TAPE ONE SIDE ONE

Vivienne Felix: Today is March 5, 2002, and I'm here speaking with Gerald Gill. This is a project documenting the African-American experience at Lafayette during the late sixties and the early seventies. First, I am just going to ask you a few background questions concerning your preparation coming into Lafayette. What high school did you attend?

Gerald Gill: I attended New Rochelle High School in my hometown of New Rochelle, New York. It's a public high school of approximately 3,000 students, and I graduated in June of 1966.

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

GG: I got an excellent preparation in terms of secondary school education. New Rochelle High School had entering perhaps one of the ten best public high schools in the state of New York. It was a high school where students could take various course offerings, and I took college prep, and I got a very good background in terms of college preparatory courses. However, I was not invited to take any AP[1] courses. Those courses were exclusive to whomever the teachers wanted to choose, but I was not chosen for AP classes. But still I got a very good education and a very good preparation for college in terms of the college preparatory program.

[1] Advanced Placement

VF: How many of your peers from your hometown attended college?

GG: New Rochelle had prided itself in terms of a large number of the students who attended public and private schools. I can't give you an exact percentage in terms of my graduating class, in terms of the number of students who might have attended college and universities, but I would assess maybe it was close to fifty to sixty percent of students who attended either a two-year or four year institution immediately after high school. Maybe higher, but that's just a rough estimate.

VF: How did you hear about Lafayette in your college application process?

GG: It's very interesting. I heard about Lafayette in the fall of 1964 when I was taking the PSATs[2]. I was then in my junior year of high school. I checked a box on the PSAT form for… that was placed there by an organization called the National Scholarship and Service Fund for Negro Students and on the PSAT form it indicated that if you were a Negro student, and if you were interested in hearing more about the work of this agency, check the box. I checked the box, and then several weeks later I got a form from the National Scholarship and Service Fund for Negro Students, and it was a questionnaire asking me to fill out my personal and academic interests because I had done relatively well on the SATs[3]. I wasn't seen as a candidate who might be of interest in going to colleges, and the National Scholarship And Service Fund for Negro students was largely

[2] Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test
[3] Scholastic Assessment Test

designed to help Negro students - as we were then referred - to apply for predominantly white colleges and institutions. It was largely designed to help students go to interracial institutions not historically black colleges. So I received this information from NSSFNS[4], I filled it out, and indicated that I was interested in attending colleges that had programs in International Affairs, and they would send me materials and among the materials they sent me was a sheet from Lafayette College. So that's how I first heard about Lafayette College and this was been in the fall of 1964, winter of 1964. I then filled out a form for Lafayette, and I started to receive more and more information from Lafayette in my junior and entering my senior year.

VF: What other colleges did you apply to?

GG: In addition to Lafayette, I applied to Syracuse University. I applied to NYU[5]. And I applied to Lake Forest College in Illinois. At that partic… and I had heard from Lake Forest from NSSFNS. I knew about Syracuse because it was a football powerhouse and some black students from my high school had gone to Syracuse. And I applied to NYU because it was a nearby school and also had a program in which I was interested. At that time, you probably didn't apply to any more than four or five colleges, students across the board and many colleges were colleges that were nearby. All the schools that I applied to were quote unquote "integrated schools." Because I was interested in international affairs, and the only black school I would then consider was Howard[6] and

[4] National Scholarship and Service Fund for Negro Students
[5] New York University, New York, New York
[6] Howard University, Washington, D.C.

Howard didn't have a program in international affairs. I didn't apply to any historically black institutions.

VF: Prior to your arrival at Lafayette College, what was your image of college life?

GG: I had never set foot on a college campus before in my life with the exception of NYU because I had gone there for an interview. So, I had a… and there were two colleges in my hometown, but they never invited local students to come on campus. So what I knew about college campuses were based upon NYU, which was a urban campus, and also based upon my images of colleges as one could see from college catalogues. So, I just assumed that, for example, that Lafayette would be comparable to what I had seen in terms of its catalog. And could you remind me of the question again?

VF: What was your image of college life prior to coming to Lafayette?

GG: My image of college life was largely based upon schoolwork and also in terms of a social life and also extracurricular activities. I thought it might have been just a more accelerated version in terms of what my high school image would be. So I thought that college would be different, but a continuation of, let's say, some of the classrooms, all those things, extracurricular activities.

VF: What was your first impression of Lafayette?

GG: I hated it 'cause I had never visited the campus. At that time students weren't required to. Interviews were an option, and they could be a plus in the admissions process. But, I was never told that I needed an interview. I didn't see a need to visit the campus because I had a high school. I had a job after high school so I couldn't take the time off from school to come to visit the campus. So, I never… I had never seen the campus. I had never met anyone from the campus. I hadn't met any Lafayette alums. I hadn't met any current students from Lafayette. No one had… No current student had ever been in contact with me and… So what I knew about Lafayette was largely based upon what I had read about Lafayette, and how I envisioned Lafayette, so needless to say I was in a shock. I mean I knew Lafayette was all male, and I knew Lafayette was predominantly white. But, I didn't necessarily know in terms of what I would expect when I arrived on campus in September of 1966. Reality was much different than my impressions.

VF: What was that reality at Lafayette?

GG: One of the biggest shocks I got in terms of coming on the college campus was making the left turn from McCartney Street and going up towards South College and seeing Theta Psi. I had never seen a house that large. And I didn't… And I really didn't know what a fraternity was. But, so I was just amazed at a house that size. As I began to… As my family and I moved into South College and I began to realize about the college, I was meeting some of the people on my floor. I had met my freshman roommate. He was a white male, - Mark Davis from the class of 1970 who had

graduated from Plymouth White Marsh High School outside of Philadelphia. And, I just assumed that there would have been more Negro students, that's the term that we were using then, at Lafayette, and I, so I was just dismayed over the course of the day. I hadn't seen any other Negro students. And I later saw one black student and his family at the president's reception, but that was towards the end of the day. So consequently, as my family members were getting ready to go home, would have been my father, my aunt, my father's sister, and my older sister who came with me to college. As they were getting ready to leave at the end of the day, I wanted to go home with them. I was just shaking my head, and I said, "Oh no, this might not be the place for me."

VF: How was your transition to Lafayette academically?

GG: Academically, it was rocky. I had done very well in terms of high school, but the academic adjustment to Lafayette was, it caught me off guard. Partly because, for example, we had no counseling beforehand in terms of the courses that you were supposed to select. You got a form over the summer, filled out the form about the courses you were going to take, then they matched those courses with the time offerings. I had initial, I had a rocky experience initially. I had done reasonably well in terms of high school math. I grew up in New York so I had to take the Math Regents[7] exams in terms of algebra, geometry, and intermediate algebra, and also in terms of trigonometry. But I ended up flunking calculus. I really didn't… I got lost from day one. I sought help from the instructor. The instructor was somewhat sympathetic and arranged for me to

[7] The New York State Mathematics A Regents Examinations. This test is required of all students in order to graduate from high school.

have a tutor, which I had to pay for, but still I ended up flunking the class. I took a English course and somehow I always got C's in terms of the papers that I had to write for that English course. Somehow it seems as if I could… whatever the work I was doing was satisfactory, but not good, and even though I would spend time writing my essays, rewriting my essays, and then submitting them, somehow I got C's. There was one particular book we had to read and critique was *Out of Africa* by Isak Dinesen. I read that book, and I hated it. Hated the movie when I saw it also with Meryl Streep, but we can talk about that later. And I wrote a critique of that and when I cited… When I used Kipling's verse "East is East, and West is West and never the twain shall they meet," and I used that as an introductory paragraph to talk about the meetings of people of different races. He didn't like what I wrote, and I don't know… And I did not do very well on that particular essay. So I was not happy with my academic performance. I wasn't doing particularly well in terms of a religion… religion courses. I was doing so so, but I wasn't really participating in terms of class. I wasn't participating in English classes. I had done very well in terms of history and I had, I didn't take AP history because I wasn't invited to take AP history, but I had done very well in terms of the history achievement test for the SAT. So, I felt comfortable about my background in American and European history in terms of high school preparation. I took the first exam. I studied for it. I knew the material. I answered the essay, but I got a C on the exam. The instructor was less interested in terms of the comments that I wrote, in term of the responses to the answer to the question, but the instructor wrote a lengthy comment on the essay about one sentence that I wrote. I wrote the sentence that an unnamed or unknown European monarch, doesn't matter what the name was, ascended to the throne, and then he wrote a long and

lengthy comment that one does not ascend to the throne, but one ascends a throne upon becoming installed in terms of a royal office. Gave me a C on the exam… and that was the only reason where I lost points. I was disheartened, and I was dispirited, and I was unhappy cause he also wrote that I should study Latin. That, in other words, I did not know the English roots of words because if I did I wouldn't have made such a mistake. So I was not happy. Saving grace that semester came from a French course that I had taken. Because I was interested in majoring in international affairs, and I had very good preparation in terms of high school and high school French and History. I had taken the French SAT exam, and I had done very well, and I placed out the first part of the language requirement. But because I was an international affairs major, I needed to take upper level French courses, so I took a French literature course which was comparable to a course that I had taken in my senior year of high school which we read books in French and discussed the books and wrote about the books. There were thirty-five students in that class and there were only three freshmen, and I was the only black student in the class. I got along well in the class. I spoke up in the class. I really enjoyed the class, and it was comparable to what I had done in high school, and I had a very good experience in the class. But I was somewhat concerned after the midterm exam because I wasn't doing well in my other classes. So I was walking out of South College one day, and I was going towards Marquis Hall and a professor, Professor Streeter[8], Harold Streeter, came out of Marquis Hall. He was on his way back towards the office and he hadn't passed out the exams back yet, but he said to me, "Monsieur Gill," and he said, "You did very well on the exam." And that was the first time that anyone had said anything about my having

[8] Harold W. Streeter , Head of Department of Modern Languages, 1959-1968. Retired from Lafayette College in 1968.

done well academically in terms of any academic work at Lafayette, and this would have been October of my freshman year. I felt somewhat better. My grades did improve over the course of the remaining five or six weeks of the semester. I ended up getting an A on the second exam in history which brought my overall grade up, but again my grades that semester were Bs and Cs, and I got an F in calculus. And I wanted to transfer.

VF: Why did you choose to not transfer?

GG: Two reasons. I had actually written away for an application to a school to transfer, a public institution in New York, the State University of New York. And I was home over the Christmas break when that transfer application came, but the same day in the mail there came a letter from the History Department. And the letter from the History Department said that because of my overall performance in history and also how I had done on the achievement test, I was one of a group of students who had pre-registered for History 2[9] who were being chosen to take part in an advanced seminar for students who were taking History 2. We would go to the lectures, which met three days a week, but at the same time, we were exempt from the weekly discussion sections. Instead we would meet every two weeks, or maybe once a month. I can't remember how frequently. But we would discuss readings related to the course. But at the same time, for each class meeting we would have to prepare critiques of the various books and articles that we read. So the readings that we read largely gave us different interpretations about historical events or historical personalities. And that's one of the benefits of the history department here, that you were exposed to different points of view in terms of

[9] Origins and Development of Western Civilization

presentation and the study of historical material. And then we were supposed to critique and write our impressions of these various readings. And then we were supposed to talk about this because this was a seminar class. I felt very comfortable in that particular format, and I did well in terms of that history course. But when I got that letter in January before I actually enrolled in the course, at least that made me feel good, that somebody thought that I was doing well that they would recommend me for this particular class. And again, I was one of maybe three freshmen in this class for History 2. The other students were sophomores.

VF: Who were your favorite professors and why?

