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Nicole Brown

Nicole Brown '99

Illinois Wesleyan University

Meg Miner

Illinois Wesleyan University

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Oral History Interview with Nicole Brown

Meg Miner: Hi, my name is Meg, and I am the Archivist and Special Collections Librarian at Illinois Wesleyan University. I am here today on a – rainy Friday... [Brown laughs]... May 19th of 2017, at the home of Nicole Brown. Nicole – could you please introduce yourself – tell us how you're affiliated with Wesleyan and we'll see where the conversation takes us . . .

Nicole Brown: Sure . . .

Miner: Thanks.

00:00:18 Introduction, affiliation with IWU. Class of 1999, worked in corporate sector, former Director of Multicultural Affairs (2005-2009), Visiting Assistant Professor of Sociology (2016-2017). Also taught as an adjunct for one semester as a sabbatical replacement for Sociology and taught one class while in Student Affairs on leadership, possibly with a Business course classification.

Brown: Umm.. So – I – am Nicole Brown... I am a... an alum [Miner laughs]

Miner: Yes.

Brown: I guess that's my current affiliation.

Miner: ... very true; current affiliation . . .

Brown: I – class of 1999, and – I worked in a corporate environment and then came back to Illinois Wesleyan working in Student Affairs as the Director of Multicultural Affairs. Now it's called Office of Diversity and Inclusion, but at the time it was Multicultural Affairs. So I was the director there from – I believe - '05 to '09 ... umm ... I know I left to pursue the Ph.D. in '09. So I believe it was about a four year period and I've tried to think it was ... it was before Daniel – he was born in '06... [Miner laughs]... so that's how--

Miner: Marker.

Brown: --Yes. And then ... then came back to institution again after receiving a Ph.D. in a visiting Assistant Professor role, so I have seen the institution as a student, as an alum – as a – as a ... a student affairs professional and as a faculty member.

Miner: And your visiting position – you've been a visitor for a lot longer than I thought – I – 'cause didn't you just had an anniversary? [Brown laughs]... I saw your name at the anniversary luncheon, I thought.

Brown: Yeah . . .

Miner: Is it longer than that?

Brown: So well, actually – I – I believe what – how they explained it to me was they took the four years of the Student Affairs experience...

Miner: Oh...

Brown: Plus the one year of the visiting...

Miner: Okay.

Brown: And so I guess other folks had ideas about how long I was gonna be there too [laughs]

Miner: Oh dear – oh my...

Brown: But – yeah it was something to give those emails about the milestone – but that's another story.

Miner: but it was a – essentially a year in an adjunct position...

Brown: well as a – yeah – well as a year in a visiting ... assistant professor...

Miner: A visiting – sorry – okay.

Brown: I actually did do – I forgot about that – it was the Fall of ... 2015, I think – it was either Fall of 2015 or Fall of 2016 – but I did teach for a semester. I taught in class—one of the faculty in Sociology was on sabbatical...

Miner: Okay.

Brown: And they asked me to come in and teach this course –so – so I did that... I tried to think.. did I – did I teach, again? [laughs] ... [Miner laughs] ... I taught when I was a Student Affairs. There was one class—it was right during the time when the—the—the then VP of Student Affairs had done that work to—with – with a faculty in the academic affairs side to—approve a course that was taught by Student Affairs, so Matt Damschroder who is no longer at the institution – him and I co-taught a course on leadership and I believe it fell under the business—business curriculum, but--

Miner: Oh, great!

Brown: I did teach a semester as a Student Affairs professional and then I came back and taught as an adjunct—and that role, I was an adjunct...

Miner: mm-hmm...

Brown: That fall semester, and then this time around, it was a—a visiting position...

Miner: Okay...

Brown: So... [laughs]

Miner: That is a lot of different connections.

Brown: Yes. Yes...[laughs]

00:04:02 On choosing IWU. How being a first generation college student and her boyfriend's acceptance affected her choice of IWU; also discusses her early upbringing and educational experiences.

Miner: So, how did you get to Illinois Wesleyan originally? What—what was a...what drew you there?

Brown: Well- So it's an interesting story. I'm a—a first generation college student—first generation faculty—first Christian out there—and so what that means in terms of my college searches that I didn't have a lot of assistance in navigating the process—umm—in high school I got really good grades, you know, A(s)—and I was – involved in lots of—you know—I was a strong candidate for college—but—because I was a first generation college student, I didn't know that you should apply to many colleges ... [Miner laughs] ... right? Particularly, if you've got straight A(s) and if you in all of these, you know, so I had no idea about how desirable...

Miner: Right?

Brown: ...I was. So I only applied to one institution and that institution was Illinois Wesleyan.

Miner: Why?

Brown: Well ... [laughs] ... at the time, my boyfriend had gotten accepted— my boyfriend who became a husband, who's now my ex-husband... [laughs] ... got accepted to Illinois Wesleyan and was there—and I would go to visit him and then I kinda made friends, you know--

Miner: Sure...

Brown: The institution was small, so I was comfortable—and I wanted to be around him. Now—thinking back, if my—if—if the boys ever, you know, concocted that scheme about, you know, rationalizing how they're gonna pick a institution...

Miner: Mm-hmm...

Brown: ...that would not happen. That would not be their process.

Miner: Mm-hmm...

Brown: But for me—you know the family was happy that I was going to college – the—the institution seemed like a really good institution so everyone was really happy, so—and, and I

was happy—I was, you know I was certainly happy I got accepted ‘cause it was the only ... [laughs] ... institution that I applied for... [laughs] ...

Miner: So are you from this area originally?

Brown: ...well I was—I was born and raised in Chicago—

Miner: Okay.

Brown: And actually my—my grandmother and my uncle raised me – from the time I was really, really young, maybe like 3 or 4— up to my—my elementary school years. So from first grade to eighth grade, I was with my grandmother, my uncle—I was raised by them and—on the south side of Chicago—56 Indiana—and it’s so funny because years later, I think while I was in Student Affairs, I would meet a student who lived in the brownstone two doors down—

Miner: Oh, wow!

Brown: -- from where I grew up. But, anyway ... [laughs] .. so ... so yes, I grew up on the south side of Chicago and then I moved with my mother for high school and I think there was some discussion around—you know—wanted me to go to better schools and that type of thing – so I ended up in the South suburbs of Chicago in Country Club hills and I went to school in Olympia Fields and graduated from Rich Central—so I’m still—I still wanna get out—I’ve been in Illinois my entire life ... [Miner chuckles] ... [Brown laughs] and I’ve, you know, lived in the north suburbs, lived up in Hoffman Estate, in Schaumburg, and then moved to Bloomington for the Student Affairs role, came here for the Ph.D. In Urbana and I—I have seen enough of ... [Miner laughs] Illinois—

Miner: time for a change –

Brown: Yes. We’ve got eight more years for—for Daniel’s 18th birthday and then I’m—

Miner: Okay.

Brown: We could go, wherever we wanna go—

Miner: okay.

Brown: -- it will not be in Illinois ... [laughs]

Miner: I ... [Brown laughs] ... I understand that—I understand that impulse quite, yeah—

[Both laugh]

Brown: I just wanna see something—just experience something different—

Miner laughs

Brown: -- yeah, it's a long time in Illinois.

00:08:07 Choosing a major and some classroom experiences. Reacting to racism by a professor in class, getting assistance from another professor, and a conversation with a recent Business Administration student on related experiences.

Miner: Hmmm ... [Brown laughs] Oh, when you got to Wesleyan, did you have a plan on what you wanted to major in or you're one of our many –

Brown: Oh, no.

Miner: -- popular undecideds?

Brown: Oh, I was undecided as long as I could be – definitely through freshman and – first year and sophomore year. Interestingly enough, so my Ph.D. is in Sociology...

Miner: Okay

Brown: ... and when I thought about a major—when I started to seriously consider a major—at the end of my sophomore year when they said you have to pick a major, I said, Huh! Well maybe I'd major in Sociology, and my grandfather—I remember—you know, mentioning this to my grandfather and him saying, “Oh! What are you gonna do? Be a damn social worker?” and it was kinda like, okay that's not really the same thing but umm—yeah, okay! I'll major in business, 'cause ... [laughs] ... it's like surely he won't object to that—you know that's his practical. So I majored in business – you know—and it's just funny how kind of—what's the expression, All roads lead to home?---

Miner: Yeah—

Brown: Because however many years later...

Miner: -- you wanted to...

Brown: ... I came back to Sociology. But yeah—so I reluctantly—majored in Business – Business Administration—it was ... I didn't—I can't say I enjoyed it ...

Miner: Okay.

Brown: ... I didn't enjoy the curriculum. I remember there was a professor—he wasn't there very long—but—I think I took statistics like three times—like the first time I failed it—or came close to failing it. Maybe I dropped before that happened. The second time was with this professor who—wasn't there very long, but— and, and again it kinda comes back to this like this—this desire to think, I guess, sociologically or ask sociological questions, but in the stats class, first there were—the class was – I was the only black person—black student in class—the class was overwhelmingly white men—and the professor who was also a white man. He

would—we would—we would do these problems related to statistics but he would throw up these—facts—I – I don't know what—you know—he would throw up this information like, for example one time I walked in a class—he's like, okay, so—African-American's dropout rates are this, you know, in comparison to white Americans. And—and it was like all of the examples were very—and I was sitting in class -

Miner: oh, no!

Brown: -- And I would sit in class and I'd go-- so we're not gonna discuss any type of context or any—

Miner: Oh...

Brown: -- factors, or we're—we're just—this is just data...

Miner: Yeah

Brown: And we're just going to, you know, and I'm looking around the room and I'm seeing people hear this information and then I'm— then me, you know, I'm sitting in there, you know—and—and I just remember being so—uncomfortable and just not wanting to engage the material, like, you know--

Miner: Right

Brown: -- and I actually went into—after the 'cause I failed the class ... and I went to Jerry Olson and I think he was—my—made my advisor at the time, but I went to him and I—I said, you know, this is what I experienced in this class and—you know—I really think this is—you know—and I don't know how much of my—I suspect that this person has some other issues that probably contribute to them not being there anymore but the-- that person wasn't there again.

Miner: Oh.

Brown: And I doubt that that really had anything to do with what I say—but the—I had to pass this class for the major--

Miner: right

Brown: -- and – god sent me an angel in the form of Robert Leekley --

Miner: oh... [Brown laughs] ... great!

Brown: -- Professor Leekley - he was so patient, and so kind, and – and he - - I wished that my first experience with statistics had been with him because he... he...he was just so patient and so kind —and gifted me that C ... [laughs]

[Miner laughs]

Brown: -- gifted me that C, and years later when I came back as an alum 'cause I—'cause when I graduated, I ended up working for GE—well GE and then HSBC – and I came back and I saw Prof. Leekley, and I think it was at a—a football game and he said—oh! We're catching up and I'm like "Oh it's so—really good to see you, I said, "Guess what I'm doing. You'll never guess what I'm doing." And he said, "What?" I said, "I'm a risk analyst." ...[Both laugh] ... And he said, "With what company?" and I'm like—"Yeah, well wouldn't you like to know?" ... [Both laugh] ... I was like this—I was like, "You know what kinda--how much I struggled with statistics. So can you believe it?" ... [Both laugh] ... I was like --- so I was—I was so excited to come back and tell him that.

Miner: Oh, that's great...

Brown: But yeah, so—I mean, that—that is my fondest—memory of, you know, the business major.

Miner: Mixed with

Brown: Well—well my finest memory was professor Leekley--

Miner: Yeah, right, yeah...

Brown: Everything else was horrible—

Miner: And...

[Brown laughs]

Miner: But you as an educator know ... [Brown laughs] ... you can see in students who are so devoted to trying too—

Brown: Yeah, I mean, I'm really, really—you know—I really, really tried and I was—I was grateful—particularly after coming off of a very—very horrible experience--

Miner: Right, right...

Brown: -- and failing, and just, you know wondering is it gonna be like this again—and he was just so kind and so patient and it's just so interesting because when I think about my experience in that major—and then I had a student this past semester who was a business major and when she talked about all her—all her faculty are white men, you know, the—when she looks around the classroom, it's you know, predominantly, you know, white men, and it's just like- wow, the more things change, the more they stay the same ...

Miner: ... the same. Do you think that she's had experience that-- I probably shouldn't ask you to speak for her, but—similar to the—the sort of bare statistic without ... that —points at?

Brown: Yeah, well that I don't know, and I don't—I don't – I'm unsure about how sensitive this student would be, too— 'cause she—this wasn't an African-American woman—and this was someone who—and we talked about that like—she—she—she presents as white. So, even though she's not—you know, people—you know, kind of white-white-passing – so I'm sure that her experiences were different but I mean, you know, we could talk about just the—the limitations of the curriculum are connected with the limitations of the faculty.

Miner: Well, let's talk about that.

00:15:05 Limitations in curriculum as reflection of the faculty. Limitations are the result of homogenous faculty and reflect IWU's lack of commitment. Graduates are not being fully educated without truly diverse curriculum. Example of Women and Gender Studies students not knowing that a major contribution to feminist theory, intersectionality, came from Black feminists. How can the curriculum, in this historical moment, be considered legitimate without a single Black tenure line faculty member?

Brown: Yeah, so you know, when you—when you have a homogeneous faculty—you know, racially homogenous [laughs] faculty, then I think it's really—it limits the students, and—and not—not just the students of color- all of the students. I think it's really interesting that for, you know, Illinois Wesleyan currently has zero tenured-track faculty. Excuse me—zero tenured-track black faculty, right? And it's inter—I'd say tenured-track specifically because I talked about this at the talk --

Miner: Mm-hmm..

Brown: -- the difference between proximity and commitment. So tenured track positions speak to the commitment of the institution as opposed to adjunct positions or visiting positions, you know, you'll-- I didn't realize there were black folks teaching on campus—like 'cause I would never see them, but they were adjuncts—

Miner: Mm-hmm...

Brown: you know they're adjuncts, so they're visitors—so it's like we can create an appearance without having a commitment. So that's what I was talking about with that proximity vs. commitment. So—so we have an institution that currently has 0 African-American tenured-track faculty, and it's interesting to me that the curriculum and the academic program is still viewed as legitimate.

Miner: Okay. So what would it take then to legitimize that?

Brown: What—in my mind, having, you know ... [laughs] ... particularly in this historical moment, like in this current moment to have no black faculty; period. So I'm not even talking about—in Sociology, you know, in English, in—I mean, just none.

Miner: Right.

Brown: I don't, you know, I don't know how that is okay. I've had students—when I—when I taught my black feminism course, students who were Women and Gender Studies majors, who had never heard anything about the theories that we would learn about in the end of class. They, you know, they had no idea who Barber Smith was, you know, and Barber Smith...

Miner: ... came to campus...

Brown: came to our campus. There—there were faculties who – I – I mean, I advocated for Barber to come to campus...

Miner: Right...

