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-October 2013
This is Marna Weston at the home of Dr. Nathan Boclair. Dr. Boclair, thank you very much for the interview today. Could you please state your full name and, if you could please spell anything we might have problems with, spell them later?

Nathaniel Boclair, N-a-t-h-a-n-i-e-l [Anthony] Boclair B-o-c-l-a-i-r [Junior].

Do you have a middle name, sir?

No.

Okay. And when were you born?

I was born January 20, 1927.

And where were you born?

I was born in Charleston, Mississippi, Tallahatchie County.

Okay. Who were your mother and father?

My father was Nathaniel Boclair and my mother was Jane Harris Boclair.

Were they originally from Charleston?

My mother was originally from Charleston, and my dad was from—he was in the country, out from Charleston about four or five miles out of town there.

Also in Tallahatchie County?

Also in Tallahatchie County, that’s right.

Do you recall their dates of birth or approximate dates of birth?

No, I don’t.

On your father’s side, can you tell me about his mother and father? Who were they?
B: His mother and father both died when he was five years old. I have no recollection of them at all.

W: Your mother’s side? Their mother and father?

B: On my mother’s side . . . I never knew who her father was. Her mother was Dorcus Harris Offer, though.

W: I’m sorry. Could you say that again, please, sir?

B: Dorcus.

W: Dorcus?

B: Yeah, Dorcus.

W: How do you spell that?

B: D-o-r-c-u-s.

W: Dorcus, and—

B: Dorcus Offer Harris, Offer was her last name.

W: Dorcus . . . Dorcus Harris Offer.

B: Yeah.

W: And where was she from?

B: She was from Charleston, also.

W: Okay. Do you have any knowledge or memories of her mother and father?

B: No, I don’t.

W: Okay. Do you have brothers and sisters?

B: Yes. I have one brother, deceased, and two sisters.

W: Okay. Could you please say who they are in the order of their birth?
B: Okay . . . Aberdeen Boclair Smith, and I don’t know exactly when she was born. Then Dorothy Boclair Lewis and Floyd Anderson Boclair. I know that he was born in May of 1929.

W: So . . . in terms of growing up, did you grow up in a rural area, like on a farm with chores? How would you describe how you grew up?

B: No. I grew up inside the city limits of the small town of Charleston, which is really a very small town. At the time, the population was only about two thousand five hundred. But we have chores to do, you know. We had outside toilets at the time and we had outside water. You know, we had a garden. My mother would sometimes have livestock. Sometimes she might have a cow or sometimes she might have a pig back there or something like that, that she’d buy from somebody in the rural area and bring it to town and keep it in there, raise him up, and then slaughter him the following year, in the winter of the year, you know. But we worked around the house, and I mowed lawns around there in town with a push lawn mower, did little odd things like that; picked blackberries. I’d go in the woods and pick blackberries and plums and bring them back to town and sell them and things like that. But it was a hardscrabble life, because that was really in the Depression. Times were really hard then. If all you know is that people around you, everybody’s in the same shape, you don’t ever know you’re poor. All that’s relative.

W: Did you grow up in a predominantly black area?

B: Oh, yes. It was a predominantly black area. The section of town that I lived in was basically all black.
W: Did it have a name for it?

B: Yeah, they called it Smokey.

W: Smokey?

B: Yeah, Smokey.

W: Okay. Did your parents have any leadership roles in the community, or what did they . . . ?

B: Yeah. My dad was always looked upon as a leader in the community for some particular reason. I guess it was because of the things that he was attempting to do. He always was attempting to vote and he was very active in the church and everything. My mother would teach what they would call night school; your itinerant workers in town, that were letting it, had to do the work at night. Even though she only probably went to seventh, eighth grade or something, she still had her teaching in the night school. It wasn’t a regular public school like we attended. You know? And everything. But everything was over a very small scale. My father wrote insurance, and he worked at a cleaners. He finally wound up owning a cleaners in town and everything. That’s really when we started to get on our feet and start to moving ahead, that stuff and everything, when we got the cleaners. Camp McCain had just opened up down there, and they would dump off a truckload of clothes on a Monday and come back with a truckload on Monday and pick the clothes up on Friday, you know? Basically, my dad had about three people working in there, in the cleaners, pressing it and doing things like that. But, basically, my brother and I did all of the pressing at night. We’d get off work, we’d get off of school in the afternoon; we would come up there and we
would press all of the clothes at night, so that was basically just clear money for him. He’d maybe give us ten or fifteen dollars, something like that.

W: What is your earliest memory of education and where did it take place?
B: My earliest memory of education was in Charleston at the local school there.
W: What was the name of that school?
B: Charleston Colored School.
W: Do you recall the principal?
B: Huh?
W: The principal, the headmaster?
B: Professor Hopkins. I don’t know what his first name was, but the person that impressed me the most was John McKay, and he was a math teacher. I got to be pretty good in math because of him. I always said it was because of that fact that I majored in math in college. I attributed that to him, you know? He had finished school at Alcorn all down there and everything.
W: What was it about how he mentored or supported you that made you support math as where you wanted to go?
B: I suppose one thing—he might have been the first male, young teacher that I had ever seen, for one thing. Most of the teachers there, they was kind of elderly, and most of them was female and stuff. But this guy came in, he couldn’t have been no more than twenty-three or twenty-four years old. For some reason, they’d hired maybe five or six young black teachers there. It happened with me. We had never seen anything like that before in a small town like that.
W: You were impressed that he had gone to Alcorn State, or Alcorn College?
B: Yes. It was Alcorn College at the time.

W: So, did you put in your mind at that time that you would attend Alcorn, because he had attended?

B: Oh, no. It never dawned on me to go anywhere except to Tougaloo. My parents, when I was born, my parents said I would go to Tougaloo. There was an uncle, an uncle that had five daughters; four of them went to Tougaloo. They was all older than me and everything, so it was just a known fact that all of us was going to Tougaloo. I didn't know how they was going to pay for it. I thought they was—you know, I say, my mother and dad talked about sending me to college, but with the kind of money that they're making, how in the world are they going to do that? Back there, people could do everything with nothing, almost.

W: Mm-hm. So, that was your elementary school?

B: No, I was in ninth grade when that happened.

W: Oh, in ninth grade?

B: Ninth grade when he came there, because he was teaching college algebra. I'm sorry, I mean teaching Algebra I.

W: Okay. So, you finished high school?

B: Yeah.

W: What activities were you involved with in high school?

B: Well, I played basketball. That's about all. I don't know of any other kind of activity that they had, that it wasn't a football team there because that was normally—you're in World War II, now. See, now, it might have been ten of us in the high school altogether; males, I mean, you know. It was basically all females
in the high school there, during that time. Basically, the football team was just off
during war years. I came along during that time, and the only activity, basically,
that they had that was organized was the basketball team.

