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Pamela Buchanan Muirhead

Pamela Buchanan Muirhead '68
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Illinois Wesleyan University

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Subject: **Dr. Pamela Buchanan Muirhead (1968)**

Interviewer: Lonnie Smith

Date: March 17, 1997

Place: 3 White Place, Bloomington, Illinois 61701 at her home

Transcriber: Elizabeth Smith

Typists: Nathan Smith and Elizabeth Smith

Side 1

LS Could you please state your full name?

PM Pamela Diane Buchanan Muirhead.

LS Date of birth?

PM December 21, 1946.

LS Place of birth?

PM Chicago, Illinois.

LS And high school attended?

PM Hyde Park High School in Chicago until I graduated in '64.

LS And was Hyde Park at that time integrated?

PM Yes, it was.

LS Were there any racial riots or race riots or were you there during that period?

PM It wasn't so much a matter of riots during that period. There was a lot of activity in the civil rights moment and a lot of organizing going on in the cities. And all of those processes used college students very heavily and what was going on with college students filtered down, as you can expect, to high school students. So I can remember students objecting to racist teachers. I can remember students walking out of classes. I can remember demonstrations of sorts. There were a lot of people who were actively trying to organize high school students and sometimes in the building. I mean the access to the building wasn't as restricted as it is now and there was a lot of swirl of activity. I think I would have hated to have been an administrator at the time. I think the black parents got very bold. They had always been, I think a certain group of people had been fairly outspoken. But for my parents who were people who had clerk jobs and post office jobs and weren't college-educated people, it was very much a matter of bear what you could and then if things got really awful, then they would probably step in and try and make a stink. But for the most part, it was, you know, these things are a part of the way of life and you try to get around them. But I think people became more bold and I think certain students did in saying that they were not being treated well by individual teachers and, of course, there was quite a mix of teachers at Hyde Park High School: young black teachers, teachers that were white teachers who were part of the old guard when the school was predominantly white and had undergone quite a change, and I suppose people caught in the middle of that. So it was it was a lively place but not quite what it was going to be a few years later, I think.

LS Can you recall when Hyde Park High School was first integrated?

PM No, I'm not sure when that would have happened. There had been, of course, black families and middle class black families in Hyde Park for quite awhile. Hyde Park is probably right now the most integrated community in the city of Chicago. Maybe even some areas of the north side now have with different immigrant groups have become more integrated, but at that time, I think, it was Hyde Park or nothing. And so the high school had I don't know what percentage. I'm not sure I would have been aware of the percentage at the time but a considerable number of black students. But it was segregated in a certain way: the high school was tracked. And there's tracking, academic tracking in schools. That's not uncommon. It was a large high school. I think there were about 5,000 kids and there were five levels in the tracking so tracing is pretty complex. There was an average level and there were two honors levels above that. So there was honors and high honors, designated as "h" and "double h." And then there were two levels below the average group. So as you started moving up from the average, you saw fewer and fewer students of color. The brown faces disappeared and, to that extent, it was a segregated system. I happened to come into the high honors group and I remember from my English classes—and history classes had honors but not quite so rarefied—I remember in English we started school with a class of fourteen or fifteen of us. I was the only brown kid in the class. There was one other African-American student, a woman who was very, very, very "high" as we would say—Christine Carter, absolutely wonderful person. Christine is the most genuine and kind person I think I knew in high school and her father was a lawyer who worked for the mayor's office in Chicago and they lived in a penthouse on the lake. And I was [laughs].... It was a social class to which I was not accustomed. But it was me and Christine and that was pretty much it in that class. But for the fourteen of us, we began school with a classroom that was equipped with its own library, paperback library within the classroom. Our books were waiting for us on the first day of school, and typically and probably even now the Chicago school system, it's three and a half to four weeks before books are handed out to students because there's so much movement within the classes. So if you belonged to the high honors group, you walked in and you had books; you had small classes; you had the French teacher who lived in France; you had, you know. You name it; you had it. As you moved down, the faces got browner and the privileges weren't there.

LS What grade level did the tracking, that five-tier tracking start?

PM Freshman. It started the moment you walked in.

LS There wasn't any at the junior high level?

PM I went to—the high school pulled in kids from a fairly wide neighborhood. I went to what I've come to understand was one of the first junior high schools in the city of Chicago which was Forestville. There was a grade school there near 43rd St. and the lake, not too far from the lake. It pulled in students from quite a wide area who—then it was a seventh and eighth grade junior high school, a building just for seventh and eighth graders fairly new and when you got into eighth grade, towards the end—the middle of the eighth grade, you took an exam and the scores on that exam determined where, you know.... If you went into a certain high school, you could use that for placement. And there's still segregation by neighborhood, of course, as there is today in Chicago. And my family lived in a neighborhood that went to DuSable High School, an all-black high school in Chicago. And as we got close to time for me to go to school, my mother remembers reading in the newspaper—I didn't notice this or she didn't call my attention to it at the time—that a girl who was at DuSable who was in the honors program at DuSable was shot to death. And this is like, you know, we're talking a long time ago, right? 1960. And my mother was absolutely horrified and began to look around for some other place for me to

go to school and there were no magnet schools and either you go to private schools, but there were only so many private schools if you were black and we didn't necessarily have the money for that either. So my mother began looking around for, you know, what would be the closest school not in that district, but in one that would have a good academic program. And Hyde Park, of course, would be the next closest school and the school that was integrated. But this took some doing because we didn't live in the district. But it so happens that my eighth grade English teacher—seventh and eighth grade English teacher—had been my father's high school English teacher and he [my father] went to Phillips. And this very odd—happen—circumstance meant that my eighth grade teacher and my mother conspired and we had a family friend, very close family friend that lived they lived in the Hyde Park district and my cousin, play cousin, went to Hyde Park High School and so my teacher changed my records in the principal's office to change my address. So I lived with—so-called—lived within the so-called Hyde Park area and we had allegedly just moved there, but I was finishing eighth grade in the area in which I was located. So I took the exam, the placement exam, and scored high enough on the placement exam to make it into the high honors track there. And I remember after doing all of that, the recruiter came from Hyde Park High School to interview the students for the honors program there. And I can remember my eighth grade teacher and my mother coaching me to lie essentially about if she asks you your address, say, you live in your cousin Pat's house. Okay! And you sit back and you think, here you are coaching this kid who's been taught all her life "Do not lie" to lie. But you understood that in the high stakes racial game that was being played, it was a matter of being shot to death at DuSable or going into the honors program at Hyde Park High School. There wasn't much choice and any case, you weren't given.... There wasn't a discussion about whether or not I was going to do this. I was simply told what to do. I remember the interview because I had the scores and I had the address which meant I could go into the honors program, but the woman—I can remember my mother was sitting on one side of me and my teacher was standing behind me. This was really quite one of these little tableaux. And the woman said, well, I know she has the scores, but you realize that this is not the situation. This is not going to be the same kind of situation that she's been going to school under. And she may, you know, have good grades and high scores here but it's going to be very different there. The competition is different Which is a fair was a fair and honest thing to say however her motives may have seemed at the time. You know, I'm sure all this was true. And I can remember my mother saying, "Well, she'll worry about that. That will be our problem." End of discussion. And so I went.