Brown: ...and I had to educate faculty on who she was, and why she was important. So again, the limitations of the faculty-- spread to the limitations of the students. But to ... to graduate with a Women and Gender Studies major and to not learn that one of the major contributions to feminism came from black women in the form of intersectionality...

Miner: Mm-hmm

Brown: ...to walk away with that credential and not know that—to me that is—I question the credibility of that, you know--

Miner: Right.

00:18:41 Observes advocacy for racially diverse students but not faculty colleagues. Recent emphasis on Black faculty as mentors for Black students misses the point of Black faculty's value as knowledge producers who can contribute something to the curriculum and to elevate peers and influence students' perceptions in this era. The optics of diversity seem more important than the substance.

Brown: and it's, you know, so when I think about the challenges of the curriculum, I think about, like you know, faculty and you know, faculty want to see racially diverse students sitting in their seats. I have not seen the same level of commitment as it applies to their peers—like I want, you know, racially diverse peers. I, you know, I think we should have African-American faculty in the department. I've not—I've not seen that from, from, you know, other than the usual suspects, right--

Miner: Right, right, right...

Brown: -- the usual, you know, usual folks that are—that are saying this or calling for this. And this notion that—and I'm talking specifically about black faculty—the black faculty would be good because they would be good mentors to black students and I think that that is part of the problem--

Miner: Right...

Brown: One of the problems is that the institutions don't recognize my value...

Miner: Right...

Brown: ...as an African-American faculty member to the institution.

Miner: As a scholar.

Brown: As a scholar, as a knowledge producer, as someone who can elevate my peers--

Miner: Right...

Brown: --as someone who can elevate the students and their thinking—all of the students. The value of being able to see particularly in this historical moment; to see an African-American woman in a position of authority and influence and—and as an expert.

Miner: Right...

Brown: You know, none of that is really seriously taken into account when you look at a black faculty member say they'd be a good role model for the black students.

Miner: Right...

Brown: You know, so—you know so I—I think that on an institutional level, that is a real issue and that's why you have like, when the—we talked about kind of the—the ebbs and flows, it's like, there's a crisis. There's a crisis when the optics of the number of black students we have seems to be problematic. When we—when we got the same—we pulling the same students for the brochures...

Miner: Right...

Brown: ...we, you know, we go, we try to recruit folks we don't have enough people to host them

Miner: Right...

Brown: You know now the optics are kind of, you know, a problem.

Miner: Yeah

Brown: So—so now there's a crisis—so let's hire somebody from admissions who's gonna focus specifically on recruiting African-American students.

Miner: Right.

Brown: Okay? And then you get to a point where it's like—okay, we got enough of them now. We're okay. The optics are okay. So we're going to, you know, maybe we won't continue to track this, maybe we won't allocate as many resources, you know, because this is—this is no longer an issue...

Miner: Right.

Brown: ... you know—and, if that is how we're operating and then we're thinking of specifically African-American faculty as being, you know, something that's only of benefit to African-American students...

Miner: Right..

Brown: ...then ...

Miner: ... then it's a problem.

00:21:57 Making a connection with Kimberlee Crenshaw's theory: if the frame doesn't fit, the facts don't matter. It is time to shift the frame and actively, aggressively advocate for Black faculty. Brown draws on examples through her 20+ years of affiliation with IWU to illustrate the differences between recognizing there's a problem and doing something about it.

Brown: Yeah, that's this one—you know the problem. So these things are really very much kind of connected and—and during the talk, I talked about Kimberlee Crenshaw and, you know, and her, you know, observations around—if the frame doesn't fit, the facts don't matter.

Miner: Right

Brown: And if, if—if the frame is that as a black faculty member, I am only of use—my usefulness resides in my ability to be a role model for black students exclusively...

Miner: Yup.

Brown: ...then—then it's difficult to—with that frame make a case to faculty about why you need to, you know, actively, aggressively recruit black faculty—like this is a travesty that we have no black faculty in the—in the midst of the movement for black lives...

Miner: Right...

Brown: ...with—in the midst of this current, you know, administration, you know, then—then we – then we preserve this—this bubble, you know, that somehow we're—we're outside of everything that's going on, like all this other context. Yeah, it's—it's troubling for me and it's something that I think has sustained since- I mean I came in '95, so we're talking about this just 20+ years. So if you just take the 20+ years that I--from the time I was a student to now—if I

count up—all of the—and I'm talking specifically about the African-American faculty—if I counted them up, folks who came and went--

Miner: Right...

Brown: --'cause there's no one there now--

Miner: Right

Brown: I count them all up—I wouldn't come close to—to half of the representative population in the US. So 12 to 13%-- I wouldn't come close to 6%.

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: Like that's, you know, adding them all up together...

Miner: right—in twenty years

Brown: you know, and that's just twenty years. And I haven't done this, but I would venture to guess, you go all the way back and add everybody up—

Miner: Yeah...

Brown: -- and you know, and that's—that's a problem, but I don't think it's viewed as a problem.

Miner: I think it has been, and I—and I certainly won't claim to defend—

Brown: yeah.

Miner: -- the institutional problem, but I think it has been—noticed, right?

Brown: Noticed—yes.

Miner: And the stumbling block—the part that I don't myself understand is- why is there a problem with recruitment and why is there a problem with retention.

Brown: Mm-hmm

Miner: Because the people that we have managed to convince that Illinois Wesleyan might be a good place for work [Brown laughs] have decided otherwise, right?

Brown: Mm-hmm..

Miner: And this is –

Brown: Well, and I push back on whether or not they decided or if a decision was made for them.

Miner: Okay, okay, let's do that too.

Brown: Yeah..

Miner: But it's not just black faculty...

Brown: mm-hmm

Miner: right.

Brown: mm-hmm

Miner: Because I – I have no other faculty of color who left feeling that they were isolated—

Brown: yeah.

Miner: --and had no colleagues or peers that they could talk to.

Brown: yeah.

Miner: And were never asked when they left, you know, why they were leaving—

Brown: right

Miner: so—

Brown: Right

Miner: ...and—and my personal difficulty with this is that I don't wanna put the responsibility on the person who has been authored to explain this--

Brown: right.

Miner: -- but at the same time, how do we know if we don't ask the question.

Brown: In the—I—I seriously doubt that—that these folks were quiet throughout the whole time.

Miner: Okay.

Brown: So—so it's like the only way that we would know what's wrong with the institution systemically—as if we ask them questions after they left.

Miner: okay.

Brown: It's likely that you're getting some clues throughout the process--

Miner: during the time...

Brown:--of why this is such—so difficult for—for me—

Miner: right.. right..

Brown: I seriously—I certainly wasn't quiet--

Miner: okay.

Brown: -, you know-

Miner: All right.

Brown: -- throughout the process

Miner: So what were some other things you're—and before we get too much further, I wanna say because you and I have the benefit of knowing each other--

Brown: Right

Miner: -- we're recording this--

Brown: Right. Right.

Miner: And you mentioned a talk, and I just—for the recording I wanna reference for the—the—that the talk Nicole is referring to is for the Martin Luther King Teach In that happened in January this year and you were an invited speaker to that--

Brown: Yes

Miner: --and you were kind enough to contribute your remarks--

Brown: Yes

Miner: --to the Archives, so they will be associated with this file at some point--

Brown: Good...

Miner: In the future-- just want the recording to know that

Brown: yes--

Miner: okay.

Brown: -- check it out

Miner: Now--

[Brown laughs]

Miner: --let's go back to this—this problem that we have so please correct what I was saying.

Brown: well, no, no—it's not a correction but is—but I wanna, I guess add to it or you know like, tease it out a bit--

Miner: Please do.

00:26:49 Argues against the idea that the institution understands the curriculum lacks legitimacy. Finds fault with the argument that Black faculty are not available and notes that even when the idea of hiring Black faculty is promoted, the topic turns to standards and quality of qualifications. Black IWU alumni are discovered for the IWU Magazine but not identified when it comes to potential for faculty.

Brown: --because you said, you know, the institution is noticing, or notices and--

Miner: At the crisis moment, right?

Brown: right—and may even identify it as a problem, let's say – but I don't think they are—you know, I don't think on the level of the provost, level of department heads, and for most faculty, I do not believe that they think their programs are illegitimate...

Miner: okay

Brown: ...or—or--or—or—or lack credibility...

Miner: That's a problem

Brown: ...or, or are losing credibility or have lost credibility because their faculty are not racially diverse.

Miner: Okay.

Brown: Like I, I—you know, I don't believe that. I think that folks still think that, you know, you can have an all-white faculty and we would be, you know, I—I predicted and I hope that I'm wrong—but I'm like, you know, the institution has my syllabus. I would not be surprised in two years' time, there wasn't specifically a white person, a white woman teaching black feminism.

Miner: Okay.

Brown: So, when I said you want black feminism in your course catalogs but not your tenure lines--

Miner: Right

Brown: -- that wasn't for affect --

Miner: Right . . .

Brown: . . . you know, it's the reason why we, you know get sent to these workshops --

Miner: Right.

Brown: -- Right? These upcoming workshops coming up about how to improve your search--

Miner: Right.

Brown: -- and , and it- it – is curious to me how when questions of, you know, and I'm- I'm- I speak specifically about black faculty. When we talk about black faculty recruiting more black faculty discussion suddenly come up about ...standards- and you know, we – you know, we have high standards--

Miner: Hmmm

Brown: -, you know, and we wanna make sure that people are qualified, qualification is...

Miner: ...Like the assumption is --

Brown: Exactly, like the implied assumption is that to- to have a black faculty member would mean that we're- we're conceding in some ways, the quality in exchange for you know, the diversity--

Miner: right...

Brown: -- which is, you know, ridiculous when you hear it out loud, right? But when you listen to people navigate and do all types of, you know, gymnastics- verbal and mental gymnastics about why we can't hire black- more black faculty, is certainly not because we're hiding --

Miner: right..

Brown: -- so, I was hiding at the University of Illinois ...[Miner giggles]... for six years, right? We could track students from, you know, Lindblom and we- we could track students beginning at middle school if they can run with a ball--

Miner: Yeah

Brown: and we can follow them along and put little, you know, I get the- the way that the job market is- if you- first of all you have to do is pick a program. Pick a program, pick a discipline, call up the department- who are your black students? [Both laugh]... And you're guaranteed to get a – well, there is so and so – and a – so and so ...[laughs]

Miner: [laughs]

Brown: So, you know, pick up the phone, pick your program- pick up the phone and pay a little bit of attention to that person...

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: ...Send an email. Have one phone conversation. Like that [giggles], like it is-- the notion that-that we're somehow --one that we're unicorns, right? So we're these mythical creatures that really don't exist and two that we're hard to find. You know, Illinois Wesleyan is- is a - a - a - not producing but we have Illinois Wesleyan alums who are going on like many of our alums that go to graduate school and - and you know, pursue higher degrees like Ph. D(s) - you know, terminal degrees and so --

Miner: mm-hmm...

Brown: you know, we - we - we manage to find those stories when we want to put them in the newsletter or the magazine, but then we somehow can't make the connections about this and our supposed pipeline issue --

Miner: mm-hmm...

Brown: I don't believe that--

Miner: okay...

Brown: [laughs]

Miner: so you think active - maybe, active invitations, and - I mean, to reach out and have people come back and contribute as faculty to campus might be one way to--

Brown: -- well that might be one way. But it's - it's - it's interesting because with my experience -

Miner: Yes

Brown: -- it's so funny. There's all this conversation about how, you know, for - so I was in a visiting position. I applied for tenured-track position but wasn't considered for an interview. So there was some discussion amongst - you know - my supporters around, like, how could this be - like, you know, you - you know - we - we need someone like you here, and I agreed, you know - [giggles] with that. But, what always bothered me about those conversations was that there was always an assumption that if an offer was extended to me that I would take it.

Miner: Mm.

00:32:18 What does IWU have to offer Black faculty? Commentary on resources for student recruitment as opposed to faculty. Reflects on issues of value and worth and that we pay consultants when people who do give opinions on changes are not heard.

Brown: and so we don't even get- because we're so - you know - because there's this larger problem around how we identify recruit and the barriers around getting people in potentially, that we don't even get to have a conversation about what does Illinois Wesleyan have to - to offer--

Miner: Offer- right.

Brown: You certainly don't have to off – you don't have – other black faculty – [laughs]

Miner: right

Brown: --colleagues...

Miner: right.

Brown: ...you can't offer that. What – why would – you know – an African-American faculty member wanna come to Bloomington, Illinois – Illinois Wesleyan, and there – there comes a point where, you know, the – usually the response is – our students. Okay. Our students are wonderful. I enjoy – I, you know, yes, okay – and?

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: What else? So I – so I get to engage with – great students and then come to my department, and department meetings and be devalued and marginalized and – or put on every diversity committee or, you know--

Miner: Right.

Brown: -- So I get [laughs]

Miner: Because you are the voice.

Brown: Right. Right. So it's like, so – so – so there also needs—a lot of things I think need to happen simultaneously. And – and I don't of course have all of the – the answers but certainly, you know, the – the – the common kind of excuses around not knowing where we are, and – and – and you know, and then – and then also not addressing issues around, you know, what does Illinois Wesleyan have to offer. I mean, I think as an institution – that question is being asked about students --

Miner: mm-hmm.

Brown: --and that corresponds with the price tag.

Miner: mm-hmm.

Brown: so like, we're – you know, in a – in a market and it's like you need to be competitive. So in order to be competitive and drawn, these students what sets us apart --

Miner: mm-hmm

Brown: --it's like, these discussions are happening now and you know the type of money or resources that are going into that.

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: But somehow when we talk about – and again, I keep coming back to black faculty specifically--

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: you know—

Brown: -- we wanna get that on the cheap.

Miner: Right.

Brown: So let's just talk to our networks and let's just – you know --

Miner: Right.

Brown: -- How- how could we do this, you know – cheaply?

Miner: And you mentioned that in your talk too, about resources not being put into --

Brown: Mm-hmm..

Miner: --that faculty... kind of effort.

Brown: Mm-hmm

Miner: So would you see that resources – I mean, 'cause what is happening with the resources on the – the student curricular, and that you're talking about now with signature work --

Brown: Yes

Miner: -- is it people who have ideas and who are developing classes --

Brown: Yep.

Miner: -- those are getting funded --

Brown: Yeah.

Miner: --so --

Brown: --And I had a lot of ideas. [laughs] ... I had a lot of ideas

Miner: I don't doubt it. I don't -- for a minute.

Brown: [laughs]

Miner: But what would you see that then on the faculty side? What would be an equivalent, sort of, martial plan, if you will, for – for getting our faculty diversified?

Brown: You know – and I don't – I don't mean to be – I'm not sure what the word is, but – you'd have to pay me for that.

Miner: Okay. A consultant.

Miner: You wanna be a consultant?

Brown: Well, I don't want to be a consultant but you know

Miner: you would be a consultant

Brown: – a – a very – a very wise mentor, dear friend – you know, I call him uncle sometimes, Dr. Jaggi – Narendra Jaggi --

Miner: Sure.

