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“Look’n M’ Face and Hear M’ Story”
An Oral History with Professor J. Herman Blake

Interviewed and Edited by Cameron Vanderscoff
With a Supplemental Interview by Leslie López

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2014

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Table of Contents

Interview History	1
Family, Church, and School in Mount Vernon, New York	8
Discovering Black History as a Young Person	19
Army Experience as a Conscientious Objector in America and France	24
Discovering a Life of the Mind: Employment and College Education in New York	33
Graduate School in Sociology at UC Berkeley	46
Malcolm X, Mexican Demography, and Political Debate: Personal and Intellectual Trajectories at Berkeley	60
“We Got Through”: The UCSC Hiring Process	79
Intellectual and Imaginative Dynamics: Reflections on Cowell College and Early UCSC	84
Tobacco Road, Part 1	99
A University that Serves the Community: Thoughts on Cowell’s Extramural Program	103
Reflections on Student Protest, Disruption, and the Early UCSC Experience	112
Debate, Dialogue, and Decision-Making in the Planning of College Seven	120
The Naming and Funding of Oakes College	157
A Space for “Constant Learning”: Collegiate Academics and Teaching at Oakes	170
Reflections on Staff and the Oakes Community	191
Reflections on the Role of Students in the Oakes Community	209
From Collaboration towards Conflict: Personal and Collegial Impacts of Changes in Central Administration	216
Thoughts on Affirmative Action and Opening the Door	230

“Community Morality” at Oakes: Looking In and Reaching Out	238
From Tougaloo College to Iowa State: Frustrations and Fulfillments in Higher Education	250
Towards Humane Assets and Understandings: Personal Educational Philosophies	262
Leaving Space for the Limitless: Thoughts on Liberal Education and Professionalization	272
Thoughts on Working with, Learning From, and Grading Students	277
The Weight of A Name: Reflections on El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz	281
Thoughts on Oral History, Interviewing, and Transcription	287
Reflections on Huey Newton, and Revolutionary Suicide	294
An Ongoing Education in the Sea Islands	301
Collaboration with Dr. Emily Moore	311
Storytelling as a Way of Teaching and Connecting	314
The Oakes Legacy: Nationally, Locally, and Personally	319
Current Work in the Medical Humanities	323
Current Community and Public Involvement	337
“Every Shut Eye Ain’t Sleep, Every Goodbye Ain’t Gone”: A Closing Reflection on Continuity and Core Values	339
An Interview with Herman Blake: Understanding Education for Justice by Leslie López	344
Introductory Essay	344
The Emil Schwarzhaupt Foundation and Extended Education, 1967	357
Septima Clark, Teaching Everywhere She Went	361
Myles Horton: Why UCSC Students Were Never Placed at Highlander	363
Herman Blake at UC Santa Cruz: Providing Educational Resources to Excluded Communities	364
Lessons from Saul Alinsky	369

How It Worked: Understanding the Importance of Chancellor Dean McHenry and Bob Bosler	370
Recruiting Minority Faculty at UCSC: Eugene Cota-Robles' Role	371
Writing and Literacy	374
Why and How Writing is Empowering	377
Working With Struggling Writers in College and Adult Literacy Campaigns: Similarities and Differences	379
Diversity as a Concept: Blake's Ongoing Research and Struggle	384
Social Justice Work	397

Interview History

"When you get to the table and know that you're a full part of the process, the institution where you've been denied in the past, don't just feel good about having succeeded. Think about who's not there."

Dr. J. Herman Blake arrived at UC Santa Cruz in 1966 as an acting assistant professor of sociology at Cowell College. He remained at UCSC for eighteen years, gaining renown both as a teacher and for his leading role in the formation of UCSC's seventh college, Oakes. This oral history explores both the public biography of Blake's career and the intimate biography of Blake's own youth and education, addressing how he sought to make more room at the "table" of education for others and how he worked to get there himself.

Born in urban Mount Vernon, New York, in 1934, Blake relates the challenge in finding home in the context of a "slum" and its "counter-forces," reflecting particularly on the strength of his mother as a "protector" in their living situations, which ranged from a series of houses to an abandoned storefront divided by beaverboard. He walks through his experience in the Seventh Day Adventist educational system, his military service as a conscientious objector in France, his ultimate enrollment in New York University as an undergraduate, and matriculation in UC Berkeley as a master's and doctoral student. Throughout, he reflects on the stepping stones of this journey towards a "life of the mind," such as the gap between his growing ambitions and the expectations of his family, and balancing his many roles as an aspiring sociologist, a family man, and associate of the Berkeley NAACP and Malcolm X.

Moving forward, Blake candidly reconstructs his career at UCSC, detailing the inspirational climate at early Cowell College and the ensuing development of Oakes College. The latter topic is a particular focus of these interviews, charting the evolution of Oakes from the initial demand for a black studies college to an ethnic studies model and to its ultimate structure, which went beyond explicit ethnic quotas and programs to embody Blake's faith in liberal, cross-cultural education. He provides an interior perspective on the challenges, conflicts, and collaborations that characterized the early history of this groundbreaking institution, which connected with communities and individuals who had historically been marginalized, underserved, and "denied" by higher education.

The sessions move to a close with discussion of Blake's educational philosophy, exploring his decision to focus on issues of educational access and retention as the core of his life work. They conclude with a meditation on the defining themes of Blake's personal and vocational narrative, and a reflection on gratitude and meaning in his life today.

A story is always born of a setting, and this oral history project took place in a larger constellation of interest in Blake and his autobiography. Our interviews occurred in February of 2013; one month earlier, a group of former students and admirers of Blake had traveled to Charleston to film a documentary about him and his work, *Eyes on the Sparrow*¹ Two months after our conversations, there was a tribute held for Blake at UC Santa Cruz on April 27, when a second

¹ This documentary is currently available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WfzCZJSJgmA>

Regional History Project interview was conducted by Leslie López (included here as a companion piece). And one year earlier, Blake visited UCSC. It was here where we first worked together, and, in one sense, where the story of this oral history project begins.

"I tell stories," Blake said to me when we first met—April 20, 2012—as if it was not just a pastime but an avocation, a choice of being. It was the beginning of a ten-day trip to Santa Cruz for a series of talks, presentations, and meetings, including a public interview with UCSC writing lecturer Don Rothman.² Though his visit was conceived as a core part of the annual Alumni Weekend, Blake engaged with a range of current students over the preceding week, as well as with former students and colleagues who returned for the occasion. As a recent graduate from UCSC, I was his scheduler, assistant, and driver. We learned about each other through the hum and hustle of his itinerary, talking about our families by way of talking about ourselves, trading memory over the chords of Herbie Hancock, McCoy Tyner, and Jimmy Smith. These conversations were an education for me in seeing stories as roots, in seeing stories as wings, and they formed the interpersonal foundation for this oral history project.

