaders left at a crucial time in the beginning of the movement when it was still a potentially an integrated movement, but when they left, then it really became a Black movement. Smith:

And that was also the beginning of the Latino movement here, because Evelio, as you probably know, although black Cuban, was very involved with the Mexican American community. He was one of the founders of the CSO [Community Service Organization], which was their equivalent of the NAACP. And with Herman Gallegos and some of these other guys around here, helped to spearhead that movement. In the early days they were very close to us. Joe Coto and Jimmy Degadillo and people like that became members of the East Bay Democratic Club. They really tagged along with a lot of the early leadership.

Self: Why don't we go back to the Ford Foundation project. One of the things that I'm also interested in, in Oakland, is the movement of the black community from West Oakland to East Oakland, and the nature of that transition, geographically, spatially. A community in West Oakland where there is a deep tradition of black politics—a lot of black institutions, black churches, Men of Tomorrow and so on, to a part of the city without any of that institutional and political infrastructure in place. I'm wondering if part of the Grey Areas project, part of the efforts in East Oakland, were designed to kind of give that some of that infrastructure to a part of the city where there wasn't that infrastructure before?

Smith: Well, first of all, I sense that the transition was overnight. Within a two-, three-year period, East Oakland changed from perhaps 10 percent black and hardly anybody beyond Fruitvale, which was always an integrated neighborhood, back to the '30s and '40s with a fair number of blacks and Latinos, to the big jump out to far East Oakland. It happened in a two- or three-year period. Talk about exodus of whites. Of course, this is now at the peak of the explosion of housing in South County—San Leandro, Hayward, Fremont, and Walnut Creek on the other side, were exploding with \$20,000, \$25,000 new homes for whites who just left in droves, so you didn't have that much of a void. Churches would move their entire congregation out to East Oakland during that period, '60 to '65. So, I would guess that by the time that the Ford project started in '62

or '63, East Oakland was essentially already a black ghetto, and I know that we extended it out—in fact the early emphasis was on that East Oakland area with the Ford project. When OEO came along we then brought it around the estuary and took in all of the four of the lower income flatland areas: North Oakland, West Oakland, Fruitvale. The original emphasis of the expanded Interagency Project was East Oakland, Brookfield Village, specifically the schools, and the rec center and the health outreach operation largely oriented towards lower East Oakland.

Self: Maybe you can talk about that transition from Ford to OEO, both in terms of administratively how the transition worked and also in terms of the vision of these programs and how—what the vision was essentially, both from Ford and OEO.

Smith: Well, again, I sense that the Ford project was predominantly addressed to the youth issue in East Oakland—schools, probation, and health, and that sort of thing. But, the problem was that it was pretty much limited to old-line established institutions—school district, welfare department, department of health, probation, police—that weren't terribly integrated in terms of leadership and token professional involvement with blacks. The OEO program came along with a different mandate. They had this commitment to maximum feasible participation and a commitment to new careers and more emphasis on manpower development, bringing the focus on adults for the first time. We started thinking about adult training programs. We started thinking about the development of legal services, which had never been a part of the notion of the earlier project. We got the probation department to seriously consider starting a pretrial release program. We had a grant from the Rosenberg Foundation for the first time to develop a program for pregnant girls who had been just arbitrarily kicked out of high school. It was kind of a different dimension, and some of these were newly formed. We brought a little more neighborhood focus on the community development project, which, at that time, was a kind of paternalistic social services thing run by the United Crusade. So, there was quite a bit of difference—much more color, much more relatedness to non-school and youth involvement.

Self: And a chance to sort of break down these paternalistic—

Smith: Yeah, it really started to put pressure on those institutions to—almost all of them started hiring more people of color, although schools still—their first two project directors were Andy Viskovitch and a Italian American guy. The teachers out in East Oakland were black, including a young woman, Ruth Love. She was just a sixth grade teacher, went on to be superintendent of schools in Chicago. I guess those were the days of maximum affirmative action.

So then, of course, the other thing is that as we went from Ford, which is kind of centralized with a hand-picked group of people who served as the oversight committee, predominantly the heads of the agencies—that was a dramatic difference. When we went into OEO, we then had to have citizen oversight. And Lionel, who had been sort of a pro-forma member of this interagencies oversight group, became the chairman from the new OEO board, which had people from each of the four target areas on it. There was real tension, of course, at that point, because they had very great hostility toward schools-police relations. The ones that were primarily focused on were the enemies of the black community, and they had almost no input. You saw very few black folks.