GG: That's a lengthy question, and I'm taking it very seriously, partly because I had very good professors here, but there are different types of professors here. There are people who influenced me in the nature of what they taught in the classroom, and there are people who influenced me in terms of some of the values that I've learned from life… life-long lessons. And both of those groups of professors influenced me in terms of making me the type of person that I am. I ultimately became a history major, so I was deeply impacted and affected by the history professors under whom I studied. I didn't take any courses from Richard Welch[10], and it's one of my regrets in terms of Lafayette. I never had a chance to take a course from him. He was my advisor during my freshman and sophomore year, but I couldn't take a course from him during my junior year. He taught American History, American Diplomatic History and Contemporary American

[10] Richard E. Welch, Jr., Associate Professor of History (1962-1970) and Chairman of the Interdepartmental Program in International Affairs.

History going up to maybe the early 1960s. He was on sabbatical leave during my junior year, and he was away for that entire and then my senior year, because I was taking education courses that met the same time that his history courses met, I couldn't take any of his history courses cause I had needed the education courses for my second field which I'll talk about. But, I did take courses from Al Gendebien[11]. He was the chair of the department in history, and I took two, at least two courses from him. His area of specialization was European History. I took one course that he taught by himself, and I took one course that he co-taught with Robert Weiner[12]. And this was Robert Weiner's first semester at Lafayette. So I took his courses in European History. What I learned from him was how to give a good lecture. How to give a lecture that will be engaging. How to give a good lecture that would be informative in terms of content information. How to give a good lecture in terms of style and delivery. And that's something I admired him. I took a course from Jacob Cooke[13], who was a distinguished scholar of the early national period in American history. And he largely focused upon the work of Alexander Hamilton. He taught a course in terms of American political and constitutional history to the end of the American Revolution just up until about 1830 or 1840. His courses were not necessarily lecture courses per se, but he would come into the classroom, and Jacob Cooke was a short individual, very cocky and very self-assured. He'd come into the classroom and give you the impression that he knew it all, and he did. But what he did was he was masterful in terms of getting students to discuss and participate in terms of classes. He exposed me to the dynamics in terms of teaching, that

[11] Albert W. Gendebien, Professor of History (1962-1978) and Head of the History Department (1967-1977).
[12] Robert I. Weiner, Instructor in History (1969-1974).
[13] Jacob E. Cooke, John Henry MacCracken Research Professor of History (1962-).

teaching isn't always based upon lecture, and in terms of engagement of students, in terms of the materials that the students have read. He was very good in terms of incorporating discussion in terms of his preparation. I learned that from him in addition to the course material. I took courses from John Coleman[14]. John Coleman was, a rather stiff, a rather formal, and a rather protician individual. As a lecturer, he was dry. He knew his material, but he was not necessarily the best or the most dynamic or the most engaging lecturer. But, for example, he was the type of person who could also give you a very informative lecture, but a lecture you might not necessarily be interested in terms of the techniques of colonial shipping and ship making in terms of New England in the early 1700s. But still, I learned a lot from him. I learned a lot from George Heath[15]. George Heath was a… He was an institution in terms of his time at Lafayette. George Heath had a sense of humor. He was wry. He could be sarcastic and he also for example would make… He was a punster, and he would also make references to sexual behavior in terms of historical personalities. George Heath was the type of person who could get, if there were fifty people in his class, he could have fifty people in his class on a Saturday morning because just in terms of his humor and his lecturing style. And he was a real eccentric 'cause he used to run across the campus everywhere he went. *(Laugh)* And he was about maybe, he was in his fifties at that time. But, he was a real character. And I learned, for example, that one has to have a sense of humor, that one doesn't necessarily have to take everything so seriously, but one could be self-deprecating and still get the lessons over. I just told you something about teaching styles and teaching personalities, but more importantly, these men allowed me to, when I became a history major, to do the

[14] John M. Coleman, Associate Professor of History (1958-1971).
[15] George D. Heath, III, Associate Professor of History (1960-1977).

type of research that I wanted to do. I had an interest in terms of African-American history and African-American culture. It was not necessarily being discussed in terms of the courses that I was taking. But, for example, they would encourage me to do pursue research in terms of my particular area of interest. For my seminar, and history majors had to take a seminar, and in junior year I took a seminar from Charles Cole[16] who was the then Provost of Lafayette College. He was a historian, an academic historian. So he taught a seminar in American history and from him I learned how to conduct American… read historical research. We read the book *What is History?* by the English historian E. H. Carr which is one of the classic texts about what is history as a discipline, and how does one discuss historical work. We read that book. For his seminar, I wrote a paper on the development of the black church in the United States, focusing upon largely black Protestant denominations and how enslaved peoples learned Christianity and then how enslaved peoples start to reinterpret Christianity to deal with their social realities but also in terms of what Jesus meant to them in terms of New Testament interpretations, and also in terms of how enslaved peoples became familiar with the Bible and offered a degree of sympathy to the struggles of the children of Israel when they were enslaved in Egypt. But, I wrote that particular paper. There weren't sources at Lafayette that allowed me to do the paper. But I did make use of sources in public libraries in New York, particularly in terms of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture[17]. And that's how I first learned about the Schomburg because of some of the writing assignments that I had to do for professors here. I mentioned George Heath. He taught courses on the history of

[16] Charles C. Cole, Jr., Dean of the College (1958-1967) and Provost and Dean of the College (1967-1970).
[17] Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, 515 Malcolm X. Boulevard New York, New York, 10037.

England. But for his course, "The History of England to 1588" or something like that, I wrote a paper on the Wat Tyler Revolt of 1381. Wat is "W-A-T," Tyler Revolt, which was a peasant revolt in England against - peasants would have to pay taxes. This would be part of what would later be described as the new social history, the study of history from below, the study of the struggles of working people 'cause history has largely been presented as the study of winners, and the study of elites. But I wrote this paper on the English peasant revolt. For his second course, in terms of English history since 1588 or something like that, I wrote a paper on Sir John Hawkins and his efforts to… He was one of the early English slave trading captains. So I wrote a paper on England's efforts to become involved in the slave trade, and how that led to the wealth in terms of England, but also in terms of the enslavement of peoples of African descent to be dispersed throughout the Americas. And I wrote that for a paper on English history. We weren't talking about English overseas expansion, but I could link that, and I was encouraged to do that. I took George Heath's course, "Europe in the Age of Revolution," which was a study of revolutions in Europe from 1789 to 1848. But my paper was on the Haitian Revolution and the impact of the French Revolution and the principles enunciated in the French Revolution: liberté, egalité, and fraternité; and how enslaved peoples in Haiti and also some free people of color in Haiti interpret those principles to call for an ending of slavery in Haiti, but also in terms of the establishment of the Haitian Republic. Now I wrote that paper for George Heath, and he was fully receptive. I got As in most of these classes and then the classes I didn't get As I got Bs. But, I got mostly A's in classes. People were appreciative of what I did. I took a course from Al Gendebien and Robert Weiner during my senior year, but because of the student strike that year I didn't have to

turn in a paper. And the research that I conducted was on the Otello-Ethiopian War between 1935 and 1939 and this was a course in European history. But in talking about Italy during the years of Benito Mussolini, and Mussolini's efforts to try to avenge Italy's honor for having been defeated by the Ethiopians in 1896. I wrote this paper on the Otello-Ethiopian War of 1936. I researched the paper 1936-1939. The point is, that for example, each from each of these men I learned about the historian's craft: what it is to do a historical research; how does one do historical research; the sources that one can consult; and then how does one write up his findings in terms of having done this work. In other words, I learned the historian's craft in terms of what I would later become in terms of my career after Lafayette. Those are vital lessons, and that's why I've talked in some length in terms of what I've got from each of these individuals. But there are other individuals who've impacted me in terms of values that I've learned that didn't necessarily have to deal with my occupation. But in terms of people skills and also in terms of challenging some assumptions that I might have held about people and who they are. One individual was Dean Richard Dowall[18]. Dick Dowall, and his name was "D-O-W-A-L-L" was at Lafayette for two years. He and Herman Kissiah[19] were hired at the same time. Herman Kissiah was hired as the Dean of Students. Dick Dowall was hired as Dean of Residence. I met him through my roommate who, my sophomore roommate who was a resident assistant or a proctor in McKeen Hall. But, when I became a proctor the next year I had conversations with Dick Dowall, and I was starting to become very angry and very embittered. And, he would allow me to talk to him and just to vent my frustrations but at the same time he was a voice of reason that he would listen to me,

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[19] Herman C. Kissiah, Dean of Students (1967-).

perhaps empathize with me, but not in a condescending manner or a patronizing manner, but just in terms of just allowing me to vent some of my frustrations but not at the same time in which he would try to go overboard to show that he was on my side. He was never condescending, but he was a friendly voice and an open and sympathetic ear to whom I could voice some of my concerns. And this was before Dave Portlock[20] came on campus. Second person is James Vitelli[21]. I took American Civilization 66, and I had worked with Jim Vitelli in terms of helping to set up the parameters for that course. American 66 would be "The Black Man In American Civilization" - the first course taught at Lafayette that dealt with the experiences of people of African descent. And that course arose out of student interest, and we got that course created, and I can talk more about that later. But, Jim Vitelli impacted me and affected me, partly because I liked his teaching style, but also in terms of one particular event that happened. We were discussing the literature of the Harlem Renaissance and this was about maybe the third or fourth week of the class. My interest in African-American literature or what I knew of African-American literature was largely based in terms of the more modern period or the then contemporary writers: Lorraine Hansberry, the playwright; James Baldwin, the novelist and essayist; and Mary Brokay the playwright and also the poet. So I was more interested in terms of reading their works, and we're talking about writers of the 1920s. This is the 1960s, but the 1920s… time had passed. Mean, I knew Langston Hughes, and I knew much of his work. We had discussed Langston Hughes. We were discussing Floyd McKay, and then we were reading from an anthology that we had and I said, "Why do we have to read these writers? Why can't we go on to discuss more recent writers?"

[20] David A. Portlock, part time Consultant to Dean of Students. Portlock was appointed in 1968.
[21] James R. Vitelli, Associate Professor of English (1960-1968) and Professor of English (1968-1978).