W: Were you all any good?

B: Oh, no. We thought we were, but we weren't, though. [Laughter]

W: Do you remember your coach?

B: I think McKay, McKay was the coach, too. Yeah, McKay was the coach, also,
sure.

W: So you graduated and then you went to Tougaloo?

B: Tougaloo, right.

W: How did that transpire? What was your transportation? What did you study?
How'd you get over there?

B: I had never been to Jackson when I graduated high school; I'd never been to
Jackson, I'd never been to Memphis. They put me on a train and I went to
Jackson down there, and Tougaloo had a van out there to meet us down there
and they carried me out to the campus out there. I was returning, I was going to
major in math and continue what I had been doing all along.

W: Did your parents take you to the train station?

B: Yeah. The train station was in Oakland, Mississippi, which was about ten miles
from Charleston. The train did not run in Charleston. Charleston was kind of off of
the main line. See, but Oakland was right on Interstate 55—at the time, it was 51.
But Oakland was on the main line out there, so I caught the train out there, and
they carried me to the train station there, yes.
W: How long was the train ride?

B: I don’t have . . . [Laughter] I don’t remember about the train. I would imagine it was a couple of hours, though, at least.

W: Did anybody else from that area go with you, or did you go by yourself?

B: No, I was by myself.

W: Okay. So you got to the train station in Jackson and Tougaloo met you, people from Tougaloo met you. You recall who met you?

B: No, I don’t know who else was. There was a van out there from the college and they told us the van would be there, but who was driving this van, I don’t have the least idea.

W: So, you got there, and you began your studies in mathematics. Did you have professors who inspired you, kind of showed you along the way, who encouraged you?

B: Yeah. Dr. Rice was the—about half of the teachers at Tougaloo were white at that time. Dr. Rice was an elderly white man. He lived on campus. His wife was the postmistress on the campus there. I kind of, because of the fact that he was teaching math, I just assumed that’s where I started, following around after him, learning to run movie projectors. He would run the projectors to show campus movies and stuff like that, and I’d mess around there with him, doing things like that, you know, and everything. Then, there was Professor Lomax was from New York City. He was black. I learned how to play tennis, and he and I would always get up early in the morning and we would play. He had influence on me, also, there.
W: So you always felt from the support you got from the professors you were going to succeed.

B: In other words?

W: That you would succeed.

B: Oh, yeah, sure. You know, it never dawned on me that I would fail. I was naïve about a lot of things; it never dawned on me that I would wind up in the streets out there or anything like that, because you’ve got to remember, now, the times that we were living back there, I never really knew anybody that didn’t have a daddy at their house until I came to the Delta up here. Everybody in Charleston had a daddy there, unless their daddy was dead or their mama was dead, you know, but there’s always a connection. There wasn’t any of this kinds of things that we see going on out here, you know, people doing something of everything and stuff and locking doors. I don’t know if our house even had a lock on it or not. I really, I really don’t think it did.

W: Well, what degree—you got a degree in math at Tougaloo, and then you went to, what was the next step?

B: The next step. I was on my way home from Tougaloo and I called my father to pick me up. He told me that they needed a teacher, a math teacher, in Grenada. He gave me the lady’s name, so I called her and I talked to her, so she gave me the job teaching there, teaching math in Grenada.

W: This is the principal in Grenada?

B: Huh?

W: The principal.
B: No, I wasn’t the principal.

W: No, the lady who called up—

B: Oh, yeah, yeah. This was the first time I’d worked under that lady.

W: What was her name?

B: Her name was Cara Dotson.

W: Okay. Do you recall where she got her education?

B: Rust College.

W: Rust College.

B: Yeah.

W: What did you teach?

B: Huh?

W: What did you teach?

B: What did I teach? Well, basically, the first three or four years I was there, I taught all of the math that was taught in the high school. It was me; I taught the algebra, both of them, and I taught the geometry. I taught the business math and advanced math, trigonometry, everything that was taught there in math, because I was the only math teacher there. In fact, in the high school there, I was sponsoring ninth grade class and, I remember clearly, I had ninety students in that class, for my homeroom. You know? Classes weren’t being divided or anything like that at the time, because I was just one and one. One English teacher there, one math teacher there, one social science teacher.

W: When you taught ninety students, did students sit on the floor? What kind of a room was it?
B: No—I had a room big enough to see them all.

W: Okay. It wasn’t in a gym? It was in your room.

B: Oh, yeah. It was a room big enough to seat them. That room on the corner down there is the very first room you went into, you know. I guess they was anticipating it or something, but that building is a church now, because they built a new high school there, maybe eight or nine or ten years later. They built a new high school there, and they named it after Ms. Dotson, the high school; the new school they built up.

W: Well, you said you coached, as well? What else did you do?

B: Well, what happened, it was two men in the entire high school. This other fellow, he and I roomed together. He was a football coach.

W: What was his name?

B: His name was Woody Foster. Well, now, Foster was a good boy. He was real smart and he was very versatile. He could do a lot of things, but he was not a disciplinarian. Well, they told me I was a disciplinarian. So he would take the boys off and stuff, and I distinctly remember, they came to Leland—you know where Leland is down there—they came to Leland down there to play football, and the boys at that time, you know, you had to dress in a room in the school. So they were dressing in their shop there. The boys came back and they had stolen all the saw limbs—[Laughter] At the shop, they brought it back to Grenada. So, the principal called, the principal up there. So she said, Mr. Nathan, you get them boys out there. I got them in there and I scared them half to death and everything, so they started bringing stuff up there and everything, so she started
sending me with the football team. Then he left and she asked me if I would take it over. I didn’t know about coaching no football, so I got me a lot of books and literature and film and stuff like that, and I got to be pretty good. In fact, one time, we won thirty-six straight ball games at one time. Won three or four championships and stuff. But that’s how I got into coaching. But I was coaching and still teaching full time, you know, what I was doing then. They wasn’t paying nothing for coaching back there, then.

W: Were you applying any of your principles from teaching mathematics to teaching football?