In my second visit with Blake, for these sessions, he made it clear that a keystone to understanding him and his story is 'listening' to his context in the Sea Islands and in Gullah Geechee culture.³ This time I was the passenger, and the routes he guided me down were thick with the past-in-the-present. We traversed Johns Island by car and by foot, moving through the muddied reeds of the lowlands and the forests gauzed with Spanish moss. We paused at the site of

² Currently available on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bsDW_M-NdtY

³ The title of this oral history, *Look'n M' Face and Hear M' Story* comes from Gullah enunciation and was chosen by Dr. Blake.

the Stono Rebellion along the length of the Stono River, honoring the largest slave uprising in the British colonies. I sat, and stood, and clapped, and celebrated during Sunday service in the pews of his family church in Red Top. We called on his cousin Alan in his home and went alongside a family cemetery nearby. Throughout, Blake shared his bonds to this place and these people with stories stretching back to slavery times, and then tracing onward through the groundbreaking civil rights work of people like Esau Jenkins and Septima Clark to thread through the present towards the prospective. Later, in Charleston, we toured his workplace at the Medical University of South Carolina [MUSC], and he dropped me off at his barber shop, where I spent the afternoon, got my first straight razor shave, shot the breeze, and was gifted with a very excellent grapefruit. And I spent much of my free time walking around Charleston, or driving with Blake, changing neighborhoods to the tune of his narration or my own silent curiosity.

Our recorded conversations took place in between and around these travels, and they were profoundly shaped by them—as was I. We tracked more than thirteen hours of audio over four afternoons in the middle of his work week; it had the feeling, though only a few days in duration, of a *journey*. There are places where our tiredness is audible from the pace of our sessions and the weight of the memories, coupled with Blake's many other dedications and obligations. Speaking for myself, I can hear this in a few places where I ask questions with some redundancy, miss a follow-up, or stick too closely to my prepared notes. But this pace had the double effect of bringing us together, of generating a sharing, and I was moved to a deep place of witness. I was honored

that he referenced some of my stories—a lake named for my mother's family in rural Minnesota, for one—in reflecting on his own family, his own roots. For me, it was a chance to see the space between us work as a bridge, one built of the similarity *and* the difference in our backgrounds and our experience. For me, valuing and learning from both the divergence and the convergence were indispensable in this binding, and I hope that readers will find ways to listen and look for both of these features in their own engagement with Blake's story. In a way, I wonder if this gets at a part of what helped make Oakes so special: this ongoing valuation of difference while constantly seeking connection.

Blake himself argues for a life of growth—indeed, the word “constant” comes up again and again in his narration, like a refrain of persistence, of struggle, and of the discovery that comes from going beyond the comfort of personal experience and knowledge. This oral history is one accounting of his life, as told to me. I would encourage those who are impacted by this telling—and if the current level of interest in Blake is any indicator, there could be many—to look further, to open space for constant growth on not just Blake's story, but the core themes and endeavors that define it. As Blake himself points out in these sessions, oral history is an “extremely important” way of recreating the past, but it can be enriched by an appeal to other sources. There are a wealth of further resources along these lines, many of which are footnoted in the oral history itself (such as the aforementioned tributes to Blake's life and work), or other materials like Blake's publications, archived Oakes documents, and the work of his influences and collaborators, from Myles Horton to Dr. Emily Moore.⁴ And, of

⁴ There is a range of materials on the development and growth of Oakes College available in the Special Collections of UCSC's McHenry Library.

course, there is perhaps the greatest testament to Herman's work of all: the ongoing story of Oakes College.

Before closing, I'd like to acknowledge a still broader setting of this narrative, found in the individuals who shared their time, resources, and experience in its fruition. They were my community in this endeavor. First is Dr. J. Herman Blake, for the thoroughness and courage of his storytelling. It has been a great joy to be his assistant and his interviewer, and going forward, I am glad to number among his many grateful students. Elsewhere, my gratitude to the people who welcomed me to South Carolina: Herman's cousin Alan; his cousin Joseph and the congregation at St. Mary's; the kind people at his barber shop; Sabra Slaughter and other staffers at MUSC; and to Dr. Emily Moore for her hosting, meals, and conversation.

A special thank you to Faye Crosby, Provost of Cowell College, who helped spark this project in the first place and, through her generous assistance, enabled Blake's story to be heard in its Sea Islands setting. Moving through California, I'd like to thank Michael Cowan, Bill Doyle, Adilah Barnes, John Rickford, and all the others who shared their memories of Blake with me, both in formal meetings and casual conversation. On the Regional History Project end, thanks to Leslie López for her wonderful companion interview, which I'm excited to have included here; and, as always, to the director of the Project, Irene Reti, for her "constant" guidance of this project and my growth as an oral historian.

Finally, I'd like to share a closing note for the late Don Rothman, longtime writing lecturer at Oakes. His insights, feedback, and sheer luminosity were

formative in this project, and in my writing and thought about Blake and Oakes College. Though he passed away just two days before we were to discuss this particular oral history in detail, his interview with Blake from April 2012 was a key influence for me, and his presence was felt deeply in these sessions.

Copies of this volume are on deposit in Special Collections and in the circulating stacks at the UCSC Library, as well as on the library's website. The Regional History Project is supported administratively by Elisabeth Remak-Honnef, head of Special Collections and Archives, and University Librarian M. Elizabeth Cowell.

- Cameron Vanderscoff, Interviewer & Editor

New York, New York, October 2014

Family, Church, and School in Mount Vernon, New York

Vanderscoff: Today is Monday, February 11th, [2013]. This is Cameron Vanderscoff, here for the Regional History Project with Dr. J. Herman Blake for part one of his oral history project. We are in a conference room at the Medical University of South Carolina, in Charleston, South Carolina. We're going to start out today talking about your childhood and education when you were young. To contextualize us, when and where were you born?

Blake: I was born on March 15th, 1934, in Mount Vernon, New York.

Vanderscoff: When you reflect on home as a child, what space, or spaces, come to mind?

Blake: (pause) I don't reflect on home as a child. Childhood was very different from what perhaps many other people might think childhood is. In terms of the concept of 'home,' it really doesn't have much meaning. Houses do, various houses we lived in at various points. But the concept of 'home' and 'family' have very different meanings. So I don't think in terms of that question the way you might articulate it.

Vanderscoff: Mm-hmm. What sort of houses come to mind? Who were the people in those houses with you?

Blake: My mother. My father. Siblings. A house on Franklin Avenue in Mount Vernon, New York, which had no indoor toilet. Then a house on South Eighth

Avenue in Mount Vernon, New York, which was the first house that had an indoor toilet. My brother, Sidney, was just delighted that we didn't have to go outside to the bathroom anymore. And from there to a storefront on West Third Street in Mount Vernon, New York, which in today's terms would be called homeless, but where we lived for a number of years in a situation that was space, but certainly wasn't home. They had used beaverboard to divide the former store into essentially cubicles, which they called rooms. One was for my mother and my two sisters. The other was for myself and my siblings, my brothers. My parents had separated by then. So it was just us then. Then there was a back room—a back room of a store. They had a stove in it that you could cook on. And there was a toilet, but there was no bathroom. No bathtub. Any of that. So those are the spaces.

The tenement in which that store was located caught fire. That would have been about 1950, '51, and a whole bunch of houses, apartments burned. Ours was smoke-infested, but it didn't burn. But three people lost their lives. It was a January night. A very cold January night. So it wasn't a home. Never was. But it was a place where you were protected.

Vanderscoff: And what did you and the people who you shared that space with—your mother, your siblings—what do you think you all engendered to create a sense of community, or a sense of protection, in that home? What steps did your mother take? How did she make you feel protected in that way that you just suggested?

