

TAPE ONE SIDE ONE

**Kamaka Martin:** Today is April 5th, 2003, and we are in Pardee Hall. Today we are interviewing Clarence Curry Class of 1965 as part of the oral history documentation at Lafayette College. My first question to you is can you please tell me about your family and your childhood?

**Clarence Curry:** I'm one of two children; oldest of two. Grew up in Hampton, Virginia. My parents were both educated, both degreed from Hampton Institute now Hampton University<sup>1</sup>. My father was employed in the post office, retired as Post Master in Williamsburg. My mother was a teacher she taught deaf children in Hampton, Virginia.

**KM:** What high school did you attend and what was that experience like?

**CC:** I went to high school at Phenix High School which was located on the campus of Hampton Institute. It was a, all... the schools in Hampton, Virginia at that time were totally segregated. My experience for elementary, junior high school and high school was with all black students, all black teachers, principals were black. Even the deputy superintendent who was responsible for the black schools was black.

**KM:** How do you feel that your high school prepared you for your education or a career at Lafayette?

---

<sup>1</sup> Hampton University, Hampton, Virginia.

**CC:** Well, in hindsight it prepared me very well, but when I came to Lafayette I was intimidated, graduating from what was perceived by everyone including me as an inferior black school, inferior colored school. But we had all black teachers who cared about us and did the best they could given the fact that they didn't, that they were working with scarce resources.

**KM:** How influential was your family in your decision to attend college?

**CC:** It was clear from the time I was born that I was going to attend college. The disappointment was that I didn't go to Hampton.

**KM:** Had others in your family attended college?

**CC:** Almost everyone in my family had gone to college and I just helped write a bio for my dad a couple of weeks ago. My father's grandfather graduated from Hampton Institute in 1892. So counting through my son who also went to Hampton, we are a five generation Hampton family here starting in 1892 going up to my son who graduated in 1991. My mother, all five or six of my mother's brothers also went to Hampton.

**KM:** What was your process of finding and choosing schools?

**CC:** Well, I wanted to do engineering and most of the black schools at that time did not offer degrees in engineering. I... part of the process that led me to Lafayette was that there was a group called something like the National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro students. And what they did was they took test scores and tried to match students with, with schools and they sent me list of five or six schools and Lafayette was one of the schools on that list.

**KM:** What other colleges did you apply to?

**CC:** I applied to Hampton, Morehouse<sup>2</sup>, Lafayette, and University of Virginia<sup>3</sup>.

**KM:** Did you have help from a guidance counselor?

**CC:** There were guidance counselors available, but I pretty much did it on my own.

**KM:** Did you have any opportunity to visit the campus before you made your final decision?

**CC:** No I never visited Lafayette until I came with my suitcases.

**KM:** Of the colleges and universities you applied to, why was Lafayette your final choice?

---

<sup>2</sup> Morehouse College, Atlanta, Georgia.

<sup>3</sup> University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.

**CC:** Well, a part of it was the financial aid. I was not admitted to the University of Virginia simply because of, well, I never rejected either—that was, that was an issue of race. So they procrastinated and kept finding things wrong with my application until I decided to go to Lafayette. I didn't want to go Hampton because I didn't want to stay at home. So that pretty much left Lafayette.

**KM:** What was your first impression of Lafayette?

**CC:** It was culture shock going from an almost totally colored environment to an almost totally white environment. My experience has been that I never had a white teacher until I came to Lafayette and in all of my college and graduate training I've only had one black teacher that included Lafayette, Pitt<sup>4</sup> and Carnegie Mellon<sup>5</sup>. I only had one black teacher in all of my classes in those schools.

**KM:** What was the role of orientation in your initial Lafayette experience?

**CC:** I'm trying to remember what I remember about orientation. I did, and I did in my speech for tonight<sup>6</sup> I did recall one incident which left a, which left me with a very bad taste in my mouth. I was a, I was a good test taker and all the freshman students had, it was a required diagnostic test that we had to take. So my advisor who's not the advisor

---

<sup>4</sup> University of Pittsburg, Pittsburg, Pennsylvania.

<sup>5</sup> Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburg, Pennsylvania.

<sup>6</sup> Curry was the keynote speaker for the annual Multicultural Awards/Black Alumni Banquet held on April 5, 2003.

that I named on the report, that was Dr. McGeady, I don't know who this this person was. He signed me up for the remedial classes before the test results were available. And I told him that I didn't need remedial classes, that I had done well on those tests and he just ignored me and then he never apologized for it when I passed the diagnostics and didn't need to take the remedial classes.