B: Well, I can imagine that your problem solving skills for mathematics should be applicable to any phase of your life, you know. You know what the problem is and you know what the parameters are and everything; you know what you’re trying to get to, and how to raise to get there and everything. So, you take it step by step by step, like you’re solving an equation; you know, step by step by step. In fact, I say it’s been applicable in everything that I’ve attempted to do in my life. I surely would, you know, and everything. I got to be pretty well known around there in Grenada, between the blacks and the whites in that community there. The next big thing that happened there was the Meredith March. You know, when Meredith started off with Memphis coming down that way . . . they would stop at different towns every night and stuff, everything. When we got some—me, her being a female, and I wasn’t married at the time when I first went there. So anything that happened at night, he had to give me the keys, and they called me Mr. Nathaniel because my brother was working there, too, and they called
him Mr. Floyd. So, the distinction between him and Mr. Boclair, you know, just call them by their first names. But Mr. Nathaniel, I want you to go over here tonight and do this; come over here on the weekends, say somebody's going to be over there, they need to get inside to do that. I was glad to do that, because I lived right in front of the school—and she lived right beside the school—but I lived directly in front of the school, [inaudible 18:36] there, you know. So I spent a lot of time in school there and I spent a lot of time with the male students around there, also. I had me a bicycle—I didn’t have no car then—we just had a bicycle and we’d just be running around there with the Boy Scouts. I was the Boy Scout master. I mean, we did a lot of things then. But, anyway, this Meredith March started down through there. Well, we knew they was coming to Grenada. I had married by that time. My wife’s father had the only black service station between Memphis and Jackson on Highway 51. They was coming straight down Highway 51; 55 wasn’t out there then. So, it was a group of us young, black men there in town. We had had us a little Boys and Girls Club there at the recreation center, and we having all kind of games and we having dances and just doing things, trying to keep them out of trouble, you know. But, anyway, we got together and said, well, now, so your daddy-in-law got this station up there? They’re coming right by there. I said, we’re going to ask him if we can get everybody drinks out there to have them and be ready for them. He said, oh, yeah—they called me Chief—he said, oh, yeah, Chief, we’d be glad to do that. So we had all these drinks and things out there. Meanwhile, the City Fathers—they had gotten in touch with the City Fathers—and they wanted to camp out on the school grounds
up there, you know. So, he had me up there. We was talking about it. I said, well, I
don't understand how we're all going to stay up here. I said, other times they've
been in, they can stay on the school campus, maybe one nights or two nights
and then they leave. But, man, they got the group unloaded; they stayed there
six weeks. They sure did. I mean, all hell broke loose there and everything. It was
. . . it was really a rough time there for everybody. It was just a rough time there
for everybody, you know?

W: How did you know they were coming?
B: Huh?

W: Was there an organization, or what was the network that let you know that—
B: Oh, it was on the news. It was on the news every day, you know? On TV every
day. You know, you could just see them up there, you know? Maybe five or six
hundred of them or something out there. Man, some of them was in wheelchairs
and things, coming along there. They was coming on down the line out there.
But, anyway, when you got to Grenada, after the first night they busted all the
windows out of my father-in-law's place up there, so we did put planks up there
for the duration of the time that they were there.

W: What was your father-in-law's name?
B: Eddie Robinson.

W: Okay, and your wife's name?
B: Huh?

W: Your wife, sir?
Mattie. She was Mattie Robinson. We organized, and we was boycotting. Now, meanwhile, the principal had already told them, now, look. Said, all of my teachers got to be able to vote. She told them that even before anything about a march, anything. So all of us were registered to vote already. So she told the white folks, said, look here, now. If he hadn't got no sense to vote, he hadn't got no sense to teach. So, she had all of her teachers registered. She made them register all of us. So they said, well, she got up here—at that time, a woman could do a lot more than a man could do, to tell you the truth of the matter. But, anyway, she had all of us register to vote. That was one of the best things she'd ever done, simply because of this reason: when they came there that night, in that big room I was talking about was at a church right there in front of my house. It's even now a church, because they built a new school across town over there. So, now it's a church there. So, they had to march there that night; Martin Luther King, man, he turned the place out there. Stokely was there. What's that little short rascal's name from Washington up there?

W: John Lewis?

B: Huh?

W: John Lewis?

B: No, no. Not Lewis. Lewis was in Georgia. I can’t think of his name, but anyway, Jose was there, because Jose stayed there the whole time. King would just come in and—

W: Jose Williams?
B: Yeah. Jose stayed with my brother the whole time he was there, mm-hm. Sure did. But anyway, that night, the preacher said, we need a telephone. I said, well, I have my three boys over there in the—my three sons—I had carried them over there to hear Martin speak that night, you know. I said, well, there's a telephone right across the street; my house is right there. So I carried him in there, and he made a call to somebody. He said, we're going to open that courthouse up tonight, and we're going to start registering people to vote tonight. So, when we got up there to the courthouse, they said, well, there's too many people up here, and there's only this one woman working in there. You've got to be a registered voter—they had us who was already registered to vote there, so they forced in there and I stayed there. I missed going back to graduate school; I called my senior professor and he told me, he said, look, what you're doing has been a valuable lesson. You stay there and help out with that. So I did that for a solid week there, though, and I imagine we registered at least fifteen hundred or two thousand people there to vote, and that changed that whole town now. You go over there now, it's a different place in terms of who is holding this boards and who the mayor is and who's on the city council, you know, and things of that nature, though. We did a lot of other things, though. The stories I could tell you, man, it takes too long to tell, about us trying to build a store and how much trouble we had. Martin coming out; we would meet with King about once a week. He would come and meet with us, the members of the board. We was going to build a store, we called it the B&P, Black and Poor. We weren't going to buy no groceries in town, nothing, you know. [Laughter]
W: About what year is this, by the way?

B: This was in the middle [19]60s, in the middle [19]60s. So, we was going to build a store, but one of the white man had a store there. He sued us and said we put him out of business. So, what they did was this: we bought a couple of acres of land down there and we started building on the building, but they froze all our money. We'd already raised about twenty-seven, twenty-eight thousand dollars there, and we thought we was on our way. Man, what they done was this: they didn't know who was doing what. So they said, well, who are we going to get up here, then? Well, who is on the checks? Who can sign and say . . . ? The preacher that was signing checks couldn't; he had gone to Detroit, he'd left down. I'm the only somebody left there with checks on them, so they wind up taking my house. I finally got it back, but it was, oh, I'd come back at Valley before I got possession of the house. That was way in the [19]70s before I finally got full possession where I could sell it, you know. Now, they didn't take it like they would take it in—it still stayed in my name, and I still had to pay taxes on it, you know—

W: They just tied it up.

B: But I couldn't do what I wanted to do with it, you know, and everything.

W: Yeah.

B: But it was a rough time there, oh, man, it was a rough time there. It sure was.

W: Let me ask you a couple of questions. Your three sons, what are their names?

B: My oldest son is named Nathaniel also, and he's an engineer with NASA. He's been there twenty-some years now in Huntsville, Alabama. My middle son is named Edward. He lives in Naperville, Illinois now. He's the vice president for
Gold Operations, for a software company. My youngest son, Kenneth, lives in Jackson. He’s a real estate broker. He has his own business down there in Jackson.

W: How did you meet your wife?

B: I met my wife in Grenada. Her home is in Grenada there, see. She was off in college. When she came home, stepped out to see and talk and stuff, I guess it was five or six years before we got married.

W: So, you graduated from Tougaloo and then you talked about graduate school?