- Self: But that might be a place to spend some time. I'm interested in the way that—it seems that the original composition of that OEO board—
- Smith: Well, it ended up being called the Oakland Economic Development Council—the OEDC.
- Self: OEDC, right, except that the leadership of that committee really goes back to the East Bay Democratic Club: yourself, Lionel, Clint White, Don McCullum. I mean, that's that core group that you're really talking about.
- Smith: It was a group that Wayne saw fit to relate to as sort of his black kitchen cabinet.
- Self: But talk a little bit about—I'm very interested in this idea that you've got on one hand a set of federal programs that have a mandate to do the kinds of things that you are talking about—integration between both services that opened up administrative and social, professional development for a wider body of people, and people like yourself and Don McCullum and so on who were making this push. But then you at the same time have this constituency that you are talking about, who are in the neighborhoods who see a lot of these institutions as you said as hostile. Can you talk about how you thought about negotiating that tension, whether it was productive or instructive—how that played out over the course of your time at OEO board?
- Smith: Well, I think one dynamic was that the initial response of opening up the neighborhoods to participation brought in a lot of irresponsible riffraff, quasi-hood- type people—in West Oakland, we had some really rough times down there. It took a while for the more stable, middle-aged people to come out and take it seriously, and you'd go to these meetings, there was always this young punk ranting and raving about Uncle Tom niggers and all of this stuff. Even Lionel took some of that flack, and I certainly took a lot of it, because I happened to be living here driving a Jaguar and all of this bullshit, although in their hearts, many of the kids we started to relate to used to say to me, "I want a Jaguar, I want a Brooks Brothers suit," and then they began to set a little higher aspiration than just taking some first junk job.

But, it was clear that there had been very little, if any, communication at the grassroots level. The notion that the people being served ought to have something to say about the services was almost revolutionary. As I said, this predecessor program Interagency, was just this kind of centralized operation, really run by the heads of the departments. They didn't make any goddamned decisions unless the superintendent of schools, police chief, et cetera, agreed. That was the orientation of that, and I think Evelio would confirm that.

But, yeah, so getting back to the last question about the friction between the citywide leadership and the grassroots people. It was rather dramatic, but I think that by the time I had left, we had pretty well gotten over that, and we had a core of people—males, and females too incidentally, because that was the other problem; finding someone other than the big mama black woman syndrome that still persists I think, too much in the black community. But in North Oakland, for example, we ran into two or three of the guys—a young black minister, another black businessman who had kind of the ghetto men's store on San Pablo Avenue, another guy who had been an old leftist in the thirties, Bill Low. North Oakland, in many ways, was our strongest, because we had

that kind of participation from knowledgeable, intelligent people. In West Oakland, one of the main people that we relied upon was a black Catholic priest, Father Howard, who was really sort of an icon down there. If you got Father Howard, nobody would attack you, because he really brought credibility to whatever was being done. We also had a couple of young white radicals down there who were ranting and raving about the tools of the establishment.

Self: How about Ralph [Williams?]?

Smith: Ralph started out rabble-rousing, but became one of the real stalwarts of the area—still is I think. Of course we had a good relationship, because one of his sons went to Tech High and my wife was his math teacher and we had that kind of a relationship, so he never had any reason to be suspicious of me or my motives, but he was by far the strongest guy down there. I guess you read about this crazy radical guy Curtis Lee Baker, who was sort of built up by the white community as being a kind of folk hero, but was just a mentally ill street person.

Self: I think that he's one of the main people that Amory Bradford interviewed.

Smith: Yeah, which was unfortunate. And, of course, Paul [Cobb] had just come back from Howard or wherever he went to college and was a little bit on the rabble-rousing side, but was always kind of a middle-class guy and a religious guy that came out of an Adventist background. So, Paul and Ralph, you're right, would have been two of the strongest people down there with Father Howard. Fruitvale, beginning a kind of movement of the Chicano community—and we focused primarily on Latinos in the area, although, at that time, blacks were equally represented in population. Then, of course, far East Oakland was all black. [It included] the younger, more professional group, because that was the better housing for blacks. That's where Don McCullum lived, for example, 75th Avenue, at that time. And Leon Miller, who was a very prominent leader out there and an active Democrat, he had an insurance agency out there. So, we were really relying upon some black intellectuals out there.