Brown: -- he – he's given me a lot of nuggets of wisdom but one nugget he gave me was that, you know, everyone doesn't deserve to – to know what I think.

Miner: Okay.

Brown: And – and that's not – I'm not talking about you, 'cause we could talk about it--

Miner: No, sure.

Brown: – we got—I'd be happy to share with – with you, but just – you know, my experience has taught me to, you know, know my worth --

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: -- and that it– it also kinda comes back to this wanting, you know, things on the cheap, like institutions will – will, and not just Illinois Wesleyan, but institutions will say, 'Oh yeah! Let's – you know – what are your ideas? What are your...?' – you know, and the same thing you would pay a consultant thousands of dollars to – to come in and tell you that you'd actually move on. It's likely these folks have been telling you that from the beginning.

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: You don't need to hire somebody to come in and talk to faculty about – sending emails to folks- like - I'm not coming up with anything new or novel, but it's just if you don't value my voice --

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: -, you know, then [laughs] you know, and you – you know, we tend to value what we pay for.

Miner: There you go! I was just gonna say that.

Brown: Right?

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: You know, so ... [laughs] ...

Miner: It's shocking how many consultants we bring in, I think sometimes.

Brown: Yeah... I mean it's you know, but [laughs] that's another--

Miner: That's another --

Brown: That's another story.

Miner: well, what other things that I've – I've often felt – I don't – I may – I probably heard this somewhere but it – it is always focused on students and I so appreciate you bringing the frame --

Brown: Oh!

Miner: -- to that, right? [Brown giggles] It's that we say we bring the world to Wesleyan and Wesleyan to the world--

Brown: mmm....mm....

Miner: --and we talk about diversity of student experiences from that point of view, and it's one of the things that I have often considered a strength of the institution is that we do insist on a world view --

Brown: Mm-hmm..

Miner: -- but it does seem that the world is outside of these racial tensions--

Brown: Yep. Yep.

Miner: -- that we have. So – I – because I am – I am a problem solver more than .. [Brown laughs] ... I probably is healthy for me ... [Brown laughs] ... I always do turn to, well, how do we make this better?

Brown: Yeah.

Miner: And I certainly don't want you to – you know – have to --

Brown: No, no, no, no.

Miner: -- be responsible for making it better. I'm telling you how to make it better, but anyways, that's sort of where my thoughts go during these conversations.

Brown: Yeah. Yeah.

Miner: So that's why the questions go in the way that they do.

00:37:00 Bringing the world to Wesleyan and Wesleyan to the world. We don't bring racial issues into the world exposure for our students and asks if this could be purposeful, as in the way we want IWU to be. Student Affairs is the primary place on campus where Black people can be found—in the role of caregivers, helpers, and not viewed as knowledge creators.

Brown: But – but the thing that you said about the – you know, the bringing the world and the world – you know, but think about – think about where Illinois Wesleyan is--

Miner: Right.

Brown: – as a whole: faculty, staff and students. Could it be that where that institution is currently, is a manifestation of what it wants the world to be?

Miner: Ah! Well, that would be really sad, but--

Brown: Well, but, I mean but think about it, 'cause the institution decides--

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: --right – what it wishes to create, you know – how that manifests. So they – so there's this focus on having a racially diverse population of – of folks who soak in knowledge.

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: Right? And – and I mean – truth be told, we – we don't have any graduate programs--

Miner: Right.

Brown: --or – or Illinois Wesleyan doesn't, so if we're gonna be real – most – most faculty are not counting on undergrads to create new knowledge.

Miner: Right.

Brown: That's not something that undergrads do. It – you know– you – we have some folks who – you know, can --

Miner: Right.

Brown: -- but – but from a – form a pedagogy perspective, curriculum perspective, we're – you know, giving them information.

Miner: It's - a little birds with their mouths open.

Brown: Yes. Yes.

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: So think about that. You – you're creating an environment where you want a racially diverse student population that can take, you know, like little birds with their mouths open--

Miner: Yeah. Right.

Brown: --Take in information. When you look to who your knowledge creators are - the folks who are supposed to – supposedly imparting this wisdom --

Miner: Mm-hmm

Brown: Right – you know – faculty – what do they look like?

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: When we look at the staff – now you can – now – and this is my – my masters. I got a Masters in Education focused on college student personnel. So I learned about the history of student affairs as a profession.

Miner: Okay.

Brown: And essentially this is kind of the nitty gritty watered down version of it is essentially the profession of Student Affairs came out of the... faculty's either inability to or -or disinterest in dealing with all that other stuff, right?

Miner: That makes students human.

Brown: Right. We just wanna teach. I don't wanna have to deal with this whole, you know – this person is crying – this person is – they got housing needs – I – I – I just wanna teach. Okay, so we got the Student Affairs. Okay – so Student Affairs will take care of the rest.

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: I am the knowledge expert – you know – within a discipline and – you know, and the Student Affairs is the rest. When you look at – look at our staff and look at where African-American folks are within the staff--

Miner: Right.

Brown: --the majority of those folks are in Student Affairs.

Miner: Right.

Brown: Okay? So you can't tell me that that's just- ahh! That's just a kawinkydink right?

Miner: Right.

Brown: That- that – you know, you have the academic affairs, you have your – you know, so the helpers--

Miner: Right.

Brown: -- the – the – the folks who care you know, for the students – so you've got the baby birds with their mouths open, you have the caregivers for the students, then you have the – you know, the imparters of knowledge and then you have the leadership.

Miner: Right.

Brown: Okay? So – so – so that – that question about the world – bringing the world, you know – are we – are we bringing students to the world and the world to the students? Are we trying to create the world that we want to see? And – and if folks wanna – it doesn't sound good to hear, right?

Miner: Right. Right.

00:41:52 How do we explain the lack of diversity at IWU today? If we assume we do genuinely want diversity, how do we explain where we are? This is the result of bright, intelligent problem solvers? Concludes that racial diversity is not seen as profitable and that IWU needs Black faculty specifically, not just diverse faculty. This is where evidence of anti-Blackness is explicit and closes the loop on profitability.

Brown: But let's assume that everyone at the institution from the top-down has a genuine, sincere interest in ...in seeing a... seeing that institution as truly a microcosm of the world. So that would include that we have a genuine – we're – we're genuinely interested in investing from the top down in not just our student body being racially diverse but also our faculty--

Miner: Mm-hmm...

Brown: --also our staff – everyone. Like, we – let's assume that we're genuinely, okay --

Miner: Okay.

Brown: -- so if we assume that everyone is genuinely on board with this; the folks are genuinely not anti-black; that this is a group of intelligent folks; intelligent problem solvers; resourceful, innovative folks that can make things happen – you see where I'm going?

Miner: I do.

Brown: We assume the very best. Look at where we are right now.

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: How do you explain that? That's the best?

Miner: Right.

Brown: If we – if we assume the best, then this is the best that we can do.

Miner: Right. Which is pretty sad; which should send ...[Brown laughs]... people running and screaming away. These are the things that are – that come to one's mind, right? [Brown continues laughing]

Brown: This is why the conversations with me are usually short.

Miner: Yeah. [Brown laughs] No. No. I --

Brown: But you see what I mean?

Miner: I do see what you mean and I – and I – I've seen it. And I think other people see it. And I – and I don't know how we get off that dime. Honestly. So, I think – but I think having these conversations --

Brown: Yeah.

Miner: --and living with our discomfort--

Brown: Yeah.

Miner: -- is something that we absolutely have to be committed to and I – and I think the choice of the incoming class's reading material--

Brown: Yeah.

Miner: --for the fall--

Brown: Yeah.

Miner: -- is something that's gonna shake up a lot of people --

Brown: I hope so. I hope so.

Miner: --yeah.

Brown: I'm a bit – I guess my ...my pess...my pessimistic view on like – and kind of honoring your like problem solving –yeah well [Miner laughs]

Miner: Sure.

Brown: --What do we do, right? I feel – and this is a really kind of, maybe pessimistic--

Miner: Go for it.

Brown: -- answer, is I think it has to be viewed as profitable to have... that I keep coming back to black faculty 'cause and I – I – I will rally and support and advocate if, you know for – for other marginalized groups to say, 'Hey, you know, we – we want this too and I'll be right there with you.'

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: But there's just something about – I was talking with someone about this – it's just the inability for folks to actively speak that we want and need... more, or need, not more black faculty specifically. That – and – and that's where you kinda see the – the implicit anti-blackness. Because it's like, it's not okay to say, because the minute you say black faculty, it's like – oh, well yeah, well, diverse faculty--

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: --and diverse – you know, could mean so now we've gone from talking about black to talking about diverse and now we're talking about region, income, we're – you know, now we're talking about be- because we – we cannot stand on that, you know, ground.

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: And it – it's just, you know, it's like, why – if we had, you know, the faculty were all white men; or all men and someone said, 'We need more women.'

Miner: mmm

Brown: I don't think any – you know like yeah, there would be some folks but it wouldn't be like it's, you know – Oh well yeah, but you know, you know, it wouldn't be this – this – this desire to some . . .

Miner: . . . Spread it out.

Brown: Yeah.

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: You know – and I think – so I think it has to be seen as profitable and that's why I -I made that connection which I'm sure folks will fight me – I don't care fight me fight me ...[Miner laughs]...

Miner: It's your story--

Brown: Yeah.

Miner: -- you can tell it.

Brown: But that's the thing – it's not just my story and it's not just Illinois Wesleyan's story; it is the story of – I've said this many times – it is a story of whiteness; it is a story of white supremacy; it is the story of a – a – a heteronormative-- heteronormativity; it is the – it's the story of isms--

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: --it's the story of oppression – you know – so – so it's not just, you know, my story but I'd – I lost my train of thought--

Miner: You were – you were gonna talk about profitability--

Brown: --oh, yeah!

Miner: --what is it about not – what – what is it about not going after black faculty that would be unprofitable, I guess – Is that the right way – did I say that right?

Brown: Well, yeah – I mean – I don't think that – why – I mean – one, it's like – like that's just my pessimistic view of – of what would make folks, kind of, decide that this is important enough--

Miner: Mm-hmm

Brown: --to address--

Miner: If there were something in it--

Brown: -- and sustain.

Miner: --in terms of dollars for the institution --

Brown: Yes--

Miner: --okay.

Brown: -- Yes, and I stand firm on that because of – of the way that I hear top administrators and other, decision makers, talk about students. They talk about students in terms of revenue.

Miner: --Absolutely.

Brown: Okay? So every student that comes in, we know how much they're bringing in to the institution, and then – and then we – we – we start off all right. This is a --

Miner: --Right

Brown: liberal arts institution, right? We're not supposed to be focused on such things but – but here we are, you know, and it's like – well we – we recognize kind of the optics of having a student body that can afford fifty thousand dollars.

Miner: Right.

Brown: So – so in addressing these optics we want to make the institution financially accessible for folks who can't afford that, right? So – so then we have – you know – the low income students but then, we know how much they're quote unquote worth--

Miner: -- worth, right.

Brown: And how many more need to offset --

Miner: Right.

Brown: -- their work. You see how really scr—how F-ed up that thinking is--

Miner: -- yeah.

Brown: So that's why I say that – you know – it has to be viewed as – as profitable--

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: --like, so this – so maybe this person is bringing in a lot of grants – which I had a lot of ideas about grants and stuff –you know ...[Miner laughs]... poor – poor Dick Folse was like – oh, I hate to see you go

Both laugh

Miner: Oh, man!

00:49:02 On switching the frame from money/resources to Black women and the course contributions she made during her year in a Visiting faculty position. Explains the Black feminist course she created, student reactions to it and how that is missing because IWU has no one else advocating for and bringing these themes into the curriculum.

Brown: But I mean I think it really just – and that – that speaks to ideology, right?

Miner: --yeah.

Brown: in terms of how we think about people, how we think about resources, you know, like in relation to...money, right? So – so we already – you know and – and if that's the frame --

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: -- then – then anything – like ‘fill in the blank’, but I will always fill it with, you know, increasing black factor ...[Miner laughs]..

Miner: And I – I think that’s great – I mean, why not? If the...if the discussion is always gonna be about money, why couldn’t it always be about black faculty, right? ...[Miner laughs].. I mean, you know--

Brown: -- who else is gonna bring it up?

Miner: Right.

Brown: Right? You know, that’s what that’s what—I have become so unapologetic about talking about black women specifically because it’s like, who else is gonna bring it up? No one asked me to teach a black feminism course, right?

Miner: What were you brought in to – to --

Brown: --I was --

Miner: --contribute anything to the curriculum or--

Brown: -- well, no – no – I was – I was supposed to teach an Intro Soc course, the Sex and Gender course, and a 300-level gender course.

Miner: Okay.

Brown: That’s it. I got you, right ...[Miner laughs]... I could’ve gone gone any number of ways--

Miner: --right --

Brown: -, you know, and – and someone who didn’t see or recognize the value of – of – black feminist theory and – and – and – and intellect and, you know, recognize the broad value; the far reaching value of it and – and understood and knew the material well enough to teach it, right--

Miner: Right. Right.

Brown: would not think, you know – that, hey this would be a great contribution to the curriculum. There’s a huge gap--

Miner: --Did you--

Brown: You know.

Miner: -- get any flack for that?

Brown: No, I didn't. I didn't get any flack for it. The first – it was – it was interesting. I was very disappointed with the way that it was advertised or not advertised. So the first semester it was just special topics and nobody knows what that hell that is --

Miner: --right

Brown: Who's gonna sign up for a special 300-level Special Topics course.

Miner: -- right- right.

Brown: So that was problematic – and then there --

Miner: -- but there was no description?

Brown: Yeah – no there was – it – it – I don't know when the timing of things came about but--

Miner: -- to go to some --

Brown: --there was some- Yeah, it was late something – I was like oh okay – whatever – I'll take that one. It was really a task to get enough students --

Miner: Okay.

Brown: -, you know, but then when I think about it, it's like it makes sense and it doesn't 'cause I don't even put that all on the – the advertising bit – because why would students value black feminism?

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: You know. They're getting Ph. D(s) as, you know, Gloria Joseph would say 'And why male studies?'

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: So why would they value – why would they see that. Even if they saw it will all the description of the course, they'd not think that this is something that will be useful for me. And I can't tell you how many – the majority of the students in my classes, they, you know, fall and spring, they were small classes, about 10 students, but the majority of the students were white and those – those white students were surprised at how much they gained. You know like – like telling me in, you know, in – during class, in their papers, you know, in their feedback and emails that I learned so much--

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: --and part of me was like – that's awesome!

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: That's awesome – that you...that you recognize the value of black feminism and that you're going to apply it in these ways and also it's very sad--

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: --that you would be surprised. I'm never surprised that I'm gonna gain something --

Miner: From a class--

Brown: -- from this tradition

Miner: -- why we're here – yeah.

Brown: Right?

Miner: Right.

Brown: I – I expected I'm going to learn something --

Miner: Mmmm.

Brown: If some – if I open up a book and it's something related to – you know, black intellectual – like, I expect it.