LS Can you recall if there were any other black students that lived outside the Hyde Park district that maybe went to Hyde Park?

PM I didn't know people and partly students—didn't socialize. I socialized very little within that world. I mean I knew a few students. I remember very well one of my classmates that I got to know quite well and Christine, the other student of color in the class. But by and large, I didn't have as much to do with students who were there. It was, you know, over an hour to get home. And it was a longer school day than it is now. So you spent an hour I got on the bus and then I rode the El and then, you know, then you came right home and that was that. No after-school activities. No, you know, that was pretty much so. So I didn't find out. I'm sure there were students there had to be students doing it—just not right in my immediate class.

LS Then what year did you enter IWU?

PM Fall of '64.

LS And how many black students entered with you? Can you recall?

PM I think there would have been four of us in the freshman class.. One, two, three, four. Yes.

LS Four?

PM Yeah, I think there were four of us if I recall. Yeah! Okay.

LS Was, I'm trying to think Craig Rice?

PM Craig would have been. Craig, my roommate Lawana Piernas.

LS Oh, okay. I didn't come across her photo.

PM Elementary education major. She was killed in a car accident.

LS Was she in school?

PM No, after she graduated. Not too long after she was out. Craig was there. And we had one more classmate. It would have probably been Craig's roommate, George, who was shot to death, as the story goes, after he returned home, he was—there was a party at his house and they shut somebody out of the party and some early, early version gangbangers came back and killed him.

LS This was after he graduated from Wesleyan?

PM Yeah, so we didn't do all that well, I think, when it came to making it and that was before things were violent. George Lowe. I think that was. Yup! Very, very handsome, very handsome boy. It would have been a waste even if he hadn't been a handsome boy but he was a very handsome boy.

LS How did you hear about Wesleyan?

PM Oh, very strange way, I guess, to me. I was president of the MYF at our church, the Methodist Youth Fellowship at St. James church in Chicago. And it was at the time, of course, this was integration time so church youth groups were having exchanges back and forth between black and white groups. And a group from Crystal Lake came to visit us and we hosted them. They stayed overnight at the church and, you know, this kind of thing. And the minister at the time said, "Are you planning to go to school, you know; are you going to college?"

I said, "Yeah, well, I guess so." My father had, I think, my father pretty much decided, you know, well, if I wanted to go to school, I could go to Roosevelt or I could go to city college system or something, you know. And my mother with not having much experience with colleges, thought, well, she really wanted me to try to go to Spelman although I don't think she knew anyone who went to Spelman, you know, at the time. But we really hadn't talked about it very much. I knew my classmates at Hyde Park had been scheming and planning and, you know, arranging their grade points and getting ready for exams but this was largely a world that I wasn't caught up in.

But the minister said, "You know, there's this Methodist school named Illinois Wesleyan. It's not too far away and you oughtta go down and visit the school." And I have this vague sense of visiting the school. Jim Ruotti says he took me on my tour. He remembers. I don't remember Jim. How I could ever forget Jim I don't know, but, I think, I was in a general daze but he remembers me. Course, Jim remembers everybody. So I Wesleyan was the only school I saw. The only school I applied to. I don't know if it ever occurred to me I wouldn't get in. I'm not sure what occurred to me at the time but, I

think, it was just not --the College Guide. I never saw a college guide. It was a Methodist college. It was two hours away from home. I could take the GM&O. I could ride the train. My parents knew where it was. And that was that.

LS Now did your parents come down with you when you visited campus?

PM Yes, they came. No, not when I visited the campus, but they did come —they did come down at some point. Maybe it was the time I visited the campus. I'll have to ask my mother to make sure. I sort of have these dual images of things—of the orientation. I remember my mother, my parents leaving me here in front of Pfeiffer Hall. And my mother—I was sort of awkwardly saying good-bye. I was very happy to get away from home, very happy. I'm not stupid but in any case and so we had this sort of, you know—and I was always one for not being terribly sentimental about going on trips. I was always curious about where I was going and what was going to happen and so I wasn't always great about saying good-byes. So my mother kept hesitating and hesitating. So I said, "Well, Mom, here I am. It's okay. You can leave."

Finally she said, "Well, are you sure you're going to be okay?" I said, "Well, of course, I'm going to be okay. Why wouldn't I be okay?"

She looked around and she said, "They're all white people here."

I remember thinking, "Well yes," but, you know how when you're eighteen years old and you have enough brains to fill a raisin box? "Yeah, okay, but, you know that's how it's going to be any place." Okay.

Of course, at the time they had the usual move-in procedures and some women from Pfeiffer Hall had run out and grabbed my suitcase and were very cheerful, warm and welcoming and chipper in the way people are in small towns and my mother was kind of dismayed nonetheless and said, "All right, it's your call. Bye."

LS Now had you been away from home for long periods of time before?

PM No, of course not. You know, pure confidence. Oh, sure, I can do this.

LS Now was there a buddy system when you first got into Pfeiffer? I know Jeannette [Jeannette Crooks, '63] mentioned that there was a buddy system that the school had in place to make sure that the students were "safe."