Self: Now, Fruitvale was an area that became a real extension of the Spanish speaking—?

Smith: Yeah, a lot of their leadership lived all over the city. People like Bert Corona who was a fantastic old leader in the community, and Jimmy Degadillo was just kind of a working-class guy who delivered papers. They had a pretty good group of professionals, a few lawyers. Joe Coto was a young guy in the school district at that time who went on to be superintendent of the school district. We set up that first service center out there with people from all agencies, for the first time bringing people in from the state employment service who went all out and hired an almost an entirely Hispanic staff of case workers to work in Fruitvale. Of course, not that long after that the Clinica de la Raza, the indigenous health-oriented freestanding group, got started up there.

Self: Is Don McCullum still around?

Smith: He died about ten years ago of lung cancer, early case. Leon Miller died early. All of those guys are gone—Judge McCullum; Lionel died recently; Allen Broussard who started in the group and went on to be a supreme court justice. All of these guys took

turns being president, incidentally, of the old Men of Tomorrow. Lionel, Allen Broussard, Evelio, Don McCullum before me—that was our first example of trying to get some leadership to what was the early moribund movement.

Self: Would you say the same thing was true of the NAACP, that Don took over that as his project?

Smith: Yeah, he was pretty much the loner there. Most of us didn't relate to the NAACP. Yeah, we were members, but—

[Tape 2, Side B]

Smith: —The level of leadership until Don became—

Self: Right, they really took off under his leadership.

Smith: Yeah, yeah. They did, and Berkeley also had a small NAACP, and San Francisco had one headed by a very prominent attorney over there, Terry Francois, who incidentally was one of Evelio's classmates at the Catholic College in New Orleans.

[tape interruption]

Smith: Yeah, I think that [Berkeley] would be willing to talk to you. You can certainly tell him that I felt that this has been a good experience. He's not a member of any of these interventions that I'm talking about. He's always a freestanding, independent guy with a law firm and a newspaper, a housing developer, and I don't know why we weren't able to involve him, but I think that there was some friction between him and Lionel and some of the other guys, because he was always sort of on his own thing; you couldn't depend on him. He supported Nixon once, he supported somebody else—not always a Democrat, but an independent. He was a very successful, bright guy, and he didn't need us and sort of never felt that he should be a part of any organized group that he couldn't lead.

Self: I should tell you that I ask these questions—I pose them to you—if you feel like I'm misinterpreting or I'm skipping over things, please feel free to correct me or add things that you think that might change my—

Smith: This tape, incidentally, is just an in-house, confidential tape.

Self: Totally in-house and confidential. I'll certainly use it to shape my thinking, but I won't distribute it publicly or anything.

The place I'd like to go to next is a question I have that may lead us a little bit into this transition within the poverty program to a larger emphasis on Black Power. But first I want to talk about one of the questions that has come up as I've looked at the poverty program book on Oakland. As you described it, it has a strong emphasis on services, on decentralized services, and at the same time, it seems that coming out of some of the grassroots constituency is this concern about jobs and this question of "Well, the services are great, but what the community really needs is jobs." I'm wondering if your thoughts about the trajectory of that in Oakland, how that played out, and what the

relationship was between what you were doing with the poverty programs and this larger concern about economic development and jobs with the city.

Smith: Well, of course, there were two streams. One was the parochial interest of people out in the neighborhoods of being hired for some of these jobs that related to the new services, and that was an easy buy-off, I guess you could figure, but we took it seriously, and although at that time most of the professionals were from outside of the community, even the blacks didn't live in those target areas, the paraprofessionals that we started developing new careers were all people out of the neighborhood. And I think that's one of the really prime legacies of the poverty program, that that movement got a big boost during the sixties, and then it sort of began to break down that shell between the servers and the servees, and it may have been even more important than the overall infusion of neighborhood people into the governance because people still don't get their say when you have two or three people on big boards dominated by powerful people. The general thrust for jobs though, I think, had not really been addressed prior to that time. You had the perfunctory state employment service—there were a couple locations, but I don't think that they ever had one in East Oakland or in Fruitvale—which we integrated into our service centers. It also brought us into contact with the regional manager of the employment service, which was perhaps more integrated than most. They had probably more black and brown people on their staff—it was the unemployment service.