B: Yeah.

W: How did you decide what graduate school did you go to, and how did you decide to go there?

B: I went to St. Louis University, and I went there because I received a brochure in the mail for the college of teaching mathematics, said they need some assistance to go up there. So, I rode up there and everything, and I gave them this spiel about—they’d have the closest school to me that I could go to. [Laughter] At the time, it probably was the closest one I could go to and everything. So I said, this is like my home school. So they let me go up there. They treated me well up there, too. I had the best time. I met some good people up there.

W: And you had good support from Tougaloo? They would encourage you to go?

B: What's that?

W: The faculty at Tougaloo.

B: No, the faculty at Tougaloo encouraged me to go the first year I got out. They was trying to get me to go. In fact, if they hadn’t needed that math teacher in
Grenada at that time, I probably would have went on to grad school at that point, without even taking a teaching job. I probably would have.

W: How long did you teach before you went back to graduate school?
B: Well, let me see. I'd say about twelve, thirteen years.
W: Twelve or thirteen years.
B: Yeah, yes, sir. It was a good stretch up in between there, you know.
W: Okay, so, you get to St. Louis. They're happy to have you there.
B: Oh, yes.
W: What kind of support did you have from the faculty while you were there?
B: They had . . . something like a, I would call them a tutor. One of the students was above us there in graduate school, and they had hired them just to assist us with any type of help that we need. Like we had the study session and etcetera, but they had somebody, always have somebody there to give us assistance if we needed it, you know, and everything.
W: And it was a warm environment? You felt that everybody was . . .
B: Oh, yes. It was a very warm environment. Basically, the first time I left there, I was basically the only black—I know I was the only black in the dormitory, and I believe I might have been the only black in that particular department, in the mathematics department at the time. I mean, there just wasn't a whole bunch of them up there or anything. One thing I found in the graduate schools, most of the black students in graduate schools would not be from the North or the East, they would be people from the South; blacks from the South would be going up there to get their—I know we had Rutgers up there. I mean, those black people out
there probably didn’t even know what was out there. They really didn’t. And it was a brick’s throw from them, when they could have taken advantage of it. But, for some reason or another, they said, mm-mm. They sure didn’t.

W: Do you recall the chair of your master’s committee?

B: Huh?

W: The name of the chair of your master’s committee.

B: Francis Reagan.

W: Okay. What kind of relationship did you have with Dr. Reagan?

B: Oh, very good, very good. There were four or five of us there together; I don’t know what they called us there, but it was four or five of us, and basically all of us were some of coach in our school and all of us was math teachers at our schools, also. So we would get with Dr. Reagan and we would take him out to dinner, some nice restaurant there in town, you know. Yeah, but he was okay, though. Very, very good.

W: How quickly did you finish the master’s?

B: Four years.

W: Four years.

B: Yeah, but I was just working in the summers, now.

W: So, you finished the master’s. Did you already have a plan about what you would do next?

B: Oh, no. You see, I just came back to Grenada. Then, when Mrs. Dotson retired, she recommended me to be the principal and everything there. A lot of people in town would say, man, you know they’re not going to give you that job, because
they had you in court; you was testifying against there up in that civil rights day. I said, well, if I get it, fine. If I don't, you know, you can't miss something you never had. But I did get the principalship and everything. Soon after I got the principalship, that's when this thing with Proctor came through. I agonized over that, you know. My wife and my brother, other people that I talked to and everything said, well, man, you know—you've gone about as far as you can go here, for the time being, you know? Someday, there's going to be a black superintendent here, but they ain't ready for that right now yet, now. Said, you might as well go on back to school and everything, and so my wife thought it was a good idea, so we packed up, went on up there to Piscataway, New Jersey.

W: To Rutgers.

B: Uh-huh, yeah.

W: Why Rutgers? Did they . . . took special effort to call you up there, or what happened?

B: The president of the Mississippi Teacher's Association had some kind of contact—I'm sure Sam got in touch with him, Proctor. And asked him if he was looking for teachers in the area, black teachers in the area of science, mathematics, and English. You haven't talked to Roy Hudson yet?

W: No, he'll be the next.

B: I said, you're going to probably meet him now, because me and him been together all day today. There's where I met him at, and I brought him back down here with me when I came back down here. [Laughter] This is his home. But, anyway, he had his master's degree already. So, Dutworth called us—
W: Who is Dutworth?

B: Dutworth was the president of the Mississippi Teacher's Association at the time, which was a black organization at the time. So, went down there and Roy Hudson was down there. Sam's emissary was there, a boy named Johnson. I forget what his first name was. But, anyway, he told us about the program and everything. I said, shoot, I don't know if I'm going up there or not. But, anyway, after talking it over with my family and everything, we said it might be the best thing, the best move I ever made. So, we just decided to go on up there and take a chance at it, you know.

W: And what year was that?

B: That was in [19]69.


B: Right.

W: What happened when you got there?

B: Well, when I got there, my wife got a teaching job making almost twice as much money as she was before we unloaded the truck, almost. Sam had everything laid out for us up there; we didn't have to worry about anything too much, to tell you the truth of the matter. I mean, he had the housing already laid out for us and everything, and schedules and all that kind of stuff. The people who would help us, if we had any kind of problems or anything, he had it well laid out there and everything. It was real good, too. The money was nice. Since Sam had part of the money there, now, they were basically paying us to go up there. It was real nice, because my kids got a chance to go a lot of different places that they
probably wouldn’t have been going to that soon. They went to Yankee Stadium, went to Shea Stadium, went to Madison Square Garden, went to Washington, D.C.; we did the stuff we’d always been going somewhere up there, taking advantage of it all with them and everything. But it was . . . it was a shock, in terms of the people up there and the town and stuff and weather and everything, in comparison to what it was, you know. What it was down here and everything. But it wasn’t anything that was so traumatic that we weren’t able to deal with it.

My wife was in the public schools. They was crying for black teachers up there then. So they was so glad to see her, they didn’t know what to do. Some days, she’d be back home at twelve o’clock before they even turned school out down there. Police at the door—I had never seen her like that before. I had to go up there and get permission from him to unlock the door and let me in, things of that nature and stuff. So it was a cultural shock in terms of the way you’ve been accustomed to living, and living with a situation like that. But it was a good experience, though. Sure was a very good experience.

W: Mm-hm. What was your department like there?

B: The department was . . . it was pretty good, but it was a lot of resentment there from a lot of the other students there because there were seventeen of us. They knew that Sam had gotten all of these different things for us and everything; had people to help us in the libraries, if you’re looking for something and you couldn’t find it or something, because he knew we had to get out of there in two years, though. He said, if you’re not in the two years, boy, you’re on your own.