Blake: (laughs) Well, she always was a protector. And one of the ways is setting up the (pause) counter forces, helping you understand the counter forces. Police

were predators. There were a lot of forces in the community, patterns, that were destructive. If there was any violence, you went in the opposite direction. You never wanted to be around anything that was going down. You just headed home or went away. We didn't drink. Never had alcohol in that house that I know of. Never. Or smoke—none of those patterns. We were very religious and engaging in religious behavior and the church was very, very important. And a very strong emphasis on obedience and care in school. Those things brought contentment and peace, and engagement with neighbors who were supportive in creative and constructive ways. That was the whole notion. The neighborhood *was* a neighborhood. It was a village, a community. And those kinds of things definitely were a part of it.

Vanderscoff: And what denomination of the church was it?

Blake: We grew up in the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

Vanderscoff: And what sort of involvement did your mother encourage in the church? How did you participate?

Blake: Youth programs—what they called them was Sabbath School, which we call Sunday School. All of those kinds of things. Choirs. We all engaged in musical activities of one sort or another. My older brother, Henry, learned to play the trumpet as well as the sousaphone—you know, the three-fingered instruments. I learned in elementary school to play the trombone. And Henry and I used to do duets of church music in the churches. Trombone and trumpet. They used to call it, "The big man with the little horn and the little man with the big horn."

Vanderscoff: (laughs)

Blake: Things like that.

Vanderscoff: I'd like to start the thread of education here, which of course will go through a lot of these sessions. As a kid, as a child, was school an exciting or worthwhile or challenging place for you?

Blake: As a child, school was a social place. It's where you met your friends. You played on the playground. You did all of those kinds of things. Of course, you did your schoolwork. That was taken for granted. It was never a problem. And you did your schoolwork. No, it was interesting. It was a part of childhood. We didn't have television. I mean, it didn't exist. We had a radio, which we used to listen to occasionally. My older brothers liked to listen to—you know the accounts—*The Green Hornet*, *The Lone Ranger*, and all of that sort of business. But those were usually in the evenings or other times. They did not occupy a great deal of time, as I recall. So it was mainly—school was very important in the social realm, as well as the educational realm.

Vanderscoff: And so going into that social realm, what did you and your schoolmates do for fun? What sort of games would you play?

Blake: Oh, I remember king of the hill, ring-a-levio, running games, tag games, kickball. We never played—when I was growing up—baseball or softball, anything like that. And some of my friends and I used to play football. We had these little football things going all the time. But that was mainly through the police athletic league, which organized athletic teams. And I played football for

the, as we called it, the PAL. We would go the Boys Club and we'd play, I don't recall what it was, basketball or other kinds of things. I was never much involved in that. I did boxing. I boxed a lot. But more than boxing in the ring I spent a lot of time learning how to really tattoo a punching bag. And my thing was being very, very skilled on the punching bag, where you could make it go for long periods of time with all sorts of different patterns, hitting it with your elbows as well as your fists. All of that kind of thing. I loved to make the punching bag go for long periods of time.

Vanderscoff: And given that you came to be a sociologist, a job that has so much to do with interviewing, would you describe yourself as a curious kid? Did you ask many questions of the people and places around you?

Blake: You didn't ask those kinds of things. You didn't ask questions. That was being impolite. No—I was too busy trying to survive, if you can use that term. I started working when I was nine years old. I've never been without a job since. Seventy years. Got a job throwing papers and delivering papers when I was nine. So, you know, many of the things people take for granted we never experienced. It just wasn't a part of our world. So, I don't know. I wouldn't say I was particularly curious at all.

Vanderscoff: I'd like to widen the scope a bit—

Blake: Let me just come back to that curious thing, in the sense that I read a lot. I went to the library and read a lot. I would always read. I read a lot of biography and autobiography. And maybe that was a way of being curious. I don't know. But I certainly traveled all over the world through books.

Vanderscoff: Do you remember in particular what stories, what sort of autobiographies and biographies would grab you?

Blake: Well, first of all, my brother, Donald, and I read a complete series of books called *The Black Stallion*. It was about this black horse. I don't remember anything more than the black stallion. We read every *Black Stallion* book when it came to the library. In terms of biographies, I read a lot of the work of Carl Akeley, who was a professional hunter for the Museum of Natural History of New York. He traveled to rather exotic countries to bring back specimens for dioramas and display. He talked about hunting down silver-backed gorillas and elephants and lions. Oh, I read *all* of those stories. I don't know about now, but in the past if you went to the [American] Museum of Natural History in New York City, you would see these displays of animals that Carl Akeley shot. And I read all of his stories about traveling around the world. I read some spy stories related to World War II. I don't remember the authors or names or anything like that, but I used to enjoy reading some of those.

But I primarily, as I got older, read intensely biographies and autobiographies. George Washington Carver was a very meaningful one for me. Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglass, and others. I don't recall all of their names, but I would devour them. But in that I was going outside of my community and outside of my family and my world. But it was not necessarily curiosity in the way that it might be traditionally looked at.

Vanderscoff: Did you spend much time experiencing the larger scope of New York as a child or as an adolescent, going into other neighborhoods or other parts of the city?

Blake: No. Hardly. No, you were in your own little world. You might transition to the school. By the time I was in the sixth grade, my mother, through the influence of our church, pulled us out of the public schools and sent us to a Seventh Day Adventist School, which was located in Harlem. Now we were living in Mount Vernon, but I had to go to the subway everyday, take the subway down to 125th Street. Went to a small school on 127th Street, between Lenox and Seventh Avenue. So I came into the Harlem community, but once you were in that building you were in school, and when you left that building you were in that subway going home.

No, I wasn't going around to other neighborhoods, other communities. The closest was when I delivered my newspapers. Every morning I had to deliver papers and we'd be picked up by the owner of the paper company, George Ugelow. We'd go to Yonkers, New York. And we had paper routes. I would deliver my papers in Yonkers. There I would see homes, physical houses, like I didn't know and experience. I remember the springtimes. I always loved them because the smell of the fresh-blooming flowers, particularly the hyacinths. And to this day a hyacinth is one of my favorite fragrant flowers. I loved the blooms and the scents. That was very important.

And so actually when we built Oakes College I recreated a little bit of that.⁵ We had a hill there. You may have heard, I don't know. But we planted seven hundred daffodil bulbs on that hill. And when they would bloom in the spring.... I did that because I knew the winters in Santa Cruz and the rain meant that come springtime the students had cabin fever and they wanted to get out. I

⁵ In this oral history the generic name College Seven and the lasting name of Oakes College are used interchangeably to refer to UCSC's seventh college, opened in 1972.

wanted those flowers to just blossom in a way that it gave another vision, a view of the world.

Vanderscoff: Like they had for you as a kid.

Blake: Yeah. Absolutely, absolutely. So that was, to the extent that it was anything different, it was in delivering those newspapers. But you never—you always felt like you were a stranger; you were an outsider. When you were finished delivering the newspapers, you were back in what people now call the ghetto. We called it a slum at that time. But it was home, to the extent that there was a home.

Vanderscoff: How did larger changes going on in the world around you—the ongoing Depression, or events like Pearl Harbor and the advent of World War II—impact your life? Were you conscious of these shifts? Did they seem to matter to you as a kid?

Blake: I knew nothing about the Depression until I studied it and read about it. I lived through it, the latter part of it. But I knew nothing about it—didn't know there was that word. We just knew that there were these soup lines. That was not at all atypical. There was welfare. And there were other efforts to get things done. That was not at all atypical.