That was also, I think, what led eventually moving on to this New Oakland Committee, realizing that we had to engage in dialogue with the real prime movers and shakers in Oakland. Although Edgar Kaiser himself had served with Lionel on the early on the OEDC board, we really didn't get much involved with it until we started talking to them directly. Kaiser didn't serve, but his hand-picked right-hand guy Norm Nickolson—come across that name at all? Vice president of urban affairs or something for—and he was a very active member of our committee, and gave us real access to the full spectrum of the industrial community in Oakland. Kaiser Industries, of course, didn't really have much in the way of grassroots, entry-level jobs here. The blue-collar stuff was down in southern California or someplace else. So, their headquarters was here, and Kaiser Engineers was here, but Gypsum and Steel and all that were not in the community to produce any jobs.

Self: And the same thing would be true of Bechtel as well?

Smith: Yeah, right. It's just the headquarters, a white-collar operation. I'm sure some of that opened up as a result of some of that time, or maybe they were just sensitive enough to open it up themselves. But job training, I think, got its initial thrust there, which led, of course in the last fifteen years, to the Private Industry Council, through which all of the federal manpower money is channeled. Coming out of that same movement was the development of the Oakland Skills Center, which lasted for about ten or twelve years, out at the old Friden Calculator plant on San Pablo, which is now where you see the UC warehouse. Both of these things came out of this early recognition that improving the quality of the services to young people and to families wasn't terribly strategic, unless you can do something about jobs for breadwinners and heads of household.

Self: The transition from—you leave the OEO in '67?

Smith: '67, the summer, yes.

Self: My reading of the poverty program in the period after that, is that it takes a very strong turn to black nationalism and Black Power which as a part of the community had become prominent? I'm interested in your take on someone like Percy Moore and his emphasis on both black power, but also on using the poverty programs to leverage jobs, his notion of—which I don't think ever came to any kind of demonstrated fruition—but using the neighborhood centers as a kind of third council job distribution, this kind of thing. Just comment on your take on—.

Smith: Well, I sort of kept an eye on things, because I was right over in San Francisco, and the Community Action Program was by far the largest of the components of OEO's program. I should tell you that I had known Percy for years, and when I knew that I was leaving, I recruited him to be a candidate for the job, because there wasn't that much manpower that I had confidence in. I had a couple of assistants, one of whom went on to be the head of Parks and Recreation. Percy was an intellectual and a strong liberal and came out of that tradition of human rights and human relations.

Self: Did he come out of the ILWU? Was that his—?

Smith: I think that he did work in the labor movement, but for about ten years before he came over here, he was the head of the San Francisco Council for Civic Unity. But, it turned out that we should have done a better job of screening. I sense that Percy already, at that time, had some substance abuse and alcohol problems, and he hired his girlfriend and he never—I don't think he ever moved over here, and sort of started hanging out in bars. I got all of this indirectly. I never really confronted him about it, but I felt really let down by the fact that we got a person who really was not appropriate for the job, and I don't think he ever really related to the black leadership here. I couldn't comment on any contribution that he made that I was aware of, except that was the time, of course, when Lionel also got carried away in spinning this off as a separate entity, taking it out of the relationship with the city, wanting it to be freestanding, which I thought was strategically an error. But, I don't know whether Percy convinced Lionel of that or if they jointly came to the conclusion that it had to be free of the image of the city. But the whole notion of OEO and of the Ford project was infiltration of the establishment rather than confrontation. And I thought that we had been rather successful with that for the four years that I was there. And also recognizing the bootstraps and black nationalism really didn't mean very much in the long run in terms of improving lives.

Self: You were at the regional OEO for just a year, is that right, before you moved over to Merritt?

Smith: Eighteen months. I was over there as deputy director, but sort of the day-to-day administrator. The guy who got the job that I applied for was a lawyer, a liberal lawyer who had served in the Peace Corps and personally knew OEO director Sarge Shriver.

Yeah, it was a transitional experience for me, and I was surprised when the things got so hot with my predecessor at Merritt that I was almost invited by the Chancellor of the district, John Dunn, to come and talk about a job.

Self: So you were there really when Merritt was kind of a hotbed of nationalism?