W: You had a group of seventeen students that he recruited at the same time?
B: He recruited at the same time, you know. He went to Louisiana. I gather, he did the same thing he did in Mississippi, you see. But it was more from Mississippi than what then I think was eight of us in Mississippi up there. But he had some from Louisiana and South Carolina, I believe it was, and it might have been one from North Carolina and one from that Mormon state, up there, I believe. Seventeen of us up there altogether. So a lot of our contact was just between us and that little group of seventeen, like have little parties and things. We would have everything, just be that little group of seventeen there, basically, all of the time.

W: Well, tell me about Sam Proctor. Where was he from? Why did he do this? What was his motivation?

B: Well, Sam had been a college president at North Carolina A&T, the same time Jesse Jackson was there. Jesse left to go during the civil rights march and things, and Sam fell out with Jesse then; he tried to get Jesse to stay in school, he said, but Jesse wouldn't—no, he had a different calling and everything. Well, Sam was the president of North Carolina A&T at the time, and then I think he went to Virginia Union or something. Then he went to Africa, running the Peace Corps down there in Africa for Kennedy down there, you see. So, Sam had been to a lot of different schools. Then he went to the University of Wisconsin and Rutgers recruited him from the University of Wisconsin. I found out one thing up there—big schools like that, man, department head didn't mean anything. Nobody wanted to be department head, because those full professors are going
to do what they want to do anyway. Like Sam said, I don't teach no classes on Monday.

W: Period.

B: Period, huh-uh. I'm not going to teach no class on Monday, said, because I'm going to be travelling. I'm speaking somewhere every week—that was before he got to be the pastor at the Abyssinian Baptist Church, you know. When he got to be the pastor up there, I guess he started teaching on Monday then, because he probably wasn't doing much speaking engagements and things. We had Sam down here about three or four times when I was in the university out there, you know. But he had somewhere to go all the time. But, anyway, I guess Sam felt a calling, and he knew the plight of the black colleges and things. He was basically—he didn't say we needed to go to a black college, but he was basically training us to go where he wanted to go, because the first class you took was going to be under Sam. First class you took, I forget what the name of the class was, but it was B.S. by Sam, that's what we called it. He was a preacher, but he could do that, too, man. I mean, that man could talk; ooh, he could talk. He was really, he was just a wonderful person, I tell you the truth. He really was.

W: So, do you think he was following the mission of the land grant? You know, the 1890 school, that's why he was—

B: I don't think it was so much land grant, I think it was just a black college thing. I don't think Sam made that much difference between the land grants, because some of the students, some of them up there, some of the seventeen came—was already out of college, already had a master's degree, but they didn't have
their doctorate degree. Like the boy from Cleveland, he had a master's degree, but he didn't have a doctorate, though. But I don't think that Sam was so much with the land grant situation, I just think that he felt in his mind that this was something he saw that he could do to help the black colleges, so he wrote his grant and he got the money. Excuse me. He got the money from Washington there, and got the program funded, you know, and everything.

W: So you finished in two years, like . . . ?

B: Oh, yeah. Me and Roy. Most of us finished in two years, but the kind of help that Sam gave us, oh, man, you almost had to be an idiot. What I found out in graduate school, I don't know how it is in Florida, but what I found out up there, man, there's as much politics in there as anything. Sam said, look here, now. You don't have ideas of your own or know nothing. Said, when people started questioning you about, dissertation ought to be wrote this way here and this thing in here, you say, yes, ma'am, no, ma'am, you get out there and go back and change it. The other one's going to tell you to change it back the way it was, so you just keep on doing what they want to do until they get tired of seeing you down there and everything. [Laughter] This money's going to be gone in two years, and you got to be ready to go out and get you a job. He said, because I can't help you after two years anything. But he had it laid out there with the people to give us the assistance that we needed and everything. I mean, he really did that.

W: And he gave you the mentoring to avoid the political problems.
B: Oh, yeah, uh-huh. Like I said, you know, the class basically worked—last time, when I was sending students to school and everything. It's the politics. The classes are not the problem; it's the politics that's the problem. I mean, shoot. We got a couple girls we sent down to Mississippi State—I made some good contacts in Mississippi, once I came back to Valley, you know. I was on a couple state commissions and stuff like this. But anyway, I met the deans of the schools up there and everything, and I could send people that was right for it in there and everything. He said, shoot. He said, Boclair, I'm trying to help that girl, but I can't help her, though. She won't help herself. She can get a lesson and everything, but Miss So-and-so, Dr. So-and-so has been here forty years, and I can't against her. [Laughter] She says, if she can't get along with her, now, she might as well go on back down there to Valley with that master's degree, because there isn't a thing I can do for her up there. I just can't do that. But, now, the people that could work the system weren't having the trouble getting out, you know. In fact, we had a lot of them. In fact, my wife went to Mississippi State up there, in no time flat, almost. But, like I said, classes are not the problem. I mean, it's the politics. I believe that, if somebody in the department don't want you to graduate, I don't believe you'll ever get that doctorate degree, if somebody there don't want you to graduate. But somebody that wants you to graduate, and you're doing the right things and everything—but like I said, you got to get your lesson, you know. But the lesson is not, basically, the problem, you know. We had one fellow up there—I mean, he would never get out of school. We would be trying to tell an instructor about what they ought to be doing and everything, and Sam told us, don't go up
there with that foolishness. Look, man. Said, you go in there, sit down, and be quiet. Just listen to what they got to say and try to get it back to them when they get ready for it or anything. Don't make no waves or nothing. Said, now, once you leave there and you get that paper in your hand, you go right back and tell him anything you want to tell him, anyway. But, said, huh-uh, now, you just don't do that, not if you intend to get out.

W: Do you think that it is a particular situation for the black graduate student or the young black faculty member? They got to walk the line a certain way, or how would you describe?

B: I don't think it's any different for a black one than it is for a white one. I don't believe it is, you know, at that level, at the doctoral level. I don't believe there's any difference between a black one and a white one. That's just my own present opinion about it, though, with anything. White students, at that level, generally have very strong opinions, also, about things, you know, and they don't have any reservation about putting them out there, you know, anything. Shoot, I looked at Rutgers, some of those people been around there for seven, eight years. I said, I don't know what this is; folks got money or what it was. What do you want to be, a professional student?

W: [Laughter] So you left Rutgers in two years. Did you already have your next step set up, or . . . ?