PM Boy, that's interesting. I don't recall that a buddy system per se. I know we got to know people pretty quickly. Of course, I had my roommate Lawana. One of the reasons you got to know people was that you had to wear a green beanie so you were identified as a freshman, God help you. You know, male and female alike, you had these these hats on. These little stupid things on your head which pretty much marked you out for any practical joke or assistance that you can imagine so you had lots of buddies even if you didn't want one in that way. And we sort of clung to each other for awhile. I can't remember. We had to wear the beanie for a certain period of time until we got, I think, pretty well-adjusted or they played every practical joke known to the campus on you. And then you were fledged, I suppose. I don't recall specifically a buddy system per se. But, you know, Pfeiffer's a pretty amiable hall and we had floor meetings and things like that and so you got socialized very quickly. Also because where could you go in Bloomington? I mean there were so few places. There was Casey's which is now the flower shop, what was then an all-night deli. And besides you were locked in at 10:30 during the week days and so if you went any place after 10:30, it required climbing out of a window and stumbling around bushes and window wells and other kinds of things and then there wasn't any place to go so. We didn't have cars, by and large, and so you socialized in the dormitory with—got to know women pretty well.

LS Were there any popular hangouts on campus or off campus? You mentioned that the opportunities were limited. Were you a Grill Rat?

PM Everyone was a Grill Rat. Unless, of course, you were Greek and then there were real limitations on even then there were limitations on men being in women's houses because the fraternities had housemothers too, which must have put some restrictions. I think a lot of Greeks partied off campus or had a lot of more opportunities for partying off campus. But we generally went to the Grill. Yes, indeed, to the old Dugout and that was it. Went to the library. You sat out a lot, you know, outside by and around. In the winter couples found the few places that were both warm and private on campus and there were very few. One of them which exists to this day is, of course, there are stairs from the side of the McPherson Theater. There are stairs leading down to the utility rooms, and there are doors down there that are vented and in the winter there is, of course, a lot of very warm exhaust air. So you can sit on the steps and stay quite warm in the middle of winter and but, gee, other than that, there just were not that many places to go.

LS Can you recall any students maybe living in a mixed—having maybe a white roommate?

PM Certainly, yeah, a lot of students did. It's just that the university had "race" on the room reservation forms and on the applications and when you came in unless you indicated you wanted to room with someone, you were deliberately segregated, but after that, you could do what you pleased. And so Lawana and I parted company, you know, quickly enough. I had other roommates, you know, various folks. So, no, you didn't have to and I don't think anyone thought too much of it.

LS Now did you live in Pfeiffer Hall all four years?

PM. I lived in Pfeiffer all four years.

LS Okay. Can you describe your first reaction upon walking on campus and tell us a little bit about being left in front of Pfeiffer ?

PM Yeah, it was—so many things were new to me that it's hard to isolate one thing from another and so much of it was new that I missed a lot of it. A lot of things that I might have been worried about were just lumped into that general newness. We didn't have a shower at home. We had a bathtub. But, you know, as a lot of old-fashioned houses would have had, you know, we just.... Later on, my parents put in a shower, but we didn't have a shower so, for me, it was the great miracle of negotiating Pfeiffer's showers, you know, of all things. There were telephones in the halls. I mean students have phones in their rooms now, but there were two telephones per hall, per floor, in little booths. And I'm not even sure those booths still exist or what they'd be used for if they were. It had glass doors and, you know, louvered in the bottom so if the phone rang, someone answered it whoever did and then went calling up and down the hall to summon whoever it was that was being telephoned. And that person went in and closed the door. And then all of her friends gathered around and sat down outside the door and listened to [unclear] half the conversation. So, having a private conversation was just not something that happened. And you didn't get phone calls after a certain time at night because the switchboard or whatever was closed down. So it was just amazing the sorts of things you had to get used to. Having grown up in Chicago, I was accustomed to outside of the neighborhood a certain, a great deal of sort of city reserve. There are certain things you simply didn't do, especially when you were around "white folks" as the idea was. You didn't necessarily find yourself in casual conversation with people who were not from your neighborhood or part of your group and that was just partly city behavior, as well. And I

remember being totally puzzled walking across.... I was with Lawana, my roommate who was from, actually from, I think, she lived in Markham at the time. Her parents lived in the suburbs, you know, smaller neighborhoods, kind of things were a little more what she was accustomed to. We were walking across campus and people kept speaking us, speaking to us and speaking to us and I didn't speak to people. I didn't know these people. And Lawana finally said, Pam, "Why don't you say 'Hi'?" "I don't know who these people are." "You're not in Chicago any more. These are people on campus. People say 'Hi.'" I said, "Oh, okay, cool" and started to kind of—so, you know, there's kind of a getting used to a different way. Bloomington's a—it certainly seems like a small place when you come from Chicago. But it was really small place then. It may not have had more than 30,000 people at the time. Normal was really a town—was the university and maybe a little more but not much more than that. You have 100,000 people now. It's bordering on being a real city. But at that time, it wasn't. So it was very different. A lot of students were from rural areas—much larger percentage than now and so—culturally it was vastly different. Everything about it was different.

LS Now being involved with the MYF or the Methodist Youth Fellowship, did you become involved with the Methodist Student Movement here on campus?

PM Yeah, I don't know what the percentage of students who were Methodists at that time. I imagine it was a majority. A majority of the students who declare religious preference now are Catholic, but at that time, I think, it was probably Methodist.

LS Can you recall some of the activities the Methodist Student Movement sponsored?

PM We didn't get Sunday dinner then—same as now, and there would be meetings, fellowship meetings and then, you know, you could bring \$3, \$2 whatever it was maybe less, and then there'd be a meal, prayer services, sometimes speakers, various kinds of group activities. So nothing, nothing real high tech. But, you know, just the usual sense of fellowship of students being together.

LS Did you attend chapel here on campus or did a lot of students maybe go to Wesley United Methodist or maybe Evangelical?

PM I went to Wesley reasonably often but, I think, for some of us it was the first time we didn't have to go to church in the morning so we didn't for awhile. I mean, you know, it was one of those—not only wouldn't you go. You wouldn't be bothered. But a lot of the community churches gave students rides but, you know, so there'd be a bus or somebody would pick you up and actually I did go to Wesley Methodist a fair amount. Chapel was not compulsory but convocation, the university convocations were. If you didn't go to a certain number of convocations, you—ctually your academic, your credits were, I don't know how to say this. There was a debit on your credits. You lost a credit or so if you didn't attend convocations, a certain number of convocations.

LS How was that monitored?