Jim Vitelli put down the book. He was not pleased with the question, but he took the question somewhat seriously, and then he responded. And, he asked me, "Did I know of… He asked me, and I remember this. He said, "Do you know who Rudolph Fisher is?" And that's one of the writers that we were going to be discussing the next week, and I said, "No." Then he began to tell me about who Rudolph Fisher was, and he said, "You shouldn't criticize that which you don't know." That's a valuable human lesson. I was acting upon assumptions based upon impatience. I wanted to study more recent writers, but arrogance. I assumed I knew it all, and he wasn't telling me anything I didn't know. And basically what he was trying to tell me that, for example, to get a true and full appreciation of something, you don't always rush to the present, but you look at the development, the traditions, and themes within a development of what we would now call a canon. So I learned that. But it's a lifelong lesson that I got from him in terms of that particular issue. Probably the white faculty member who most impressed me was Samuel Craig[22]. Samuel Craig had been hired in the Education Department. Clay Ketchem[23] was in the Education Department, and she was the only woman who taught courses in the Education Department. But by my late sophomore, early junior year I was becoming increasingly interested in terms of perhaps teaching after I graduated from Lafayette. I was a history major, but what was I going to do with this history degree? I thought briefly about going to law school, but I abandoned that prospect largely because what I

[22] Samuel B. Craig, Jr., Assistant Professor of Education

[23] Clay A. Ketcham, Director of Reading and Testing (1962-1966), Assistant Professor of Latin and Director of Reading and Teaching (1966-1967), Associate Professor of Latin and Education and Director of Reading and Testing (1967-1968), and Associate Professor of Latin and Education (1968-1973). During this time period Ketcham was the only woman professor on campus.

knew about lawyers was coming from Perry Mason[24]. In other words, lawyers go up and get up in the courtroom and argue. Never thought I'd see myself being in the courtroom; it's funny I stand in the classroom, but never thought I could see myself in the courtroom. So, and again because I had a very skewed notion of what lawyers did, I didn't want to be a lawyer, and so I decided I was going to be a teacher. Partly because there was increasing interest at that time to have more and more black males become secondary school teachers or elementary school teachers, and there was a demand for black teachers. Clay Ketchem's courses were too traditional in terms of the course offerings. Sam Craig came in as a breath of fresh air in terms of energy and trying to revitalize the educational course offerings, and he also made his courses quote unquote 'relevant' in terms of the issues we discussed. We discussed contemporary issues in terms of education. So I remember that for one of his classes, and it might have been "Introduction to Education" or maybe there might have been a course called "Education and Society." We read the book by Jonathan Kozol K-O-Z-O-L called *Death in the Early Age*[25], which is a study about the impact of public school education in Boston on black students in Boston. And it was based upon his experiences as a black, as a teacher. He's white. Kozol is white. This is a teacher in the public schools of Boston in dealing with black students. But, he wrote largely about his frustrations dealing with the school board and the school administration, that how the…, and that's the title of the book. That the policies of the school committee in Boston were largely calling the mental and social death of black school children at an early age. Powerful book, and it's interesting now that I'm in Boston 'cause it's also a book that I'm using for my, in terms of my current

[24] Courtroom drama television show staring Raymond Burr. Series ran from 1957-1966.
[25] Full title: *Death at an Early Age; The Destruction of the Hearts and Minds of Negro Children in the Boston Public Schools*.

research on race relations and African-American protest in Boston. But, I was first exposed to that book in his class when we read it and also when we discussed it. When I was taking courses from Sam Craig there were also issues taking place about City University of New York, particularly in terms of City University of New York's move to establish open admissions. So we would have the discussions and debates in terms of education classes about open admissions. What would it mean to the quality of instruction if students who were to enter City University of New York who were not thought to be of the caliber of City University students or City College students of the past? What happens when, lets say, the aim of the educational mission clashes with that of the aim of communities in terms of communities want inclusion, schools to say, well perhaps, you know, what happens? Those were the type of issues that we were discussing. And that was different from what Clay Ketchem was discussing so I found these to be very interesting. But what I really liked… Sam Craig was a white male southerner. And, in addition to George Heath, who was a white male southerner and Jacob Cox[26] who's a white male southerner. I grew up in a black working class family. My parents were both born in the south, although I was born in New York. But probably what , I had stereotype notions about white southerners. This is based upon having seen the footage of the civil rights movement on television. White southerners were mean. White southerners were racist. And white southerners killed black people. And those were the images I held about white Southerners. I didn't know anything about decent white southerners, and had never met one. So consequently, when I came in contact with these three individuals I might have been at first somewhat leery of these individuals, and I might have made assumptions that these men, products of the south, and southerners by

[26] William A. Cox, Instructor in History

birth, might have been racist or in my estimation they were probably racist. They proved me wrong, and particularly Sam Craig, who was an eminently fair individual, a very supportive individual of me as a student and also a very supportive individual of black students. Sam Craig was not… He was… had a tenure track appointment, but he was not tenured. He did not get tenure. And that's really one of the things I really regret about Lafayette. Sam Craig should have been tenured. But, the impact that he had on me was one that he told me that for example I shouldn't pre-judge people by who they are in terms of where they were born. Each person is an individual and once you get to know the individual person and not act upon prejudices. It's probably something internally that I would have said to white students should look at black people as individuals. But here is somebody who told me that the reverse is true in terms of how black people look at white Southerners. See beyond, for example…, go beyond the accent that you hear, but gauge the worth of the person. And that's an invaluable lesson. It transcends racial boundaries in every situation, but it's a lesson that was imparted to me not necessarily by what I was told in the class, but how he treated me, and the relationship that we did have. Sam Craig was also one of the white faculty members who openly identified with the ABC[27]. I don't know if that was a disadvantage to his tenure case or not. He was someone who I deeply respected. Last would be Dave Portlock. Dave Portlock would be the first African-American administrator hired at Tufts, excuse me, at Lafayette.

VF: Yes.

[27] Association of Black Collegians

GG: And he was hired at Lafayette beginning in the fall of 1968. We had not been consulted about his having been hired, but when we came back on the campus in the fall of 1968, the ABC had just been formed, and we heard that there was somebody who's working as a special consultant to the Dean of Students. And instantly we did not seem him being, perhaps an advocate on our behalf, but somebody that the university, the College might have hired to try to temper us and control us. So we were initially leery of him, initially until we met him. But we had heard from some people who had better contacts in Easton than I did, that they were seen as being quote unquote "alright." That he was somebody that we perhaps could confide in. So we had an initial meeting with him 'cause Dave was part time, so he came at Tufts, excuse me, he came to Lafayette. After his day job which was at Easton Area High School, he was on campus either two or three days a week and on Saturday morning. But, we had… We had a meeting with him, struck it off well, and then thereafter individuals as well as groups would always meet with Dave on most of the days he was here. Whatever work was being done, obviously we were keeping him from it in terms of paperwork and that because we were always in his office. We talked to him about a wide variety of matters. Dave was about ten years older than us. So we could talked to him about things that what it meant to be a black male on this campus or a black male in the United States. He gave us advice. He was always trying to prod us to do better in terms of class. Obviously he had a list in terms of our grades and our records. And he was prodding us to do better in terms of class. He understood our frustrations, but he didn't want us to wallow in self-pity. That we should overcome our individual frustrations. In other words, we were here because we were talented individuals and therefore we should exert ourselves to our maximum ability and

not necessarily sulk and, for example, and not necessarily concentrate on our work. We needed somebody to tell us that, but we were more receptive hearing somebody black tell us that than somebody white. So we listened to his advice. There were some things that he could do for us. For example in the office he helped publicize some our activities particularly when black students began to write some of our first literary efforts or quasi literary efforts. If you read those things, for example. *(Both laugh)* That's okay, thirty years from now you're going to read something that you wrote when you are Lafayette, and you're going to say, "I don't believe I wrote that." *(Both laugh)* But, at least it gave us a way in which we could vent our frustrations and put it on paper rather than either keeping it within or striking somebody. So it was a useful outlet for us to voice some of our feelings and some of our discontent and some of our alienation. We also published a social guide for, a directory of black students in Lehigh Valley. That was instrumental because it allowed us to be in contact with each other. We could know the names of the men and women who attended the other schools of the institution. And that was vitally important to me 'cause my first job at the ABC was set up as the Social Coordinator, and I was in charge of the parties. But now, I had the list of the names of people, so I could… it made it much easier in terms of trying to call people, "Oh, we're having a party here." Or "What's going on on your campus?" So, that's what Dave did in terms of his first years here. There were some things we weren't going to tell Dave. So we might have told him when we had our, when we issued our demands, but we didn't tell him what we were going to say. And certainly, and later I'll talk about, didn't tell him about the march on the president's house. We didn't tell him about that. But, I'll address that later.

VF: What was *The Black Voice*?

GG: *The Black Voice* was a collection of essays. It was free form in terms of content. Essays, poetry, statements that people might have made about their experiences at Lafayette or their experiences in the United States. I wrote one poem called "Bourgeoisie Blues," which was … I was calling for social responsibility by educated people, educated black people in terms of being concerned about people who were not as educated or people who lived in urban centers. So, in other words, I was saying that people should not necessarily concentrate on their individual aims and goals but perhaps also be concerned about the well being of other black people. I wrote another collection of statements. It was called *At Home.* The National Scholarship and Service Fund and Negro Students had written in the publication I had received three years earlier. It said that Negro students should feel at home at Lafayette. But what I then decided to do was to say well what does being at home mean in terms of the social isolation that I felt? At home meant that, for example, you'd never see a black woman. You wouldn't have much of a social life, at least in terms of my first two years at Lafayette. You didn't study anything that was dealing with the experiences of people of African descent. At home meant that if you went to a Lafayette football game and or a basketball game, in particular, and Lafayette was playing another team, and that team had black players, the black players would be called names such as guerilla and ape. At home meant being here on Thanksgiving. And spending Thanksgiving dinner at the college diner because no one asked you to go to dinner over Thanksgiving. In other words, at home was not at home. And, it was… it was that type of thing.

VF: How frequently was *The Black Voice* published?

GG: Probably there were two issues of it. We had hoped to have it come out more frequently, but you have to keep in mind what publishing meant then. What it meant is that, for example, we would write our particular essays. Then we would type the particular essays. Then we would take them to Dave's office for the secretary in the Dean of Student's Office who would type the essay on stencil on mimeograph paper so then they could run it off. Okay. It was a long, detailed printing process. So we turned out two, at least I think there were two issues. I don't know if we did a third. One issue my junior year, and one issue my senior year. We had hoped to come out with more issues but at least we came out with those two. What we did for the first issue of *The Black Voice* we used what was our then senior year. We had hoped to come out with more issues but at least we came out with those two. What we did for the first issue of *The Black Voice* we used what was our then symbol which was a clenched fist, and that was the logo. And we chose the clenched fist deliberately as a means to show unity and solidarity among the black men on campus. But also in terms of tribute to how the Black Panthers[28] might have used the clenched fist as a rallying symbol. But also in tribute to John Carlos and Tommie Smith[29], two black male sprinters at the 1968 Olympics who raised clenched fists when they were in the medals stand after they had been awarded the gold and bronze medals while "The Star Spangled Banner" was being played they raised

[28] The Black Panther Party of the United States which believed that the historical experiences of black people in America could be retold through Marxist-Leninist ideology.
[29] Carlos and Smith were known for their Black Power salute on the medal stand at the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City, Mexico. Smith finished first and Carlos third in the 200 meters. On the medal stand each man bowed their head and raised their fists in a Black Power salute.

clenched fists. So, this was in tribute to them because the ostracism that they had received in terms of their political protest during the playing of "The Star Spangled Banner."

VF: What was *Rapped In Black*?

GG: *Rapped In Black* was a publication that the admissions office came out, and I think *Rapped In Black* was published for about five or six years before it ceased publication. But it came out in 1969/1970, the first issue. What the admissions office did, it was designed to increase the recruitment of black males, but now Lafayette was going towards coeducation to black females. So it was designed to increase interest in terms of Lafayette from black male students and from black female students. Five or six black male students and Dave Portlock were given questions to which we were to respond. And the black male students differed in terms of their points of view and differed in their, in terms of their perspective. So the opinions could vary in terms of the answers to the questions. Then these pictures, these responses were tabulated and what happened then was the fact that they were reprinted in response to the particular questions. People asked about the social life of a black student at Lafayette, the cost for Lafayette, what it meant to be at Lafayette. And also, because we were trying to encourage students to come to Lafayette that if they had any questions they could write to us in terms of their, about their interests and other questions in terms of Lafayette. There were pictures of individual black students throughout the magazine and many of these pictures were staged. In other words, that, for example, a photographer would take picture of these. It

wasn't random shots, but these were staged. Many of the pictures were staged. So there is one picture and there was, it was… are five black students on the steps of the Skillman Library. Two going in. Two going out. And one to the side. That was a staged picture. Okay. The picture at the party was not a staged picture. That was actually a real picture. The picture of the black table, and I'll talk more about the black table, that was a staged picture. But some of the pictures were staged. Others of the pictures were canvass pictures of Lafayette. We came up with the name *Rapped In Black* 'cuz obviously we were using the term rap in what it meant then, not in reference to music, but in terms of people having conversations. People rap with on another or people to or, but we were using the term rap 'cuz the admission office wanted, was contemplating the use of the term "I Am Curious Black." There was a film in the late 1960s called *I Am Curious Yellow*[30] which deals with the sexual coming of age of a young woman. But basically they wanted to make use of that title "I Am Curious" 'cuz of the reference to the movie. But also, and "I Am Curious Black" that if anyone whose interested in Lafayette, has any questions or interest in Lafayette they can find some of the questions and answers in terms of this brochure. We didn't like that so we came up with the name *Rapped in Black* and that was the term that was used throughout its existence. We didn't… I didn't necessarily like some of the responses 'cuz they was attributed to me that I didn't make. In other words somebody else's words were incorporated within some words I said to give the impression of… but it was under my name. But on the whole *Rapped in Black* was a very positive recruiting brochure, and certainly, for example, there were results evident in the next spring when there were thirty-three black students in the freshman class.