B: No, huh-uh. My major professor up there was trying to send me to the University of Buffalo. When I came to Washington that weekend, to a football game, is when I met Dr. Boykins down there at the football game. He was up there for the
football game; Valley was playing in Washington. I met him and we started talking, but I didn't know him beforehand. In fact, I didn't [inaudible 45:03]. I just knew it was over there. Everything I tell my kids, the football game's down there and stuff, but I didn't really have any connection to it or anything. But Roy Hudson had graduated from there, so he was the one said, Boclair, let's ride down there. So we went down there and I met him, and he started calling me every Saturday, he would call me. He said, when is the best time to call you, man? I said, Saturday. So I gave him my number and everything, he called me on Saturday and we'd talk and everything. In fact, he had his own telephone up there, sure did. He said, imagine the things I got to get done down there. I said, I've asked a lot of stuff about you in Mississippi. Said, I believe you can help me do it. So . . . that's how I wound up down here. My wife won't stay up there, though. She really did. I said, well, look, man. My wife, I was looking at her, my parents are getting older; your parents are getting older. I said, shoot. It's one thing, driving from Itta Bena to Grenada or Charleston and catching a plane in Buffalo, New York, trying to come down here and see about him or something. I said, it's a whole different thing. Sure enough, man, after the first four or five years, we started having that sickness on both sides before they all died and everything, sure did.

W: So what year was that, that you came to Valley?
W: Okay, and what was your position when you came?
B: Dean of Education.
W: Okay, so you came in as the Dean of Education.

B: Oh, yeah. I came in as the Dean of Education, yeah, uh-huh.

W: Had you, with Dr. Boykins, had you negotiated the salary, your position, tenure? I mean, was all that set up?

B: All that was set up. I mean, I didn’t get tenure. In fact, I didn’t ask for it. In fact, I never asked for it. I never felt like I needed tenure.

[Telephone rings]

B: A lot of people spend a lot of time doing that and everything. Hello? I'm doing fine, Stacey. No, he's still here. Okay, fine, then. I'll get him out here in a minute.

[Laughter] Okay, sure. Yeah, uh-huh. That's Stacey. She says, could you get to get her to the car? They're waiting on you. I told her, I said, Stacey, what you could do if you wanted to now—

[Break in recording]

B: Yeah, he just . . . again, he bored down the resources. The school's putting money in the programs that want us to win. White and black, University of Florida, y'all winning, but y'all putting money in the program, though. You paying them coaches good salaries down there and things. Small schools like Vanderbilt, Kentucky and stuff, they might get lucky and win one every once in a while, you know, but they're not on a consistent basis like Tennessee and LSU and Florida and Alabama, because don't nobody put no money in all of that. Same way with the black schools, you know. Southern, Jackson State, Meridian, they're the ones putting money in the program. They got them big crowds.
following them and everything. We play a football game out there, sometimes there's going to be five hundred paying people in the stadium out there.

W: Mm-hm. You think black college sports is a metaphor for what's happening with black colleges overall?

B: Oh . . . I would say so. Because, when we first came here, we was getting some really good students. I mean, without half trying. But now, man, to get a student in the top percentile of his graduating class, man, you've got to be doing something. Ole Miss and Mississippi State now just gobbling them up. They just prefer going there than coming here.

W: I was in Oxford today and I saw there were a lot of black students.

B: There's a lot of black students. Delta State, the campus for Mississippi State got more than they got, Southern Mississippi got more than they got. It's a bunch of them there, it sure is, now, see. It's just a sign of the times. I hate to say this, I don't know how much longer black colleges are going to be able to make it unless they can start appealing to some crossover students, which is very difficult to do.

W: What about international students?

B: Yeah, international students would do just fine, but I don't know how many people from Russia and Canada are going to want to come down here, though. They've got to give them good, going out there now, but they tell them to come down here and play volleyball or soccer or whatever they're playing out there, they're having some luck with that too and everything, but it's just . . . I think it's going to be difficult. I won't say it can't be done, because you don't ever say what
can't happen. Somebody, someone's bound to come along and figure out a way to do it.

W: What about that black student that wants the black college environment, or that black faculty member that wants to be a mentor to black students? They're willing to say, I'm not worried about the resources at the predominantly white school; I'm not worried about the salary. I want to come back to a place like Valley or Alcorn. I want to be a mentor to black students. How does the historically black college track that faculty member, that student?

B: [Laughter] You say that, you know . . . when I was [inaudible 50:37]. One of my basic responsibilities was trying to attract faculty, you know, especially at the doctoral level. I never ran across one that . . . expressly desired to me like you're talking about. Basically, you've got to grow your own, almost. The way you can grow your own, you've got to go out and try to get somebody that has got something down here other than the university, you see? Your wife wouldn't want you to come to Valley to teach if she wasn't teaching out there also, because there's nothing for her to do. No nice restaurants to take her to, nowhere you can take her to a play or anything, you know? It's just not here. So, when you take somebody like me, I had parents down here, I had something pulling me down here besides the fact that I had a job waiting on me out there. You see? And everything. My wife was the same way; she had something pulling her, and she still didn't want to come. She still didn't want to come. It's very, very difficult. So, what I tried to do, I said, look. We need to grow our own up. We had the Title I money and we sent them to school and everything, but they . . . they didn't want
to major in what I wanted them to major them in. If you're teaching in the English department, I want you to major in English. I don't want you to be getting no Education Administration degree. I'm not fattening frogs for snakes; I'm trying to get somebody in the English department over there, you know? That's what the blues says, fattening frogs for snakes.

W: [Laughter] It's hard to follow that one. Okay, let's put them HBCU's aside for a second. Let's talk about the predominantly white colleges. They have the resources, but you mention the situation about things to do, socially and culturally, that tie in with black faculty and the lifestyle of a black person that associates with black people. What can the predominantly white institutions do to try to attract and retain that type of scholar or those types of graduate students?

B: I think the first thing they need to do is to try to make sure they got a cadre of black faculty there. If you got a cadre of black faculty there, I think that would automatically, when black graduate students come there, if you've got black graduate faculty there, when black graduate students come there, it's a different relationship between students in graduate school and faculty and students in undergraduate school and faculty. It's a totally different relationship there. At Rutgers, I mean, shoot, we'd have wine and cheese in there every night for class in there. You know? You're not going to be doing that with undergraduate students, though. So that was a different relationship. They'd be inviting us out to their houses and things, to parties and things, stuff like this. You know? To make them feel at home and to make them feel welcome, you've got to have people there that . . . can do that, you know. Now, some people are just not social by
nature, though. But if you've got people there who is social by nature and you can kind of encourage them to live in the same neighborhoods, and black faculty and white faculty live in the same neighborhoods and try to get a good mix there, really, what you got there is this: the black students feel welcomed to be there with the blacks and the whites, but the blacks is close enough so that when he gets ready to go to a black church on a Sunday, he's got somebody to take him to a black church on Sunday, you know? If he wants to go to a place at night that's predominantly black, you know. At the University of St. Louis, I tell them what I was looking for. I said, I'm tired of them white folks all day. I've got to go find me some black folks. I go down to the corner, the bar down there. [Laughter] More black folks than you can find bricks down there, you know? So, you're not scared to go down there? I said, no, I'm at home down there. I'm not scared to go down there. I'm at home down there. But it's . . . life is something else, though, to tell you the truth. I don't know what the answers to all these problems are and everything, but . . . I think that it's people like you that's coming along that's going to be writing these books and things that's just going to help to kind of . . . to help to bring it together. I'm just hoping that you looking at a white college to work rather than just spend my time in a black school. It's nice to do that, you know. But I would advise any young person coming along now to try to handle themselves in such a way that they can move into the mainstream of a predominantly white institution, because there's going to be enough black folks to help you to save your life, black folks at Valley out there.
W: What do you think is the greatest challenge facing the university today? We'll start first with the predominantly white colleges. What's the greatest challenge that those schools face?