**KM:** How was your roommate arrangement?

**CC:** Oh one other thing I remember.

**KM:** Sure.

**CC:** Which, which made a long term impression on me, part of the orient, and, and I'm not sure if this is what you call the freshman orientation or not, but it's part of the engineering orientation. The freshman engineering class we had to, we had to learn how to use a slide rule. I already knew how to use a slide rule because my cousin had taught me how to use a slide rule. So I'm sitting in this class when we're, we're doing the drills with the slide rule and I'm the poor colored boy from the poor colored school and he's running around the room and he'd put this problem on the board and everybody's giving him the wrong answer and I had the right answer, but I tried to give him an answer similar to what the white guys had given him. So when I realized that I had the right answer, I said I'm never going to do that again.

**KM:** Right.

**CC:** I'll go with what I know is right.

**KM:** So can you explain what your roommate assignment was like when you first got to Lafayette?

**CC:** Well, we didn't get any choice in roommates. They were two other black students on campus. We were each assigned to a different dorm. I was in Easton Hall my roommate his name was Martin Rosenberg.<sup>7</sup> Nobody liked him. He flunked out at the end of the first semester. We got along, I didn't have any problems with him, but there were more negative things said about him as, as a Jew, than there were about me as a black person.

**KM:** Did it help or hinder your adjustment being away from home? Your roommate assignment?

**CC:** It didn't help.

**KM:** Can you explain how supportive the administration was towards African-Americans?

---

<sup>7</sup> Martin L. Rosenberg, Class of 1965.

**CC:** They were neutral, I guess they were neutral. They were, there was no particular support for them.

**KM:** After you adjusted to daily life at Lafayette did your feelings about the institution change at all?

**CC:** Well, I came to get a degree and I wasn't going home without a degree so I had to do what I had to do.

**KM:** Where did you live on campus during your four years at Lafayette?

**CC:** Freshman year I lived in Easton Hall, second year I lived in McKeen Hall and the third and fourth years I lived in the fraternity house, the Phi Kappa Tau house.

**KM:** How would you describe a typical day in the residence hall?

**CC:** They... Life in the residence hall particularly freshman year was pretty... how should I say this? It was hard work during the week and acting silly, drinking beer on the weekends. It wasn't at all unusual to, to see somebody passed out in the hall on the weekends.

**KM:** Were you compelled to become an RA after your first year?

**CC:** I was never an RA, but Ron Brooks<sup>8</sup> the other black student in the class he was an RA. I never applied for it.

**KM:** Please describe what your experience like, please explain what your experience was like in terms of like the music that you listened to and how that affected your experience here at Lafayette?

**CC:** Well, one of the few things I brought a record player as we called em then with me and some records mostly, mostly jazz. At home in Virginia I heard enough Motown and those kinds of things on the radio and I never felt a need to buy any Marvin Gaye<sup>9</sup> or Supremes,<sup>10</sup> those were the, black artists at the time. After I was here, when I couldn't find it any place else, I started buying those kinds of things.

**KM:** How would you describe the daily interactions between white and black students at Lafayette?

**CC:** Well, there were so few of us that we were almost a novelty. I got asked dumb questions, "Did you ever pick cotton?" "We had a maid named, we had a black maid. Her name was Sally, did you know her?" It was easy enough for the students who didn't, the white students who didn't want to be bothered with us to avoid us, there was so few

---

<sup>8</sup> Ronald Brooks, Class of 1965, B.S. Electrical Engineering. Brooks was the first African-American man to win the Pepper Prize at Lafayette College.

<sup>9</sup> Song writer and singer of the 1960s and 1970s whose hits included "I Heard It Through the Grapevine," "Sexual Healing," and "It Takes Two."

<sup>10</sup> All female singing group of the 1960s whose hits include "Come See About Me" and "Where Did Our Love Go?"



of us. There were a lot of, of whites from wealthy suburbs who had no contact with blacks and they were curious. I had many white students tell me how much they hated Jews. Because they had experience with Jews they knew they didn't like them.

**KM:** Did you know of any Jewish students on campus, and, if so, can you explain their experiences in comparison to yours?