[30] *I Am Curious Yellow* a 1967 Swedish film directed by Vilgot Sjőman.

TAPE ONE SIDE TWO

VF: How did you feel about the issue of coeducation?

GG: I was a supporter from day one. Again, one of my major frustrations with Lafayette, and it became evident shortly after I was here. I mean, the fact that Lafayette was an all male school had no bearing on my coming here. I knew it was all male. But knowing it was all male in terms of a recruiting brochure and experiencing it being all male were markedly different. So I was supportive, very much supportive of coeducation and for two reasons. I was supportive of coeducation because, for example, and even though it was going to take place after I graduated, it would increase the number of black students on campus, not only black men but also black women. Secondly, I was supportive of coeducation 'cause it might do something for the social life of black students on this campus. So that, for example, we could, there could… And there's a third reason I was supportive of coeducation, and it's one of the major regrets about Lafayette. I never had a woman in my class, in any of my classes between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two. And I only had one female instructor. But, what does that mean in terms of socialization with women? What kinds of attitudes could I get about women? I could get attitudes about women that would be unhealthy. And, for example, some of the attitudes that one could get on this particular campus is a lack of respect for women. Or that women are only supposed to be used and exploited and abused. I never had a chance to interact with a woman as a equal in terms of any sort of conversation and

any sort of classroom assignment. But, for example, I could have an attitude towards women that would largely say that women are people who should be sexually exploited. And that's one of the unhealthy aspects of coeducation, of single sex institutions – that you often times you don't have, can't get an appreciation for someone as an equal to you. You either put them on a pedestal or you seek to violate all of them. And that's also another reason why I supported coeducation. When a rally was held on the steps of Markle Hall[31] in my junior year for male students to show their support for coeducation, and before the strike of 1970, this was, that was the largest demonstration and rally at Lafayette in my years at Lafayette. People of all ideological points of view, all political views came to that rally. No matter if you were a conservative student, a supporter of fraternities, or in support of ROTC[32], or if you're a critic of ROTC, critical of fraternities, and defined yourself as a political liberal, political rally or a political radical, people agreed on coeducation. And the ABC emphatically supported coeducation. There was only one male student who was against coeducation, among black male students was against coeducation, because he thought it would change the tone of the ABC from a political organization in terms of some of the work that it was doing to a social organization. In other words, an organization that was only interested in holding parties.

VF: When was the ABC created?

[31] Rally in support of coeducation held on February 27, 1969, on the steps of Markle Hall. A crowd of 750 supporters attended. See *The Lafayette* February 28, 1969.
[32] Reserve Officers Training Corps. All freshmen and sophomores were required to take part in ROTC until the faculty voted to drop the requirement in October 1968.

GG: The ABC was created in the spring of 1968. For a year and a half black students, a small number of black students were frustrated, but we often times didn't share our frustrations with other black students, and we often times didn't seek to do anything to improve our conditions either as individuals or as part of a collective. Black student organizations were in the process of being formed prior to this particular time. So, comparatively speaking, the founding of the ABC is relatively late in comparison to other schools. But Lafayette had hosted a conference in 1968 on the crisis in the city[33], which was dealing with urban issues, and many urban issues had a racial component. So many of the… two of the speakers addressed those issues and one of whom was Dr. Nathan Wright, a black Episcopal priest who had convened the Black Power Conference in Newark, New Jersey, in the late summer of 1967[34]. After he gave his presentation, and I found his presentation to be very impressive, because he was saying things that I wanted to hear. But he was also saying things that were starting to gel in my own racialized conscience. 'Cause I came here as an integrationist. I firmly believed in attendance at nonviolent peaceful reform to bring about civil rights. Which had won major victories. But, I was starting to become disillusioned with that strategy, and I was also starting to look at the problems of black people that the Civil Rights Movement could not address. And I was also dealing with questions dealing with racial pride and black identity. So after Wright spoke, a group of us surrounded him for a small group discussion where we were continuing to talk about racial identity and racial protest and we were really impressed with his answers. So I was standing next to one black sophomore, no one

[33] The conference was held on March 13, 1968, as part of the first All College Convocation. The theme of the program was "The City, 1968--Chaos or Order." Speakers included Dr. Nathan Wright, Jr. See *The Lafayette*, January 19, 1968, and March 15, 1968.
[34] The National Conference on Black Power was held in July 1967 in Newak, New Jersey.

black junior, I was a sophomore, that I didn't know very well. He was an engineer, and I was in liberal arts, and we hadn't had any classes. And he was in the fraternity that, and I was in a fraternity, but we hadn't been close. We spoke to each other or nodded each other in terms of passing, and I knew of each other on campus, and I knew his name, but that was about it. But we were talking about our frustrations at being at Lafayette and then the other, three other black students who were around us started talking about our frustrations. So the five of us started to say, "Why don't we meet three days from now and just talk and break down what we consider to be our frustrations and what we could do about them." So we got together five days later. There was a black freshman I had wanted to invite to that meeting, but he wasn't in town, and he had gone home and missed the, and missed that presentation. So the five of us met in the basement of Marquis Hall, and we talked about the need to form a black student organization, but we didn't know what type. So we issued a call to, of the black students just to meet to try and talk about an organization. So maybe about a week later, it was a group maybe about eleven or twelve black students, and there were probably maybe thirty black students on campus, but approximately one third of the, maybe about one third of the black students on campus came to this particular meeting. We talked about one of the… the organization. Some people wanted to talk about setting up a black fraternity, but we said, "No." Other students were talking about setting up an independent black organization, one that did not, was not, didn't have to be recognized by the College, but one which we wanted to work with and for black student organization but not rely upon recognition by the College. And I supported that point of view, but the majority of people at that meeting didn't, and we had a vote. The majority of the meeting, of people's call for the

creation of a black student organization would the one that needed to… One that was recognized by the College, so you get funding from the student council to, for some of our work. Got lot of view prevail. And I supported that view because I wanted to see a black student organization even though I wanted to see one that was independent I supported the founding, the form, the black student organization that had to be recognized. I was a member of the student council. So we were told that in order for a student organization to be recognized that you needed a constitution and a name. We really hadn't come up with a name for the organization. And we didn't have a constitution. So Rick Cummings[35] who was then a junior wrote to a friend of his who was, who attended Princeton University, asking them for a constitution. So the Princeton group sent us a copy of their constitution, and we had a small meeting, maybe five, six, or seven people, so no more than seven people attended. We read and discussed the constitution of this Princeton organization. There were things that we liked about its structure, its organization, its aims and missions, what it attempted to do in its various committee structure. And there were some things that we changed. So we submitted a revised version of this constitution, and unfortunately I, we only had one copy of it, and that was the copy we turned in. And we submitted that to the, to the student council, and then we decided that since we had largely borrowed the constitution from Princeton, we borrowed the name. And they were the… The name of the black student organization at Princeton was the name Association of Black Collegians. Various blacks… college organizations had the names. Some were the Association of Black Collegians. Others were the Black Student Union. Others were the Afro-American Society. Others might have chosen names that were, let's say, that were East African, particularly Swahili, as

[35] Richard H. Cummings, Jr., Class of 1969.

those people started to discover Swahili. We didn't know Swahili so we didn't come up with an indigenous names based upon one of the seven principles of Kwanza[36]. We didn't even know about Kwanza. So we chose the Association, the name Association of Black Collegians that this was to be an organization of black students at Lafayette College. It was submitted to the student council, and we got a favorable recommendation from the student council after they go over their concerns about whether or not this was in the social, this was going to e a fraternity. Cuz there was some opposition at that time to fraternities in general, and there was some opposition to the causes that most of the fraternities had on campus that said fraternity members, most of the fraternities here did not rush black male students because they had clauses in their national constitutions that prohibited the fraternity as an organization from accepting into membership individuals who were not white males. So, for example, most fraternities did not have black members, and the College was trying to lean on fraternities to have their, their national change their charters that would allow them to rush men of different racial groups. So we were asked, "Was this a black fraternity?" And we were asked this question largely because the efforts of the College was attempting to try to change the charters of the largely white male fraternities on this campus. And we said, "No, it wasn't a fraternity." And we cited the fact that several of us were members of fraternities on campus, those fraternities that admitted black males. I was a member of Phi Kappa Tau which is no longer in existence. Several of the other black male students were members of Phi Kappa Tau. Other individuals were members of Kappa Delta Rho, but a majority of black male students who were among the early founders and of ABC were members of Phi, were

[36] Kwanza is an African-American spiritual and festive celebration occurring between December 26th and January 1st.

members of fraternities. So we said we weren't a… this organization was not going to be a fraternity. Then we were asked, for example, what about the name. "Why don't you change the name of the group to Association for Black Collegians?" And the question of prepositions was very important. We had said that this was an organization that was to be all black--the Association of Black Collegians. We were told by Dean Kissiah, and I don't think it was only coming from his office, but it might have been coming from other places within Lafayette, that the name should be Association for Black Collegians. In other words this would be a group composed of black and white students who were interested in issues pertaining to black collegians--the Association for Black Collegians. We rejected that name, and we were insistent even if it meant that we were not going to be recognized. We wanted an all black organization, but at the same time we were not… We could work with white students, interested white students, and number one we didn't think any white students would want to join anyway. But we were interested in working with white students on issues where we could work with white students as allies. But we didn't see the need to have an organization that would allow black students and white students as members of this particular organization. So we rejected that. I think we might have made a case, particularly when we stressed that we weren't a fraternity, and the name of the constitution, the Association of Black Collegians was accepted by the university. And so the ABC started functioning on its own accord throughout the spring semester of 1968 without College recognition. I think the College recognition came towards the end of that academic year, probably around April or May of 1968. Probably May of 1968. So by academic year 1968 when Dave Portlock joins, the ABC is already been established and recognized. Cuz there's some people who say that Dave Portlock

founded the ABC. He did not establish the ABC. We were in existence in, before he was hired.

VF: How many…how many white students were involved with ABC?

GG: In terms of being members, none. White student involvement with the ABC largely came in two forms. In the fall of 1969 members of the ABC, and you didn't have to… There were no dues or anything like that. So if you were a black student, we made you a member of the ABC. So it meant that, for example, we were speaking on behalf of all black students at Lafayette, but not every black student at Lafayette saw himself or affiliated himself with the ABC. But in 1969 we had a group of thirteen black freshmen who came in that year. I had de-brotherized from my fraternity, and I was also a dormitory proctor, so I had free board. So I chose to eat, not in Watson Hall which was an upper class dining and residential facility, but I chose to eat in Marquis Hall, and that way I could work with the entering black freshmen. So I got to know the entering black freshmen , and we had, and the… Some of them I knew their names because we had, I had written letters to them the year before when they were interested in applying to Lafayette. So they were very much active in terms of the organization, but because they, freshmen at in Marquis Hall at that particular time. We set up a table in the back of Marquis Hall that was referred to as the… We called it the black table. And initially black students sat there, but over the course of the first semester a few white students started to sit there. We had no problems. We didn't say, "Go away." The white students who sat there were largely people who were friendly with black students from their

various dorms. So a black student would come over to eat at the table, and he might bring some, not his roommate, but somebody who was on this floor and somebody who would be interested. And people would come over to the table. We had no problems with these individuals. They sat down, ate meals, cracked jokes, and the general things that we were talking about over the meals. Why we set up the black table partly is because, also it was a way in which we could see each other during various parts of the day. Most black students weren't in the same classes, so we'd see each other at lunch, and we'd see each other at dinner. And it's the same thing over the course of the day when you meet with you friends and just talk about what's going on during the day and what your plans might be, blah, blah, blah. But several white students were involved in the ABC. I mention this in part because there were letters that were written by some black freshmen to *The Lafayette*[37] in 1969 talking against the black table in Marquis Hall. But several of the white students who sat at the table wrote letters in our defense saying that they had sat at the table, they had no problems, they felt fully welcoming. And it's one of the thing that, for example, anything that sometimes seems all black many white students view hostilely. But these students were there, and they said we don't feel any pressure or anything like that. And so what they were doing was trying to educate other white students about the black table, and they were, they proved to be invaluable political allies. These were also individuals who helped us when we issued our demands in October of 1969, but I'll talk more about that later.