Smith: Oh, yeah, things were almost out of control and it was the beginning of the Panther movement and the height of the—this was a year after the Sacramento march, and after the shootout—or about the time of the shootout. I guess it was before the shootout, involving Huey, because I can remember him many times rapping in the auditorium while I was president there. But yeah, it was pretty dramatic. You know the notion when things get bad enough, they turn institutions over to blacks, whether it's the superintendent of schools or the police department or the mayors of the decaying cities, and that was kind of what was happening there. I thought I was a good candidate, but they may have just made up their minds that they needed a black president in this setting, and the black consciousness movement just overwhelmed the white members of the Merritt faculty.

Self: Right. Do you have a sense of what the particularities of Merritt as a place were to this group? Clearly, nationally, H. Rap Brown with [Stokely] Carmichael and so on, the emphasis among the younger generation especially, was toward nationalism, but I'm wondering what the specifics of Merritt and West Oakland—were there particular influences there that had an impact on, say, Huey and others there to kind of add fuel to this foment nationally?

Smith: Well, of course, part of the foment came out of the deprivation of the black community and the need for—it was just about the low ebb of the cycle. You had the high ebb during the war with the war jobs and some minor transition, but then things just got as bad as they ever would by the mid-sixties, twenty years after the war with, you know, housing deteriorated in old areas, and white flight. It wasn't a good situation. So that was the primary cause of the friction. I don't think these radical movements would have gotten much attention, except that there was a lot of hurt going on in the community. And the middle-class people who had made it were pretty much removed from the day-to-day livelihood of the poor people. A few of them still lived in the community, even though Lionel and the rest of us certainly weren't living in the community. Then you had this drop down to the really indigenous people, who didn't have training, experience, and background to really articulate the leadership to the power brokers at the top. Fortunately in Oakland we were kind of able to meld some of that group of the outlying professionals coming back to the community, primarily through the East Bay Democratic Club and developments like that, going all the way back to the Men of Tomorrow. There were few if any of those guys—but then I think, for whatever reason, back as early as 1960, '61, people like Don Warden and Don Hopkins and Henry Ramsey, who went on to be a judge and then just retired from dean of the law school at Howard—these were the young black nationalists who were preaching on the corners and getting people really turned on later to positive feelings about themselves.

And then, along came the Panthers, who I've always described as kind of a group of thugs, really. You have to go back and check on the record, but Huey was really a notorious belligerent, in that sense. He got involved with the black nationalist group, which had been at Merritt for three or four years, but then he started his gangster tactics and the black nationalist group which was called the Soul Students Association threw him out. He went off the campus, into the streets and recruited some mostly high school age street youth, and really that was the genesis of the early Panther movement.

Bobby was surprising to me, because he was a more middle-class guy. He was eight or nine years older than Huey, had been in the air force. But had a real attitude problem,

because of what happened to him in the air force. But was married and had a young kid. He was a strange mixture, and his sister was a very middle-class actress down in Hollywood. It was really quite a different thing. In fact, Huey's family was fairly middle-class. His brother Melvin, who I hired as a part-time instructor in '69, went on to be a faculty member and coordinator of some academic office at Laney, and is still there, I think. He was the older brother with an MSW from Berkeley, in social work. Something happened with Huey that really turned him in that direction.

But I don't like to bad talk the Panthers, because certainly they tried, and some of my good, black, middle-class friends tried to relate to them with their neighborhood food programs and that sort of thing and raised money for them. But I think that they never really were grassroots, in the sense that they got into the Marxist thing. And in many ways, the Marxists were more apprehensive about black nationalists than they were about the white establishment, because the real black nationalists were not Marxist, and the Panthers were really willing to get into bed with the white radicals from Berkeley who would come down and were really calling a lot of the shots. The people I was most concerned about, when things got heavy at Merritt, were the white radical students from Berkeley. They would come down and jointly registered as students and were really the brainpower behind a lot of the things that happened that I can remember.

[laughs] I can remember when a couple of my black college president friends [from Fisk University and Tennessee State] came to Berkeley and Oakland to visit me in '69, and they were dying to meet Panthers. They heard all about this movement, and the Panthers headquarters was just a few blocks up the street. Huey was in prison at that time, so I called Bobby Seale—we had a good relationship—and told him what was happening. He said, "Bring them on up." So, I took them up there, and what happens? We go into the headquarters and two young, white kids frisked us for weapons and had us up against the wall and then took us in to see Bobby Seale.

Self: [laughs] The vanguard of black nationalism.