PM By various systems. Students being more clever than almost any math system you could think of and we used to have to sign our names and or we'd have to—you'd get a oh, we'd have to turn in a piece of paper. I can't remember various sorts of little ways of managing this huge checklist. You had to have a certain number of things. And, of course, to this day, I have on my academic record that I lost credits because I wouldn't go to chapel or convocation. And then after awhile, you have a larger students and also a much less cooperative student body as you move into the '60s. You can imagine what uproar was going on at that time even at Wesleyan—minor uproar. One of our minor

uproars was, of course, to make it absolute hell for the poor people who were invited in as our convocation speakers. Now if you can imagine—have great sympathy for President Bertholf who was the person who had to endure this, but of course, we had to go to these convocations. And they would have in a various collection of fairly hapless ministers or business people who were alums and who were good and decent people, but God knows—here they were with this group of folks who were getting restive and what-have-you. And we got to the point where we'd be in the fieldhouse sometimes for the convocations because we certainly outgrew Westbrook as a student body. And people would bring pillows. And they'd bring books and sit in the bleachers and they would play cards and one of the last ones I went to and I think one of the last times we were required as a student body to go, the speaker gave up a very average kind of talk. Not too long and not too boring and but not necessarily very noteworthy as we played cards, slept and did homework. Not—some of us. And then when he finished, we applauded him for five minutes. He was so astounded that he knew something was wrong.

LS It couldn't have been that good?

PM It wasn't that good. He knew it wasn't that good. And yet we continued. Every time he tried to sit down, we cheered and kept applauding and I think about that time President Bertholf decided this was perhaps not something to subject a speaker to. I think we were polite except for the card playing and the other things. I think—people didn't talk. We were still still, I guess; we reached some bottom line with talking during a speaker was probably something that we couldn't do. Certainly the other things you could do quietly.

LS Oh, my.

PM It was probably well, you know, not particularly outrageous for this day and age.

LS Can you recall what campus organizations you were involved in?

PM I was on the dorm council and became president of Pfeiffer at some point and the dorm survived. I was on inter-hall council and the University Methodist Fellowship. Those were the things I primarily.... BSU was not an option in those early years, in the early part of it. I was student senator from my.... The dorms had senator reps and so I was a student senator from my dorm. So those were pretty much the things I did.

LS Were you involved with ACT?

PM ACT? Don't remember ACT.

LS With Skip Gilbert and Greg Dell?

PM Oh, was that what they called the group? I don't remember being formally, you know, a part of that. I do remember the kinds of things Greg and Skip worked on but more events-specific like recruiting minority students in Chicago. I remember that and I remember their generally petitioning the administration to get race removed from reservation forms and other kinds of very concrete—to remove at least the surface gestures of segregation from campus and racism.

LS Can you talk a little bit more about when you, Greg Dell, and Uncle Dick [Richard Muirhead] and yourself went up to Chicago to recruit students and how that came about?

PM Well, Dick and Skip were very much involved in this and the idea was that we minority students, particularly black students, were beginning to obviously to graduate

from Chicago high schools in the first wave of the first generations and instead of necessarily going South to historically black colleges, they were going to state schools like ISU and U of I and going to private schools. And the Methodist church had been very obviously a strong tradition with United Methodism had a lot of churches that were funneling their students, high school graduates, Methodist high school graduates, to Methodist colleges and so it seemed reasonable not only to have—that the churches would be doing this but that we also should go to recruit minority students as well. So that effort to do so Greg Dell and Skip, but Skip and Dick particularly were very much involved with. And some of us went with them up to predominantly black schools to talk to students in the Chicago area about coming to Wesleyan. Obviously our admission staff could certainly have done this as well and would do this as well. But we had this sort of blitz in a short period of time to try and talk to students in high schools and so it was my first experience in that kind of recruiting, I guess, of any sort and I saw more places in Chicago in that experience than I had growing up. It was very interesting.

LS Did that span several different weekends?

PM Yes, I remember one weekend in particular but it did occur more. I made, I think, at least a couple of trips. There may have been more trips, but I remember going on a couple of them.

LS Did you meet any resistance from the administration or the admissions office concerning?

PM Not that I was aware of. Skip and Dick would know as organizing it. I was pretty young at the time in terms of, you know, pretty new to the process so in terms of how the politics all worked out, I was totally out of it. Made the trip but didn't do the deal.

LS Can you remember King coming to campus?

PM Oh, vividly. Vividly. I remember vividly.

LS Can you share some of the emotions?

PM After reading about King and what he had done and knowing the emotions connected with it which I think people lose the perspective and assume that King was always agreed with and always welcomed by an older generation. Younger generations certainly embraced him, but an older generation of people who really held power within the black community -- you know, the notion that they all thought King was wonderful was something that people need to back away from very quickly. And, I think, of course, you can read "The Letter from the Birmingham Jail" and understand that these ministers who were reluctant when King was there are just representative of lots of folks of their generation who were afraid that what he did was too public. It was asking for too much. It angered and disturbed too many whites. That it endangered the black community. So people have died not just in the civil rights movement but in all the years leading up to them. And what black people had come to Chicago for, in part, was to try and protect a future generation to protect their children in some ways, to give them better lives. And here King came, saying that there really isn't going to be a better life even though it seems somewhat different in Chicago than in Alabama, unless you really put your life out on the line again unless things are disturbed more profoundly than they have ever been in American culture at least in the memories of all these people in the 20th century and so here's this man who suggested that people expose themselves hideously and he was—through SNCC and other, you know, connected organizations, a whole group of young people, college age people, high school people—these were the people who were going on

the front lines and the parents were just absolutely terrified. And the meanwhile within white communities like Bloomington-Normal, here are a group of people who had to for whatever reason—religious or moral convictions had to put themselves on the line in communities where people who disagreed with them violently would target them. And if you've never been targeted on a day-by-day basis for your beliefs, you know, this is a rather extraordinary experience. And so there's that strong sense that this had to be done and in a sort of a great—a sense that King was doing it the right way that people who were—who saw themselves as Christian or as decent people could at least embrace a nonviolent revolution. The pain of it, of course, was that it was only nonviolent on your part. It was not—you didn't get agreement on both sides that this was going to be a nonviolent revolution. So there was a lot of sense of purpose but a great sense of fear at the same time. King coming here to this town and this place meant that the university, I think, took an enormous risk. I remember even after growing up in Chicago I saw—I'd never been some place or been to a public meeting on this kind of an occasion in which there were so many police officers. I'd never seen dogs—police dogs and I remember dogs. I remember—my sense that Bloomington having a canine unit which I'm not sure they must have at that time. I mean, it's a bit odd. The FBI was here. King, of course, was going to die not too long afterwards and his life had been threatened and there was an enormous amount of tension here and I remember that. I remember wondering, people wondering who would come. And, my goodness, the Student Senate had invited them. And people filled Shirk Center! [sic. the fieldhouse] It was a huge, huge crowd. I can remember walking over and the student senators had seats up front, and I remember sitting there with Wenona Whitfield and we were both on the senate at the time and thinking, oh, my god. Oh, my god. It was happening. There he was. And there was Coretta. And they were within touching distance and we went backstage afterwards and went on stage and met them. Yeah, it was one of those moments. I didn't know whether to cry or what.