I remember Pearl Harbor very clearly. I remember we were sitting around the radio at our home—I think it was on Franklin Avenue—listening to the accounts of what had happened in Pearl Harbor, and then listening to Franklin Delano Roosevelt addressing the nation as he indicated that he was recommending and they were going to declare war on Japan. I remember that

very well. And my father and my older brother with a look of fear in their eyes about, you know, they were going to have to go into the army or the military—but everybody saw it as the army. My father never went. I don't know whether he was too old or not in good health. My brother, Henry, was a little bit too young. So they missed out on World War II.

We had food rationing and you'd get your stamps so that you could get sugar or other things. To the extent that I was aware of those things, you might say I had some awareness. But I can't say it impacted us. We were poor and we lived that way. The war came and it was pretty much that way.

The only thing that I can say really impacted us were air raid drills, when they would practice with the sirens and you'd have to turn off all the lights. My father was an air raid warden. He had a little helmet that he wore and an armband. They would patrol the community at night when they were having these air raid drills to make sure there was no light from any buildings. And that was it.

Vanderscoff: You were just discussing the rationing that went into effect in World War II. Did you have a sense that that negatively impacted your family's economic circumstance, or was it same difference?

Blake: Same difference. I didn't feel it negatively or positively impacted us. It was just there.

Vanderscoff: In this shifting larger climate, what hopes do you think your family had for you?

Blake: You know, it was, in terms of the hopes— (pause) My parents were survivors, my father in his own way. Victory gardens—we planted gardens. When we were on Eighth Avenue we had a huge yard and we had a huge garden. We would plant vegetables, tomatoes and collard greens, okra, corn. We had huge gardens and we had ways of preserving a lot of those vegetables in the cold weather, so that when you weren't growing you were still surviving from it. They urged people to have victory gardens. So we called it a victory garden, I guess. My brother and I used to dig up the land. Not plow, but dig it up with a pitchfork and do the planting. My father supervised it all. We did that all of the time. What was the question there?

Vanderscoff: Well, what do you think your family's hopes were for you?

Blake: Oh, hopes? Yeah, okay. Well, we were doing all of those things. We weren't talking about the future in the way that people might think about hope. In terms of hope in our community, it was like default. You hoped you did *not* become what a lot of people become. You didn't want to go to prison. My mother was *always* insistent that we behave in such a manner that we never came in contact with the law. Because if you got a criminal record, it followed you all of your life. You don't want to do anything that lets you get a criminal record. So you behave in such a manner that you're not called to the attention of the law.

Now, in terms of the larger community, one of the things that they used to talk about—guys would go into the military—was that you had to come out with an honorable discharge. Honorable discharge. If you come out and they say your discharge was dishonorable, it prevented you from getting employment and everything else. But the point was, you lived honorable lives. So beyond that, no.

Vanderscoff: I'd like to move a little bit forward, more toward your adolescent years. You mentioned school being a very social place for you and that being one of the ways it mattered to you. Did your relationship to school change in adolescence, in high school?

Blake: Not really. Not really, I became like a leader, if you will. Our school was so small that was not hard to be. The school was attached to the church. So if you were outstanding and well-recognized in the church, it carried over into the school. And so that was very easy, in that sense. But my adolescent years, my high school years, middle school years, were in these church schools. And that's what they called it, 'church school,' and with teachers who came out of that religious tradition and administrators who came out of that religious tradition. But we were dealing with all the other kinds of stuff in a limited way—but a very limited way. More scared to step outside of that framework than anything else.

Vanderscoff: And within that framework, in your teenage years, what sort of leadership roles were you holding as a youth in your church?

Blake: Oh, we used to have what they called the junior church, which had all of the roles that a regular church would have: junior minister, junior deacon, and all that sort of business. I was always one of those heads. A couple of times a year we would conduct the whole service. I usually was a junior minister, who would develop the sermon and leadership in the junior church. That was very, very important. Then we would have the youth educational program, something called a missionary volunteer society, which was an afternoon educational thing. So, I was very much involved in that.

Vanderscoff: So, did that give you experience and make you more comfortable, then, with speaking in front of groups of people and conducting yourself in that way?

Blake: Absolutely. I was good at it. Very, very good at it.

Discovering Black History as a Young Person

Now the churches would have things like oratorical contests and I'd get involved in those. I was always good. Usually won first or second prize. In social events, as Seventh Day Adventists we did not engage in movies or dancing or any of those kinds of events. So one of the things that they used to do is, churches used to hold, collectively, Negro history contests. They'd have a Negro history bee just like you have a spelling bee, line you up and ask you questions. And who could answer the questions won, the last person. I never lost. I read Negro history, started reading from about the eighth grade. Never lost.

When I was in the eighth grade one of my teachers, Nauford O. Phipps, suggested to us that we go and learn about our history. I made my first trip to the Schomburg Collection of the New York Public Library on the corner of 135th Street and Lenox Avenue, as I recall. I could not believe what I saw. I learned about Phyllis Wheatley. I saw the poems she wrote and dedicated to George Washington. Saw the letter George Washington wrote to her and things like this. I just started reading. The first book on Negro history I read was *The Story of the Negro* by Arna Bontemps. And I started reading all of Arna Bontemps' stuff, which led me to also read the stuff that Langston Hughes was writing, and

others. I read all of these books or pamphlets on Negro history. J.A. Rogers just turned them out by the dozens.

Since I was in Harlem going to school and I'd go to church there on weekends, sometimes you'd see some of these guys standing on the corner of 125th Street and Seventh Avenue. Man there by the name of Michaux had a bookstore there, where there's now a state office building, where Bill Clinton has his offices in New York City. But people would stand outside of Mr. Michaux's bookstore and debate Negro history. All sorts of stuff.

Michaux was an interesting man and he had a bunch of flags in front of his store for the different African nations that were at that time independent. People would gather there—even later in my life, Malcolm X. I never saw Malcolm on a ladder there, but people from the [Marcus] Garvey Movement, the United Negro Improvement Association, they would be there debating and discussing. So you'd see those kinds of things. But you just did whatever you did.

Vanderscoff: When you think back on that fascination with history, do you have any sense now of why it was so important for you to understand your history as a young person?

Blake: Absolutely. This was very clear. It was talked about all of the time. Mr. Phipps was our eighth grade algebra teacher. He came into class one day. We were playing and we had set the lights swinging. They had these long chains with the light went up into the ceiling and they had this globe at the end of the chain. And we set those things swinging.

Vanderscoff: (laughs)

Blake: He came in and looked up. It was swinging. And we were taunting the girls. We were always doing that—eighth graders. And he said to us, he said, "Boys, learn your history. You have no reason to hang your heads." We didn't know we were hanging our heads. And then he said, because we were taunting the girls, he said, "Treat your women right. The race will never rise any higher than its women." Two dictates that stick with me to this day.

Mr. Phipps was what they called a race man. Every question, every issue was perceived in terms of race. What is its significance and meaning for the Negro? So (pause) we had—it was felt many of us had a strong sense of inferiority. Things that came out of the experiences of our forebears as enslaved peoples. And then denied peoples—really *denied*. Even then, in places like New York and around, there were places that just weren't open to colored people or Negroes. They didn't necessarily have signs but it was very clear.

So it was believed that you read your history to understand that enslavement was not the only thing that characterized the people from whom you came. I remember when I started reading that history and I started learning about Timbuktu: a center of knowledge and learning that Europeans went to in Africa. Timbuktu became for me a symbol of learning, a library. That name still rings a positive bell in my head. So learning your history was learning about things you never understood. When I read *The Story of the Negro* by Arna Bontemps, I started reading about the Maasai and other African—what they called at that time tribes—who lived incredibly complex lives as independent people.