**CC:** I knew lots of Jewish students. My roommate, both my roommates my freshman year were Jewish. When it came time to look at fraternities we kinda compared notes in terms of what they knew about which houses took Jews and there were only two houses that had black students in them. But it was, it was kind of a shared, I mean, it was a shared experience of discrimination. Now I'd had no white, no contact with whites including no contact with Jews. I remember my freshman year one of the Jewish students who I got close to asking me did I think he looked Jewish and I told him, I said, "Well you're the only Jew I know, so yeah you look Jewish to me."

**KM:** During the 1960s the college saw a shift from a majority Protestant student body to a more broad range of denominations. Did you know of any conflicts based on religion other than the Jewish students that you mentioned?

**CC:** Well, there, there were incidents of prejudice. My freshman year there was someone who was putting swastikas on our, on our dorm room door and finally, I caught him. I finally caught him. And he was big, he was a football player and he was at least

two hundred pounds and I was about hundred and twenty-five pounds something like that and I confronted him. I don't know what I would've done if he had swung at me, but, but I stood my ground and, and... So there was some of that. There was also required religious, there were required religion courses, so I think we had a choice. I think well, one of the choices we had is that you, you had to take a religion course. You could take a course on Christianity or a course on comparative religions and I choose to take the course on comparative religions. And most of the Jewish students also took that course.

**KM:** How did the Greek system impact your first year experience?

**CC:** The Greek system isolated the freshmen from the rest of the students. There was, and that was, I mean, that was the rule to, to avoid a pre-rush, pre-pledging there was very little contact between the upperclassmen and the freshmen. So I didn't even know some of the black upperclassmen until fraternity rush started. I didn't even know how many there were. Some of them I hadn't even seen before.

**KM:** Can you explain how you were, got involved with the Kappa, the Phi Kappa Tau fraternity?

**CC:** There were, well, there was a, there was a, a formal rush period. You had a card. You had to visit houses and get signatures on the card and then you submitted your choices and they the fraternities picked who they, who they wanted. So I don't remember now, there were probably somewhere between I wanna say eighteen, but somewhere

between fifteen and twenty fraternities on campus. Most of the upperclassmen lived and ate in the fraternities houses. The, the cafeteria was not officially a freshman cafeteria, but that's what it was, so nobody, none of the upperclassmen really wanted to come back and, and be with the, with the freshmen. So it was a shopping process to, to visit the houses. There were two that had black folks, the other houses that I visited most of them were cordial nobody was nasty to me, but I, it was pretty clear fairly quickly that, who was willing to take black students and who wasn't, was not willing to take black students. The two that had black students were Phi Kappa Tau and Pi Lamda Phi. Ron and I decided together to pledge Phi Kappa Tau.

**KM:** Can you explain what your experiences were like once you were, became a member of the fraternity?

**CC:** There, there was pretty much self selection there in that there were black, there were already black students in there before us. So anybody who came in new came in knowing they were coming into a group that had black students in it. I think we were treated reasonably well there. I remember one of the guys telling me when we were pledging that don't think you're going to get any special treatment because you're Negro cuz you're not. I'm not, I'm not sure you were answering tell me the question again.

**KM:** I just wanted you to explain what your experiences were like once you became a brother of the fraternity.

**CC:** It was a small group and we were fairly close, most of us were fairly close. Again probably about a third of those guys were Jewish. As opposed to Pi Lamda Phi where almost everyone except the black guys were Jewish.

**KM:** Would you say it was easy or difficult to find a date on campus?

**CC:** There were no dates to find on campus.

**KM:** Could you explain, well, basically explain the system where the guys were busing women to the college?

**CC:** Well, freshman year there was a series of mixers. They took buses of guys from Lafayette to these schools and also girls were bused in. There were three, there were three schools that I remember. Cedar Crest<sup>11</sup> which we drove past coming in from Pittsburgh. Cedar Crest is about twenty miles from here. Wilson<sup>12</sup> is, was in, was further away, Wilson was on the other side of Harrisburg I think in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, and Douglass<sup>13</sup> was some place in New Jersey. Also Centenary<sup>14</sup>. There were black girls at Cedar Crest and Wilson. I don't remember seeing any black girls at Douglass or our information network didn't reveal that there were any black girls at Douglass. So, and there were very few black girls in town really. So most dates either came from hometowns or from one of those girls' schools. Now Ron was from Harrisburg he was

---

<sup>11</sup> Cedar Crest College, Allentown, Pennsylvania.

<sup>12</sup> Wilson College, Chambersburg, Pennsylvania.