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: I'm disappointed when I don't get that.

Miner: You know, when we talk about students coming to Illinois Wesleyan and learning outside their discipline --

Brown: Mm-hmm..

Miner: --or their major, I guess--

Brown: Yeah, liberal arts.

Miner: --that's what we hope for, right? [Brown gives a laugh] We hope to surprise them with the value of something that they didn't know they needed.

Brown: Mm-hmm.

Miner: So almost I wanna say it's not surprising to me that some – I mean I don't know what their majors were or --

Brown: Yeah. Got it. Elementary education, business, bio, psychology – yeah.

Miner: Yeah. So I mean – I --

Brown: Women and Gender Studies.

Miner: -- kind of glad that they said that. I mean, it's sort of what we talked about wanting students to experience --

Brown: Yeah.

Miner: -- is going into an area or -- or going into a thought process that they hadn't.

Brown: Yeah.

Miner: And then -- close in the loop, right? --

Brown: Yeah.

Miner: --making it applicable to the other parts, and that's a thing that I think we don't do as well --

Brown: Yeah.

Miner: -- when we do have those 'aha' moments is connecting them to something else that's gonna be in their immediate surrounding and -- identify where those things happen in the world.

Brown: But no one asked me to teach that --

Miner: Yeah...

Brown: -- that class. But I knew what I --

Miner: -- but you --

Brown: -- I knew what I needed to do.

Miner: -- because of the skills and the studies that you brought to it --

Brown: Yeah.

Miner: -- because of your lived experience as a black person.

Brown: Exactly -- exactly.

Miner: Okay.

Brown: Exactly. And that is what--

Miner: the value

Brown:--you miss out on.

Miner: Right. Right.

00:54:31 Anti-Blackness initiative within IWU Annual Theme “Women’s Power, Women’s Justice,” and her Black students’ reactions to Course Cluster Closing event. Discusses her idea for the [Fall 2016] Anti-Blackness initiative within the annual theme “Women’s Power, Women’s Justice.” Brown saw this as a celebration as opposed to just acknowledging that anti-Blackness exists, and discusses the way she built community as a survival strategy in an environment where anti-Blackness exists. Brown recalls student reactions and reflects on how significant it was for Black women to be represented in other students’ course presentations.

Brown: And in my experience, it’s not – you know this – this is not a monolith, so --

Miner: Right

Brown: -- which is why you need more than one.

Miner: Sure. [Brown laughs] Right.

Brown: Right?

Miner: Yeah. Yeah.

[Brown continues laughing]

Miner: No, I get it. I get it. And I was struck in your talk too when you just said that a minute ago about – and I’m gonna get – I’m gonna get lost here ‘cause I marked at my sheet that what you talked about ... [both laugh]... about something that I heard from one of the faculty members who was advocating for the Women’s Power | Women’s Justice theme--

Brown: Mm-hmm.

Miner: --which is something that you brought up. I think a really valuable perspective to with the anti-blackness initiative--

Brown: Mm-hmm.

Miner:-- and in discussion for that theme, there were people who said this should be a gender recognition and she said, “No, when you talk about gender, you lose women.”

Brown: Mm-hmm.

Miner: -- and what I just heard you – I think I heard you make a similar statement--

Brown: Mm-hmm.

Miner: -- when you talk about women or diversity, you lose elements of that--

Miner: -- of that—

Brown: Mm-hmm – Yup.

Miner: --of diversity when you lose the blackness. So you brought to the Women's Power, Women's Justice an anti-blackness initiative that--

Brown: Yes.

Miner: you talked a little bit about in your presentation that you gave at Martin Luther King day -
-

Brown: Yeah.

Miner: And I was wondering if you wanted to talk a little more about that and the way it could apply to. I mean, essentially this is what you're saying in this conversation.

Brown: Yeah, and it's just – I mean, these books have been --

Miner: -- bringing anti-blackness--

Brown: -- yeah, these books have been written – right – all the – all the men are – what is it? All the – all the – ahh, I'm gonna mess up the – I'm losing this but it's something – all the – all the women are white--

Miner: Right—

Brown: All the

Miner: I know the title you're talking about.--

Brown: Yeah, yeah, I can't--

Miner: -- I can't get it either.

Brown: I can't find it over there. But... but yeah, this – so I saw the – it's Women's Power, Women's Justice, right--

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: So I saw that theme – I was like – huh – and I was really me just kind of using my sociological imagination, right – to speculate about how – how that – how those conversations went, how those meetings went, right --

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: -- it's like – oh! We're gonna do Women's Power, Women's Justice --

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: --and I just envisioned these conversations where when folks were thinking about women, they were thinking about either white women or they were thinking about black and brown women over there.

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: Like black and – black and brown women over wherever – you know, in the third world; they need to be safe from the black and brown men.

Miner: Sure.

Brown: Right? So, you know, I'm just – oh, just kind of, speculating – you know, based on my experiences and ...[both laugh]... you know--

Miner: -- where would you have gotten that kind of an idea, right?

Brown: Right?

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: And I said, “Hah!” and I said, okay, you know, I would like to make an intervention that reminds folks who need to be reminded that black women are women too.

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: So if – so if I wanna talk about engage – I mean, my research relates to black women and my, you know, intellectual interests are, you know, related to black women and their experiences and – and knowledge and all of these things so – so this applies --

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: -- to me too--

Miner: Right.

Brown: -- like I have an interest in this – you're talking about women; you're talking about me.

Miner: Right.

Brown: And the anti-blackness initiative very simply was an invitation to other faculty to acknowledge that black women are women too and in whatever way they desire – you know, in their classroom to make an effort to acknowledge that anti-blackness exists on this campus and outside of this campus. And again, we're – we're in this current moment--

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: --right?

Miner: Politically as a nation.

Brown: Yup.

Miner: Right.

Brown: Politically, socially – you know, we – you know in the midst of the movement for black lives --

Miner: Right.

Brown: --anti-blackness exists.

Miner: Right.

Brown: Right? And to – you know, invite other faculty to pull students in, you know, and to say this does exist. This exists here. This exists outside of here and – and not just acknowledging that it exists but as a form of resistance to this ‘cause if we can – if we assume that most folks would think – yeah, anti-blackness is bad, we shouldn’t have that.

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: So in an effort to resist that that we would celebrate – that we would celebrate black women because black women are women too.

Miner: Yup.

Brown: We would amplify their voices. We would try to engage – you know, in their literature, scholarship and research. So – so you know – I – it was an invitation to other faculty to see me.

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: And to see us--

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: --within the context of this theme. And I – I only did it for one semester --

Miner: mm-hmm.

Brown: -- because I was – I was actively divesting from the institution back--

Miner: Right.

Brown: --the spring.

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: So it's like – no. But – but you know, several faculty accepted the call, accepted the invitation and they did that and I – I – created a statement that they were welcome to put in their-

-

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: --you know, their syllabus about – you know, this is the anti-blackness initiative – this is what this means – you know – in terms of celebrating the contributions of black women and girls – and – and actively resisting anti-blackness, acknowledging and resisting that and some of the faculty included that language in their syllabi, which is great. Others did other things. Others thought that they wanted to expand it, you know, more and use this language that really, you know, made – watered it down--

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: -- where we would no longer, or – or – or there were assignments because I encourage people to actually, you know, this is not just in – in word, you know, in your syllabus, but actually, you know, incorporating this into what you're doing – and some faculty did – did that and they were – they stayed focused on black women. It was so interesting when you see that – that end-of-semester kind of presentation, you know. My students from my black feminism course came back to me and they, the black women specifically in my class – they came back and said, "We went to this cluster."—it was like the cluster --

Miner: mm-hmm

Brown: --end of semester presentation thing where all of these students were presenting projects related to the theme, right and she said, "There were like four, including us, there were like four different classes that were talking specifically about black women."

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: And they felt seen. They felt validated. They felt like black women were women too.

Miner: Right.

Brown: Right? And they – they were being considered in that space, and that came out of a simple invitation.

Miner: Right.

Brown: You know, so, it's not hard – it's not – it doesn't – it doesn't require a whole hell of a lot--

Miner: Right.

Brown: --and it doesn't require – no social – significant social change requires, you know, the masses--

Miner: --Thousands of dollars or anything--

Brown: --No! It's just – it's always a small group of people who refuse to lay down, who refuse to shut the hell up, who are not afraid to – to be, you know, not respectable--

Miner: Right.

Brown: -- who – who are – who will not be tone policed.

Miner: Right.

Brown: Who aren't afraid to go to jail ...[Miner giggles]... Right?

Miner: Right.

Brown: It's—that's not--

Miner: Right.

Brown: -- that's not—it's not a bunch of people? So this was a handful of faculty who interpreted, you know, that vision in their various ways and it resulted in – in really, you know, changing kind of the – the – the shape of that end of semester event, and that – that was just one thing. . .

Miner: . . . one time.

Brown: You know – and the --

Miner: --But it took your passion to bring it and to not be – and – and to not be afraid of speaking, right?

Brown: Yeah – I was gonna do it either way --

Miner: -- and to call a meeting where you were open.

Brown: Yeah.

Miner: And you were insistent on – on the particular language that you distributed to people in the--

Brown: Yeah.

Miner: -- course adapted it--

Brown: Yeah.

Miner: --the way a faculty will--

Brown: Yeah.

Miner: I suppose.

Brown: Yeah

Miner: – but--

Brown: -- and I wasn't trying to tell anybody – it's like I know enough about faculty to know--

Miner: Right.

Brown: --not to tell them what to do, or to imply that I'm telling anybody what to do--

Miner: Sure.

Brown: -- but it was really just about – honestly, these are survival strategies for me.

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: Teach – choosing to teach that course was a survival strategy.

Miner: Sure.

Brown: You know – I needed something that feeded me--

Miner: Right.

Brown: In an environment that didn't have any black faculty.

Miner: Right.

Brown: like no one is gonna be engaged in this stuff--

Miner: -- where else you're gonna talk about--

Brown: --where else am I gonna talk about this – where I could talk about it in my classroom – anti-blackness initiative – I'm coming into a situation where I know anti-blackness—blackness exists--

Miner: Yes.

Brown: -- how am I going to survive as a faculty member--

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: --I'm going to look for people who are willing to go on record and say they agree that anti-blackness is bad.

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: I'm gonna find those people.

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: That – that – that invitation was a way to do that. I have folks who told me – and I wasn't surprised at all that there were faculty who had no interest in that anti-blackness initiative specifically because I called it an anti-blackness initiative – and I believe that because, well, one – I am grateful because – I'm grateful that the vision was clear--

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: --because the last thing that I wanted was to come in on some anti-blackness stuff and have people who weren't on board--

Miner: Right.

Brown: --sitting in the room with me --

Miner: Right.

Brown: - you know – and then – and you know, have my--

Miner: who needs that!

Brown: - you know, yeah! So – so – so I was glad that was very clear. So it's like, I credit myself for being very clear about the vision and being unapologetic about it. But – but I wasn't – I wasn't pushing people to--

Miner: Right.

Brown: - you know – it's just – it's just like, you know what – I – if – if you wanna – if – if – it's an invitation --

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: -- if you wanna accept the invitation, you know – and I'm taking notes, right?

Miner: Right.

Brown: folks who accept the invitation--

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: -- these might be folks that – you know – I can look to – down the line. I didn't know the lines will be shorter than what I – then what I--you know --

Miner: -- and that was part of what – part of what – my asking you about that experience was is-- were you satisfied, I guess, with the results, I mean four presentations out of- how many were in there?

Brown: I think there were 11.

Miner: Only eleven?

Brown: There were 11. Yeah. That's – that's what I was told --

Miner: -- okay--

Brown: -- it was in the material--

Miner: -- Gosh there were just so many student there so many students there—maybe that's what it--it just seems so huge

Brown: --they say it was 11.

Miner: It was a huge event. That's pretty – that's not –

Brown: I mean, you know-- I was – I was impressed because I had no expectations.

Miner: Okay, good.

Brown: I mean, that's the – quickest way to get disappointed—to be disappointed is to have expectations.

Miner: It's true.

Brown: I had no expectations. I knew what I was gonna do.

Miner: Sure.

Brown: And I said I could – I could lead by example – just do my thing and maybe people will notice – maybe they won't. I, you know I can offer an invitation for folks to join--

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: - and you know and black feminism teaches me that, as Audrey Lorde says, “Without community, there is no liberation.” So I think I was guided in some ways of trying to find a community – you know – find a community within a community.

Miner: That's a way to do it.

Brown: --that's one way to do it.

Miner: Let's raise the flag and see who would rallies.

Brown: Yeah, exactly. But I had no expectations.

Miner: Hmm

Brown: And that's what some – someone made this comment about – what was she asking me – with one of the initial meetings – how big do you want this to be – and I was just like, I don't – like I'm not concerned about being big. I'm concerned about it being pure.

Miner: Yeah. That's a good way to--

Brown: - you know, but it --

Miner: -- yeah, and genuine, right?

Brown: Yeah.

Miner: Genuine and pure.

Brown: Yeah. Like that's ...[laughs]... I could work with that.

Miner: Oh man!!!

[Brown continues laughing]

01:07:22 Racial identity development through extracurricular activities. Recalls Black Student Union (BSU) activities—her leadership role and the importance of the 30th Anniversary BSU Celebration they held. Describes how the recruitment of perspective students was planned and conducted by five women in BSU in order to increase numbers of Black students on campus, with numbers that went from 8 in her incoming class to 30 the following year.

Miner: Where do we go from here, Nicole?

Brown: Oh, I don't --

Miner: --the part of me – I mean, I – I want you to talk more about your faculty experiences if you want to--

Brown: Yeah.

Miner: --but also in these conversations with people want to know about their experiences with students. So you started about a little bit on that--

Brown: Yeah.

Miner: -- and then you left it pretty quick.

Brown: I think that certainly my involvement in – in extracurricular activities contributed greatly to nurturing my racial identity development.

Miner: Okay.

Brown: And some pulling back from my Student Affairs – student development theory.

Miner: Sure. Sure.

Brown: I was – I know that for all four years, I was active with the Black Student Union and I know that I – I was Vice President at one point, and I know that every – everybody expected me that senior year to be President. And I d – maybe it's the wisdom of the ancestors because I don't think I was smart enough to recognize this but I made a conscious decision not to be in that role. I was a senior and I thought it was my responsibility to groom folks, and – and to still be there if they needed help. So I groomed Jeremy Daniel and Jeremy came in as President and I believe I was his Vice President. I was still around. Maybe I wasn't Vice President, but I was still around.