Smith: Yeah, but there was almost an unholy alliance there and you know, when we got to the point where we moved—and you've probably heard about that traumatic situation where the black radical students and whites took over the campus there for a few days just as we were moving. The whites kids sort of faded suddenly out of sight when that took place, and the kids that I had to arrest for felonies were all blacks, including two or three kids who came out here from Chicago and New Haven. They were part of the movement there, and things got hot, and they gravitated to the Panther movement here. I just never really had much respect for the Panther movement. I thought it was greatly overstated as a force in the black community, and it never really took control of that stirring of undercurrent or the dissatisfaction and concern about what was happening.

Self: Would you make the same estimation of the Panthers in '72, '73, when they were running Bobby and Elaine [Brown] for office? Do you think that by that time that—?

Smith: I think that they had separated themselves pretty much from Huey's nonsense and Eldridge's nonsense. They were both out of the community, and Elaine Brown as you may know, is a very middle-class gal out of my hometown, Philadelphia. She, I think, had run-ins with the old Panthers who were pretty sexist. By that time, I think that she was kind of making her last statement that she knew was futile, but she wanted to leave

some kind of positive image before she picked up and moved to Los Angeles. I also knew Father Earl Neil, the black radical Episcopal priest, whose church housed most of their services. And you know, he was an example of some of the middle-class people who were captured by the notion of—. Ruth Beckford, who was a very prominent black woman, dancer, a real icon here in the cultural community, got attached to them, and served breakfast and all that. There was a handful of these people—twenty, twenty-five non-street-hood types.

Self: What about in 1977, when—I want to go back and trace that a little bit better through the [inaudible] and all that—but since we are on the Panthers, is it your sense at all that they played a role in voter registration, mobilizing a larger number of voters in Lionel's first election?

Smith: Not at all. We had a group of fifteen or twenty people who did all of the work in that election. I never saw any Panthers. Sandré Swanson, who was then a young guy at Laney, but an activist, who has been now fifteen years in Congressman Dellums' office, was the nominal chairman for P.R. purposes. I was the chairman, for example, of the hill area that delivered some 25 percent of the white vote to Lionel. There were fifteen or twenty of us, and I did not recognize any Panthers at all. Now, maybe they were behind the scenes, but they certainly didn't share any strategy and didn't produce any money and didn't identify themselves as Panthers as far as I can interpret. They may have still have had some remnants of their people in West Oakland and North Oakland, but I don't think that they were ever a force out in East Oakland. And, of course, all of their families were West Oakland and North Oakland families.

Self: Why don't we go back and trace the political movement that produces Wilson's election in '77. We can go back to the New Oakland Committee or start wherever you want, but I'm interested in the way that group comes together, the forces that {inaudible}, the momentum of that, and the trajectory of that.

Smith: Of course the first breakthrough was when, as the result of his leadership of the East Bay Democratic Club, Lionel became a judge. Governor Brown appointed him as one of his first appointees in January, February of '59 right after he was first elected. Then shortly thereafter, McCullum became a judge—Lionel's old slot. And shortly thereafter Broussard became a judge and eventually supreme court justice. So, the infiltration of the legal establishment was a significant part of the buildup of black leadership, putting people in highly visible spots in the community that I think had some impact on the white establishment and also served as role models in the black community. It gave them some aspiration to, if not control, have major influence in the community. So this is '59, Lionel became a judge.

Self: When did Don McCullum become a judge?

Smith: Well, about four years later Lionel is elevated to superior court and McCullum took his place on the muni[cipal] court. But I'm trying to think of the things that were happening. Of course, our program was developing all that time. Lionel, '59 a judge, and then '63 to '68, heavily involved in OEDC, and then by that time there was no real viable West Oakland political organization because Byron had left, had been defeated. He unfortunately ran against a very popular liberal senator, Nick Petris, and lost, and that sort of devastated him. Somebody else came along and took his position in the

assembly, and a series of eight or nine blacks have held that position, that West/North Oakland/South Berkeley position.