<sup>13</sup> Douglass College is an all women division of Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

<sup>14</sup> Centenary College, Hackettstown, New Jersey.

closer so I would go to Harrisburg with him. He arranged blind dates for me a couple times with girls from Harrisburg. I, I, guess my last two years I had a girlfriend in Virginia who came up to visit me a couple times. But there were also folks who tried to be helpful who, I mean, in the fraternity there were, you know, there were guys who had regular girlfriends and they would say I know a black girl at, at my school would you like to meet her. But, but it was sometimes they didn't even know her it was like there was a black girl on campus do you want me to try to fix you up. So it was very, it was, it was strange.

**KM:** Describe how the absence of women on campus affected the social climate.

**CC:** The absence of women made it a very crude environment. We had rules like dressing for dinner you had to wear a coat and tie to dinner. If there weren't for rules like that it would have just been total chaos. But guys acted silly, they would drink too much beer, throw beer on each other. Act silly when girls would, a car of high school girls might come up and, and, and wave and act silly. And the guys would run out and surround the car and shake the car and do silly stuff, do silly stuff like that.

**KM:** What did you do for fun?

**CC:** We watched TV and drank beer. If we had any money we would go to New York.

**KM:** What was the black student relationship with other colleges in the Lehigh Valley area such as Muhlenberg<sup>15</sup>, Lehigh<sup>16</sup>, and Cedar Crest?

**CC:** Lehigh was the enemy we didn't talk to anybody from Lehigh. Other than the girls schools there was really no communication with the other, I don't know that I ever, I was ever on the Muhlenberg campus.

**KM:** During the early sixties at Lafayette there was major construction of buildings such as Marquis Hall, South Hall, several fraternities houses and Skillman Library. How did this influx of construction affect life on campus?

**CC:** It didn't. I mean, I don't remember any consequences. Marquis Hall was done because Ron lived in Marquis Hall my freshman year. I don't remember any particular issues around construction.

**KM:** How did your social life change in general over your four years at Lafayette?

**CC:** Well, social life changed as we learned how to live with it. As we made contacts in Philadelphia and New York, we would go to Philadelphia for parties, go to New York for, usually when we went to New York we just went to a club or something, but I knew people in Philadelphia and we'd go to Philadelphia for parties. Plus by the time I was,

---

<sup>15</sup> Muhlenberg College, Allentown, Pennsylvania.

<sup>16</sup> Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

each year I was a little, by the time I was a junior I had, I was getting good summer jobs so I had a little bit more money in my pocket.

**KM:** How was your transition to Lafayette academically?

**CC:** It was difficult. I was, I came out of a high school where I had never had to work to get good grades. I had no study skills. It took me the first, I lost the first month figuring out that when somebody told me to read an assignment they really meant for me to read it. I did poorly my freshmen year. I got my rhythm my sophomore year, did well my sophomore year. Screwed up, screwed around my junior year and almost flunked out and then had to work my senior year to, to get my grades back up and graduate.

**KM:** Why did you choose metallurgical engineering as a major?

**CC:** Well, I came to Lafayette as an undecided engineering major thinking I wanted to do mechanical engineering, but with the, the courses we had in the freshman and sophomore year where you had to try a little bit of each discipline, and I decided on metallurgical engineering.

**KM:** What was your involvement in the ROTC<sup>17</sup> program?

**CC:** Everyone had to take two years of ROTC. Everyone who was physically able had to take two years of ROTC. I played in the ROTC band so that got me out of a lot of the,

---

<sup>17</sup> Reserve Officer Training Corps.

the, the, the drilling which we just we played while the other students marched up and down with their rifles. There was one incident with the band, the ROTC band. The ROTC band my freshman year went to Winchester, Virginia, to the Apple Blossom Festival south of the Mason-Dixon Line. This was a big deal that was a, you know, competitive, it was a judged event. We came in second in whatever division we were in. I know there was a college division, a small college division I don't remember. So we went back sophomore year, you know, determined that we were going to win. Also the band director found enough money so that we could stay overnight. So it was going to be a nice trip for us. When it came time to go the band director called, there was one other black student and me. When it came time to go the band director called us, he called on us individually. He didn't call us in together. And he showed me a letter and said we've confirmed reservations for you to stay at such and such a place and it said, "We understand that the band is all male and all white." So he said to me that "Well, you're from the South you know what it's like down there. We've made arrangements for you and your friend to stay at the colored Y. And if you don't want to do that we won't go, but you know how disappointed your friends will be if we don't do this." So the two of us we talked and we went back and told him we weren't going. And of course they figured out another way. We found, they found another place where we could stay. We all, so we all went and we, and we won whatever the prize was that we were seeking ... But I mean, but I thought that was very unfair for that, for that military officer to put us into that kind of predicament. To make us young boys make that kind of decision.