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: But it was my senior year, his junior year because I don't – I don't attribute it to my wisdom—had to of been the wisdom of-- 'cause I wasn't that bright back then. I didn't have that foresight. But it must've been the wisdom of the ancestors to know them and – you know – you've gotta build your bench and you've got to stick around to support that. And – and I – when I think back on that, I'm – I'm proud of that, I'm proud of that, you know, 'cause it wouldn't be easy to go on to that role and to be on the lime – not to be hold on the limelight, but you know --

Miner: Mm-hmm

Brown: -- just the ego – it would've been easy to do that and no one would've faulted me for that 'cause that was what everybody expected but, you know, thank goodness for that wisdom--

Miner: -- you're already teaching. You're already --

Brown: --That – that's what it meant --

Miner: --You're already--

Brown: I all – yeah, it – I mean, it was so – so --

Miner: You were a sociologist.

Brown: Well, I was – I'll tell you a story. We were – I forget what year it was, but it was the 30th anniversary of the BSU and – oh, well it had to be 70 – 80 –90 – 98 - 'cause it was established in the – in the '68, when King was assassinated. So '98 – so I would've been either a junior or a

senior but I was an upperclassmen, so we decided we wanted to do something big for the 30th anniversary – so we had this committee, we had stationary – I could show you. I think I still have it somewhere like stationary ‘cause we got – I still have the letters afterwards from like, I think, the president, development office – I have to see if I can find those.

Miner: That would be great!

Brown: But yeah, we had this logo of 30th anniversary – you know – so we had these planning meetings and I’m setting up – I think it was – it was either in the Henning room or the Davidson room – I can’t – I can’t remember which one. But I got in there before my committee and there was a clock on the wall – so they still tease me about this – so I covered up the clock and at one point, one of my friends – and these are all my friends now, all the folks I met at Wesleyan - they’re still my dear friends. I remember, Jewel – jewel Little, that was her maiden name, but Jewel looks up at the clock ‘cause she’s like we had been in here for I don’t know how long– she looks at the clock and she sees I’ve covered up the clock and I wrote up top ‘The time is now.’ ...[Miner laughs]... And they still give me grief about that. But it was like, it was so important and – to me --

Miner: -- to get it done

Brown: --to get it done and to do it right and we invited all of these alums to come back and it was so important for us to honor them, you know, in the right way.

Miner: Sure.

Brown: You know – and to – to give them the – the – the honor and reverence and respect that they likely didn’t get when they were there as students, you know, for this to be a – a homecoming -

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: - you know, where you – where it’s home, you know, and we were serious about that. So I – I really enjoyed working with that group of folks, ‘cause there was- there was a whole group of us – was Don and Jewel, Silver, Jeremy – I wanna – you know I don’t wanna leave anyb--, but it all of us – it wasn’t a one-person – you know, thing – all of us and it was this – just a beautiful moment that we created in that space and I – I really feel like, you know, black alums – and folks that were affiliated with BSU felt loved and appreciated and – and – and seen, like I’m always talking about seeing people like I see you--

Miner: Right.

Brown: - you know, and – and to be able to do that – you know, particularly for – for – for some folks who never felt that in that space--

Miner: Right.

Brown: -- and to change what that space meant for them--

Miner: -- to honor them truly.

Brown: Yeah. I mean, I'm so grateful to have been a part of that. And then the other thing, because I did I know I listened to another oral history of one of my classmates' and was a little miffed about the way in which black women, specifically, were erased. And so, my freshman year, the -- that -- that class of '99 cohort, there were 8 African-American students in the freshman class. I think as recently as a couple of years ago, they had 11--

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: -- and that was like oh I got you beat but it's like, this is a horrible competition we're [laughs]

Miner: Right. Yeah. Exactly.

Brown: You know -- yeah. But there were 8 of us and we didn't like that. We were like this, you know, it is the -- the, you know, it wasn't something that the institution was parti -- seen to be particularly, you know, concerned about the optics of it, but we didn't like it. So a group of 5 black women -- two freshman - I was one of the freshman; myself and Jenny Johnson -- Jennifer Johnson and three seniors, okay? So when you talk about this like -- we are all in the generation but you know, underclassmen and upperclassmen--

Miner: Sure -- yes -- yeah.

Brown: --working together -- that's all -- that it was always my experience throughout my time at Wesleyan. But you had two freshman and three seniors and the seniors were Esther -- Esther Franco was her maiden name, Haneefa -- Haneefa Pole was her maiden name and Vernay -- Vernay Irvin was her maiden name. So two freshman, three seniors -- and we decided we were gon do something bout it. The institution is not doing anything about it -- we gon do something about it. And we -- and this was -- a -- a lot of this rest on the seniors because they knew how to navigate the institution -like, that's what -- that was my first -- like, I just -- I'm just here --

Miner: That's true.

Brown: --like, first semester -- I don't know what I'm gonna do. I've no idea, you know . . .

Miner: . . . Who I talk to?

Brown: Yeah, I don't know what -- how do you make things happen here -- like I'm just trying to find my classes like, you know, like -- so, so they knew how to navigate this institution and the -- we decided that if the institution was not going to recruit black students, we were gonna do it.

Miner: Okay.

Brown: And they gave us phones – like they let us into the admissions office when that was over in Holmes – now Student Affairs is over that – but you know Holes – let us have those phones, gave us lists. We called schools – called students from schools like Linblom, Kenwood, Hyde Park, you know, all those places and we begged these students to come to campus. Then the second thing that the institution did-- they allowed us to use the phones, they gave us a list-- who to call, they gave us a van. One white van – I don't know if it was a 12 or 15 passenger van, but it was one white van--

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: And we drove from Bloomington to Chicago and got these students – piled them up – it was way too many – like, ...[Miner laughs]... I don't know who the liability, like counsel or whatever it is like – is it ...[both continue laughing]... is this some – somethings you just can't do when something is--

Miner: --But nothing happened?

Brown: No, everybody was safe. Everybody was safe, but – but that was like I look back on that now after my Student Affairs experience – you know, the liabilities – but we jammed everybody into that little van, that white van and drove them down here and I'm not gonna lie – we straight bamboozled 'em. We had all these events planned and they thought that it was on and poppin' like this all the time ...[Miner continues laughing] And they had no idea we did this all for y'all and this is, you know--

Miner: Awww man!

Brown: -- but we had events and parties and all – you know, and just organized all of that. And then – and then we did it again the second semester. My class – my cohort we had 8 African-American students. The following cohort was quadrupled.

Miner: Wow!

Brown: There were 32 black students who came in and those – and a lot of those they're folks that I had rattled off – those are my friends, like Jewel and Silver --

Miner: They were happy for being bamboozled --

Brown: -- Yeah, they've – they've – well I think they--

Miner: --oh!

Brown: -- they were pissed when they realized what we had done ...[both laugh]... You tricked us – we gotta do it again with another group ...[continue laughing]... but- but – but that – we were talking earlier about the power of students --

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: --and that's the power of- of students when they're given just a little tiny bit and are left alone.

Miner: Okay.

Brown: Right?

Miner: Don't micromanage and --

Brown: -- Yeah! Just leave us alone. They gave us a van, like we- we probably wouldn't have figured out something if we hadn't got a van --

Miner: Sure.

Brown: --but they, you know, gave us a van and they gave us you know phones -- you know, to call and listen who to call but we, I mean you know, we were determined that we're gonna do *something* and then that -- once- once the institution saw that this is- then it became formalized, institutionalized and then what resulted was a 'Student of Color' weekends.

Miner: Really?

Brown: Yeah. Yeah. So the --

Miner: Okay.

Brown: -- Student of Color weekends- these recruitment weekends--

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: --I remember that's what they -- they call them when they -- you know, students of color weekends -- and then I don't know what happened after that 'cause I --I heard somebody else is laying claim to creating the first -- it's like -- okay, whatever. But ...[laughs]... it's like, I know --

Miner: You know what happened.

Brown: -- I was there -- five black women -- five young black women: three seniors, two freshmen. And -- and yeah, just decided that -- that 8 was ridiculous--

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: -- And we needed to do something.

Miner: So you got administrative support from Student Affairs?

Brown: Well- Admissions in-in the form of the -- and I'm trying to think of --

Miner: -- the phones – telephones--

Brown: -- yeah. I'm trying to think who was over there doing that time 'cause I think Malik had left. Oh no, maybe- was – Malik still there – 'cause Malik Jones worked there – he was an alum, too. And he worked there – he recruited me ...[both laugh]...

Miner: That guy – I thought you send your boyfriend did.

Brown: Well, yeah. But he -he was the – he was – he was the face of Illinois Wesleyan--

Miner: Okay.

Brown: -- for – for me. He was the person who contacted me that make sure you get your stuff in--

Miner: Sure. Okay.

Brown: -, you know – so that was Malik- that – that was – that was the only person I really talked to at the institution.

Miner: Okay.

Brown: But I'm trying to think who was there – I think we- we had a – we had a friend, or some, you know – Esther, Haneefa, and Vernay they had a friend or someone, you know, in admissions, so that was you know and I don't know how we got the van.

Miner: mm-hm.

Brown: I don't – I'm – I'm- I'm sure there are all types of policies in place now that—

Miner: -- you have to take a driving test.

Brown: Yeah, we – we did not take – none of that – I'm sure – I'm sure that lands all types of policies ...[both laugh]... 'cause that's what happens, right? When you resist --

Miner: -- right. Right.

Brown: Next thing you know it's a new policy.

Miner: It's law– I'm sorry . Hands are tied...[Brown laughs]... Oh, man!

Brown: Yeah so - I don't – I – I am not comfortable calling it support.

Miner: Okay.

Brown: It- it was just . . .

Miner: . . . It was connection.

Brown: -- 'cause support – yeah – 'cause support has to do with like you--

Miner: Intentional--

Brown: -- actively doing something.

Miner: --Yeah.

Brown: Yeah. Being intentional and deliberate about doing something, I think it was more – we were left alone.

Miner: Okay.

Brown: Like we would-you know– and – and I –I don't know what the administration of the institution thought about – you know in terms of this being a success.

Miner: Mm-hm.

Brown: you know, and I think it was probably like you know, [makes awkward sound] they wanna do it so let's let them do it so--

Miner: But you didn't have any connection with people in the administration at that time?

Brown: No. Not- not me. I mean, I was – I was a freshman. I didn't- I mean – yeah--

Miner: -- But I mean, as you – as you then became a leader in--

Brown: --Oh yeah.

Miner: --Black Student Union, and --

Brown: -- yeah, that was – that was where I met Jim – Jim Matthews and actually 'cause I started my first year – freshman year 'cause you got, you know, work-study --

Miner: Mm-hm.

01:21:19 Work study experiences. Negative experience in the mail room and then a positive one in the Dean of Students' Office. How her college experiences were the most memorable--how she found herself in a constant state of anger but that she bonded with people who valued her. This led most recently to the realization that what she thought was her love for the institution is actually a love for the individuals who loved, cared and nurtured her for herself. She quotes a line from a poem [titled "won't you celebrate with me" by Lucille Clifton] in summary of her experiences with IWU and other institutions: "something has tried to kill me and has failed."

Brown: --So you get you know, the jobs – whatever, and I was in a mail room and that was my first work-study job. Ohh, I hated it. I hated it.

Miner: Why are you smiling?

Brown: 'cause ...[both laugh]... 'cause – 'cause – 'cause I – 'cause I know what I'm not gonna say--

Miner: Oh!

Brown: --but I – but I – but I – I hated it.

Miner: Okay.

Brown: Eric worked in the mail room. He's- I think he's still there. He's certainly still on campus and he was so nice. He was so nice.

Miner: Oh, good.

Brown: But, other folks were not.

Miner: Oh!

Brown: And I just – oh and I think they're still there but ooh, I hated it. I hated it. So I was so grateful to get out and – and I think – I don't think I had anything in – in between there 'cause I think I went from the mail room to the Dean of Students office and that's where I met – at the time, Dean Matthews and is till sometimes call him Dean Matthews ...[Miner laughs]... it's like, it's the term of endearment like you know, I can't- I cannot- I can't call Dr. Jaggi by his first name.

Miner: Sure.

Brown: Like I'll call him kaka, which is like uncle but I can't- 'cause it's like, it almost feels disrespectful.

Miner: Right.

Brown: But yeah, Dean Matthews – I, you know, met him and got to – you know, just in the office, so you're just doing --

Miner: Sure.

Brown: -- things related to the office . . .

Miner: Sure.

Brown: . . . but you have conversations – you get to spend time with folks and – and that was a really, really good experience. I had – I had no idea that that was the beginning of, you know, what would be, you know, a longer professional relationship –you know, that I would come back to the-- I had no idea I was gonna come back to the institution much less twice. But to come back

to the institution I didn't know that – that seed was being planted, but I will say for – for – like people talking about high school – like the best years of your life are high schools – oh! No!

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: [Miner laughs in the background] No! No! No! College was absolutely the best – and it – it wasn't because the experiences were- we would always fighting- I would just remember I always being mad- like always being- always being – you know – what does Baldwin say to be- to be black and conscious in America is being in a constant state of rage --

Miner: Mmm.

Brown: --like paraphrasing. But I just- I remember always being mad ...[laughs]... about some racist crap that happens- some, you know . . .

Miner: . . . in class

Brown: . . . in class

Miner: . . . with peers

Brown: . . . in the residence halls-

Miner: Okay.

Brown: - I mean, I might still have some of the clippings from different things. . . But yeah, so I – so I was just – I was mad but in – in the midst of all of that, I had a community.

Miner: Right.

Brown: And ...and – and I think I – I've really gotten a lot of clarity over the last year in terms of, you know, I used to think that my love was for the institution and it was like, you know, bleed... green and white and I'm titans and, you know-

Miner: Not anymore.

Brown: - I'm of a different opinion –I got-

Miner: Okay.

Brown: - I've come to, you know, point of clarity, but it was really about, you know, that place was, you know, it provided me with an opportunity to connect with people through the adversity, you know. And-and we're bonded in a way that you can only be bonded when you go through shit toge ... sorry-

Miner: All right.

Brown: - but, I'll try. I was so good ...[laughs]... but when you go through those things together , there's just, you know, and – and – and I love, you know, I love them-

Miner: Yeah.

Brown:, you know, and we actually – we have a – a sanity circle. So it's a group of about ten of us from – from undergrad. We still- we hang out-

Miner: I love that sanity.

Brown: - we try to get together every quarter, you know , umm ...

Miner: That's great.

Brown: ... and those are – those are my people ...

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: ... that is my community and they remind me, every day that, you know, that I belong even as these institutions try to tell me I don't.

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: Or that I'm worthy, I'm valuable, even as the – these institutions try to tell me that I'm not and – and that was nurtured in that space, and – and – and...some of that nurturing, you know, in that space had to do with – with how difficult it was to be a black student in this space...

Miner: Right.

Brown: ...and – and – and the- the issues and the problems that, you know, that – that space had. I mean, you know, we – we – I – I remember taking classes with Dr. Muirhead , cause she was the only one that taught-

Miner: Yeah.

Brown:, you know, black literature, you know, and I still have my books from – from her class and it was just this – this hunger and this desire to find myself in a curriculum – same reason why I – I took every class that Paul Bushnell -

Miner: Right.