You learned about people who played a key role in American history. Crispus Attucks—I didn't know that Crispus Attucks, the first person to die in the war of the Revolution, was a Negro, I understand an escaped slave. But he was involved in that whole set of events. You learned about many, many others. My brother, Henry, in World War II, became captured by the story of Dorie Miller, the navy person who worked in the kitchen on the ship. But when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, he took over one of those anti-aircraft positions and brought down many of the planes. Dorie Miller became my brother Henry's hero. He could talk about Dorie Miller all the time. You didn't know much about him but you knew he existed. And that existence said you weren't what they thought you were. So that's what learning your history was about.

Vanderscoff: And so with that expanded sense of personal possibility that came with this history, when you graduated high school what sense did you have of the routes or opportunities ahead for you?

Blake: Well, several things had happened. One, I told you I was delivering newspapers. In addition to delivering newspapers, I got a job working in a drugstore. And during the day in the summertime I would deliver drugs into the people's homes—you'd take the prescriptions, ride your bicycle. Always on my bicycle delivering packages of medications and sometimes small orders of other things that people might want. The drugstores at that time usually had a fountain where people would get sandwiches and sodas and things. So during the lunch hour I'd work the fountain, washing dishes, and sometimes making a malted or other things. And I met a gentleman there, Mack Resnik, who got interested in me and thought I was pretty bright, from my interaction, and

offered me a job in his place. He had a mail order firm. And I remember the drugstore owner saying that Mack could offer me more in terms of opportunity than he could, because all I could do was deliver drugs or wash dishes at lunch.

So I went to work for Mack Resnik. I guess by this time I'd stopped delivering newspapers. Mack had this mail order firm. I started. He had a lot of orders and other things. He wanted to put the names and addresses of people on index cards. Because he didn't have what we would now call a database. He had none of that. He just had these orders that were stacked up. It was him running it by himself with occasional help from his wife. They lived in an apartment building across the street from this little basement place which he had rented.

So I sat and started typing up these names and addresses. That's when I learned how to type. I couldn't type. I mean, these were hundreds and hundreds of letters he had piled up. So getting those things typed, I developed typing skill. But it was not only typing skill—you had to be accurate. And not only become accurate, you began to learn about the names of places. I remember subsequently I was looking for a job when I was at NYU, and I was being interviewed, and a man wanted to know what I knew about different things. He asked me a series of questions. And he asked me about—I forget what the name of the city was, but he wanted to know what state was it in. And I said Oregon and Maine. I knew that it was in two different states. That was from typing these addresses and all of these things. He was quite impressed. But I developed that skill.

Army Experience as a Conscientious Objector in America and France

When I finished high school, Mack Resnik wanted me to work with him because I was good at typing and then packing and shipping these orders. The main thing he did in his business, the thing that really made it big, was he had these diaper containers—dirty diapers, where you hold them until the diaper service would come and get them. I don't know, he sold untold numbers of them because of the baby boom. So they were just going out of the door and I was doing the shipping and packing and all of this sort of business. He couldn't keep them in there. And he suggested that, "Maybe you oughta think about going to college and studying business," and then working with him in business.

Well, I went to NYU to see if I could go to college and study business. And I went to NYU because I lived in Mount Vernon. You couldn't go to City College of New York, CCNY, or any of the city college system unless you lived in the city. And I didn't. But there you could go for free tuition.

But I went to NYU and they said, "We can't admit you because the high school you graduated from was not approved by the regents of the state of New York. You don't have a valid high school diploma." So they couldn't admit me. They thought I was nice.

So Mack Resnik said, "Well, maybe they can give you an admissions test and you can pass that." And they said, "No. We can't even do that. You need a regents' high school diploma." Well, how do you get a regents' high school diploma? You take the high school equivalency test. That would get you the high school diploma and then they could admit you.

Well, I went to take the high school equivalency test and they said I couldn't take it unless I was twenty-one or I was a veteran. Well, I was not twenty-one and I wasn't a veteran. So at that time the Korean War was in process. My brother, Donald and my brother Henry, both of them older, were in the army, and both went to Korea. So I decided I'd try to go into the army and become a veteran so I could get my high school equivalency diploma. They said I couldn't go in unless I volunteered because I was a conscientious objector as a Seventh Day Adventist when I registered.

And they said no, I would have to sign up for three years and give up my conscientious objector status. I wouldn't do that because I was deeply engaged in the church. So then they said, "Well, you can volunteer for the draft." And that meant that when I registered for the draft—everybody had to register—your name went at the bottom and it worked up. But you could sign a waiver that put your name at the top, so that you were still in the draft situation. You could still be a conscientious objector but you would go sooner. So I did that and they called me within a month. And I was drafted into the United States Army for two years. I wasn't even nineteen.

Vanderscoff: Where did you go for your basic training?

Blake: I was drafted and processed through Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, and my basic training was in Camp Pickett, Virginia. I think it was in Blacksburg, Virginia. I went there for eight weeks of basic infantry training, but being a conscientious objector along with several others who were conscientious objectors, I never did any weapons training. Never touched a weapon, was not assigned a weapon. And when the regular guys did weapons training, the

conscientious objectors were assigned to KP: kitchen police duty. We would do the KP while they went to weapons training. Which they loved because they would get out of KP. Nobody wanted KP. But I did a lot of KP in all of that, for my first eight weeks.

And since conscientious objectors were generally in the medical service roles in war, my brothers were on the front lines in Korea. They didn't carry weapons. They carried medical kits. And guys like that, because you've got a medic there who was more concerned about their lives than trying to kill the enemy.

So after the first eight weeks I was sent to medical training at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas. They also had a major air force base there. That's where I went for eight weeks of medical training. After that I went to Valley Forge Army Hospital for additional advanced medical training.

Vanderscoff: You talk about going to Blacksburg and then going to Texas. Had you ever been so far away from home before?

Blake: No. No, I had never been so far away from home. But you'd get your orders, and you'd get a ticket, and you'd ride a train. They took us on a bus to Camp Kilmer. And then after we were processed there we were given tickets and they took us on the train to Fort Pickett, Virginia. And the trains were segregated. Because you were in the South, you know. You might have been in the military and serving your country but you sure weren't going to be in the same cars as white people. So I went to Camp Pickett—and not only that, you couldn't go off the base without running into problems. Now the military by this time had been

desegregated by a mandate coming out of Harry Truman's [administration] but off base that wasn't the case. So you dealt with that.

So I had not been away from home but Camp Pickett was an interesting experience. I was mainly on the base. Hardly went off the base. Those military towns weren't pleasant places. I mean, they had a million souvenir stores and bars and women of rather questionable morals. I wasn't interested in the souvenir stores. I sure wasn't interested in the bars. And I was scared of the women, given all those stories I'd heard from my mother and others—just scared of them. Plus, I was trying to always help my mother, so I took half of my paycheck and had it sent home to my mother every month. All the time I was in the army half of my paycheck went right to her as a contribution to the family. And I tried to make it on the remaining amount, which meant you couldn't go on leave or do some of the things others did.