Side 2

LS Was there any opposition to King on campus?

PM Oh, my god, yes.

LS Can you describe some of that?

PM Well, one of—there's always, of course, there's always just an enormous amount of talk. There would have been more anti-integration, anti-black, anti-, you know, talk at the time than we can probably imagine now. Coupled with this, anti-Communist because, of course, J. Edgar Hoover had targeted King and declared, you know, that he was a Communist any time you get to change things mean, we've sort of forgotten about it, of course. The Soviet Union is not—no longer—the pariah doesn't exist any more. But the rallying cry for anything anything anyone wanted to do that seemed to question the status quo or the social fabric was the term communist, the epithet, was applied to it. So, of course, there were all these ad staunch anti-Communists, otherwise fairly rational people, who associated King with that and so the charges -- the conversations were charged and could be quite, quite ugly in the process. So it wasn't just that King was coming and you're going to hear King and people would talk about him as they might Maya Angelou coming to visit. There was a great deal of sort of ugly ugliness about some of the negative talk as well and an intensity as if he was the anti-Christ. And the world was going to fall apart because this person was here. At the same time there was enormous excitement. And so, it was sort of like Vietnam; it polarized the conversation on campus so. I remember that. I remember that the editor of The Argus at the time wouldn't print any stories about King. So if you looked for news article in The Argus about King's visit, you won't find

it. But you have to go to The Pantagraph. Yeah. So sometimes what's not in the paper tells you a lot about something about the campus.

LS Now I heard that there were people, possibly the Klan, putting pamphlets on cars. Can you relate that incident?

PM Oh, yeah. There were a lot of rumors and, of course, you know, sort of hate groups were leafleting things and so you picked up bits of these—they'd be stuck around in various places. But, I think, people—they were put on some of the cars that night in the parking lots. So, you know, I've seen this under other circumstances. But the notion that Klansmen—no one showed up wearing any odd headgear or displaced white choir robes. So no one—to my knowledge—no one stood across from the—you know, that sort of things—so there wasn't—you didn't have to walk through a group of demonstrators or people throwing stuff. That was—I don't know whether the FBI or the local police decided they weren't going to have any problems, but I'm not sure how all that worked. But I didn't see, actually see, any people—yeah.

LS Now you mentioned that Student Senate was responsible for bringing King and you and Wenona Whitfield were student senators. Did it come to a vote before the full body of Student Senate?

PM You know, I don't recall that actually. I don't recall that it did and I'm not—I wonder if it's a combination of the religious activities commission and the chaplain at the time, Bill White, and obviously the president of the university because this was the university administration—this wouldn't have happened otherwise. King had been here before actually and spent time. The religious activities commission always had a speaker and a campus visitor and so on for a period of time at that time and we were all required, of course, to take a religion class which is a requirement that only recently has been eliminated. So King—I didn't—King was here, I think, in '62 and I've talked to people who—particularly Bob Keck who's retired coach—talked to people who talked to him when he was here, but I wasn't aware of it. So he was really a return visitor to campus and it would have been the same administration, you know, so....

LS Can you recall—there—I read something in The Argus about Acacias "Down South on Campus" at campus carnival. Can you recall any other type of maybe blatant, overt acts?

PM Yeah, let's see now. Who was it? Must have been the Acacias that had the confederate flag that they flew which caused—some people didn't appreciate that a whole lot. I think they had to work on that one and I should say for contemporary listeners that the Acacias today aren't really exactly the Acacias of the past. These are very different people. The Sigma Chi had a discrimination, sort of, clause in its charter at the national level at the time and that's been changed. But that was also a part of how they routinely did business. I remember when I came, I knew nothing about fraternities and sororities, even black ones. Why my family was—we were just not part of that scene. No college graduates and certainly not middle class people in the conventional way. And a friend of mine who was an upperclassman named Arthur Wilson from New Jersey, I believe. Arthur had one of these eastern accents. I didn't know any eastern Negroes. It was just—Arthur was just the most wonderful person in the world for me. And he did dance and theater and just, you know—he was into the arts. He was an original and Arthur being from a city, a real city, knew somebody—a little green, colored girl when he saw one—all green behind the ears. So we were new on campus, you know, and there were parties all over the place on the weekends at the various houses and things. So Arthur said to me—what did I know? He said, "Tell you what. Why don't you go with me? There's going to

be a party right on campus at one of the fraternities.” I thought, “Really? What’s that?” So Arthur took me to Sigma Chi which was—well, you know, not—when people heard afterwards, they said, “You did what?!” And this was a time they had bands or records at the houses themselves. And so and Arthur knew people—he was an upper-classmen. He knew folks—so he hauled me into Sigma Chi. And Arthur, quite the center stage kind of person, decided I thought well, this is pretty exciting cause I grew up not going to a lot of parties, you know. This was not allowed very much so I thought this was terribly exciting and Arthur proceeded to —we danced and had a grand old time, not knowing that I’d broken any taboos or invaded anybody’s space. I was clueless. So my social introduction to Illinois Wesleyan was at a party at the Sigs and I didn’t realize that I was integrating campus in quite such a dramatic way. I found out later, though. I think people were too surprised to say anything.

LS. No one said anything?

PM No one said a word. There was Arthur. What could you say?

LS Can you describe academic life at Wesleyan during the ‘60s?