Brown: , you know, ever taught, you know, and it's like we'd have to wait 20 minutes for him to come to class, but, you know, but ...[both laugh]... when he-

[Both continue laughing]

Miner: Oh my god!

Brown: I – I love Professor Bushnell, but you know ...

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: ... but – but when – when he got there, you know, we – we were still there ...[laughs]... when we knew he was gonna be a little late...

Miner: Ohh!

Brown: ... but he had a, you know, a story to tell and it – it was based in his lived experiences and, you know, and Dr. Jaggi – I never took a physics class ...[Miner laughs]... you know, most of – most of us who know Dr. Jaggi never took a Physics class-

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: But the – the love and care and the – the nurturance and the – it was, you know, we never – I never felt like I had to ask permission, you know, with – with those folks, you know, to – to – to – to be me, like it was never, you know, yeah. So – so – so – so we – we managed to find each other...

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: ... in that environment and that is what I appreciate and that is what is sacred.

Miner: mm-hmm.

Brown: And it – it – it – it – it has less to do with the institution and more to do with the – the conditions that the institution created and upheld...

Miner: ...backwards kind of a way.

Brown: you know-

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: I mean but that is ... ya know...what is it ... Lucille Clifton ... I – I sent this poem out to – to everyone – (mumbling) my circle before I left. It's – it's – what is it – celebrate with me, and the – the last line is – I know I'm gonna mess it up – but it – it – it basically says like ... maybe I can – I'm – I've like – I know I could find it somewhere-

Miner: - go find it if you want to.

Brown: But it – it – it basically says that, you know, you know, 'celebrate with me...' you know, and at the end it's like, 'because everything that has tried to kill me has failed.'

Miner: There you go!

Brown: Like that's the last, you know ...

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: ... And – and that's kind of ... Wesleyan in a nutshell-

Miner: Oh my god!

Brown: - for me, but it's – it's not – it's not just Wesleyan though...

Miner: Sure.

Brown: ... 'Cause I'd say that about, you know, University of Illinois ...

Miner: Right.

Brown: ... I could – I – I didn't stay around Illinois State long enough to, you know, experience those things. I was a commuter-

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: - student. I was – I was, actually, I was in the Student Affairs position – I was director of Multicultural Affairs when I was getting the Masters, so I was just driving in and driving out, but certainly, you know, other institutions, my corporate experience, you know, it's like yes, celebrate with me 'cause every, you know, I'm still here. Everything that's tried to kill me, you know, has failed--

Miner: Yeah.

01:29:35 Goals as Multicultural Affairs Director. This was her dream job – to be an advocate for students so that marginalized students could have the same college experience white students were having. Expresses disappointment in the lack of institutional progress and that students only see themselves through multiculturalism and not as people who can resist oppressive structures. Rather than placing blame on the students, this is a realization that they have not been taught they have power over their own experiences.

Brown: --And – and I am the better for it. And – well, I, you know, but – but ...[both chuckle]... that – that's – it's not as if you – when I came back the first time...to Multicultural Affairs, my hope was that I would be able to have in impact in such a way where students weren't surviving, the way that I felt I was surviving-

Miner: Yeah. That was my next question. How-

Brown: -Yeah

Miner: - did that change that experience for you?

Brown: Yeah. I mean, I really – I – that was what I wanted. Like, I wanted marginalized students on that campus to – to – to thrive; to have the experience that, you know, all of the white students were having, or that seemed like, you know, they were having, you know, to just – to just be, you know, to just be able to have that experience without having to explain or having to deal with, you know, without having to be, you know... you know .. eating while black, you know, going to saga while black, or walking – walking down the quad while black, or walking into residence hall while black and seeing, you know, the “n word” somewhere, you know, these were all things that we experience, and my hope, when I came back the first time was that, you know, I might be able to do something where students would – would be able to thrive and, like that position was ... when I was working in corporate, that was my dream job. I had this ridiculous idea that I was going to work in corporate and maximize my earnings potential and – and be able to, you know, leave that situation in, you know, early and retire early, whatever be financially stable enough where I could afford to just leave it all behind and – and work in my dream job. Ridiculous! It was just ... [Miner laughs]... that was a 23- year old mind, like, coming up with that, you know, but that was, you know, so this like, director of Multicultural Affairs is like my dream job. So then, when I heard that Monica left ... I – my first call was to Monica, to go-

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: - what happened? Like, do – do I need to flip over tables or what – what did they do to you, or like, you know-

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: What, like what – what happened?

Miner: Right.

Brown: you know, and then I, you know, found out that she – she actually wanted to leave, and then my second call was to Jim, to Jim Matthews ... and, yeah, that was kind of how I got the – the job pretty much. But I – but that – but I wanted it to be better and it – and it’s really kind of ... I don’t know sad is the right word, but we’ll just use it as a filler I guess now. It – it’s – it – it pains me that nothing has really changed.

Miner: Right.

Brown: I think, perhaps, the – the only thing that’s changed is, to some extent ... I hesitate with how I wanna say this ... I think some ... racially marginalized students, particularly African-American students are now in a place where their whole life they’ve been fed this kind of multicultural script, this post racial script -

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: And ... I ... my time there this year, this past year, I didn't see as much of that resistance ... that – that fight, that recognition of oppressive structures and - and – and you know, and – and yeah, and I wanna be really careful because I don't wanna unjustly criticize, you know, young people-

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: -but I – and I think part of the reason why they're there right now was because of just how poorly we've done, in terms of educating them on a lot of this stuff, but in like – in my conversations with students just like, being okay with the status quo, like, I don't – I don't think the students would march and demand that there are more black faculty, for example on campus. And ...so – so there's a pain there for me, because it's not just that things are the same-

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: but like, you know, this everyone's kinda complicit in kinda keeping things, you know.

Miner: But it did happen three years ago. The students ...

Brown: Yeah

Miner: ... came into a faculty meeting.

Brown: Yeah. Yeah. Actually... and I remember 'cause I actually – who was that – Mark Timmerman or who's it- Mark – I mess up his name now. Yeah – it was Mark Timmerman and I did a – a – what was it – the Human Rights committee or something, they had this workshop and we facilitated a – I don't know – workshop or something on 'Black lives matter' and had a list of – that was really student-driven – and that was one of the things they talked about-

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: - and I think it was either right before or right after that event that the students – that was when I did like the silent protest-

Miner: mm-hmm.

Brown: -was that the one ... yeah. But see – but see here's what ... I'm glad they did that and made The Pantagraph. I got to read it, but they asked for permission-

Miner: Thank you. (mumbling) be crazy about it too.

Brown: Yeah. They – they asked for permission.

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: And ... you don't ask the oppressor for permission-

Miner: Right.

Brown: - to protest-

Miner: Right.

Brown: - 'cause they would never give you permission to do something that's really gonna-

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: , you know, so they asked for permission and – and – and I hear about, you know, some of the basketball players—not basketball—football players, that, you know, want to take a knee--

Miner: -- the dialogue. Yeah.

Brown: Yeah. They like, so several of the players – I don't know if they're still doing it – but they, you know, take a knee during the anthem, but they – but they talk to their coach first about it-

Miner: - Right. Right.

Brown: And ...so...

Miner: Don't misunderstand me.

Brown: Yeah. Yeah.

Miner: This is what my real intention is. Yeah.

Brown: Yeah.

Miner: I – I am with you but I think maybe we're of a different ...

Brown: ... Well, yeah, and that – that's why I'm really, kinda – I'm conflicted--

Miner: -- you wanna let them get there. You wanna let them get there and learn on their own but still ...

Brown: Yeah. I'm – I'm real conflicted about criticizing that but I don't – I – I personally don't believe that that's the way to get there-

Miner: Right.

Brown:, you know, that you know, if – if folks are comfortable with your protest, it's not protest.

Miner: Right.

Brown: But – and with that said, as an institution, you know, that institution doesn't teach students how to resist-

Miner: Right.

Brown: - doesn't nurture a spirit of resistance within them. I would talk to my Intro to Soc students about that-

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: , you know, and – and – and – and really challenge in the question, why do you think that is? You know. And I'd say, "Do you know that there are decisions being made right now about your curriculum?"-

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: "Do you know that there are meetings? Do you know that this is changing? Do you know that they just voted on this?" it's not a secret - why don't you know?

Miner: Right. Yeah.

Brown: you know, and it's like, you know, this – this – folks aren't going in – in, you know, basements and hidden parts of the campus ...[both chuckle]... and making the – you know– if you – If you ask, they'd be happy to give you the information. They'd be, you know, it's like, but if – if you're content, you know--

Miner: --that's another kettle of fish.

Brown: Yeah.

01:37:36 Trying to affect change within Student Affairs. Recalling encounters with veiled racism in meetings regarding students, specifically recalling one instance when a facility restriction was put in place as a result of a request by members of a Black fraternity that didn't have a house of their own. Brown also recalls the close connections she made with students and how they sustained her in advocating for them within a racist system.

Miner: So when you were in Student Affairs then, what kind of – I mean how were you having – were you able to have these conversations with either students or – or administrators ? You're making ...[Brown bursts out laughing]... a benefit of audio here, you've made an exasperated expression on your face...[Brown continues laughing] ...

Brown: Followed by an eye roll.

Miner: Followed by a sigh ...[continues laughing].. so do you wanna go there or you wanna not go there?

Brown: Yeah, I mean 'cause--

Miner: --you don't have to go there.

Brown: - some of those people are still there too

Miner: It's okay. And – and – and it's not really a big, you know, it's not the naming names thing.

Brown: No – no – no – no – no – no – no-

Miner: - it's – what I'm getting at is, you had an experience that was negative -

Brown: Yeah.

Miner: -you went back with an intention to – to take a different tack--

Brown: -- so naïve--

Miner:--so--

Brown:-- so naïve--

Miner:--okay, so--

Brown:-- so hopeful and naïve

Miner: -- and that's the reason that I asked it is because- right- you're the-

Brown: Yeah.

Miner: -your best intentions and I wanted to explore that little bit.

Brown: Yeah. I mean--

Miner: -- but if you don't want to, that's fine.

Brown: No – no – no – I'm – I'm an open book. I think that, you know, it – it was King that cautioned us about the dangerousness of the white liberal.

Miner: Okay...

Brown: And I definitely experienced that first-hand in that role. I came on as a ... Jim and I had a very candid conversation, which essentially went like this ...[both laugh]... It was basically, you know – Hey – you know – “Hey, I heard Monica left” –you know – “what's going on with this position?” He's like – “yeah” – you know – “are you interested in the position?” I'm like – “you know me. This is what I would wanna come here and do.” “You're about it or you're not-“

Miner: Right.

Brown: - “‘cause I- ‘cause I’m not” – you know – “I’m not -

Miner: - waste your time --

Brown: Yeah! I’m – I’m not this – this – this is what – what I want to do. I want to advocate for students, I wanna, you know, shake things up, like this is. So this is what you’d be signing on to and Jim was kind of like, “Hey! Bring it.” You know, like, this is kind of – obviously our conversation was – you know, but that was really the , you know, the – the – basically the – the – the ...

Miner: ... the heart of it.

Brown: The heart of it. And – and I’m convinced, like I – I – I think I’ve told them this. I hope I’ve told him this that that divine intervention that the timing of it all because the person who would replace him, there is no way in hell she would’ve hired me.

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: And – and I said sometimes I think he – he was just there – just to hire me because shortly thereafter, he left. And he went back to faculty...[both laugh]... So I think he said “I did my good deed. I’m out.”

Miner: There you go.

Brown: But... yeah, it – it – it – it was difficult. I came in thinking that my job was to advocate for students, and so I was operating under that I’m advocating for students. So to ...come into meetings and when those students that I was advocating for were black and brown and discussions would start coming up about things like safety and you know, and – and you know, access to facilities or not, and you know, it was just like – wow! You know so when – we were kind of tongue and cheek about you know the policies being created-

Miner: Right. Yeah.

Brown: - but I actually experienced, you know, policy changes occurring as a result of, you know, some situation where I was advocating for black and brown students.

Miner: Would you be – would it be possible for you to be specific about it?

Brown: Ah... yeah! So one policy change I can remember particular was – so there are no black sororities or fraternities on campus-

Miner: Right.

Brown: -if – if the students want to ... join one of those organizations, they go over to Illinois State.

Miner: Right.

Brown: We had a group of students – one of the students was working in my office as a Student Worker who was a member of a black fraternity on Illinois State's campus and as a Illinois Wesleyan student at the time ...had the – all Illinois Wesleyan students had the right to reserve facilities.

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: So at the time, they could reserve the Shirk Center. They could reserve the Memorial...Center, like the main lounge – I forget what it's called now but they, you know, so they could reserve facilities. So these students were exercising – exercising their rights as students to reserve a space and they wanted to have a party. The shit show ensued. Like, following you know this-

Miner: For a fraternity?

Brown: - for – for – well, the fraternity wanted to sponsor the party. Now – now here's the thing. The – the white fraternities and sororities on campus – they have houses...

Miner: Right.

Brown: ...so they get to do whatever, and we've had a, you know, several closings and – and that -

Miner: Yes, indeed!

Brown:, you know, so these students are doing stuff out in the open, whereas these, you know, fraternity- sororities houses you don't – you don't know what's going on inthere, you know, alums are paying... you – you see where I'm -

Miner: I do.

Brown: , you know

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: - so – so they – so what resulted because the – at the time the policy that was in place, you couldn't say no to the students-

Miner: Right.

Brown: - but then there was like, okay—if you're going to do this, then you need to have this, you need to have that, you know, and all these things in order to, you know, just basically make it so make it so that you'll never wanna do this again.

Miner: Right. Yeah.

Brown: And then following that, the policies changed around how students were able to access the facilities in for what purposes and those types of things. So – so that was, like, one example of, you know, 'cause all these concerns were – well, you know, I heard at Illinois State, you know, this – this happens and this happens and you know, [gives an expression of etc etc]. So, we were concerned about them tearing up our facility, we're concerned about – and it's just like ... and I'm sitting in this like-

Miner: Oh, man!

Brown: I am an advocate for the students-

Miner: Right.

Brown:, you know, so – so that was a – that's a very concrete example -

Miner: Sure. Sure.

Brown: - of, you know, and not the only one. I think it's good enough to illustrate the point and – and it's a way in which we can, you know, it's like – it's not – well, that wasn't about race...

Miner: Right.

Brown: ...you know, ju...jus...just about, you know, the facilities, of just things that we didn't think about before that now we are thinking about.

Miner: Yeah. What a co-incidence.

Brown: you know, and it's – and during that time, I'm sure that the institution is much more like in tune and observant and wanted to know about what's going on in those fraternity and sorority houses. But, you know, at the time, you know – so – so was – it was just the...the ... you know, disproportionate – or not disproportionate, but just unequal...

Miner:...sponsors...

Brown:...resources and – and you know, 'cause it's like this – this wouldn't a bit – you know, if this was a fraternity – like any other fraternity on this campus, this wouldn't be an issue 'cause they would have a house, they would be able to do what they want just like the other folks.