So I was at Camp Pickett, Virginia, and then out of that I got a leave back at home—furlough. I had to report to Texas. And I reported to Texas. I took a train to Texas, San Antonio, got off the train and went to the base. And when we were finished with that advanced training they marched us to the airport and put us on planes and flew us to our next assignment. I'd never been on a plane in my life and I was scared out of my wits. I would have never voluntarily gotten on the plane. But they marched us down to the place with your duffel bag—you had all your stuff in one duffel bag—march you down there and you stand with that duffel bag and they put you on the plane. Scared the life out of me, from the time I got on the thing until it landed in Philadelphia, I was scared out of my wits.

Didn't voluntarily get on a plane again until several years later. But that's another story.

Vanderscoff: Did all of this training for the military and this shuttling around to different parts of America—did it expose you to different or new constituencies or sorts of young Americans than you'd known from back home?

Blake: In the military, yes—to a limited degree. First of all, you hung out with the people you would have hung out with if you were in school or back in the community. So it was still groups of Negroes. We were in integrated units by this time but we still had our groups. I remember in Camp Pickett, Virginia, for the first time running into people from Appalachia. We called them hillbillies. I thought they were dull-witted—all of the stereotypes from *Li'l Abner*. I don't know if you know *Li'l Abner*.

Vanderscoff: Yes.

Blake: Comic strip.

Vanderscoff: Yeah, the cartoon, yeah.

Blake: Was I exposed? No. I didn't really learn anything about them. I didn't become friendly with them. I thought they were weird people who were less than *we* were, okay? So they helped to solidify whatever ego, or sense of ego—I would want to say superiority but that's a distorted concept in this context—that I ever had. So I met some of those kinds of people— But amongst the blacks, no. It wasn't until I went to Europe that I really began to get that exposure.

Vanderscoff: Did you find that the other soldiers, even within your social group, were accepting of your status as a conscientious objector?

Blake: Yes. Several things: once again, it was seen as being a support network. We never tried to get out of being in the military. We never tried to get out of being exposed to danger. We never tried to get out of risking our lives. A Seventh Day Adventist medical corpsman had won the Medal of Honor for bravery under fire. That was your job: to save lives. So no, that status was never questioned. Then there were religious guys, particularly when I got overseas I began to interact with a group of GIs, black and white, who were very religious. So that became another comfort zone.

Vanderscoff: So you mentioned that you served in Europe. Where did you serve?

Blake: Well, when I left Fort Sam Houston, for my military medical training I went to Valley Forge Army Hospital for, I don't know, three months. Every two weeks we rotated to a different part of the hospital, so I did all sorts of things. And then after that they assigned me to Red Stone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama. And I thought I was going to finish out my service at Red Stone Arsenal, which was just beginning as a military base. They had brought the German rocket scientists there and they were building what is now Rocket City, but then it was mainly a landing strip with an infirmary. I worked in the infirmary. Interestingly enough, not only did I work at the infirmary, I worked at the small ward we had. Must have been about maybe twelve beds. But I also had

a major responsibility for the laundry. Which is not exactly medical, but what they expected of, in quotes, "colored people."

I didn't finish out my service there. They had to fill a quota, I guess, and so I was selected for overseas duty. I was sent to France. We went into Germany, Bremerhaven, and from Bremerhaven I was reassigned, took a train down to—I don't know where all of the places it went, but it left Germany and went into France. I ended up in Poitiers, France at a medical military base. They had a hospital there that the French had, but at this time it was under the care and supervision of the Americans: Caserne Aboville in Poitiers, France. That's where I ended up, where I finished out my military career.

Vanderscoff: You mentioned that in basic training, essentially your social group consisted of other black soldiers. When you were in France, how did you relate to the people of France? Did it strike you as being a significantly different experience than back in America?

Blake: It was significantly different. Among other things, everywhere I went in basic training and everywhere else, I often got assigned to the desk duty, clerical duty, because of my typing skills. Not only could I type, I was accurate. And every day they had to produce what they called the morning report. The morning report required the commanding officer to submit a report on every individual under his command. And it *was* "his," because there were no women in those roles. Under his command, you had to type that up every day: the name, the rank, and the serial number. There could be no mistakes. I was doing that every day, submitting that. So I found myself doing a lot of clerical work

wherever I went. They would send the letter along indicating that I was very good at this. And I was.

So when I got to France, I was working again in the office of this hospital as well as in other parts of the hospital. They had French employees, whom I met in various places. One of them was a woman who worked in the library. I think her name was Nicole. She was one of the women working in the base library. She was married to a rather nice gentleman and they were both students at University du Poitiers. They were reading law, as they put it.

Nicole and her husband took me to University du Poitiers. So when I'd get off base, I'd get off duty and change my clothes. I'd put on my civilian clothes and head straight for Poitiers. I once got upbraided by my NCO, the sergeant who was in charge, saying I was supposed to be a soldier, not a Frenchman. But I had a French outfit. I had "civilian clothes" which I would wear down to University du Poitiers. I would pretend to be an African student. I just *loved* it. I'd see movies that I didn't understand—they would have these discussions and I would sit there. I spoke French, so that was helpful. But I just loved it, being in that setting. Just being in that setting, listening to the discussions. Never participated, but I just loved being a part of it. It seemed like it was intellectually exciting. It *seemed* like. I can't tell you whether it was or not.

But I also started going to a Seventh Day Adventist Church in Poitiers. There I met a man, Monsieur Roulier, who had a family living out about thirteen kilometers from Poitiers. Monsieur Roulier worked on the base also. So I met him and he invited me to visit his home with his family. And they invited me to stay the weekend. Nicole and her husband had a little motorbike, just a little bike

with a motor on the handlebars. You could pedal it 'til you could get it at certain speed, then you pushed the motor down on, it catches in the spokes, and it'd crank up. I'd ride that motorbike out to Nieuil-l'Espoir, the little village, and I'd stay with the Rouliers all weekend. It was an incredibly enriching experience.

When I was on the base, I'd be with the guys who were very religious. We didn't have a chaplain but we'd have chapel every Sunday when we could. We'd just gather and have prayer and study the Bible—argue the Bible, 'cause nobody else was a Seventh Day Adventist and they thought that was weird. That, you know, Sunday was the holy day, and I was saying, "No, you ain't read the Bible right."

Vanderscoff: (laughs)

Blake: We'd have these debates. There was a sergeant, and then there were two or three blacks, and a fellow by the name of Bill—I can't remember Bill's name—but he was from a town in Vermont, a thing called Colrain, as I recall. Maybe Colrain was his name. But it was a long time ago. So that was what it was.

Vanderscoff: So given this sense of intellectual excitement that you found in France, how did you feel ultimately about coming back to America? What sort of opportunities struck you as being here for you?

Blake: Well, first of all, when I was staying with Monsieur Roulier and his family, I had a sense of family that was unlike anything I had experienced before, except with the Wilsons, which is another part of my story that we don't have to get into. It was incredible. Grand-mère and Grand-père and *les enfants*—all wonderful. We'd go out into the woods for picnics. And the kids would go, (calling out), "A

la forêt! A la forêt! We all go a la forêt!" And Grand-père would put a handkerchief on a branch, and he would lead, trek *a la forêt*. I don't know if we went more than two, three yards. (laughter) But we were out there. And we'd have lunch. It was very simple: bread and cheese and water. Even though they were Seventh Day Adventists they drank wine, which shocked me. I still didn't touch it. But we'd go *a la forêt* and I loved that family.