PM I wandered around in terms of a major. And I thought, well, maybe I’d be a sociology major. I wasn’t quite sure what that was anyway, but that was one of the classes I liked and I liked Emily Dale, that firebrand. And English was what I’d really enjoyed all the way through school. I did want a teaching certificate so after somewhat being — of course, we had our general education courses, of sorts. And taking those somewhat aimlessly, I ended up settling into English, but there were a lot of interesting places to take courses at Wesleyan. There were pockets of history and philosophy and Larry Colter was in the philosophy department and the study of philosophy was new to me, in any case. and we had a pretty active speech department at that time. Actually, I have a minor in speech, and probably I have a minor in philosophy too, oddly enough. There was the old guard, the folks who’d been here for a considerable amount of time and were very Methodist, very small campus in some of their outlooks, and they were beginning to hire people who would shake the foundations of the curriculum in one way or another. It was that time and we had a series of professors who came in and who were somewhat radical as things went here and who ended up very often staying for short period of time before they offended someone somewhere somehow. But I managed to take a goodly sampling of those professors before they were evicted from campus. And so there were interesting things happening. One of the very interesting courses was, of course, it was required of all juniors which was 300 level humanities. It was a two-semester—Western Civ is probably the best way to describe it. And people came from—well, we studied philosophy and history and art and literature and ancients—from the ancients to the near moderns. I had probably my real music and art foundation and architecture, classical architecture, introduction in that class. What I learned in that class, I think, has probably enabled me, at least, to claim that I got a liberal arts education and the whole university took it. It was junior year and it was required.

LS Do you remember who taught that?

PM Everyone did. Everyone who was of any note on campus. I took my humanities sections with the late Joe Meyers who taught in English and philosophy. His wife Doris Meyers at that time, now Doris Meyers Snow, was one of the program directors and marvelously kept things in operation and there were wonderful people: Rupert Kilgore lectured in art —no longer on this earth but ,boy, I remember his lectures on Greek art and architecture. I remember Jerry Stone who’s still connected with the Wesleyan community, living on campus practically. I remember his lectures just absolutely astonishing. We

gathered as a whole class practically for the lectures and then we were divided into discussion groups so it was that rhythm of lectures and discussion and lectures and discussion which all brought us together. And for people who belong to my generation and earlier and then for awhile afterwards, for us very often the defining Wesleyan experience is Humanities—that's what we called it. It was a wonderful education for me at that point.

LS. Now you talked about some of the professors that kind of shook the foundations. Can you recall some of their names and maybe some of the things that they did?

PM Of course, shaking the foundations is from a perspective of someone who could stand on a matchbox and think she was standing on concrete. One of the people I had was Bill McDonald in English who wasn't here for ages. Kept my—I still have some of my notebooks now. Course only a college professor would still have her notebooks from when she was an undergraduate. I still teach from some of the copies of the novels that we did in his American Novel course, and I still have them and teach from them. They're a little tattered by now; the bindings are falling apart, but I still have them. And he went to Redlands in California which, I think, is where he might still be teaching. And I've heard of him occasionally, you know, since then and I've been in conferences and so on. And it was part of the intellectual rigor of what happened in those classes and the kind of discussion that took place and the fact that we had faculty members who really leaned on us in a personal way and part of it was the energy with which they taught. I remember, as well, Bob Burda who was later to hire me when I came back. He was a new professor at Wesleyan and he had a degree in British Intellectual history as opposed to English, the typical thing. I studied the first Black lit in college with Bob Burda. I also studied French existentialists in translation. I read Jerzy Kosinski. It was the other part of the liberal arts education, the amazing range of things that he was interested in and that we read in class. Studied Yeats. It was the sort of thing—partly for the intensity of the discussion and the high drama of the class which was his own personal teaching style that you were engaged; you were on edge with class. We used to occasionally have a laugh; at the same time we were also pulled in by this. He had a rather amazing teaching style and one of the things that I remember about him and he's still very much active as a professor naturally—is that he could end his lecture, whatever it was he was lecturing—he would end his talk and exit the classroom before the rest of us even stood up or could know that it was time. An accomplishment which I admire to this day and I'm utterly unable to duplicate it, but I would love to be able to do that—to have him finish—we're still taking notes and writing away. It is time for class to be over and we're still sitting there and he has walked out of the room. High drama. Or to have finished a lecture or to stop a lecture at one point, to walk in a class the next time and complete the sentence he was in the middle of when he stopped. Now, of course, we took very good notes which means otherwise, we wouldn't know these things or keep track of them necessarily, but part of it was the sheer fun of being a part of—of being around when these thing were going on.

LS You mentioned you interviewed with him and he was instrumental in your...?

PM Yeah, he was instrumental. When I graduated, I went to teach high school. Taught high school for a year. But in the midst of that—my husband had been in the Peace Corps before we met, and I wanted to do something different. A year of high school teaching during the midst of the race riots felt—taught me, yeah, that I'm not sure I want to deal with high school administrators and high school bureaucracy at that time although I was teaching in a perfectly wonderful high school, Zion-Benton, up in Zion, Illinois. I just thought I got to learn to do something different. I want to do something different. I want to do something different and so I wanted to go into the Peace Corps and I'd been writing

back and forth while I was in the Peace Corps to/with Bob Burda and he said, "Well, look, what do you want to do?"

And I said, "I think I might want to go to graduate school, but I really don't know what that is. But I might be interested on college teaching."

He said, "Look, there will probably be a job opening at Wesleyan. Why don't you plan to get a masters degree, a good masters degree? You know, if you have your masters degree in a year or eighteen months—whatever the time frame was—good chance you can come to Wesleyan and see if you like college teaching. If you like college teaching, go get a PhD. And if you don't like college teaching, go back to teaching high school," you know.

Such a deal. So I did get a masters degree at Northwestern and came to Wesleyan. I came to campus and interviewed with people and I gave a talk about some research I'd done on Martin Delaney while I was at Northwestern. I can remember wearing a dress that my mother had lent me and some high heels and being—feeling terribly, terribly nervous. I've been afraid to ever ask people what I actually did say or what they thought at the time. I have no idea. And that was that.

LS Was that in '71?

PM That would have been spring of '72 because I came in fall of '72.

LS Let me backtrack a little bit. Were there any support mechanisms as a student here outside the community or within the community?

PM Within the Wesleyan community? Not formal ones. No, there were other students in that sense. No, not host families and mentors and not really that kind of thing. The church—I think the Methodist Fellowship. There was that kind of support, community. Outside in the community, one of the things that you did if you were just African-American, the opportunity to be with other black students just to play music and talk and dance. And African-American culture—what should I say—social culture is different in some ways from majority social culture. It was very different then, very different, very different. They share a lot of things now because African-American music is mid-American popular music, one way or another no matter which color of the folks playing it. It still dominates from the language, the dress styles. You know, there are subtle differences in things in the way people do, but there was quite a radical difference. So just for a chance to be with "your people" for a while—to have kind of a rest from the relentless, the relentless being different. We partied sometimes off campus. There were people who would—especially the guys knew Mrs. Stewart and other people and we would gather in the evening and play records and, you know, talk on the weekend or something. By party, I don't mean the kind of "let's get in the bunker" at the fraternity and that kind of party obviously since there was an adult there. But it was a place that you could go and you could feel relatively chaperoned and at the same time at home in that way.