VF: How did you feel about the allegations that ABC's social budget was excessive?

[37] The Lafayette College student newspaper.

GG: I didn't feel as if it was excessive even though I, probably if I were to look at official records, I could probably see some things that, for example… This would have been in 1969/1970. There were some things that Dave sponsored in terms of whatever budget, or he saw, or maybe he had Herman Kissiah pay for them. Obviously the publishing costs of *The Black Voice*. They, the university paid for that. We didn't. I don't recall if we had a budget from the student council. But since we sought recognition we were certainly eligible for, to receive funds from the student council. Some of our budgetary items largely went for parties. If we had parties on campus, then perhaps the refreshments and the bill for refreshments were paid for… Someone… *(Both laugh)* So… I also remember for example and again this is probably something that was within budgets. This was my senior year, and I was the outgoing head of ABC. But there was a conference of black students to be held in, at Manhattanville College, which is located in Purchase, New York, outside of New York City. Several friends of mine from my high school, Manhattanville was still all female, had gone to Manhattanville. And they were having a party… And they were having a conference, a Black Arts Festival, and a party afterwards. And we were invited to go. None of us had cars at that particular time, because if you were on financial aid you were not allowed to have a car. But we wanted to go to the party. So we chartered a bus or asked Dave to charter a bus. And a lot of people said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. I want to go the party. Yeah. Yeah." And so we made arrangements for the party. And we had this chartered bus and maybe ten or twelve people on the bus. A lot people came up with reasons at the last minute why they couldn't go on the bus… "I got to finish this paper. I got to do this, or I got to do that."

Or something. But people didn't go to… So we had this chartered bus taking twelve people from here to New York. They paid for it.

VF: Why did you leave your fraternity?

GG: I felt increasingly uncomfortable with being a member of that fraternity. I had brotherized, or I had joined that fraternity. Well, first of all, the fraternity was Phi Kappa Tau and… In the early, in the mid 1950s Phi Kappa Tau pledged its first black student. And, Phi Kappa Tau's national constitution said that Phi Kappa Tau membership was only for white males. The Alpha Omicron chapter, which was Lafayette, was in violation of this national norms when they sought, national norms when they sought to pledge a black student. The fraternity said, we would have to get rid of this individual and not accept him in terms of your pledge class or you would not be considered a member or you would be in violation of the fraternity's charter. To which credit, the members, or to their credit, the members of Phi Kappa Tau said, "No, we want this black pledge in the class." He continued to pledge and he became a brother in the fraternity. But the fraternity was asked to leave its national… It was expelled from its national cuz it was violation of the fraternity rules about membership. Over the course of the 1950s, black students were probably members of two fraternities: Phi Kappa Tau and Pi Lambda Phi. Both of which, neither of which is in existence right now. Pi Lambda Phi was predominantly Jewish, partly because Jewish students were also excluded from fraternities 'cuz some fraternities had charters saying that their membership was for gentiles only. So Jewish students had set up Pi Lambda Phi fraternity and because they

had been victims of discrimination and ostracism they offered opened membership up to anyone who was deemed acceptable to the membership of Pi Lambda Phi, but that also include students… They did not discriminate on the basis of race or religion. There were also Protestant students in that fraternity, white Protestant students as well as black Protestant students in that fraternity. Phi Kappa Tau had this history in terms of accepting black students throughout the late fifties and into the early 1960s. So, during the pledge period of my freshman year when I was going around and looking at fraternities, I happened to like this fraternity because there were two black sophomores among the three black men in that fraternity who I liked. And I noticed that these two black men, Bob Moffet[38], in the class of 1969, and Fred Stricklen[39], in the class of 1969, on occasions had dates for various concerts for various shows. I'd go to the shows even if I didn't have a date, but I would see these black men with dates. I wanted a date. *(Both laugh)* So, consequently, I pledged that fraternity because I liked Fred, and I liked Bob, and I got to know the fraternity's history. But I was less interested in terms of this is being a racially liberal fraternity where I might be accepted, but I wanted a date, and I figured if I hung around with these two black sophomores eventually I would have a date. So I pledged the fraternity. And I had very good experiences with most of my fraternity brothers. I did not know them beforehand. I even was an officer, and I didn't mention that. I was even an officer in that fraternity. But, I didn't mention that. But by my senior year, by my junior year, Bob had gotten married to his girlfriend who lived in Easton, and they were living off-campus. He graduated on time with his class. But he was, he came on campus, did his course work, then he had a part-time job, and his wife worked full

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39 Frederick D. Strickland, Jr., Class of 1969.

time, and then they had an apartment off campus. So, I really didn't see him. Fred Stricklen was involved with his girlfriend in Easton, and I didn't see him as frequently. I started hanging out with other students who were more actively involved in the ABC. So I was spending less and less time at the fraternity. I never lived there. But I spent less and less time in the fraternity, and I started to spend more and more time with other black students. So consequently, I felt less of an interest in terms of being involved in this fraternity, and I felt more of an interest and more of an affinity with other black students. So I debrotherized or left the fraternity. Many of my fraternity brothers were shocked that I did so. And by the time that I left, I was the only black brother in the fraternity. A few other people had pledged the fraternity, but they left. But I was the only black brother in the fraternity… So after I left, it was an all white organization, but one that had had black members.

VF: How would you describe race relations on campus during your college years?

GG: Indifferent. And I say indifferent largely because we were invisible. And it's often times akin to the *Invisible Man*[40]. If you don't see anyone or you don't acknowledge anyone in terms of their existence then you largely say there's no problem. So then largely for many white people on this campus, there was no such problem as race relations 'cuz we were invisible. So. But race relations were touchy because the faculty might have been more sensitive to questions of race relations than many of the students. I mentioned the fraternities, for example, the overwhelming majority of fraternities did not accept black men as members. That's a problem… But the fraternities didn't see it

[40] *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison (1952).

as a problem, nor did they identify it as a problem. Certainly in terms of, let's say social life, black males had very restricted social outlets. And for example, it was just an unspoken that if you were a black male at Lafayette, and if you didn't date a black woman, then you were going to have no social life whatsoever. There was no such thing, as let's say, dating across the racial line. Obviously race relations in terms of the curriculum. There were no black faculty members at Lafayette. Dave was the first administrator hired on campus, and he was part-time. You… well, there were no real discussions taking place about course work in terms of dealing with things that spoke to my needs and interests. Even… So consequently, it was largely a question of being invisible. We were considered to be, as the term was used then, 'tokens' of people who were encouraged to apply and brought to Lafayette as part of Lafayette's good will gestures and its racial liberalism. But, for example, we weren't here in sufficient numbers to indicate a real appreciation of black life and culture. They were trying to make us into white men, quite frankly in terms of socialization. That's one of the things that we balked at. I went home during my freshman year, and I didn't mention this in my speech[41], and one of my friends, my best friend from growing up, he was a year behind me, but we had been friends ever since we were six years old, five or six years old…. And he told me I talked 'funny.' He didn't use the word 'differently' or 'oddly,' but there was a lot of things in terms of speech and lingo from Lafayette that was starting to creep into my speaking patterns, and he couldn't understand what I was saying. And that's when I realized, in terms of a crisis… I was no longer black. I was very

[41] Speech presented at Lafayette College on March 4, 2202. Gill's speech, "There Was at Time…An Alumnus Reflects on Black Student Life at Lafayette College, 1966-1970," was the kickoff event for the Lafayette College Archives Oral History Project. A copy and a tape recording of this speech is housed in the College Archives.

comfortable in terms of being a Negro. I had a firm, I had a really good sense of, and I was not ashamed of who I was. But in the sense of my being here, I was being changed into something that I wasn't. That, for example, I was being, in the process of becoming a white man. And consequently it was that type of frustration that was also one of the reasons why we wanted to set up the ABC that we could have something that could allow us to be who we were by socialization. People who were black and not necessarily that we were going to be transformed into acceptable white men in black skins.

VF: Why did you believe that black awareness was important?

GG: Partly 'cuz some of the reasons that I had just told you… But also in terms of what was going on in terms of the country as a whole. That was taking place here at Lafayette was also a manifestation of some of the changes taking place in African-American political protest. Certainly, for example, people were starting to question integration, but more and more people were starting to embrace forms of black national thought and Black Nationalist identity. To talk, we were told about being Negroes and something you may not necessarily understand. But often times we were told to be ashamed of who we were in terms of our features, you know if your nose is too wide, if your lips are too thick, if your complexion is, if your hair isn't straight and fine. Those were the dominant messages that the culture was bombarding us with. You never saw any pictures of black models. And all standards of beauty in the 1960s were largely based upon white norms. Now, if you aspire to that, that would be one thing. But at the same time, I was proud of who I was. Okay. And I was just starting, as many people were just starting to resent the

being bombarded with these images about what was good, what was beautiful. Take the word… Take the word 'white' and for example, the word 'white' has all sorts of connotations and meanings in terms of the English language. Most of them are positive. Take the word 'black.' The word 'black' has so many negative meanings. White is considered to be pure, goodly, virtuous… Black does, largely denotes evil. So consequently what we were trying to do was to take away a meaning of a word 'black' that had negative and make it positive which is one of the reasons why we were saying we were black instead of Negroes. To give a more positive meaning to something that society had labeled as being, as being a negative. So we talked about those features. We're starting to grow our hair longer. Black males were no longer wearing processes. And starting to grow Afros. And that's one of the things I find interesting now that more and more black males are starting to let their hair grow. But is it for a political statement or is it because of a fashion statement? It's probably to the latter right now, that more and more black males are growing Afros as a fashion statement rather than a political statement. But the Afro initially was a political statement: I am proud of my bushy hair. I don't view it as being quote unquote 'nappy.' I don't feel the need to perhaps go to… I'll ask you a question: Have you had white roommates?

VF: Yes.

GG: Have they asked you about your hair?

VF: Yes. *(Laugh)*

GG: Why do they ask you about… They're fascinated at least in terms that you don't wash your hair everyday. Or they're very much interested in, particularly if you use a straightening comb, why are you using a straightening comb? Okay.

VF: All the time. (*Laugh)*

GG: But, for example… (*laugh),* You're proud of who you are, and you're also proud of your features. And you don't have to feel the need to have to justify why you take care of your hair the way that you do. Okay. But, it's those types of questions would often times allow us to say, "Say it loud: I'm Black and I'm proud." In other words, I'm proud of who I am, and I don't have to look like you. Or, to be a blackened version of you to have a sense of identity and also to be who I am. So it would be those types of questions that were starting to go through our minds in terms of black awareness and black identity. We no longer saw ourselves as being Negroes, but we saw ourselves as being black.

VF: What was *The Black Manifesto*?