**KM:** How would you rate your academic experience during your time at Lafayette?



**CC:** I think it was a very good academic experience. The, the classes, the classes were demanding. The teachers, most of the teachers, I can't, I can't really say that I remember any teachers demonstrating any prejudice. They, they took whatever time, you know, they were always available if you needed extra time with them, to spend time with them.

**KM:** Which professor would you say positively influenced your Lafayette experience the most?

**CC:** Probably Dr. Leon McGeady<sup>18</sup> who was the head of the Metallurgical Engineering Department and he taught the, the sophomores, he taught the, the Introduction to Metallurgical Engineering class which made me decide to, to, to major in metallurgical engineering. And I think he was generally regarded by the other engineering faculty as, as kind of a, a demon who stole all of their students.

**KM:** How would you say this relationship helped your future endeavors?

**CC:** My relationship with him?

**KM:** Yes.

**CC:** I don't know that I was that close to him really, I mean, I, I mean his door was always open I would go in and talk to him. I remember when I had a summer, I had a

---

<sup>18</sup> Leon McGeady, Metallurgical Engineering Department.

summer job working as an engineer I would go in and talk to him about those experiences and he was always encouraging.

**KM:** Was there ever a time you considered transferring?

**CC:** I thought about transferring to a more sociable environment, but never seriously.

**KM:** What made you stay?

**CC:** Stubbornness.

**KM:** How effective was your advisor during your college experience?

**CC:** Well, I mentioned the incident when I was a freshman with the, with the testing and I remember meeting with another advisor who, where we just had a sociable chat for ten or fifteen minutes and then after that I never went back unless I had to.

**KM:** Were you involved in any extra curricular activities at Lafayette? If so could you explain which ones?

**CC:** Well, I was involved in the college band and the ROTC band. I had played in bands in high school. There was also a group of four or five of us freshmen, well, first of all, all of the fraternities houses had, when they had the, the three or four weekends they

all had live bands. So there was lots of bands and lots of opportunities to play music. So when three or four of us had put together, I was the only black one in that group too, put together a little band as freshmen. We played around campus for a while. Two of those guys stayed together and I think actually did some recording after they graduated, but I didn't stay with that after my freshman year. There was an engineering society that I was involved in, the student chapter of the metallurgical engineers or something like that. My wife found my copy of my year book and I was looking back through the year book to see what it said I did and I had listed in there the college radio station, but I don't remember. No I mean, I know I went to meetings and we worked on planning and again I was concerned about what kind of music they were gonna to play, but I don't ever remember that we actually got a radio station up and running.

**KM:** Were there any support groups on campus for minority students?

**CC:** None.

**KM:** So in terms of that what did you do when there was an issue? Did you, how did you address between yourselves? Or did you go to an administrator for help? How did you address your social issues on campus?

**CC:** You, you just bit your lip and lived with it. Now there was I think. And I was trying to remember, you know, as I was preparing my remarks, I was trying to remember

I think maybe the college Chaplin. The first college Chaplin his name was Currie<sup>19</sup> he was an older man who I didn't really have a whole lot to do with. But sometime maybe during my junior or senior year there was a new Chaplin who came in, a young guy, and I did have several conversations with him. And I remember him inviting me to his house for dinner. So I would talk, he was white, but I would talk to him. I think he'd even, he would give me, I would go to, he would give me a ride. I went to the NAACP meetings with him. He would give a ride down to the NAACP meetings.

**KM:** How did the Civil Rights Movement affect students on campus?

**CC:** Almost nothing affected students on campus. This was the time when the Vietnam War was escalating. There was some conversation about why we shouldn't, why we should or why shouldn't have to take ROTC, very few of the students signed up for advanced ROTC. Most of, most of, most of the white students and the black students as well managed to avoid the draft, but it was just something that was out there. The Civil Rights Movement was kinda the same way. There were a lot of things going on while I was here. I mean the march on Washington was in '63. I didn't go. I think we almost felt like we were already, that we were already liberated.