Discovering a Life of the Mind: Employment and College Education in New York

So when I started thinking about coming back to the United States, I wanted to keep in touch with that family. But coming back to the United States, I went back into my world. Because the United States hadn't changed that much. I was still colored, or Negro, whatever you want to call it. And we lived in Mount Vernon. I was engaged at that time and I wanted to get married. That was the important thing. My mother had had a stroke and she was paralyzed. Taking care of her, supporting her, and beginning a family—all of that sort of thing. Those were what my priorities were. That's what I was thinking about.

I really wasn't thinking about education at that time. I had it in my mind, because by this time I had gotten my high school equivalency diploma, which made me eligible to enroll at New York University. But initially I really was interested in getting married, which I did; in getting a job, which I did, in some kind of firm that was making units for military vehicles. I think boats or something, plastic units. So I got a job there as a machinist and started work, joined the union. They said after six months you get a five cents an hour raise.

So you know, I'm starting planning on this. I'm going to be a loyal husband and eventually do these other things. My wife was a registered nurse. So we had that kind of a thing. I was a leader in the church. I was a good Christian. So was she. You know, a young couple in the church. People admired us. And that's the way I was going.

But then in the process, very early on, after I got this job with this firm, within six months after I started the job they lost their government contract. And they laid off just about everybody. I remember approaching this layoff—and they used to call me "lad," because I was a young kid. I looked at these older guys. They were worried about their houses. A couple of them had sailboats that they used, or for fishing. They were wondering how they were going to handle their obligations. When I saw and heard that, the fear of layoff, of economic setbacks, the renewal of what they probably knew as the Depression—which I never experienced, in terms of in my mind—I said the thing to do was go get a college degree so you wouldn't be laid off again.

So I took my little self down to New York University, talked to a dean or somebody down there, showed my papers, applied, and they admitted me. They gave me a small scholarship. I guess it was a significant part of the tuition at that time. And between my GI Bill, which I had, and that scholarship, I started college. My goal was to build a kind of foundation that would allow me to work and support whatever family I might have and my mother, who was, for me, the saint that I had to help carry through her tribulations.⁶

Vanderscoff: Had any of your other siblings gone to college at this point?

⁶ For more on Herman's relationship with his mother, see his article "Lilacs" in Bob Blauner, ed., *Our Mother's Spirits: The Death of Mothers and the Grief of Men*.

Blake: Oh, yes. My oldest brother, Henry, had dropped out of high school. Some people in the church urged my mother to send him back to school, 'cause he was trying to help her and that's why he dropped out of school at sixteen.⁷ He went to a school that the Seventh Day Adventists had in Huntsville, Alabama: Oakwood Junior Academy. It was a high school and two years of college. So he went there and finished his high school and started college. His tales of Oakwood were just riveting. You know, "Statey mate"—you know, the guys from the same state, and people from California, and places that I didn't even know conceptually. Henry was always enthusiastic. His adolescence was an enthusiastic period. He was always adopting whatever fad there was. The hip language—he'd talk hip.

So he had gone to Oakwood Junior Academy and then my brother Donald followed him. Donald went there, and I guess by that time Oakwood was moving up and it had become a full four-year school. It was the only school in the Seventh Day Adventist panoply of colleges that was Negro. And that's where they all went. I mean to tell you they had great times.

My brother sang in the quartet that traveled around the country raising money for Oakwood. Whenever they would come to New York, they'd come to our home. Whenever they'd do their concerts, my mother would always go and they would always honor her, walking up to where she was in the pews and singing to her. Oh, she was so thrilled. And of course, her son was the basso, basso, basso. He had a deep voice. And it was not only deep, it was loud and

⁷ For more detail on the story of Henry Blake and college, please see the interview of Herman and Sidney Blake with the nonprofit Storycorps, which was broadcast on NPR in edited form on April 2013. Available at <<http://www.npr.org/2013/04/26/179015473/from-poor-beginnings-to-a-wealth-of-knowledge>>

monotonic, but that's all right. (laughs) It fit. The others covered him up with their harmony.

Vanderscoff: (laughs)

Blake: Henry never finished college. He didn't finish college then. He dropped out, once again, to get married. Met a young lady and oh God, I guess the hormones took over all sorts of sense. She was from Chicago. He didn't know a thing about Chicago but he and Carolyn went off to their new life. Donald went on to Oakwood and stayed and graduated and then decided to go to graduate school. See, we all had the GI Bill, and when he decided to go to graduate school he found out that Oakwood College was not an accredited four-year college. So he had to go get a second bachelor's degree. He'd gotten a bachelor's degree from Oakwood in biology. He got a second bachelor's degree, I think from Michigan State in biology and did a master's there and then went on to the University of Rhode Island, where he did a PhD in biology. So I had those role models out there.

Vanderscoff: And why did you personally choose to go to a secular school, as opposed to the religious school that your brothers had gone to?

Blake: Yeah, I couldn't tell you that. I felt constrained, at that time, by the narrowness of the thinking and approach. I just felt that they didn't understand the larger issues of life. That was my feeling. I mean, these ministers and others, they just followed the dictates of that church. And that church was a racist church, as I recall, being in there. They were glad to go to Oakwood College, because that was our college and frankly speaking, the black churches

established their own separate conferences because we had to have a place where we could be important. But I just felt there was something wrong with all of that stuff.

I was singing in the choir in the church and I remember a guy coming to deliver a sermon. He was a black MD and he had gone to Loma Linda, the medical school the Seventh Day Adventists had in California. He pointed out they only admitted two colored students a year—or Negro students, I forgot whatever he said. To show how true he was to the faith he waited three or four years until his name came up among that two a year. I remember sitting in the choir. I was *angry* about the fact that they were satisfied with being Negro in this setting.

So I think that was a part of it. I can't say that was all of it. But that certainly was a part of it, that I wanted to continue in the faith, continue being a good Seventh Day Adventist. But I wanted to become a social worker and not a minister, and be effective in the church. So I chose to go to a secular school. They didn't like it. They didn't like it all. The ministers who knew me and who saw me as an upcoming young man—my brother had done well, all this sort of business—and they just thought I should go to Oakwood. And I wouldn't.

Vanderscoff: What did you hope to study at NYU?

Blake: Social work. I went there to do social work and I enrolled in the program. They had a department of sociology and social work. I wanted to be in the social work curriculum.

Vanderscoff: Given that so much of your professional work has been dedicated to undergraduate education, making students feel like they have a place in their institutions, did you feel welcome or comfortable when you were at NYU?

Blake: My first experience at NYU, as I recall, was with a teacher by the name of Margaret Benz. She taught social work. She taught a course on family and when you took her course on the family it was social work. You learned to do a budget and you learned the domestic uses of being in the family. That's what she taught. She invited the class up to her home, which was in Scarsdale or somewhere in northern Westchester County.

My wife and I went on a Sunday afternoon. And I tell you, I went in that place—I was assuming white folks had homes that looked like *Better Homes & Gardens*. I went in there and there were magazines and papers all over the place. And I'm looking—it had a porch, a yard and all that, looking like, you know—She came up to me and she said, "Mr. Blake, this is a very lived-in house." (laughter) She just showed herself to be what she was.