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: But they don't have that. And not only did they not have the house, they don't have an ability to join a fraternity that they wanted, you know, because there aren't – no – no black fraternities or sororities on this campus because – part of the reason is because you don't have enough black students-

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: - in order to be able to sustain and justify, you know, a chapter coming – coming back.

Miner: Yeah, it's all very circular.

Brown: Yeah. Right? So, cause – cause at one point, black sorority, Delta Sigma Theta was actually on campus. Illinois Wesleyan did have a chapter – but it's like that – the likelihood of any of those things happening again-

Miner: Yeah.

Brown:, you know, and again, going back to that – the world we create – is that really something that the institution wants? I don't think so. It certainly would be something that would attract more ...

Miner: Right.

Brown: ...black students-

Miner: Right.

Brown: - but then it's like ... you know, so, yeah, so – so – so there were a lot of disappointments in that role and with that said, it was so ... rewarding, because of the students.

Miner: I was gonna say.

Brown: I have things like everywhere, around here of something that a student gave me or something that– you know, reminds me of – it's mostly like gifts and things that they gave me, but... Actually, this, yeah, this print ... umm... (first-last name) who used to – he – he's an alum. He was there as a student when I was in Student Affairs. He ...this is called "The Banjo Lesson". He – he went – his first job I think, after graduating was in Admissions. He worked in Admissions for a couple of years. And he came to my office and – 'cause I think I must've mentioned it to him that at one point I had this in my...dorm room, like when I was a student... and he had – he came and brought and had it framed and he said, "I got this with my – my very first paycheck."

Miner: Oh ...[continues inaudibly]

Brown: Yeah. And – and it was like, you know, so those ... yeah I'm getting choked up but those types of things helped to kind of nurture me and nourish me, and – and help me to, kind of

persist... in that environment as I began to learn more and more – the various ways in which the institution and the people within it were ... racist-

Miner: Right.

Brown: -I mean, and that's – that's just what it is I mean, , you could be – you could be very nice, you know, we're mid-west – mid-west nice, you know. It's like, you know, and still be, you know, racist; and still have racist kind of beliefs that manifest into behaviors. And – but – but – my – that was – that was very, very rewarding. That was one of my most rewarding professional experiences the relationship – relationship that I was able to build with students; not as an authority necessarily...

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: ...not as a – a – a faculty member who wielded a – a – some type of authority or – or – or power over them in the form of a grade or whatever but just often times up a soft place to land in a very hard, you know, environment. I mean, I had students come in and – and – pray in my office. I think I relinquished my office for Care once so that he could pray in there. And this was before the meditation room, you know-

Miner: Oh dear. Yeah. Yeah.

Brown:, you know – you know – I had students, you know, share about not being able to come out to their parents and you know, they're sharing it with me, you know.

Miner: mm ... Hmm ...Hmm.

Brown: I had students who looked for comfort and – and guidance in how to deal with racist roommates ...and racist teachers ...[laughs]... ... you know, yeah. So it was, you know, and their – their – their burden was my burden ... but the – their joy was my joy-

Miner: Right.

Brown:- I had these little poppers where when someone would come in you know, with some type of good news, you'd pull the thing and the little confetti, you know-

Miner: Oh, how fun!

Brown: Would come out and at one point I would just pick it all up and put it in a low cup and ...[Miner laughs]... some .. just throw at them. But when I was in the office for a long time was in, I was so angry when it got moved to the other part of Holmes, 'cause it was the – Shaw used to be ...classes were in there all the time. So, I would catch a lot of students. So a student that may be – I got some type of report about wasn't doing well in class, you know, or wasn't doing something, you know, was in trouble – I'd just have my door open. I'd just be waiting for 'em,

when I know that they're gonna be in Shaw around this time ...[Miner laughs in the background]... And then I could just grab them ...[both laugh]... So I was really-

Miner: It's good to have tactics.

01:51:06 Changing the Summer Enrichment Program (SEP). Recalls difficulties she had getting students on board with the changes she implemented in SEP and her plan to introduce structures for accountability, like ones she learned in a corporate environment. Brown moved it from a program based on remediation into a leadership program with goals, internships, performance reviews, and debates.

Brown: Yeah! You know, so I was really upset when the – they got moved, but – but yeah, so that – that definitely rewarding, and I – I – and very much reciprocal. I learned and gained so much and I – and I feel like what they tell me is that they gained and learned a lot too, which is so – you – know--I don't think anyone knows this except for, definitely some alums, but when I first started, the students didn't like me.

Miner: Oh!

Brown: Yeah. The – the, particularly –yeah the students didn't like me and they actually went so far as to try to get me removed.

Miner: Oh my gosh!

Brown: And – but what they didn't understand was that Jim and I had already talked...[Miner laughs]... Right? So – so they went straight to Jim complaining about me and Jim's already, you know, and it – that's – that's rare when you have situations like that and – and you know, but the person has got your back.

Miner: Yeah, right.

Brown: We could all already talked about but they 'cause I had changed stuff and I had you know, and they were not, you know, and I was frustrated too, because I was like – I left a corporate job and took a huge pay cut to come here, expected of folks who were gonna be like— oh! So glad you're here. And they were like, ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-

Miner: So the students were not happy?

Brown: The students were not happy and I – 'cause I changed a lot of stuff and it was--

Miner: Like what?

Brown: --One of the things that was a big change was how the Summer Enrichment Program was run.

Miner: Okay.

Brown: And, again, I'm coming from a – a corporate environment, you know, you – you have reports, you have metrics, you have, you know, you don't just make--

Miner: -- accountability

Brown: Yeah. You don't just make claims about programs working.

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: You know, you have structure.

Miner: Right.

Brown: And, you know, Monica, you know rest her soul- when I was there as a student and Monica was there in stu – in – in – as a director. She was – she was a, you know, a soft place to land, but , you know, in a very different way.

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: 'cause she was nurturing and kind but I'd – I – I – I feel like the – I don't know if it was the institution that beat her down to the point where she just – the – there are parts of me that feel like the institution beat – beat the fight out of her. But, you know, so – so she wasn't really like, trying to rock the boat...

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: ...you know, but she was there for us, you know, in terms of, being, you know, her empathy, her care, her kindness-

Miner: Sure. But not the advocate you wanted to be.

Brown: Not – not – not the advocate that I was.

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: So I would just say, you know that ... 'cause I don't know what her story was -

Miner: Sure.

Brown: -what her experiences behind, you know, but when I came in I had had a different background and I had a different relationship with the students. And I solved some things that needed to be shored up. And I solved some structure– some things that need to change – some structure needed to be in place and one of the things was the Summer Enrichment Program that I don't – when I came in, it seemed like the students didn't take the program seriously.

Miner: Okay.

Brown: And I, you know, I was like – you're gonna have internships and you're going to have performance reviews 'cause I'm coming from a corporate environment,

Miner: Right?

Brown: Si I – so I was like, you're gonna have – we're gonna have – you're gonna have goals, you're gonna have metrics, you're gonna have performance reviews, you know, we're – we're going to do, you know, activities – like we started doing debates, you know, teach them how to debate, issues ----- structure, you know, and it's like from the time you're here – from the time you wake to the time you sleep, you, you know, it's like the-

Miner: Yup.

Brown: ... you know, it probably felt like a book camp for them, which is very different from what, you know ... So they were, you know -

Miner: Expectations, in a way?

Brown: - mad. Yeah. Yeah. I – I – my – I came in wanting to raise the bar high because I was confident they would rise to the occasion.

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: And it's like – I am not here to be your friend. I'm here to be your advocate but I'm not here to be your friend. And you're not going to like it – maybe you will but if you – I really don't care. That's not my concern... [Miner chuckles]... My concern is, you know, you are going to clear this bar.

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: you know, and this is not – this will not be a minority program for, you know, which – we look at kind of the history of – of – of – of SEP. it's – yeah – yeah, I'm pretty – I'm on solid grounds that saying this – it started as like a remedial type program and – which is problematic for me. So I – I was – my – my frame was, you know, we're not using deficit models, right? So I'm like, this is a leadership program-

Miner: Great.

Brown: you know, and this is what we're preparing you for and students and – I – and I threatened to kick some folks out. That first group was like, I will send you home. A couple of students that is so interested – one of my students, he – he just graduated from Columbia Business School – wonderful. But when he was in my program and he came to a meeting with a durag on and sa... and I was like – we had it out. I was just like – oh, you know... And I – I could – I could – now I could go back and kind of complicate my own respectability politics.

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: you know, around that time, but – but even as I do that, I could say this was not -

Miner: Right.

Brown: -this – this was not acceptable and the students were really resistant. You know what it was like –

Miner: Okay...

Brown: ...I thought this was a summer vacation and this chick is coming in and talking ...[both laugh/ inaudible]. By the end of it, we were all on the same page.

Miner: Right. Right.

Brown: And I – I think they understood – and I think that that was their first semester was hard because the students didn't know me and they didn't know where I was coming from-

Miner: Sure.

Brown: -So they didn't – they didn't know how much I really loved them and – and it – it took some time for them to see like she really loves us.

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: And it's like when people love you, you know, they say things that you don't wanna hear. They call you out on your BS. They push you, you know, in – in ways that can make you uncomfortable, you know, that's what love is too.

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: you know love is the celebration and love is the, you know, the nurturing and all of that, but – but you know, love is truth, you know. And – and I think once we clear that hurdle where students recognize that I really – it's not just like I'm here for you, you know, or I support you, or I'm – is – no – I love you.

Miner: Hmm.

Brown: You know – I – I – I love you in a –, as DeBarge would say, in a special way, partly because of the shared experiences and because of the – what I know of this place and what I know, you know, the – the – the adversity, you know like, I know of it because I lived it too.

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: you know

Miner: You get some real preparation. It is supposed to be a genuine encounter.

Brown: Yeah.

Miner: ... with the things you're gonna face.

Brown: Yeah. Yeah. So it was like – so I, you know, I – I was invested, like absolutely invested in – in these students personally and – and you know, professionally and wanted them to thrive. I just wanted them to do more and than just survive in that space and I certainly didn't want them to shrink up in, you know, an—an—an wither. But I wanted them to thrive, I wanted them to blossom. I wanted them to – to own it, you know. Yeah, but they tried it...[Miner laughs]...”cause Danny – Danny was the one that called me. I'll never forget – I was sitting in my office. Danny Sharad called me and he's like, what's going on over there? And I'm like, what're you talking about? He's like, it's something that – what did he say – was it called a coupe de grace ...[Miner laughs]... And I was like, what? He was like, yeah I'm hearing through the grapevine, and I was like – don't worry about it. It's fine. It's – they just, you know, they're just bucking a little bit. It's, you know, it --

Miner: It'll be fine.

Brown: - yeah, it'll be fine, 'cause I wasn't worrying.

Miner: Danny was – was Danny on campus?

Brown: Oh, yeah, well, no. Danny – well at that time he was an alum.

Miner: Okay. Okay.

Brown: But Danny went to Wesleyan too.

Miner: Right.

Brown: Danny Sharad yup. Yeah so he-- again, these are all my friends you know.

Miner: Right. But he wasn't on campus since so--

Brown: -- No no

Miner: There really was a circle of [overlapping with Brown]

Brown: Yeah. Yeah. No, he wasn't on campus. He was just – he probably – I think – I think he knew some students who were, you know, who were on campus but, yeah – I don't know how. I didn't ask him how...[Miner laughs]... But he had heard that there was some rumblence and – and the folks were mad and they were gonna go to the Dean and he was like [mumbling] “What ? Do I need to come down there?” And I was like, “no – it's fine. It's fine.” But yeah, they tried it. They tried it. But – but yeah – that was really very rewarding in a – in a – in a lot ways ways.

02:00:29 Factors leading to leaving Multicultural Affairs. The effect of having other Black women PhDs as examples and other reasons for continuing her education. Describes an earlier time when she took a risk in leaving the corporate world and how taking those risks led to greater rewards.

Miner: I really appreciate that example ...[Brown chuckles]... So, you – were you ultimately happy with what you were able to do in the office or why did you leave or ...

Brown: I was never happy.

Miner: Okay. And is that then why you left?

Brown: No. I mean, there were – there were a lot of factors that kinda came together. One of the things that I will say is like, during my time at Wesleyan in Student Affairs, that was the first time that I witnessed an experienced black women – faculty, Ph.D.(s).

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: There was – at the time that I was there, Kira was there, Venus was there, Carren was there, Sammie, I think was there – Sammie Robinson.. I know I'm forgetting... someone... well, well, Pam Muirhead was still there. But it – and yeah – they were all black women. And it was the first time I saw myself reflected back in me in that role.

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: And it was inspiring. And it was – it was not the total reason but it was part of the reason why I gathered up the courage to go back and pursue a Ph.D. myself.

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: Because I – I had actually got to see it in – in – in the flesh of – you know, what was possible and what they were doing. It's like these, you know, these are women who look like me. And I never – when I thought about a college professor – the image that would come in my mind was basically, Professor Bushnell.

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: And I didn't learn until years later that he didn't even have a Ph.D. But that was what the image that was in my head. I couldn't even see myself, you know, it's like when my boys, they write stories and – you know and I ask them questions to see like whose – whose the main – what is the main character to look like – are you – are you seeing yourself as the main character in your own story?

Miner: Yeah. It's powerful.

Brown: 'cause it's so – representation is so – so important and it – it was powerful enough for me to see myself and inspire me, you know, but – but I – but – so that – that was – that was – that definitely had a strong influence on me to decide to do the Ph.D. but it was a lot of things. I was on the front end of what would be a long, and kinda nasty divorce ...

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: ... I was happy with what I was doing, but also kinda frustrated, because, you know, nobody leaves Wesleyan. So, upward mobility – there's nowhere to go.

Miner: Yeah ... it's tough. It is tough.

Brown: And when Monica left the position, she had – she had been in the position for over a decade, you know-

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: - so there was a lot of – a lot of things just kind of coming together in that moment where it was like, well you got to lose, you know, it's like you, you know, why – what are you waiting for? And when I went in – when I got the Masters, I think you know I – I – I knew. I was like, yeah, your schooling is not done -

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: --but it was a matter of when. And then all of these other things started to happen and I was like – no time like the present, you know. And – and then – and then , I also knew that I – that I wanted to go all in. I didn't wanna have that part-time experience that it wasn't – that I wasn't going to be successful and that I had to completely commit. So that meant leaving, you know, a full-time job with benefits , you know it's leaving my home, leaving the – the – the town that I was in and just going all-in. like, just jumping, you know, it – it was a – it was a risk. I'm grateful that I didn't really appreciate how much of a risk it was When I decided to do it, 'cause I'm very risk averse.

Miner: That doesn't sound that way to me.

Brown: No it didn't sounded, but I am very risk averse.

Miner: All right.

Brown: And I took a tremendous risk when I left corporate – I – I left corporate at like the, you know, I – I was at the height of my game and I had just completed a – a – I was in a leadership program. I was in a leadership program with GE and then I switched companies and then was at HSBC and I was leadership program there. And I was on this assignment that they're like – if you successfully complete this assignment, you – you know, you're golden 'cause you've made all these connections -

Miner: Wow!