GG: We gave our demands in October, on October 27, 1969. And there were five black students who spoke at that program. It was a packed program in Colton Chapel, and we listed our demands. Our demands would be more black students, more black faculty and administrators, a black house on campus, black studies, more black studies courses, and the end of neutralization of racism on campus. That was our programmatic, through us,

and they responded to that. But rather than just resort to let's say the formal demands and maybe sloganeering, we decided to put in writing explanations in terms of what we want and explanations in terms of what the College could do. And we called that *The Black Manifesto*. So that was a written document that I believe was maybe close to ten pages, and it was printed in Dave's office. *(Laugh)* That was circulated throughout the university as an explanation in terms of what we wanted.

VF: What was the reaction to it from black students, faculty, and white students?

GG: We took the… *The Black Manifesto* was crafted by a small group of us, probably no more than ten. It might have been the core leadership of the ABC and also black freshman. And we drafted *The Black Manifesto.* We then presented it to the ABC for its ratify… to ratify the document. There was no opposition in terms of the people who came to the ABC. Now, we professed to speak for every black student on campus, but we didn't. There were some students in their four years at Lafayette who never went to an ABC meeting. There were some people who only affiliated with the ABC when we were giving parties. But we professed to speak for and act on behalf of every black student on campus. We stressed unity sometimes when there wasn't full unity. So we were saying that every black student supported the aims and goals of the ABC. In terms of students and faculty it was probably mixed. I'll talk about student responses first. There were white students who supported the ABC demands, particularly white students who were first year students. White students had changed, as well as black students were changed who came in the fall of '69. They were different. Their high school experiences

had taken place in different times than people who were in my high school class, whatever our racial group. So many of the white students were more politicized. They wore longer hair, they had more facial hair, and they might have been more receptive to some of our arguments than let's say some white students who were three years older than they. So there were white students who supported us. I told you this about some of the white students who sat at the table. They supported us. Other white students, first year students supported us. Some of the more political, liberal white students on campus supported us. So there was no polling done so I can't tell you at least in terms of an exact breakdown, but there were white students who were supportive of us, there were white students who were not. The form of opposition that one could see was, for example, there was an instant where someone wrote a racist graffiti on the Watson Hall door. And it said, "Niggers Go Home" or something like that. The administration covered it up immediately once they found out about it. I don't know how that was ever resolved in terms of finding out who did it. But, for example, that incident took place. You'd see all sorts of graffiti, racist graffiti in the men's room. So, for example, people write ABC stood for Aborigines, Bastards, and Communists. But again, for example, that's graffiti. But you can get a sense in terms of attitude even though it my not necessarily be pervasive. There would be some snide comments made in terms of fraternity houses. Now again we don't really know what happened in every fraternity house because we weren't members of those fraternities. But, for example, you hear every now and then about some racist remark made in terms of some fraternity about the ABC and the demands of the ABC. In terms of faculty, there were few faculty who openly and publicly stated that they identified with the ABC. A few of them were younger faculty,

Sam Craig, as I mentioned in the Education Department, a few other younger faculty. For example, I believe Donnell Borock[42] who was in the Political Science Department, Raymond Shaunessy[43] who was in the Math Department, Stan Wilk[44] who was in the Anthropology Department. A few white faculty went on record in terms of supporting us. Unfortunately none of them got tenure. And they're not here to talk about their experiences in terms of working with and supporting black faculty. The Chaplain, F. Peter Savey[45], was very much firmly in terms of our corner… And he was a staunch supporter of the ABC. In terms of some of the more senior members of the faculty, some of them may have supported us, and they obviously did by the work that was done on the floor of the faculty, but they didn't tell us. I do remember one time coming from a, coming from South College, and I must have been going to Marquis Hall. But I don't remember were the faculty, there was a faculty meeting that day. Dave Portlock came out of the meeting, and Dave couldn't vote on the floor of the faculty nor could he speak unless he was asked to speak because he wasn't a member of the faculty. He came out of that meeting, and also Earl Pope[46], who was in the Religion Department, and Earl Pope couldn't say anything, but he said that the discussion of the demands got a favorable hearing. But he couldn't say. Now at that time, news of the faculty meetings, no students were allowed to attend faculty meetings. And news of what took place in terms of the faculty meeting was never reported in terms of *The Lafayette*. We submitted the

[42] Donald M. Borock, Instructor in Government and Law (1967).
[43] Edward P. Shaughnessy, Instructor in Mathematics (1963-1969) and Assistant Professor of Mathematics (1969-1979).
[44] Stanley T. Wilk, Instructor in Anthropology (1967).
[45] Rev. F. Peter Sabey, College Chaplain (1964-1972).
[46] Earl A. Pope, Associate Professor of Religion (1966-1980).

demand to President Bergethon[47]. We didn't get any action, so we didn't know what was going on. We didn't know that things were supposed to go to committees. We didn't know that there was supposed to be reviews and studies and debates and votes before action was taken. Then it would have to go to another level. We just thought if we turned this to the President, then three days later… You either going yes or no. No one explained to us what the process was. So we were becoming increasingly embittered and increasingly alienated. But there were faculty members who ultimately, who supported us. But the senior faculty members didn't tell us, and the junior faculty members who were somewhat more outspoken in supporting us unfortunately some of them didn't get tenure for reasons that may not have anything to have done, to do with the ABC, but the fact that they didn't get tenure.

VF: Now one of the demands was that there would be a Black Cultural Center. What was the original name of that center? And why was that name chosen?

GG: The demand for a black, the demand for the Black Cultural Center came out of a meeting that we had with President Bergethon in my junior year, we called for a black meeting space. The president had listened to us, and then he made a suggestion, and then when we called for a black meeting space, and we did that fall we got the meeting space which was a lounge in Watson Hall. And that served as a vital meeting space. That's where we had ABC meetings, that's where we did office work, and that's where we had our parties. But over the course of that year we wanted a house. We wanted more space because of the type of work that the ABC was doing. We were starting to do some

[47] Kaare Roald Bergethon, Lafayette College President, 1958-1978.

cultural work. And we would also invite speakers, and we would also have reading groups, and in addition to meetings in terms of the ABC. So we wanted a larger space, and that's when we made the demand for the house. And calling for the demand for the house what we wanted was to be a space that would be residential, but it was not to be so that every black student was to move in this particular space. But a space comparable for some black students and other black students could live wherever they wanted to. And at the same time to have meeting space for readings, for presentations by various guests invited to the campus, and other activities. And these public activities were to be open to everybody. Now it's one of the points I made last night and earlier today that sometimes there's an aversion by people who are white who don't like to frequent space that's dominated by people of color. They feel uncomfortable in terms of the role reversal. Yet we're expected to be comfortable in terms of going into places predominately, that are overwhelming white, and then we're supposed to get over our hang-ups. But many black people, many white people feel very uncomfortable coming into public space if it's space that's, let's say, in control by people of a racial group that is different than they. But this was to be open space that people… We said that our, some of our activities were not supposed to be for blacks only. They were open to any person on this campus who was interested, and that's one of the reasons why we wanted a house. So after we had the meeting with the Trustees, and I'll talk about that 'cause you haven't asked me about that, but after we had the meeting with the Trustees, it seemed as if the impetus was becoming stronger to give us a house. And we got the house, which was the house of Chaplain Savey, which was two houses. It was near where Hogg Hall is located today. When I left it was the Black Cultural Center. There was no formal name for it. Probably

when the name was adopted as *The Malcolm X Cultural Center*, I don't know when that was, but if you notice in several of our publications, the issues of *The Black World* are devoted to the memory and dedicated to the memory if Malcolm X. So largely he was quite instrumental and quite pivotal in terms of someone that we admired. So the name, the decision to name the cultural center after in memory of Malcolm X was a decision that was made after I graduated, but probably I can understand that it came from the respect that we had given to Malcolm X in citing Malcolm X in many of our published writings.

TAPE TWO SIDE ONE

VF: Now, tell me about the meeting with the Trustees.

GG: The meeting of the Trustees grew out of our frustrations over academia in 1969/ 1970. As I had indicated, for example, we had… After we issued our demands, we had… we had several meetings with administrators and with faculty, but those meetings largely proved unproductive in terms of our estimation. In other words, people were asking us all sorts of questions, but it seemed we weren't being told anything about action, about what the College was going to do, what the College was doing. So we were very frustrated in terms of what was going on. I was social coordinator of the ABC, but at the same time the freshman at that particular time were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the pace of change at Lafayette, and they were pressing me to do more and to find out information. So we wanted to have a meeting with the Trustees or we

wanted to have a meeting with someone, cause we could meet with the president on occasions, but we wanted to a meeting with someone with power. We had heard through one black student who worked in Marquis Hall that the Trustees were coming on campus in February, and they were going to have a luncheon in Marquis Hall. Another… We also heard from another student, one of my former roommates, who worked in Marquis Hall, and he worked in the faculty dining room that the Trustees were coming on campus. So we knew that they were coming on campus. What to do? We didn't know where the Trustees met, but we had a sense in terms of what their schedule was going to be, that after a meeting they were going to go the president's house for a reception. So we decided that we were going to meet with the Board of Trustees. And we didn't know that number one the Trustees don't schedule meetings on an impromptu fashion. We didn't care. So we met at the president's house, and we, to my knowledge, didn't have a written agenda in terms of what we were going to do. But twenty, more than twenty of us, it was probably closer to twenty-five, but a clear majority of black students on the campus - a few, perhaps two or three seniors, but mostly, nearly all of the freshman. Quite a few of… no, there weren't that many sophomores but, and nearly all the juniors were part of this group. We marched across campus from Watson Hall, down High Street, across the quad, to the president's house on the corner of McCartney and College Ave. We got to the president's house, and we entered the yard, and there were twenty-five of us and one person had a date, so there were twenty-five males and one female. Rang the doorbell to the president's house. Mrs. Bergethon as the wife of the president and the host of this reception for the Trustees came to the door. And we said we wanted to speak to President Bergethon and the Trustees. So she wouldn't allow us in, but she got her

husband. This is February so… and it's cold. So her husband came to the door, and we said we wanted to meet with the Trustees, and initially President Bergethon said no that that the Trustees don't meet with students, Trustees didn't meet with Faculty either. And that anything that we could say we could relate to him, we could say to him, and then maybe he might say something to the president, to the Trustees. And we said no, we want to meet with the Trustees. So we're milling around on the president's yard and on the steps of his house, and it was finally decided that a small group of ABC leaders could come in and speak to the Trustees. And, maybe four of us were chosen. I was coordinator and maybe two or three other people. So we went in to speak to the Trustees. We were dressed informally, in terms of what we generally wore. Some of us might have had jeans, others of us might have on khakis. People had afros, some of which might have been combed, others some of which may not have been combed. And we came into the president's house, and we were meeting with the Board of Trustees all of whom were dressed in suits. They were not too happy about having this group, probably some of them thought we were riffraff, coming in, disrupting their reception after the Board had met that day. And probably many of them thought we should have been happy that we were at Lafayette and since nearly every, all of us were on financial aid we should just shut up and just be happy. So we… And they probably asked us what we wanted and we probably said that we probably wanted to discuss action on our demands. They probably didn't like the word demand, and the meeting was going nowhere. And it was starting to become rather confrontational because it was increasing anger in terms of the tone of some of us who were speaking, and the Trustees were not happy either. The doorbell rang. Someone went to the door. It was probably Mrs. Bergethon, and one of the black

freshman who had rung the doorbell said, "It's cold out here" because they were standing outside, and it was February. I can't remember the temperature, but it was maybe close to what the temperature is today. It was… Okay. So then it was decided to invite all of us in. So we go into the foyer. Have you ever been to the president's house?

VF: Yes.