**KM:** Please describe how the student, the activities that were going on in society pretty much affected your Lafayette experience both positively and negatively.

---

<sup>19</sup> Rev. John M. Currie, College Chaplain (1952-1964).

**CC:** It was, I think being at Lafayette, being in an all male environment, being in this little almost all white town it was like being in a, almost like being in a cocoon and it was not much concern about what, what went on outside, outside of campus.

**KM:** Did you play any sports while at Lafayette?

**CC:** No, and the white guys use to tease us cuz neither one, neither Ron nor I were athletes. We didn't even play on the, on the fraternity, on the intramural teams.

**KM:** Were there any activities that you participated in that would have been considered radical during your time at Lafayette?

**CC:** No. You mean politically radical? No. No.

**KM:** In any capacity?

**CC:** No I don't think so.

**KM:** What was your best experience outside of the classroom?

**CC:** Well, no, back, back to, to the politics and what you said earlier. I mean, there were, mostly on the west coast, there was, there were campuses on the west coast where students were protesting and burning draft cards and doing all those good things. None

of that, none of that was going on here this was, we were just, this was, we were just isolated here.

**KM:** But did you ever feel compelled to want to be a part of that kind of social movement at all?

**CC:** Well, I mean, I mean, I was aware of things in the South and I was involved when I would go back home I would talk to friends who were at other colleges and they would, they would, and we were working on things there. But I never did anything radical on campus.

**KM:** What was your best experience outside of the classroom?

**CC:** Well, the fact that I had some good friendships among the, the guys that I was in the fraternity with.

**KM:** Did those friendships last out, until after college did you guys maintain your friendship until then?

**CC:** Well, we did for a while. I've lost track of most of them now. I think the last contact involved was when my wife and I had our, well, one of, when I got married Ron Brooks was my best man. There was also one of the white guys in the fraternity was, was a groomsman. I kept in touch with him for a long time. The last time I heard from him

was when we had our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary he got an invitation to the party. He called me and we talked, but that was ten years ago.

**KM:** How would you characterize the politics of the student body, faculty and administrators at Lafayette from 1961 to 1965?

**CC:** I would say it was almost non-existent. Now I was in, I was an engineering major. I would expect that students who were involved in political science and those kinds of disciplines might have seen faculty who were more socially aware and were involved in, more politically aware and more involved in things. I remember and I think I had to take, engineers were required to take one liberal arts elective in a term and I think I took two philosophy courses from the same professor who I kinda liked. And again I'm trying to remember what his name was now, but he would, he would go off on tangents talk about political issues, but most of the engineering faculty did not.

**KM:** How would you compare and contrast the politics of Lafayette then compared to Lafayette today?

**CC:** Well I don't know. I haven't been here so I don't know what it's like. What led to me getting back here for this weekend was that there was an interview with Dr. Gerald Gill<sup>20</sup> that was published in the student magazine and I, so I, and I read that with great interest and then I wrote a note back which somebody saw and suggested that I come and

---

<sup>20</sup> Gerald Gill, Class of 1970, A.B. International Affairs. A copy of an interview Gill gave for this oral history project is stored in the College Archives.

speaking today. But it was interesting to see his perspective, being here in the late sixties when the student awareness was rising as opposed to what it was like when I was here and I was aware that those kinds of changes were happening because I was in, I was not at a university campus then. I was working for Westinghouse, but I saw some things that were happening at the University of Pittsburgh and Duquesne University<sup>21</sup>. I had a sister who was still in school at Hampton. And in fact I went in to talk to, I went in to talk to some of the Pitt students when they were having issues and were taking over the computer room. I was brought in as a professional to, to talk to them.

**KM:** Do you think the *Alumni Magazine* is representative of, of Lafayette College as a whole?

**CC:** Well, it's the only window I have. So I think it, it, well, I was referring to the black magazine *AYA*, which I think is more of a, of a, of an arts kind of, a way for students to express artistic opinion. If you're talking about the news, the alumni sheets that we get. I think they try hard to, to keep the alumni informed, but I get those from Pitt and from CMU as well and I don't, I, I got one since I was, since I agreed to come back here. So I read that more carefully than I usually do, but, you know, I get a whole series of these things and sometimes I read them and I just usually look to see if I see any faces or any names that I recognize.

**KM:** Could you recommend any alumni that would be interested in participating in this project?

---

<sup>21</sup> Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.