LS Now what street did Mrs. Stewart actually live on?

PM You know, I've forgotten. I'll have to look that up.

LS Would she provide light meals?

PM No, we'd bring our own snacks. Yeah, we'd bring our own snacks. No big thing. Nothing elaborate. Except the music. Right. That was the thing! For us, the main thing was to have music and to be able to dance.

LS Did you interact at all with ISNU students at the time?

PM Let me think. Sometimes we'd get together, there would be get togethers, but I don't remember that quite as much. ISU was a walk away and you would walk down and use Milner that kind of thing, but generally in the evening because we didn't have cars that much unless you knew somebody who had a car—Bloomington didn't even have bus service so getting around was not something that was that easy. So I don't remember socializing a lot with ISU. Occasionally, but not that often.

LS Can you recall any racial incidents that may have occurred on campus?

PM Oh, my god, yes.

LS Any specific ones?

PM You know, by and large, you spent most of your day without people doing anything ugly to you, you know. But they didn't have to do very much before you'd be kind of torn with turmoil. I remember people would do kind of stupid stuff. There was a cross burned in front of my door, a kind of paper—and this was inside the dormitory for one thing so it's a little peculiar to have something to do like that. And as it turned out, it was a friend of mine—an acquaintance who thought it was funny, who was just kind of stupid—not meaning to be malicious but just not being particularly thoughtful. You would have—if—there'd be graffiti. People might write graffiti on posters or a sign or a flier or maybe do something ugly of that sort. If you were out in town, you know, somebody may drive by and call you names which is just the kind of thing that can happen even now. Part of it was simply the casual ignorance, the thoughtlessness of things people would say or the expressions or positions they would hold or the things they would say. People didn't necessarily hesitate in their great naiveté and thoughtlessness to kind of utter common stereotypes, you know, and insist on them. "Oh, all your people can dance." And I don't think they meant it negatively, but, you know, it's just not always thinking about what they were saying. And I'm sure there were—I think things happened to the men more than they happened to women. If you were locked up at 10:30 and you didn't go off campus that often, you usually were within the circuit of your classmates who basically didn't much go out of their way to be nasty to you. That kind of thing. You did know that you probably weren't going to be invited to fraternity/sorority functions. But within the sphere of the dorms, you operated just like everybody else. They had formals and the formals were off campus generally and you went where everybody else went in that particular way. In this little world, it's not that there weren't attitudes you had to deal with. Yeah, you dealt with those pretty routinely. But as far as being a day-by-day nightmare, no, it wasn't.

LS Can you recall the incident surrounding the dentist you made reference about? [in an earlier conversation]

PM Yeah, that was one of our very dramatic moments. One of our classmates Marian [Marian King] had a toothache, made an appointment to go to the dentist. The dentist was just down the street here at Ridgeway Terrace, in that vicinity. She went to the appointment, got there. They took a look at her and said, "No, we don't—we can't"

And she came back and didn't say anything. She was so humiliated and so angry and upset and just mainly humiliated and in pain. She didn't say anything, didn't say anything. Finally she did tell someone. I can't remember if she told Skip or who she told the first time. Then, of course, the ball started rolling. The story kind of went around and people got angry about it. They discovered that this person was our university president Bertholf's dentist, had been his family dentist and, you know, there are things about this person who—it just became clear that this was not going to be an acceptable or something to brush off and it was close. And here was something that people could—it was very

tangible and very immediate in happening to a person that you knew. And I'm not quite sure how this got to be hatched but my not-yet-brother-in-law Don Muirhead and I decided that one of the things—we began to know that you have to repeat something. You have to set up a situation to prove that it was discrimination and not something else. Someone can also almost — “Oh, the dentist was ill” or can make any kind of claim, “Oh, we lost the appointment.” You know, we were well aware from other racial situations—the how these things can be excused. So Don and I hatched up this plan by which we would try and replicate the situation. If you have a situation which is clearly racist, then that seals it.

So, Don made an appointment and he said, “I just need a routine cleaning. I just need my teeth cleaned.” No big deal. Okay. The person made an appointment with him and we decided we would go together—which we did—down to the office and sat in the office. Now there are only white folks in the office and I'm sitting there. And we waited for a little while.

And the receptionist saw us and Don checked in and said, “I'm here.” So we sat and, you know, we were waiting for awhile. And there are other people—various kinds of Bloomington folks at that time, kind of country folks, not very fancy folks, and we all talked as people will do in this situation, and nobody seemed to be the least bit upset or bothered and we had chats about what people were there for and, you know, no one seemed to be the least bit disturbed. So finally they called Don and he came up and he said, “Well, I need my teeth cleaned but a friend of mine who, you know, has a short schedule—she needs to be seen and so she's going to take my appointment.” And I stepped up.

Well, the confusion started at that point and the receptionist immediately — “Well, aah, hmm, aah.”

And, of course, Don and I said, “Well, what's the problem?” Don says, “I have an appointment and I don't need it. She can have mine. So I know you have room because I'm just here. She takes my place.”

Which immediately, of course, what can you say? Not “The dentist isn't in.” The dentist is not booked. Here we are. We're standing here. So she refused and we kept insisting.

“Can't ...? The dentist can't take me? Why not?” And this didn't go on for very long. I mean she wasn't mean or any of those things—just totally taken by surprise—the receptionist. And so we insisted [sic insisted] that we wanted the appointment. This is it. Well, neither of us—and so we left. From that point, our report—then we had the verification. Marian didn't have to—she could be the complainant but we had obviously set up the situation and done it deliberately and had witnesses in the room and all kinds of things—people we chatted with and we knew their names and [unintelligible]. So it was all very public. So we decided what to do.

We ended up filing a complaint which meant that we would have to go before a hearing board and we did, up in Chicago. And the dentist came—I'm sure I would remember his name if I cared to, but—with his lawyer. And it was a three-person board. So it's not a big legal hearing in the usual way. And so we—they asked us questions very sympathetically and we explained what happened. The question was, “Did you deliberately set the dentist up?”