GG: We go into the foyer and the living room of the president's house, and there are about twenty-five members of the Board of the Trustees and about twenty-five black male students and one female student. Okay. I think she was from NYU. So we're trying to continue this talk and things are getting increasingly agitated and irritated, and we don't know what's going to happen. Neither side knows what's going to happen. But, it's not very conducive. Now, who's to say what could have happened, and it's one of the what ifs? But things weren't going anywhere until Nate Stone[48] who was the social, who was the assistant coordinator who would be equivalent to the vice president of the ABC made his comment. Nate was from Savannah, Georgia, very polite, very diplomatic, and that was one of the reasons why he was chosen to be coordinator so he could help keep control on me. I had a reputation initially of being one of the quote unquote 'militants' but by that time particular time some of the first year students were, these folks were really out there. Okay. And they were very ardent and very passionate in terms of their commitment to the ABC. But, they no longer saw me as being militant . They thought that I was being co-opted. So, Nate said, "Gentlemen" and he's speaking to the group of us. He's speaking to members of the ABC and to the Trustees: "We're all

[48] Nathan P. Stone, Class of 1971.

educated men, and we're all reasonable men. There isn't any reason why we can't sit down and discuss these issues as reasonable and educated men." That statement broke the ice 'cuz President Bergethon said, "I agree with what Nate said." President Bergethon knew all of our names. Okay. I agree with Nate said, and then we had a conversation. But, basically the conversation went about the fact that there was going to be a meeting between a committee of the Board of Trustees and a meeting of the ABC in about a month to discuss the issues. So we left that particular meeting and the meeting was scheduled a month later. Now, prior to this time we hadn't gettin' any acknowledgement of what was going on with the status of our demands. Then, all of a sudden, right before the meeting, the university put, the College put forth this response to our manifesto, and they went through it point by point responding to our particular statements. And they were talking about what the College had done and what the College was doing and all these efforts. Now, we hadn't been privy to any of this information. And it was being a point by point rebuttal, trying to make us look bad, in other words, that we were being irresponsible, the College had been acting on its goodwill and we the College had started to undertake all these actions before we had started to get loud and noisy and to complain. But we had never been informed of this information and also much of that information was wrong. Because much of the thrust that was the College was doing came because of steps that we had been prodding the College to take over the course of the last year or two years prior to that particular time. These actions that College was undertaking wasn't coming out of collegiate good will, but based upon the fact that we had been trying to get the College to undertake these efforts for two years. So we had the meeting with the Board of Trustees, and what we had done before that time was to

rehearse what we were going to say because there was going to be a member of the Board, a member of the Board of Trustees talking to about four or five black students and there were going to be five groups and each of the groups was going to talk about one of the demands. So we had practice sessions in which people would talk about the responses to what they would say to the Trustees. And we decided to balance the groups. So, for example, the groups would be composed of those individuals who would be seen as quote unquote 'moderates,' those individuals who would be seen as quote unquote 'militants,' and those individuals who would be seen as revolutionaries. In other words... So we were trying to serve as checks on one another, so that there would be no shouting match, nothing where somebody would say you !@$%. But everything would be civil, but at the same time that we didn't want to be people who were going to be kowtowed because we were dealing with powerful Trustees. That we were going to hold our ground, make our case, and respond to their arguments but in a civil and rational manner, which is why we staged rehearsals beforehand. We had the meeting in Pardee Hall. It's on a Saturday, and it's the Saturday right after the last day of classes before spring break. So most of the white students have already left, but we're on campus cause we have this meeting with the Board of Trustees. So we meet on Pardee Hall, and I don't know how long, I think the meeting might last... I don't know how long it lasted, but it might have been four, five hours or maybe it might have been an all day meeting. I can't remember. So we meet with the Trustees, and I can't... I probably was on the group with... on... coursework... cause that was the basic issue that I was pushing in terms of a Black Studies program at Lafayette. And I remember I think I was, I can't remember who else was on the committee but there were about four or five students and a Trustee, and I can't

remember the Trustee's name. But what we decided to do as a conscious effort that we were going to meet with the Trustees. The first time the Trustees had seen us we were wearing sunglasses, we were wearing jeans, we were wearing khakis, and we were informally dressed. We decided, okay, we were going meet them on their terms. So we were going to wear suit and ties and we were going to wear coat and ties. Okay. We were going to play... We were going to do what we were going to do, say what we were going to say, but they're not going to judge us on the basis of looking at somebody across the table and says this person is wearing a dashiki. Okay. We say, okay, if you're a corporate banker, then on this particular occasion, I'll dress the role. I'll wear a coat and tie. Okay. So, we had the meeting and all the groups went well. So the Trustees were very much impressed. We were reasonable. We were calm. We were civil. We talked about what we wanted. We made the case. We talked about what other schools had done. We talked about what Lafayette could do. And we responded to the arguments that were contained in the document. If the Trustee said, "This particular statement says so and so and so and so," well that's not exactly the case because this is the so and so and so and so and so and so. And this is what we've done. And, for example, you can't say the Admissions Office has been engaged in this long-stand effort in terms of trying to recruit black students. But, for example, the Admissions Office still goes to certain schools, but why don't you go to other schools? And we just laid everything out. Trustees were very much impressed, and I think that was the impetus that caused some of the changes. 'Cause a lot of things were starting to be announced over the course of the remaining weeks of the spring semester of 1970. People were being hired. Mike Jackson[49] who was in my class was offered a position in the Admissions Office. I didn't

[49] Michael K. Jackson, Class of 1970.

know I was under consideration for that position, but because of the comments I made in the *Lafayette Alumnus* where I would not accept a job at Lafayette, and also the fact when I was asked what I liked best about Lafayette and I said, "Nothing." Obviously I was not to be seen as somebody who going to be hired to recruit students at Lafayette. So I... But, people started to be hired for particular positions. It became known that there was going to be a Black Cultural Center in the spring. It became... An African-American male was named to the Board of Trustees, the first black male to be named to the Board of Trustees, and he had been recent alum. Someone who had graduated... He was a senior when I was a freshman. So I knew Ken Rich[50]. So there were changes taking place. And these were the events that were starting to take place up until the strike that took place in the spring of 1970.[51]

VF: How did you feel about the Black Studies Curriculum? What specifically did you want to change?

GG: Well, we only had two courses that dealt with… If you were to refer to Black Studies that would have been American Studies 66 and American Studies 67. American Studies 66: "The Black Man in American Civilization to 18…to 1945" was a one semester seminar that was only open to a maxim of twenty-five people in the class. And it was hand chosen by the instructor, so it meant no first year students were allowed in the class. And this class was an interdisciplinary study of the history, politics, the language… of history, politics and culture of people of African descent from the settling

[50] Kenneth (Ken) Rich, Class of 1967. Term Trustee, 1970-1975.
[51] Student Strike of May 1970.

of the Americas up until the end of World War II. And that class met once a week for three class meetings. I mean once a week for three hours. And we had very interesting speakers, one of which and I was just telling Diane Shaw[52] this morning, Ralph Ellison[53] spoke in that class 'cuz we read *Invisible Man.* And it was not a public lecture 'cuz he was only invited to speak to that class. So Ralph Ellison spoke to that class. Herbert Aptheker, a noted historian of slavery and slavery systems, spoke to that class. Herbert Aptheker was white and I suggested… And one of the concerns that came out was the fact the College said they couldn't find any black faculty members because so few black men and women were pursuing their Ph.D. degree. I suggested, "Why don't you hire Herbert Aptheker?" 'cuz be was not, he did not have an academic appointment at that time. And a person told me, "We can't hire him 'cuz he's a communist." And I said, "So?" *(Laugh by both)* He was a communist, which is why he wasn't allowed to teach at many colleges. But, I didn't know that. I mean, the man knows his material. But, we had American Studies 66 which was a seminar that was restricted to twenty students, upper class students, and American Studies 67 which was a study of the black man in American Civilization since 1945, which again was limited to only twenty students. So those were only two courses that dealt exclusively in terms of black life and culture. Nothing on Africa. Nothing about either the English speaking, Spanish speaking, or French speaking Caribbean. Okay. Those were the only two courses that dealt with the peoples of African descent. So we called for more courses 'cuz there was no African-American literature course. There wasn't any course in the History Department in terms of African-American history. The College was saying, well for example, now all… some

[52] Diane Windham Shaw, Lafayette College Special Collections Librarian and College Archivist.
[53] Ralph W. Ellison, educator and author of *Invisible Man* (1952).

of the English I classes were reading *Invisible Man,* and this is after Ralph Ellison had been on campus. But, for example, there are other black writers so why don't you have a course in African-American literature? I said, imagine taking a course in dealing with American culture, and you have, you only read one book, one novel by a white American author. Who you going to choose? So we were saying have a course in African-American culture. There was one course in the Sociology Department taught by Stan Wilk, who was a radical, and he co-taught it with Thomas Norton[54]. It was called "Race and Ethnic Relations," so we cited that course cause that course was already on the books. But other courses that would deal with the politics and social experiences of people of African descent. Obviously, the whole field of African-American and African Diaspora studies has changed markedly in the years since then. But those were some of our initial proposals in terms of possible courses.

VF: Looking back now, what was your worst experience at Lafayette?

GG: In the classroom or outside of the classroom?

VF: Outside the classroom.

GG: My worst experiences at Lafayette largely dealt with the lack of social opportunities. It was… This was a very lonely place to be as a black student, particularly when you had no social outlets. You couldn't date. And again I think that's one of the things I made reference to in terms of lack of socialization particularly for

[54] Thomas W. Norton, Instructor in Sociology (1967-1974).

males in this time period. And it was just very lonely and very frustrating. And yet, if you didn't know how to talk about it, what were you going to do? If you… During my freshman year, I was on campus, and I wanted to go home my first weekend. They told me, "No, I couldn't go home. I had to stay on campus." My father and aunt told me I couldn't come home; so I stayed on campus. The second weekend had been, was the mixer with Cedar Crest[55] and the're ten black freshmen. All ten black sophomores were there. There were five black women at the mixer, and all of them left with all the black sophomores. So there were ten black sophomores and no black women at a dance. I went home the next weekend. But I was told when I went home that I was going to stay there at Lafayette until Thanksgiving. They told me I could not come home between September 24th and Thanksgiving. So two months I stayed on that campus. I had no dates. I got along reasonably well with people in my section. We might go downtown to look a, to go to movies. There were movies on Center Street at that time. But, that's the only thing you could do. There were some things going on campus in terms of evening programming and speakers like that, and Lafayette always been very good in terms of having outside speakers. But still, it's just very frustrating. I put on a lot of weight my freshman year. I largely ate out of frustration. I really… I didn't like it, and that's also one of the reasons why I pledged the fraternity so at least I could have a social outlet. That was my most frustrating experience at Lafayette as a… in terms of the lack of social opportunities as a black male student. Over time my social life improved. I mentioned that my social life went from marginal to nonexistent. It was marginally better as a sophomore. Within the context of Lafayette, it was very, it was better in terms of my junior year and my senior year. I dated in my junior year. I had a girlfriend in my senior

[55] Cedar Crest College, Allentown, Pennsylvania. Cedar Crest was an all female college.

year. She lived in Bethlehem. Okay. But, for example, and that was more than just a causal date: somebody you would call on up and say, "Excuse me are you doing something on Friday night? Would you like to come to Lafayette? We're having a…" I had a girlfriend. Okay. *(Laugh)* And I told you the experience in terms of my junior year when I stayed here for Thanksgiving. Have you ever stayed here for Thanksgiving?

VF: No. (*Laugh*)

GG: Okay. You know when students leave for Thanksgiving. If you've ever stayed here over Thanksgiving. I was in Mckeen Hall for Thanksgiving. And I had to finish writing a paper, and that's one of the reasons why I stayed here. 'Cuz I had checked the books out from the library, and I had to write the paper and then type the paper. So I checked the books out. What's open to eat?