**CC:** Well, I think probably most of them would. I've lost track, I mean, the ones that I, the ones that I kept in touch with, I kept in touch with several of the black students after graduation, but even, even my roommate Ron Brooks, I haven't talked to him probably in ten years.

**KM:** How involved are you with the college today?

**CC:** Not at all.

**KM:** What is your perception of Lafayette College in its present state? Of what you know so far?

**CC:** I, I value my, I view my Lafayette experience as a great educational experience obtained at great social pain. So I had, I'm glad I was here, but I really had no desire to come back.

TAPE ONE SIDE TWO

**KM:** What was your post-college initiatives? Did you seek employment or did you further your education?

**CC:** I, I was ready to go to work. I was, I wanted to make some money. I ended up taking a job with Westinghouse Electric in Pittsburgh because Westinghouse promised me a job deferment at a time when, when the Vietnam War was escalating.

**KM:** What are some of the jobs that you've held after graduation?

**CC:** I worked for Westinghouse Electric, at the BeHis Atomic Power lab right outside of Pittsburgh. I worked on power reactors for the Navy submarines and aircraft carriers which qualified me for a job related draft deferment. I stayed there until I was twenty-six and no longer eligible for the draft. At that time they weren't drafting anybody after age twenty-six and I went to business school. I got an MBA from University of Pittsburgh went into a doctoral program at Carnegie Mellon. Finished all the course work, but never finished writing the dissertation. Went back to teach at the University of Pittsburgh. Taught courses in marketing and statistics and entrepreneurship at the university. Always, developed an interest early on in, in business development and economic development. Started some programs that brought money into the university, ran the small business development center for about fifteen years and then in 1995 I left the business school and went to work as an assistant to the Vice Chancellor for public and student affairs. I did that for two years and then I left to start my own business.

**KM:** Upon entering the workplace, did you feel adequately prepared for the challenges you faced in the workplace after graduating from Lafayette?

**CC:** Absolutely. I was confident that I could hold my own with anyone at that point.

**KM:** Were there any skills in particular that you developed at Lafayette that helped your post Lafayette experience?

**CC:** Well, I, I left Lafayette thinking that I had a good technical background which is what I thought I needed to, to, to build war machines for Westinghouse Electric. What I discovered once I was out there is that I had pretty good communication skills as well, that the, the Lafayette blending of, of, of liberal arts with engineering had, had given me enough writing and communication skills to, to be able to do well in business and some other areas.

**KM:** How did your degree in metallurgical engineering help in your career choices?

**CC:** Well, I haven't worked as an, I haven't technically worked as an engineer since 1970, but even what I'm doing now, what I'm doing now is mostly involving business development and a lot of construction initiatives and I still am able to, to know enough about the technical side of what's going on to not let people "BS" me when, when that's what they would often try to, try to do.

**KM:** How did you become involved in your present line of work?

**CC:** Well, I went from teaching entrepreneurship and running, as a university administrator, running business assistance programs for small businesses into doing business consulting on my own. So it was kind of a natural progression.

**KM:** How involved are you, how involved are you with the Lafayette community presently? Do you feel that after being here today that you will become more involved or, or not?

**CC:** I'm not sure. I'll see how it goes today.

**KM:** Have you ever felt alienated or disconnected from Lafayette?

**CC:** Well, I felt alienated when I was here.

**KM:** So do you feel, do you still feel that way now or do you feel more connected more so now than then?

**CC:** No. No.

**KM:** Do you feel that you want to change that relationship that you have with the college presently?

**CC:** Well, yes, yes and no. I know that being at Lafayette was an important part of who I am today, but by the same token the, the, the limited resources that I have and time and money I've done more for United Negro College Fund and for Hampton where everybody else in my family went than I have for any of the schools that I attended.

**KM:** Is there anything that you would like to see Lafayette do in the future?

**CC:** Well, I'm curious to see how the, how the, how the weekend plays out. I was, I did attend the, the gospel concert last night and saw more black students there of course than, than I've ever seen when I was here. I'm still thinking that maybe Lafayette isn't doing as, as, as much as, as much as they could be doing to recruit and attract black students. I mentioned earlier for instance that, that I couldn't get into University of Virginia. When I graduated from high school the University of Virginia had no black, they had black students in graduate and professional school, but no undergraduate black students. I would speculate now that University of Virginia is doing, in a proportional sense that, the University of Virginia is doing more for black students than either Lafayette or University of Pittsburgh is doing.