B: I think it's financial budgetary problems right now. I think that's the greatest challenge that they face right now. You see, I don't know about other states, but I know about California, I know they're having all kinds of financial problems out there with higher education. Also with all levels of education: Mississippi's having problems. I don't know about Florida, whether they have—I was down there the week before the Super Bowl, with my sister there and everything, but I don't know whether they're having problems down there or not in Florida. You're having problems, too?

W: We had budget cuts the year before last, and they're saying that we might have some cuts again this year. The legislature's in session right now, so you don't know what's going to happen when the legislature's in session. Anything can happen.

B: Yeah. The legislature's in session in Mississippi, too. I think today might be their last day, but they got to go back, though. They haven't settled on a budget for next year. The budget comes in on the first of July, but I think that's a major problem throughout the country. The biggest problem is this: the way I see it is, is that once a governmental entity is formed, it's hard to get rid of. All you've got to do is multiply and get bigger and bigger every year. When I first came here to college, the college board in Jackson down there, man, had three people down there. I bet you it's fifty down there now. That's how it's multiplying in just this
short period of time. You see? Every one is going to sending stuff up here for you to do, for feeling justified for him to be down there and enjoying that big salary that he's throwing down there, you know. When it comes time to contract it, though, we don't know what we're going to do. We'll try this and we'll try that, though. It's very difficult to get rid of a government agency. It's very difficult to make it small. They think it ought to be expanded. But things can only expand for so long, though. In fact, you got a contract—I know Mississippi's got one of the best retirement systems you've ever seen, but I'll tell you the truth, man, it's unsustainable, in my opinion. It's unsustainable. You can't let people work twenty-five years and talk about retiring, with full retirement pay and everything, and then you're going to give them a bonus check every Christmas? Man, you know last Christmas, on December 15, my bonus check was thirty-five thousand dollars. Man, that's more money than a lot of folks out here making. That's unsustainable, ain't it? You just can't keep on doing that; every year it's getting bigger and bigger, the bonus check is. Every year it gets larger and larger, as long as you live. That's just unsustainable. I don't know who wrote the rules to do that out there. I appreciate it, now, don't you know and everything, I don't want to turn no money down, but overall in the long run, though, Mississippi just can't keep doing that. Not and survive—they just can't keep doing the things that we're doing now. Now, what they're going to cut back on, I don't know. See, before, they always wanted to close—close Valley. We went through that fight three or four different times. I know Roy will talk about it, though, because he's been one of the leaders in the fight against the closure and everything. But for the one
major problem right now I see is that. The second one I would see—and I don't think there's been any changes since I was there—and that is that, during the sciences, it's the lack of American faculty in the sciences.

W: Is this at black colleges?

B: Any college. I mean, shoot. My kid up there in Mississippi State, Dad, I had to sit on the front row, trying to read his lips when somebody's talking up there and everything. When we come down to the meetings down there, we'd all go to the College Board once a month to have meetings down there, you know. College Board members be talking about parents be calling them, complaining, talking about they couldn't under their professors and stuff. A lot of them was Chinese, a lot of them was Indian, in the sciences, the physics, the biology, the chemistry, stuff like that. I don't think that's a problem that's just in the black schools; I think that's a problem in basically all of the schools. In Mississippi, I know back there, Indian was a problem, trying to attract. I know it's good to have a mix there, but you don't want to have all foreigners in a department, I wouldn't think, huh-uh. I wouldn't want that.

W: How about the biggest challenge for the black college?

B: Huh?

W: What's the biggest challenge for the black college?

B: The biggest challenge for the black college, in my opinion, is going to be to try to turn around the influx of the top black schools to the predominantly white schools, to try to encourage them to come to black schools. Like at one time, that was the only place they had that they could go to. But now, I mean, it's very
difficult to attract a top-flight black student, academic-wise. Athletic-wise, too, it's hard to attract a top student to a black institution.

W: Do you think that's generational? Because in the past, it was segregated, so that's . . .

B: Yeah. Something that's always been there, white is better, you know? White is better, you know. They like white sugar better than they like brown sugar. Seems like white is just better. So . . . they send you kind of resources and things that they have there that's, excuse me, that the black schools just don't have. They got them big endowments and people coming in. If a black school gets ready to fire a football coach, they got to wait till his contract run out. The white school getting ready to fire one, somebody come in with a sack of money tomorrow, say, y'all let him go. [Laughter] I'll take care of him, don't you worry about it. You've got to have people owning companies and things to do stuff like that, you know, big-time people and everything. I'm sure a lot of people will be there one day, but we're not quite there yet, though. But it would be good. I had the hardest time trying to talk to recruiters when I was at the university out there. Said, look, you don't have to worry about these kids making 12, 13, 14 on their ACT's. They're going to be here, they got miles to go. But go out there and bring me some 22's and 23's and 24's in here, and that's when I can send you a good recruiter now, you see? But hm-mm. Look at the head count. The head count is good because you've got to have the head count to keep the doors open and pay your bills and everything, you know, but every once in a while, the rest of us trying to squeeze one off in here somewhere, you know, and everything.
W: So you think that is a situation? A tradition at the black college to take even the remedial black student and build him up, that sense of uplift, is denying them that more highly-qualified student that isn't getting into the predominantly white university.

B: That's right because, you see, you got faculty there that's going to do more for that kid that's having a hard time and struggling. Black faculty's going to understand his plight better than a white faculty member would, now. I don't mean any black faculty or any—because I've had some blacks there that I wouldn't dare but in a remedial class or anything. But overall, though, they have a better understanding. They're willing to take more time; they're willing to stay after-hours longer to try help the student that's genuinely seeking help, you know, and everything.

W: Do you think that has changed with the black faculty that are seeking these jobs at the predominantly white institution? That, instead of reaching back to uplift and bring blacks along, they're more like, I've got to get mine. I've got this tenure pressure. I've got to publish. I can't spend this extra time doing that stuff; I've got to get out of here myself, got to do what I got to do.