And we said, “Yes, we did.” It was the only way we could demonstrate that this was not just a one-time thing. That race was the only reason that I could be refused would be race. It would be the issue. It was quite a thing. I remember Dick went up and Greg Dell and various people in the student senate—just our little group there. And the finding was that he had indeed discriminated against us and he was put on probation. It was entered in his file that he had done this, and he was told that people would be coming to check from the state human relations board to see that he was serving people. My understanding was he retired soon afterwards. The rumors went around—true or not—that he had a drinking problem and there were various kinds of things but any case, he didn't practice for much longer. And we had an experience in challenging discrimination through

the legal means that were available through the state of Illinois. We were quite proud of ourselves, of course.

LS Were you scared?

PM Nervous but not scared because we'd never been through a hearing didn't know quite what to expect but, you know, I was from Chicago so I was back on home territory. And the human relations board—it's obviously an advocate group, you know; it's not a group that had a special interest in denying that these kinds of things happened. And that impetus was coming through the system. We'd obviously been invited but we had no idea what was going to happen but we knew that there was this opportunity to do this and when we challenged it—the fact that we didn't have to go very far from campus. There was a sense of here's this person behaving this way right in our own world in his connection with Bertholf, our own president, was—you know, this was kind of close to home. Yeah. Just because of the drama of it again, you're sort of nervous but I wasn't afraid. I wasn't alone. I think Marian was afraid in some ways and very upset because she was very alone when this happened and in pain. We all had each other after it got rolling. We weren't alone.

LS Was there any momentum after that experience that maybe everyone brought back to campus?

PM I think we had to gather the momentum to go.

LS Sure.

PM And so, it actually began before the trip to do that. Plus there was a sense too in which, I think, we in our kind of righteousness about all of this—we were demanding that something be changed. I think people like Bill Whit, the chaplain, and other people who were here who were intimately connected with the community and the church and all of those sorts of things, they had a view of—because this was a campus connection—I'm sure they're thinking of alumni and they're thinking of the community and they're thinking of other kinds of things and so they probably—not that they tried to discourage us. I don't recall that at all, but I'm sure they had a stronger, historical sense of what we were about than we did. We just had the energy and the certainty that we were right, you know, in doing that.

LS Is there anything else that you'd like to share about your tenure years as a student or both positive and/or negative experiences?

PM One of the things, I guess, I want to say so it doesn't get lost in the history how important Emily Dunn Dale was to that sense of momentum and energy on campus because she has had a long, long career as a sociologist, as a public speaker for women's rights and civil rights, and other kinds of things. And she's spoken on all kinds of fora. But she took the time as a faculty member to write long, impassioned letters to The Argus. And Emily has that way of speaking to an audience, finding the core of an audience, that I think professors rarely have. They either sound too erudite or too pompous or too something. They're very often just missing the mark. And I've heard Emily speak in public gatherings of all kinds now and, you know, she's quite the speechmaker. But I remember reading her voice in The Argus and to think that here was a faculty member that spoke to a student from within the community to the students and to whoever would read The Argus in a way that was both clear and impassioned and without hesitation. I didn't know all of her personal motivations at the time, but there was an important energy there. She was on the cutting edge and, I think, that led a lot of us to have a kind of confidence that what we were

doing made sense and that we could do it. Emily was also a person who knew where you started out and could fully appreciate where you ended up between eighteen and twenty-one. And she made a huge difference in her public persona—Emily—this is not necessarily to do with the history of African-American students on campus, but Emily was also the person who also started the human sexuality course which you couldn't call that then, but Emily called it Marriage and the Family. And folks lined up for Marriage and the Family. Boy, it wasn't compulsory but it was just as important to Wesleyan students as the two-semester Humanities course. And there are a lot of people who took Marriage and the Family who weren't even in the course because what Emily talked about in class ended up being talked about over the entire campus. Oh, my! From birth control—you name it, Emily was outrageous. It's a credit to the administration that Emily could teach what she did the way she did at the time. We desperately needed her. For so many different things. So I think Emily is—there are many of us for whom Emily was a very important person.

LS You mentioned that you became a professor in the fall of '72? Was there much opposition to having a Black professor back on campus or was there currently a Black professor?

PM There had been a Black professor in English just before I came. I met him when I came to interview and I'm not totally clear about—I think he may have been in the process of finishing his masters degree at the time. Obviously we didn't overlap. If there was opposition, no one told me. Or they were too polite to mention it at the time. I was an alum and so they were people here that I'd had in class and so, you know—you—actually the people who became tenured as professors here at least in my twenty-five year memory have been Wesleyan alums. Me and Barrington Coleman. Actually there is one more person. Frank Starkey was tenured in chemistry. I remember when Frank got here. I guess most of our black professors have been alums. Our tenured black professors have been alums. So there was a sense of coming back. And I felt both welcomed and at home. Joe Meyers, my beloved freshman English teacher and Humanities professor, was still here at the time teaching. And Joe, although he kept scolding me, I could not call him "Joe" to save my life for ages. I almost tried find ways not to say, to speak his name at all because I couldn't say "Joe." But when I came back, I think it wasn't so much opposition from students as occasionally curiosity and some hesitancy. But when you belong to the place, you've put in your time and been hired back, you're an alum. The place belongs to you in a way that some of the students who were not quite sure what they thought of all this could not claim as yet. And so that little bit of belonging made it easier whatever there was that happened, whatever hesitancy. Surprise? Of course, I was the first Black professor students had had. I probably am still the first Black teacher although I tend not to even think about it very much. And I was conscious of that to a certain extent. Yeah those things were there. But that was not the hardest part about teaching. Just learning to teach—the multiple responsibilities and, of course, after I'd been here for a couple of years, I started back to graduate school at the time. So teaching and going to graduate school and, of course, the women's liberation movement among the faculty members, women faculty members, the Women's Caucus kicked in. And lots of things started to happen. There were revolutions on top of revolutions.

LS Did you feel free to create your own courses?

PM I started to teach African-American lit. We had a course structure that would allow me to do this and by that time, of course, Paul Bushnell was here and teaching African-American history and we had some African-American lit before I came. Certainly that's where I read black authors—not in whole courses of African-American or African literature but within Bob Burda's courses. And so, yeah, I was free to create those courses.