**KM:** Looking back do you think Lafayette was the ideal place to foster your growth process both academically and socially?

**CC:** No. Well, Lafayette was what it was and, and, and I think the social environment was, was just as much due to it being an all male school as it was to, as it was to the

limited number of black students here. I knew that when I came here. I didn't think it would be, I thought there would be women's colleges and other ways to get dates close, closer by, but... I think it, I think it made, you know, one of the things my mother says, "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." So, so I survived it. I don't think it has to be that hard for everybody else.

**KM:** What impact did you leave on the Lafayette community being an African-American male?

**CC:** Well, I don't know what, what, I did is \_\_\_\_\_. I think the few of us who were here showed the faculty and the staff that there were black people out there who were smart enough to, to, to take the best that was available and to, and to use that and go forward and do good things with it.

**KM:** Looking back now did Lafayette fail you in any major ways?

**CC:** No.

**KM:** Could you explain why you feel that it didn't fail you and more so that it helped you more than being something, having a negative impact on you?

**CC:** Well, when I, when I came here in, in 1961 it was a time for integration and assimilation. I make jokes now when people ask me why I came to Lafayette I say I

came, I came north, I came north to the promised land. I left the segregated south. I came north where the barriers were, were not as obvious where they were, where they were, where they were more subtle. I think Lafayette opened the doors to give me a good engineering education which is what I was, which is what I was looking for. I didn't expect to find any black history courses and I wasn't surprised that there were no black faculty here. So that's why I said I wasn't disappointed in that sense.

**KM:** If you had to do it again would you choose Lafayette College to complete your undergraduate degree?

**CC:** Probably not. I probably would, I probably would have gone to tried to go to a Penn<sup>22</sup> or if I couldn't get in, or a Penn State<sup>23</sup>. Some place where there was a larger network of other African-American students.

**KM:** Did attending Lafayette College significantly affect your future in any way positively or negatively?

**CC:** Well, I was only eighteen when I came here so I'm sure that, that it had a significant impact on my, on who I am. I can't really say that it made me a better or worse person, but it's certainly an important part of who I am.

---

<sup>22</sup> University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

<sup>23</sup> Pennsylvania State University, State College, Pennsylvania.

**KM:** When you look back now at your overall experience in broad terms what do you most want to say about your Lafayette experience to sum it up?

**CC:** Well, I would say that it was an experience on the, on the, on the cusp as the Civil Rights Movement was coming to a head and the, the simple barriers were coming down. So the time that we were at Lafayette was, was a time when it was about being able to stay at a hotel. Shortly after that it, it was clear that you could stay at the hotel if you had enough money to stay at the hotel. I think we're still fighting those battles about who has enough money to stay at the hotel.

**KM:** Is there anything that you would like to say or talk about that I did not address?

**CC:** A couple things that I had kinda put together for the speech, but they should probably be on the record. In addition to not being any, any black faculty or staff and I would, I, I don't remember there even being any, any black visiting scholars here. I'm, I've scratched my head and I've tried to remember, I, I, I have some recollection of Ralph Bunche<sup>24</sup> being around, but that maybe because one of the black students who was here was his nephew. So he may have introduced me to Ralph Bunche some place else. The other thing, oh, there were lots of black entertainers. There were always black entertainers around and one of, again one of the things, but I am giving away my speech. One of the things I was going to mention in my speech is that one well-meaning white girl who was dating a friend of mine it was a formal dance on campus and the Duke

---

<sup>24</sup> Bunche was a United States diplomat with the United Nations for more than twenty years. In 1950 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace role in negotiating an Arab-Israeli truce in Palestine.



Ellington Orchestra<sup>25</sup> played. And Duke Ellington had an attractive young vocalist who was sitting by the bandstand and she went over to, this white girl went over to Duke Ellington's vocalist and asked her was she my date. The other thing is, the other thing is that Ron and I were both on scholarship, but there were other black students who here who were from reasonably wealthy families and who were doing things on their own. So we weren't all charity cases here.

**KM:** Well, we want to say thank you on behalf of the Archives Department for agreeing to participate in this oral history project. The information that you shared with us will be very valuable for the compilation of our, our project. So we just want to say thank you.

**CC:** It was good to talk with you.

---

<sup>25</sup> Ellington was a noted and Grammy award winning jazz pianist, composer, and one of the founders of big band jazz.