VF: Nothing.

GG: None of the dining rooms are open. There was a supermarket that was nearby so I bought some fast food. Okay. I also bought a can of Ranzoni ravioli. Okay. There's no heat in… There were no cooking facilities in any of the dorms. You ever try to open a can of ravioli using a can opener and heating it using hot water from the spicket in the bathroom?

VF: No. *(Laugh)*

GG: Okay. My Thanksgiving dinner that night was Fred Stricklen, Bob who stayed here. Bob Moffet who stayed here and I went down the hill. There used to be a diner at the corner of… at the foot of the hill going towards Northampton Street. There was diner there. You ever have Thanksgiving dinner at a diner?

VF: Can't say that I have.

GG: Okay. That's miserable. Okay. And I did that for three days over Thanksgiving. I mean that was when I was a junior. I didn't want to tell that 'cuz there are people who will probably say I'm going home tomorrow. *(Laugh)* But that was part of the experience. I wrote about that when I said I was at home. So the next year I got seven invitations to go to people's houses for Thanksgiving. People were calling me up in October. "Where are you going…? Are you staying here for Thanksgiving? You know, we'd like to invite you to our house for Thanksgiving." But I had a girlfriend then so I went to Paulette's house for Thanksgiving. Okay.

VF: So what was your best experience outside of the classroom?

GG: In hindsight in terms, the friendships that I made with other black students and other white students. The fact that one of my roommates was here last night certainly showed the nature of friendships and friendships that can stand the test of time. We hadn't seen each other in thirty years, but we had kept in contact with each other. That

says something. The friendships that I had with black students, with other black students. I regret the fact that we always didn't keep in contact with each other after graduation. And that's a major regret. One thing I would say to you, "Keep in contact with the people with whom you're close after you graduate." Email makes it easier. But please, keep in contact because these were people who shared very important moments with you in your years here and you need to nurture and continue to develop many of those relationships. I had friendships… I had experiences with faculty members. The fact that I haven't seen Robert Weiner since I graduated. He and I had talked on the telephone. But the fact that I was very glad to see him. I'm sorry that I can't see Al Gendebien because of his physical condition right now, but he was my advisor for two years. And also someone from whom I took two classes. I learned from him, I would have liked to have seen him. I saw Richard Welch in Widener Library at Harvard University. This might have been right after he took early retirement and just before his death. And he and I had a very lengthy conversation. He was very pleased to know that I was a faculty member at a nearby institution, at Tufts, and he was quite happy about my success. I would like to get in contact with Sam Craig. If I could ever find… Probably what I'll do, one of the things I need to do is probably when I get back to Massachusetts is just to look him up in terms of world wide web. 'Cuz I'd like to reestablish contact with him, just to let him know how important he was. I was at a historical conference about ten years ago. It was… No, it was an American Studies conference. It was the New England American Studies Association and it was meeting on the campus of the University of New Hampshire. And I was to give a paper the next day, but the first day I was to give a workshop. So the person with whom I was co-leading and co-teaching the

workshop was someone I hadn't met before so she and I were going over the logistics of what we were going to do. And I was setting up a VCR 'cuz I was going to use a film, and then we were going to talk about the particular film in terms of how one can use the film for teaching techniques. And other members of the… And I saw a gentleman come in, and he was wearing a goatee. I didn't pay any attention to him, but… And he was smoking a pipe. I guess at that time you could still smoke indoors. And other people came in. And then as… And I was to go first, so, I was still queuing up my, the film. And my co-presenter was asking people to go around the room to identify themselves, and why they were there, and then to identify themselves. People going around and I'm listening to the snippets of the conversation while I'm still trying to queue up the tape. And this one person speaks, and it's the gentleman I told you who came in with the goatee. And he looked like he was in maybe in his early sixties, and he spoke. And as soon as he spoke I recognized his voice. And then he gave his name, and he said, "I spoke because I'm retired from Lafayette College, and I taught Gerald Gill and I saw the name on the program. I said, 'No there can't be that many Gerald Gills, so it must be the same person.'" So he drove from Maine to the University of New Hampshire to attend the presentation. It was Jim Vitelli. I hadn't seen him since graduation, and I was so glad to see him because of again, for the reasons I told you, the impact that he had on me. These are the types of memories, and particularly I think that one of the reasons why this project is so important is the fact as I've been saying over the course of my stay at Lafayette this time. I graduated… When I graduated from Lafayette I was embittered. And some of that bitterness lasted throughout my twenties and into my thirties. But over the course of my late thirties, forties, now early fifties, my attitude towards the College

has started to change. I reflect more fondly. I mean I can't forgive. I will never forget some of the negative experiences, but at the same time, I can't devalue the positive experiences. And right now I would largely stress the positives more so than the negatives. So, for example, I don't regret the comment that I made in terms of what I thought about Lafayette when I was a senior. I don't have no regrets 'cuz those were my honest and genuine opinions then. But they're not my opinions right now. With hindsight, I can give perspective, and I can be more appreciative of the positives. It's still bittersweet, but the positives outnumber the negatives.

VF: What is your perception of Lafayette in its present state?

GG: Basically, what I know about Lafayette is largely what I've read in terms of alumni publications. I read the *Alumni Magazine* when it comes in so I have a sense of in terms of what one can glean from an alumni magazine what's going on on campus. Unfortunately, I don't come back to the campus that often so I really don't have a firsthand appreciation of the issues or that are affecting people on a day-to-day basis. Alumni magazines are largely glossy and largely very positive spins on what's taking place on campus, and they often times don't cover some of the unpleasant issues that might be taking place on campus. I think during the 1980s and the early 1990s Lafayette's reputation had started to decline from what it had been when I was in high school and during my four years here. Lafayette had been viewed as a very selective, small, all-men's college. But I think maybe within a decade after coeducation I think the quality of Lafayette students had started to decline. But what I've noticed and

particularly in terms of what the college guides start to say that Lafayette's overall reputation is starting to is very much on the upswing. It's a far more selective school now than it might have been maybe ten years ago. And talking to some individuals on campus I understand they're very pleased with the quality of students who are currently attending Lafayette. One person, I won't name him, said he thought that the quality of students at Lafayette now would be comparable to the quality of students that were at Lafayette during the latter part of the sixties in terms of overall quality. This is not to say anything about students who might have graduated in the eighties, late eighties and early nineties, but certainly he's noticed an improvement in terms of the quality of students at Lafayette now than over ten years ago. As an alum, I am concerned in terms of the time which I've been on campus about the dialog I've had administrators, with faculty members, and also with students about some of the issues on campus. They're not reported upon in terms of the *Alumni Magazine*. I would have assumed that perhaps that there would have been more students of African descent on campus than they obviously are. And I know that's an ongoing issue. Some of the concerns that I've heard from students, is expressed by students are similar to the concerns that I expressed thirty plus years ago. I would have hoped that perhaps there might have been an infrastructure in place that could've resolved more readily some of the concerns that students have raised in rather ongoing critique that students have about the quality of education or the quality of extracurricular life on the Lafayette campus. In the main, I'm impressed by the school's academic reputation, but I'm disturbed by, let's say, the small number of, comparatively speaking, students of African descent, probably the small number of faculty members of African descent which means they're also overworked. And also the

small number of administrators of African descent which means they're overworked. And I would like to see the school increase the numbers in terms of faculty, staff, and administrators. But, the issues at Lafayette are not unique to Lafayette. These are issues that are taking place in any predominantly white college or university throughout the United States. Same issues I hear and work with everyday, and grapple with everyday at Tufts.

VF: How do you feel that Lafayette views you now?

GG: I don't know how they view me. I was invited back in 1990. I was invited back. I was asked to come back. Obviously, then my coming here was, was not something I undertook, but I came here for a particular purpose and at the invitation. I've been well treated while I'm here. I think people have been please about what I had to say - students, administrators, and faculty in terms of my presentation and the meetings I've had today. I would like to think that the university would be proud of me, excuse me, the College would be proud of me. 'Cuz on one hand, I am one of their success stories, somebody who graduated from Lafayette and with the benefits of a Lafayette education went on to achieve success in terms of his chosen career. I will say this and perhaps maybe this is one of the points that we'll have to talk about when this transcript is prepared for *(Laugh)* publication, unless they edit it. For example, I think the College often times seeks to only spotlight certain black alumni. And these are probably people who have been more visible than I. I won't name these individuals 'cuz I think it's unfair to them, but I think the univ…, the College can take better opportunity to think about the

full range of alumni of African descent who've graduated from this College and seek to promote all of the alumni. And to talk about what alumni did, have done. One of the things that I undertook two years ago was to compile a list of the graduate and professional schools attended by black students from Tufts over the course of the, from 1980 up until the present. I confined myself to that time period 'cuz those are the years in which I've been on Tufts University. And I starting thinking about this when I was thinking about letters of recommendation that I had written and what people did with these, after with some of these letters of recommendation in terms of schools in which they might have enrolled. And I compiled a list, and then I circulated among a group of black alumni, and I got additional names. But, for example, if Lafayette put together a list of, and you don't have to name the individuals, but just a list of schools attended by black alumni of Lafayette, what does that signal? That students have used your undergraduate education here to go on to the next level of their graduate and professional education. That's also a recruiting tool. That somebody can say, a parent can say and a student can say that if I come to Lafayette, and I invest the amount of money in terms of a Lafayette education, however a Lafayette education is financed, through parental contributions, through scholarship, but no matter how the education is financed, each student at Lafayette is, over the course of four years, is spending over a hundred thirty thousand dollars. But, people are going to ask, "What's the return of this, of spending a hundred thirty thousand dollars?" But if you have a list, particularly for students of, students and parents of African descent, of what Lafayette students have done with the education, that might allow someone or families to say, "Well gee, it's worth it… in terms of our taking out loans, our making use of scholarship, our making sacrifices, in

terms of financing our son's or daughter's education because there are positive returns. The school has a demonstrated track record of preparing students who then go on to careers based upon, go on to compete successfully in graduate professional schools."

VF: What advice would you give to an incoming black student at Lafayette today?

GG: Number one, take full advantage of everything that this school has to offer. This school has a lot to offer and partly because of its size. Because of the small size of Lafayette, students at Lafayette can get to know faculty members quite well. And there are opportunities here, more opportunities for students at Lafayette than my own school, to work with faculty members in, with faculty members on their own research, or to have faculty members supervise student interests. I'm excited in terms of some of the programs being conducted with EXCEL scholars, in terms of the research opportunities that might be available to them. Certainly it will demystify educational research for students at Lafayette to get a chance to work with students or to work with professors in terms of research projects, or work with professors on their own research projects. I would avail students to take advantage of that opportunity. It's not always available at every college and university, but this college makes use of that opportunity. Take, make use of that. Seek help if you need help. Seeking help is not a sign of weakness. Seeking help if you need it is a sign of strength, that you have the inner strength to know that you're not doing your best, but you're going to try and resolve to do better and to seek help. Don't suffer in silence, let's say if you're experiencing any academic difficulty. And if you're making the adjustment to the College and you're having some difficulty

seek people who can help you so that you don't necessarily fall into bad study habits or bad academic habits during your first year that might influence your subsequent years at Lafayette. Respect others. Respect yourself. Be civil and speak to one another, and this goes across racial backgrounds on campus. That this is a small enough school that people can still speak to each other in passing. You don't have to know someone to say "Good morning," or you don't have to know each other, someone, to say, "Good day." It's just the niceness of civility. If somebody speaks to you, for example, and you're not feeling particularly well, it might lift your spirits temporarily. But be…, I don't want to sound like a parent, but just basic decencies that will… in terms of behavior.

VF: Thank you.