But Lionel's involvement and Don's involvement in their role as judges, I think, gave them the exposure. I'm trying to think to what I attribute the real grassroots leadership that developed the turnout of the election. Of course, the numbers were there. And there was always a white liberal minority here who worked with blacks and who themselves were tired of the old establishment. I think really the breakthrough was when it got to the point that the prominent black leadership was strong enough in the eyes of the white liberal Democrats for them to say, "It's time for a change and probably we ought to go all the way to have a black rather than trying to run a white liberal candidate at this time." That was the evolution of the idea that—all during the sixties and early seventies, the coalition of the black Democrats and white Democrats was being reinforced and the frustration of the white Democrats was increasing in trying to deal with the white establishment. They sort of hitched on to the black momentum and the blacks needed them to really make the move. They had enough credibility in the white community. Because the community was always overwhelmingly Democrat—white and black, I don't know how the old Knowland machine and those guys continued to hold on to power as long as they did. Alameda County and Oakland was always overwhelmingly Democrat.

Self: Geographically, this liberal white community—North Oakland, Montclair area, is that kind of the—or was it more generally Oakland city?

Smith: It was always the hill area, this area. Montclair was the hard core of it. Almost all of the guys that worked with us who were active, some of whom are still good friends of mine, lived in this general area, or the Rockridge area. But they certainly didn't live below Telegraph or below Broadway—right on out to the East Oakland hills, the upper income areas of above [Highway] 580 were predominantly white liberals. I don't know where the Republican areas were. I guess they moved to Piedmont.

Self: Piedmont, I guess, yeah. [laughs]

Smith: Somebody told me that they now have a majority of Democrat registrants in Piedmont.

Self: Is that right?

Smith: Because I think the majority of them is because the younger liberals sort of moved in there. A lot of them moved in when the fire came and stayed.

Self: That's always been a fascinating place to me, this little island in the middle of Oakland. To go back to the New Oakland Committee, when was that?

Smith: Yeah, let's see, I left—while I was at Merritt, so it was somewhere around 1969 or '70, '71. The original notion that Lionel and Don and I and others put together. In fact, I drafted the first statement of mission of it, which was to have a small group of blacks and maybe a Latino member or two, six or seven of us sit down on a regular basis with the real white establishment. We went right to Steven Bechtel, the old man, and right to Edgar Kaiser, who at that time wasn't the old man, he was seventy—his father was in his nineties in Hawaii—and they brought in two or three other guys. But then we started

getting pressure from labor and from a broader cross-section of blacks, and it got to be just a debating society without any thrust as far as I can determine. I only lasted about two years and I gave it up. And almost immediately after that augmentation took place, Bechtel and Kaiser stopped coming, although they continued to make space available in the Kaiser Center for meetings. I think Norm Nicholson stayed with us for a short time. He was a transition person for the OEDC board.

Self: Was Safeway on that board?

Smith: Yes, I think Safeway was. Their big leader was a guy who was very active on the school board. He was their spokesman. I'm trying to think of his name; it's been thirty years now. You know, Safeway always had its headquarters down in that junky area down around the Embarcadero until recent years. But they never really played that much of a role, and they had this one vice president who was a longtime member of the school board and he was always involved in some of these high-level dialogue groups. They never saw fit to play an active role.

Self: Besides Kaiser and Bechtel, and of course, Knowland and the Tribune, who were the movers and the shakers in that older Republican establishment?

Smith: Well, there were some lawyers; there were some insurance and other businessmen. There wasn't that much big industry. All of the big industry that was left out in East Oakland—I don't think that we ever had anybody from the General Motors out there or from Granny Goose or from the remainder of the canneries that were still in Fruitvale at that time. There really wasn't that much going to relate to.

Self: I don't want to take up all of your afternoon, but one of the other things I did want to talk about before we close, I saw that you served on the board of Port Commissioners, appointed by Lionel Wilson.

Smith: I was his first appointee, in fact.

Self: One of the things that I'm very interested in is the port and the port's relationship to the City of Oakland. Of course the port became the West Coast's most important containerized port in this period; isn't it late sixties, early seventies that it takes off?

Smith: I think that they opened the Seventh Street Terminal, which was the breakthrough, about '72 or '73. I went on the Port Commission in '77. Tom Berkley, incidentally, had been on for a full eight years. He was, again, in his role as Democrat but close to the establishment, appointed by the old city council. He had a good two four-year terms before I came on. And then Lionel, who never really got along with him, didn't replace him for a while. He left him on for year just hanging there, and then just dropped him.