Brown: , you know, you could write your ticket. And it was at that moment where I was so successful and so miserable, or it's just like this is not, you know, and – and I think that had I been making any more money than what I was making was really that tipping point. Had I been making a couple of thousand dollars more, I would not have been – I would not have walked away.

Miner: Mm.

Brown: And – and it was just at that moment where you just kinda see – Oh, you know, like the possibilities ahead of you-

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: - and down this path but I was so unhappy. And then this opportunity came up with a – a forty percent pay cut-

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: - to move back to Bloomington, Il, right...

Miner: Centralm Illinois. Yeah...

Brown: Like, there was nothing appealing, you know, but you know, that – that was a risk – that was my point.

Miner: Right.

Brown: that was a risk. And, you know, and the risk – my riskiest endeavors have been have had the highest payouts in terms of my like ... personal satisfaction.

Miner: Sure. That's a great position to be in--

Brown: Well I mean.

Miner: --To be able to say...

Brown: Yeah.

Miner: I mean, wow!

Brown: I mean, it's, you know, and it – I have to remind myself so that I can't take more risks, 'cause my – my default is no.

Miner: Sure.

Brown: My default is ...

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: My default is no before you even ask me--no...[both laugh]... like my, so – so – so, when I have to consider things, I have those experiences to go back to and – and – and both of them are tied in some ways to my experiences at that institution – at Illinois Wesleyan, so I don't wanna – I don't wanna give it to the institution ...

Miner: Okay...

Brown: ... 'cause it's not, you know...

02:07:00 Skills gained from her corporate experience, implemented at IWU and used during her educational progression. How she questioned the claims others had about SEP and how she saw that trends in IWU's efforts to improve retention of Black students were more of a crisis response model and not a sustained effort. From her business experience, she learned to take a project management approach to other areas of her life: the SEP program as well as her graduate work.

Miner: Are you glad that you had the corporate experience?

Brown: Oh, absolutely.

Miner: Okay.

Brown: Absolutely!

Miner: It sounds like you got real value out of that.

Brown: Oh, yeah, I definitely did. It was - it was miserable. I hated it. I did not – and that was before I even had a, like a, a capitalist critique I just was ...[Miner laughs]... I hated it and it was – it was – it was frustrating because I was really – I was good-

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: - I was affective. I was getting promoted, but it was because I was – I was goal-oriented. I was driven by hitting milestones and getting things done.

Miner: Right.

Brown: So, you know, and that was, you know – I was organized. I could – my written communication, you know, was good. You know, I could communicate a message and those, like those – those – those ...organization skills, those ... analytical skills, those communication skills – they definitely served me very well. They- they did kind of – I think they also started to like, isolate me at times...

Miner: Mmm.

Brown: Because if you're all on the warm and fuzzes and I'm, you know, talking about, like with the SEP program, for example, the go – the going line was always, "Well. It – it helps with retention." And I'm like, "Mm. Where are the reports?"

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: Like where the – where – where – where the, you know, if I'm gonna say this, I need to be able to, you know, to see it. And that was the first place where I got to – to see. We talked about this earlier where there – there has to be this – this crisis...

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: And I began to – to – when I was doing – doing those reports, I would begin to see the fluctuations in the student – the student body – the student population as it related to minority students or students of color or racially marginalized students, however you wanna-- underrepresented students, however you wanna slice it and dice it--but I began to see that trend.

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: And it was like, Huh, okay. So this is clearly something that's not – we're not trying to sustain...

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: You know, they were just like, Oh! Something's wrong. We gotta address it—put a Band-Aid. And then they were like oh okay.

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: "Oh! Something's wrong!" and you know. So – so I began to see that in the – in the data--

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: You know, when I was in the Student Affairs. But, yeah – yeah, that corporate experience was very valuable. And it was so interesting – this is so funny. I remembered contacting ... was it – was it Jerry, again? I think so. I think it was Jerry Golston—sending him an email. I was mad because ... [Miner chuckles, Brown laughs] I came—I came out in '99 and I'm like, you know, I send him an email basically like, you know, there's this ecommerce thing that we didn't learn anything about, you know, and I laugh at my – I laugh at my audacity – I also laugh at, you know, the ecommerce was new ...

Miner: Right.

Brown: ... when I was, it's like – ahh. But – but I remember being mad about that I did not, you know, learn about this ...

Miner: Right.

Brown: ...you know, in the curriculum and – and – and they're out here like...

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: ... this is – this has been here for a minute.

Miner: Yeah.

Brown [laughing]: So...

Miner: It's funny.

Brown: So it – it definitely – yeah, I – I appreciate that experience and the lessons that came with it. I was definitely in the wrong place for – for me ...

Miner: Sure. Sure.

Brown: ...and my, you know, but I definitely took a way from it and I still – I mean, when you think of – I think of things as projects, so I think of all the things that – that – the tasks that I had, you know, the student affairs role and then certainly in my graduate program, the Ph.D. program, around having to be organized and having to create plans...

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Brown: ...and having to, you know, that – that – that structure.

Miner: There are benchmarks.

Brown: Yeah.

Miner: Yeah?

Brown: I mean, 'cause a dissertation – that's – that's, you know, writing a book. It's a project...

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: ...you know, and you don't just sit down and write a book ...[both laugh]... you know, you gotta – you gotta break that down, all right?

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: And that served me really well and I think it – it – it also – it fits well with the way I think I'm already wired...

Miner: Mmm.

Brown: ...So... so yeah, I've been able to – that – that was the place where I began to kind of hone those skills, but I would not go back. I think I have to have some more – a few more strategically placed tattoos...[Miner laughs]... to assure that I'm ...[laughs]... that I'm never – I'm never like tempted.

Miner: You don't think corporate would let you let you back with a tattoo.

Brown: I hope not. I'm gonna – I'm gonna finish this up.

Miner: Oh! Don't be tempted...

Brown: Right. Just take it off the table. Yeah I would not wanna go back. Yeah

02:12:03 Reflections on leaving IWU. She recalls over 20 years of hearing the rhetoric of racial diversity at IWU and concludes the lack of progress is willful. She brings in the example of her personal experience of being excluded from consideration for a tenure-track search. The value brought by having a racially diverse faculty is often cited but has not been demonstrated in the three IWU presidential eras Brown witnessed. She argues that institutions that emphasize the dollar amounts individuals represent are not places that will love and value individuals' talents or other contributions.

Miner: My gosh.

Brown: Do we--

Miner: -- We have – well we have – well, of course not. I could think of a billion questions ...[Brown laughs]... but we have spent a good amount of time talking about some of the problems that you faced as a black woman, as a student, and as a faculty member and I would say, I – I think we touched the different parts of your relationship with Illinois Wesleyan. Maybe with your exception of your– you've now referred to it I think a couple of times about backing away; dis...de... divesting yourself of the institution.

Brown: Oh...yeah!

Miner: And – and I would say we're probably at a good point where we could just stop or we could talk a little bit more about that...

Brown: That divestment?

Miner: ...and I – and I – or – but I certainly also – yeah absolutely. But I also wanna give you an opportunity to say anything else that you, you know, wanted to that we have... that I haven't thought to ask you.

Brown: Yeah.

Miner: I think the conversation is pretty wide-ranging but

Brown: Yeah. Yeah. Well – I'll just – I'll make it quick about the divestment, but I think – I think I mentioned this before that one of the things that I learned is, and again, what I'm – I'm pulling from...my experiences with the institution.

Miner: Yes.

Brown: Right? And the, you know, the 20-something years of being invested in – I, you know, entangled and so that's kind – that's my vantage point – that's where I'm coming from. And seeing in that time in the 20-some years ... little to no progress.

Miner: Right?

Brown: in the areas that I am – that are particularly important and meaningful to me while hearing the rhetoric. And hearing, you know, the – the institution's commitment to racial diversity ... yada...yada...yada ...and there comes a point where it's like, stop lying to me. Like – like this is no longer ...incompetence . This is no longer, you know, this is... this is active, this is willful,. This is – you know and I go back and forth you know it's like you know, intentions vs impact, like we could argue people's intentions and that's why I said, let's assume...

Miner: Right

Brown:...that everyone has the best of intentions...

Miner: Yeah

Brown:...and this is still the best we could do. I don't believe that. So there comes a point where, and particularly with this ... it is – it is personally offensive to be at an institution that claims to be concerned about the racial diversity of their faculty, for example. And to be in a faculty role, a visiting faculty role, and to not be considered...

Miner: Considered for a faculty – a permanent ...

Brown:... yeah to not – to not be – to not be considered for an interview, you know...

Miner: Right.

Brown: ...there's something personally offensive to me about hearing that from leadership, hearing that from department heads – their commitment to diversity, like hearing that and then having a very different lived experience in addition to what I see with my own eyes, you know, to look around. It is – it – it – it offends my intellect, you know, it offend me as an alum. It offends me as someone who is – who understands and believes in the – the – the value of having a racially diverse faculty; the value to students ; the value to the institution; the value to the

surrounding community... the value to the communities that these students will ...you know, go into.

Miner: Yup.

Brown: So, the hypocrisy, the contradictions, the – just – it – it...it offended me to the – it's offended me to the point where my like I said before, my 'no' I think will have more weight than my 'yes' and it – it saddens me that I know without a doubt, you know, if someone were to ask me, you know, I have two boys – would you ever send your boys to Illinois Wesleyan? Hell, no! why – why would – why would I pay money to send my children to be mis-educated... to be put in an environment that they are not likely to see knowledge creators who look like them. Where they're not likely to – to study... --

Miner: The knowledge creators that exist.

Brown: yeah, you know, that, you know, that look like them. Why would I pay for that? You know, so – so and my thing has always been that I wanted Illinois Wesleyan to be the place where I would want to send my children.

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: I've never, you know, agreed to send them there, but you know but I've always had hope that... that – that the institution would rise to its rhetoric and now I have been a part of three administrations. I've – I've seen three presidents who have all.. engaged this rhetoric in some way or fashion at some point, you know, in their – their tenure and then I've seen the results of that. And going back to Baldwin, you know, James Baldwin, who said, you know, "I can't believe what you say because I see what you do."

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: So – so that's how I feel about, you know, Illinois Wesleyan. I – I you know, I haven't foreclosed on the idea that – that it's possible for things to change, but you all have a new provost now ...[chuckles]... Look at who you hired. You know, I had a – I had a – I have known a little bit about who was amongst the pool but you know...

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: ...you know, look at the cabinet.

Miner: Right.

Brown: Look at the faculty. Look at the – you know, and I – I am supposed to believe that you know, with – with my little, measly additional contributions that that's, you know...

Miner: You're talking about the fundraising...

Brown: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Miner: .. that is all gonna be changed.

Brown: Yeah, you know, or even without it, that just, you know, this group of folks--

Miner: Right, are going to look--

Brown: --is going to see me, to think of me, to, you know, to you know, women's power, women's justice, you know means black women, too. Like I'm supposed to believe that that's, you know, that I'm – I'm not an afterthought in that. So yeah, so – so – and it's not just about like walking away, and just like I'm gonna walk away and wash my hands off it, it's like, no. I need to – I'm not telling other people what to do, I'm not trying to organize a rally. People to say “hey ...mm..mm.. you choose for yourself. If you ask me about my experience, I will tell you...

Miner: Right.

Brown: ...and I will tell you my truth.

Miner: Right.

Brown: And I'm – I am not trying to persuade or anything about what you do, but this is what I'm doing.

Miner: Sure.

Brown: I am actively divesting, because one of the – another thing that I got clarity on throughout this process was, you know, go where love is.

Miner: Right.

Brown: Right? I – I don't want to be – I don't want to be anywhere where I am not wanted, but then now it's like that's not even enough. It's not about wanting me. I want to be loved...

Miner: Yeah.

Brown:...you know, and institutions don't love. And institutions that are concerned about the dollars amounts attached to, that is – that – you're not going to find love there.

Miner: Yeah.

02:20:57 Is academia the right place? What is the price you are willing to pay for access to students? Brown recalls students' gratitude for her being the first Black faculty member they experienced and how that is a travesty in this era. Rejects the idea of the possibility of coming back to the same institution but asserts that the friends she made at IWU are lasting and that she continues to support them.

Brown: You know, and it's unlikely that I would 'cause I don't – 'cause I've got a couple of things in the works so, who knows what, you know, I don't – I've been asking myself if academia is the right place for me...

Miner: Sure.

Brown: Because institutions, you know, don't love and it's like, what's the – what's the price that you're willing to pay for the access to these other things? What's the price I'm willing to pay for access to students and to hear – I heard this during the fall semester and the spring semester and it – it filled me with gratefulness, and at the same time, broke my heart. Last semester and in the fall, I had students approach me and say, "Thank you for being my first black professor." And, you know, the first time in the fall, one of the students said it. And these were black women. I choked... I almost cried -

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: 'cause I was really just kind of overwhelmed by, like on the one hand, wow! For it to be me, I'm honored. And this is so sad and pathetic.

Miner: In 2017...

Brown: 2017.

Miner: yup.

Brown: And I'm your first?

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: Like that's – that's – that's – that's – that's – that's danning. That's an inditement...

Miner: Right.

Brown: ...on this institution and every other one like it. Like that is not acceptable. That's not okay. That's – that's a travesty.

Miner: Right.

Miner: You have not been educated, you know...So, that's the short answer for the divestment.

Brown: Okay.

Miner: ... story because I just – I simply – and someone asked me a question of, you know, this – this whole thing is ridiculous if you could go back, if – if somehow we could fix this, and someone offered you a position, you know, to work here in tenured-track position, would you take it? And I'd say, "Hell, no!"

Miner: Yeah.

Brown: Looked at me. And I'd say, I love myself too much for that...

Miner: Yeah.

Miner: it's like this is – I just – I love myself too much and you know, the institution would – what I would be coming back to would not be this institution. It will need to be a different institution in order for that to even be a possibility but I am – I am, you know so happy to say I love myself too much to go somewhere where I'm not receiving love, where it is not a truly reciprocal exchange. And I guess the – the thing that I would like – I think I've said, probably not everything, but just that you know, and even as I say that I am divesting from the institution, I will never divest from the people. And, you know, my – my – I – my dearest friends I met, you know, at this institution. There are still people there who I love, you know, I care for and you know, there are good people there and – and I – I believe in the power of good people, you know, particularly when they could find one another, and you know, I'll be rooting for you all as you, you know, you know, administer your – your small acts of resistance...[Miner chuckles]... you know, here and there but yeah, so I – I – clearly, absolutely, unapologetically divest from the institution but I – I would not divest from the people. So that's probably... that's all I got.

Miner:: That is – I think that's a good stopping point and I cannot thank you enough, Nicole, for being honest and – and speaking your truth and taking this time today, so thank you so much.

Brown: Oh! You're welcome.

Interview ends at 02:24:46