B: That's right, that's right. That pressure's going to be on them. I mean, I sometimes think that . . . not necessarily tenure is bad, but the pressure to publish, I think that as much emphasis should be placed on teaching as it is on publishing. Right now, that's not the case, though. Right now, that's not the case. Shoot, I ain't got to be worrying about teaching these classes down here or what they're doing in these classes, I've got to be worried about getting something
published out here or something. You know? So, somehow, that system needs to be equalized more; give more to it, you see, because some schools—see, Valley is a teaching institution. The original institution in Mississippi was a teaching institution. But faculty members would never believe that he got to publish something or he got to go make a speech here or do that, you know. But what we was trying to grade him on was his ability to teach and to get along with students and to get along with other faculty in the department and everything, and of course they're not. I don't know, it's just so many problems out there. I guess whenever you got people, you're going to have some problems, though. I mean, if you've got people, you're going to have problems. The more highly-educated people, the more problems you're going to have.

W: That's true. I just want to make sure I have the correct listing of your positions at Valley. You came in as a dean of education?

B: Right.

W: Then you became the vice president of—

B: Academic Affairs.

W: Okay. Then, did you say that you served as—

B: Acting President.

W: Acting President.

B: I served twice.

W: Could you give me the dates of those positions, generally?

B: Oh, boy. The first one—let me see, [19]80 . . . Ernest left here in . . .

W: He retired from Valley in 1981.
B:  [19]81, okay. Well, I served six months, then, in the fall of [19]81 I served as
President. Then Joe Boyer came in, and when Joe Boyer left, he left in about
[19]86 or [19]87, somewhere along in there. I don't remember the exact dates,
though.

W:  And as Vice President for Academic Affairs—

B:  Uh-huh.

W:  That was ongoing. You held that until you left?

B:  Oh, yeah, that's long ago. When they hired the president, you see, the first time I
served as president, I applied for the position. I came out in the top three. In fact,
a lot of people thought I had it and everything, but I found out about one thing,
though, and it was magnified when Roy didn't get it last year, and that is, at a
black institution in Mississippi, very seldom will they put a person in that they feel
may have a pretty strong following with the politicians and the people in power.
Wait a minute, we can't tell them nothing, because he got the people out there—
[Laughter] You know, so, we'll go get somebody over there at Valley, bring them
in here, see. So, that's basically what they've been doing, all the black
institutions.

W:  That's why King ended up being president of the SCLC.

B:  Huh?

W:  They wanted a young, weak preacher. That's how King, when he went to
Alabama, got in charge. That's interesting.
B: So . . . when they gave me the job then, I was still the Dean of Education at that time, see. See, when the next president came in, though, then he made me—put me in charge of Academic Affairs.

W: Vice President of Academic Affairs.

B: Uh-huh.

W: So, the next time when you were interim president, you were in that position?

B: Academic Affairs, right. So, I appointed somebody to serve in my absence, and then, when this new president came in, then I went on back over there, where I had been there and everything.

W: When did you retire and leave Valley the final time?

B: I left Valley in [19]94, as a full-time president. But the president intoned upon me, and I taught a class, and I served as his . . . disciplinary chairman, for the disciplinary committee, little stuff like that, that he got me to do. I was very close to him, too. He would get me to do those things like that, just little pick up—keeping busy, doing something, you know. I officially left in July of [19]94, when I officially left there.

W: Dr. Boclair, I've appreciated the interview and the opportunity to be in your home so much. Thank you very much.

B: Oh, no problem. Any time.

W: I'd like to conclude the interview just by expressing that thanks and then asking you to make any closing comment that you might make. It can be about the interview; it can be about something else; but, at the end of your remarks, that will conclude the interview.
B: Well, I appreciate you thinking enough of me to include you in your study, and when you finish it, I would like to see just a brief synopsis of your conclusions that you have reached, you know, as a result of all of this. I would like to conclude by asking you, what are your plans now for the future after you graduate?

W: Well, currently, it will be in my plans to remain at the University of Florida for a while, at least until this African American History Project is completed. The president of our university and the provost have recently given $150,000 to spend the next several years interviewing African American voices, seventy and over, in the state of Florida to look at integration and segregation. So, I'm currently coordinating that program. As far as my doctorate in the College of Education, I'll put feelers out there; you know, go to conferences, speak to people. I have always been open to the possibility of working in agriculture, but it was never my first consideration. I wanted a degree in communication, a doctorate in communication, so I can continue to work in the field generally. So, I feel that this degree has helped me to cross-pollinate, prepare myself to work in interdisciplinary studies in history or in communications or in agricultural education and communication. So, my goal would be to remain in the South. I don't see any reason to go up north—it's cold up north. [Laughter]

B: How'd you meet Stacey?

W: Stacey and I have worked together in the Sunflower County Freedom Project.

B: Okay.

W: I've been coming to the Delta—
B: I know you say you've been coming to the Delta, and you've got interviews coming down here, then, like that?

W: Yes, sir.

B: Okay, then, okay. I was just wondering, what's the connection with you and her, you know.

W: Well, she's been a terrific colleague, and she really believes in me and is working hard to assist me in any way possible to complete my studies and make this study good. She's just that kind of person who became a friend right off and has become a really strong colleague and friend. I have a great respect for her and her efforts, and I appreciate her interest in me.

B: Well, Valley's campus is full of people just like her, now. It really is.

W: Well, we're coming back in September. Hopefully you'll participate in our activity. The University of Florida oral history program, we're going to continue to partner with the Sunflower County Freedom Project and Delta State, so we'll be back in September to do an additional program to work with them.

B: Well, that's wonderful. It sure is.

W: Thank you for your interest in my professional development. [Laughter]

B: Well, I was just wondering, you know. I know you've got your sights set on something.

W: Well, I'm a child of children of the movement, so the agenda of race in this country is very strong for me. Before I was eleven, twelve years old, I had read *David Walker's Appeal*, Angela Davis *When They Come in the Morning*, the Soledad Brothers in prison, Eldridge Cleaver *Soul on Ice*. My parents had the
Ebony magazine, Black America series at home, all the volumes. So I was born on the day that the march to Selma began, so I think it's important.

B: I know you've read Part the Waters.

W: Oh, of course. [Laughter] Taylor Branch is an incredible author.

B: Yes, certainly.

W: It was important to my folks. We used to watch the FBI on Sunday nights, just to see the 10 Most Wanted, see Angela Davis at the end of the show. [Laughter] It's been surprising to me that it takes so much to try to explain why studying things like the lives of black farmers, or the lives of black people, is considered outside the mainstream. So, I'm working hard to make it all work together. If this study allows people to look back and feel more inclusive, say, oh, yeah, I hadn't thought about that, then I think its purpose will be survived.

B: Right. Well, I wish you luck. I'm sure you'll be successful.

W: Thank you very much. You actually changed the protocol of my interview. Nobody's ever got me to say anything after I say, you say the last part. [Laughter]

[End of interview]