Yeah, the port at that time, as you know, it was a multi-functional port with the airport and the real estate, the entire estuary stretch of fourteen miles, or whatever it is—a certain distance back is under the port's ownership or control. They served as their own planning commission and made land use decisions for all of that. It was a very strategic place to be, and Lionel, of course, eventually appointed all of the members of the Port Commission. {inaudible} The first Hispanic, Henry Rodriguez, was right behind me.

I guess the friction became evident to me when I became chairman of the commission four years later in '81. There wasn't much communication, if any, between the city management, for example, and Wally Abernacle, port executive director. And the city was beginning to have some financial problems, and they dreamed that the port's resources would be used to bail them out. But it was very clear that that couldn't happen, because the ports, the law stated, had been delegated to local port authorities, and states could pull them back at any time, and the law made it clear that the resources had to be used for maritime purposes or returned to the state.

Self: So, port revenue couldn't take away the city general fund—?

Smith: So they kept plowing the money into the further development of the facilities and that was all they could do. They tried to bootleg a little support for the city, by having the city ostensibly provide them some police and some data systems and personnel services, but all of those eventually became part of the port's own activity and that caused some of the friction, too. But I tried during my year of chairmanship to bring the groups together. In fact, I got, with Lionel's help, the appointment of a joint committee of three student councilmen and three members of the Port Commission who met every other month. But it didn't last beyond my year, and even then, because there was no communication between the two top staff people—the city manager and the port director—it never evolved. Then, I think, it began to deteriorate even further than that. It came further apart to the point where three or four years ago, under [Mayor] Elihu [Harris] there was talk about trying to change the law and actually get the port's mandate changed and there was some talk about bringing San Francisco and Oakland together, although that had already been achieved. We already had ninety percent of the tonnage over here.

And then, of course, the port started to have some real tensions, because LA/Long Beach and Seattle-Tacoma started infringing on their market share. At one time, we had about 35 percent of the West Coast tonnage. It dropped to probably 12, 15 percent because we were strategically in the wrong location. The big traffic from the Far East would either start in LA or start in Seattle and leave from there and we just couldn't compete with them. They had also subsidized entities up there, they had local taxes and private ports. Here the opposite was happening: the local authorities wanted to milk the port for support of their services.

Self: My memory is that the port was highly politicized in some of these campaigns in the late sixties and mid-seventies campaigns before Lionel was elected, I'm wondering if you have any memory of that.

Smith: You mean by the old establishment?

Self: Well, no, but by some of the nationalists who wanted the port to be more accountable to the city.

Smith: There was some of that. I think that there was more of that after Lionel became mayor, people saw that they would have some influence through the Port Commission. We had a fair number of blacks who would show up at the meetings and get agendas—Paul [Cobb] for example, became a strong advocate of that organization that he helped form, still goes on now [Oakland Citizens Committee for Urban Renewal]; [David] Glover is

the director. Those people really started focusing in on the port, and what the impact of all of that activity was on the local community. Now, I think they overemphasized the fact that there were 22,000 jobs related, but they were all jobs that were for the most part, in the private sector. The shipping companies and all of those, other than the airport maintenance and logistical people. The airlines all hired their own people, so it was kind of unrealistic to assume that you could have a major influence over those 22,000 jobs. So, then the focus became more heavily focused on the 10 percent of them that were actual employees of the Port Authority. Of course, they made a tremendous amount of progress there. A lot of those jobs went to local people and to black and brown, Asian people, dramatically so during the period I was there and thereafter.

Self: So, in that sense, it did make a difference, Wilson's election?

Smith: Oh, yeah, I think so, because before that, as I said, they had this perfunctory member in Tom Berkeley, who never really related that much—he was sort of a freelancer. He stood apart from the grassroots.

Self: Well, Dr. Smith, I don't have any more specific questions in mind.

Smith: There may be some other things that come up; you can call me.

Self: This has been excellent and extremely useful. You've helped me think about some things in new ways.

Smith: Look at those materials at your leisure. I'd like to have them back, but in a couple of months, three months, I don't need them back any time soon.

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Nadine Erika Wilmot

Nadine Wilmot has worked in oral history for the past seven years and has been with the Regional Oral History for three years. She began to use orality to explore race, place, and power while directing the Oakland Oral History Project as a graduate student at UC Berkeley. Since then, she has worked in documentary film and with community based arts organizations. Nadine holds a Master's in City and Regional Planning from UC Berkeley and a BA in African American Studies from Wesleyan University. She is from Oakland.