I got involved in a student group called the Panel of Americans and our faculty advisor was a guy named Tim Costello, who taught in the School of what was then called Commerce, Accounts and Finance: SCAF. Tim Costello used to invite us to his home on Staten Island. The only time I've ever been to Staten Island was going to Dr. Costello's home. He was so nice. All of the faculty there were wonderful. I took courses with the philosopher, [Sidney] Hook. He was incredible. He'd argue all sorts of stuff with everybody. And I never participated. I just saw him there—

I took French, because I had this skill, with Germaine Bree. She was the scholar on Sartre and Camus. She knew Camus! I was reading Camus in French. These were wonderful teachers. I had one teacher in a philosophy class; I never knew his name. He was the nicest man. He was trying to make us feel welcome in his class, challenged. I had an anthropology professor who used to, from time to time, go to what was the that-day equivalent of Starbucks. It was a coffee shop called Chock Full of Nuts. He sat and talked with me just like I was a human being. (pause) A psychologist and sociologist by the name of Katherine Organski—all these people, they treated me so nicely. The historian, whom I often dedicate my talks to. They were all super nice people. You were just a person.

The Panel of Americans was a group of what you would now call multicultural students trying to lay out some issues before people. And one of them was this tall—she always played the Protestant role—a tall, beautiful blonde. She lived up in Scarsdale and she had a thing for us at her home. Never forget, and I met her Daddy. I ain't seen such a crazy man in my life. You come up there and here you are just like everybody else. And I'll never forget the stories. She was so embarrassed by him. He was talking about how he was in a bar, and he was drinking with another guy, and the guy got high, and he said (slurring and mumbling) "'Tell me,' he said, 'I didn't sleep with my wife before I got married. Did you?'" And he says, "I asked, 'Well, what was your wife's maiden name?'" (laughter) And I'm cracking up. And she's saying, "Daddy, shut up!" (laughter) Here I am, in what you would call the white community, but it was just community.

Ira Kay, who was Jewish, used to talk about, "My name is Ira Kay. I've got an uncle named Katz and an uncle named King." And he would talk about the transition. I remember we were going somewhere one day and he looked in his wallet and panicked. He says, "I hate to leave the house with less than thirty dollars a day." I'm thinking, My God, I don't even get thirty dollars a month to spend. He's talking about thirty dollars a day. Really nice guy. All of these people.

Through all of this, my sense of self was expanding. Because I was still a leader. I was on the debate team. As a freshman, I signed up for the debate team and after they heard me one time they took me from junior varsity to the varsity debate team. I found myself on the team going up and debating Columbia and other places. I never lost. *Never* lost. Public speaking conferences, winning public speaking contests.

Vanderscoff: Do you remember any of the topics that you would elaborate on in these contests?

Blake: The debate contests?

Vanderscoff: Yes.

Blake: No. They'd have a topic for the year. And everybody would have to debate the negative and the positive. But it was always a topic for the year and you would study them, study all of the issues. I was inducted into the debate fraternity, whatever it was, Tau Beta, something or other. That was so long ago. I mean, that was 1956, '57. That was a long time ago.

Vanderscoff: Now as a way of summing all this up, you came in to NYU, it seems, intending to do social work and trying to find some sort of stability, or invest in some sort of stability for your life.

Blake: Yes.

Vanderscoff: How did your undergrad years confirm or challenge your notions about what college would mean for you?

Blake: Well, several things. Now you've got to understand the parallels going on. I married; had my first child; starting working full time at night at IBM to survive, take care of my family. That's not the issue.

On the other side, I'm at NYU and several things happened. I was taking anthropology and psychology from all of these wonderful teachers. I remember a teacher who taught a course on the psychology of thinking. And I remember, oh, that was so great. I took it. I don't remember a thing about it. But I loved being in there. She was such a great teacher. I don't remember her name. Oh, I can see her. She looked like somebody who would be a housewife in a *Saturday Evening Post* story. But she taught *The Psychology of Thinking* and I thought that was great. And I'd go around and do other things at NYU. Our debate coach was great. I can't think of his name.

But anyhow, I took a course with Katherine Organski on population. We had to do a term paper. I don't know what led to my topic but I decided to write a term paper on birth control policy in Japan—birth control policy in Japan after World War II, you know, at the end of the war. I know why: because Japan had

had such an incredibly rapid drop in their birth rate. And that came out in the class. I decided, "Let me go examine this."

Well, several things happened. One, I compiled an incredible bibliography from studying *The Population Index*, which came out of Princeton. That was a quarterly publication which gave a list of *everything* that was published about population. It would be about eighty pages, single-spaced. I'd get in there and I'd get all the references to birth control policy in Japan.

So I had an incredible bibliography. But I took that bibliography of books and articles to the New York Public Library, where I had never set foot. Been by it, but never gone in the door. And I walked in there, into that reading room, and I started getting these cards and getting books. What you could do is you could submit cards for thirty, forty books. And you'd get a place at a table and they'd bring you a cart with your books. Not only that, they had Japanese newspapers in translation, which I could consult. I didn't understand at that time *shinbun* probably means newspaper or something in Japan. I didn't know. All I knew is the *Mainichi Shinbun* and this *shinbun*. I was getting all this stuff. And it was information—it was a revelation to me.

I told you I had gone through *The Population Index*. And every time I saw something on abortion, I'd say, "Oh, I don't want that. I want population control policy, birth control policy." So I eliminated all the abortion things. And when I started reading these newspapers and these other articles, much to my surprise I discovered that the main mode of population policy in Japan was abortion. They had legalized abortion. After [General] MacArthur and the others got out of Japan, the Japanese decided, "We're going to adopt this policy." That's why the

population birth rate dropped, because of abortion. So I had to go back to *The Population Index* and get all of those articles and books I had tossed aside. Well, the thing that hit me was an awareness of the limits of my perception and that you can't allow your own perception to define somebody else's reality. It was not a deliberate or conscious thing, but it was in my mind.

I went back and got all that stuff, studied it, read it. I was in that library every day that I wasn't in class. I even wanted to go on Christmas Day and my wife had a fit. Because the New York Public Library is open three hundred and sixty five days a year. It's open all the time. I wanted to go. Learning was absorbing me.

I finally put all that stuff together. What happens is when you collect all that stuff you want to put it in your paper. Well, you can't put it all your paper. I had to learn how to sift out and analyze and select. I'm doing it on my own. I finally wrote about a fifteen-page paper. Now for an undergraduate that was big time. I was no more than a late sophomore, maybe early junior. I wrote this fifteen-page paper on birth control policy in Japan, showing when MacArthur was essentially controlling the political situation and they could not have abortions, and then when United States pulled out of that occupation they went, and [the birth rate] dropped.

Well, I submitted the paper to Dr. Organski. When I got it back in class it had an A plus on it. She said it was of graduate-school quality. I had had this incredible intellectual experience. I'd had this great fun, if you will, in learning, and then taking an idea in a place I knew nothing about, and then having to

reconceptualize and putting that all together in my thinking—and she said it was of graduate school quality.

Well, I wanted to do more. So I took another course with her on population, and I wrote another paper on the Trobriand Islanders and their sexual practices. I'll never forget. I read a lot of Gregory Bateson's stuff. You know Gregory Bateson?

Vanderscoff: Yes, he taught at Santa Cruz in later years.

Blake: At Oakes College! He used to be married to Margaret Mead. When Gregory Bateson showed up at Oakes College he was—I didn't hire him, but another group [did].⁸ And we gave him an office; it's like, "Have an office here." He was so nice. He came to meet me and I said, "Well you know, I read *Naven*."⁹ When I said that he bowed to me. He was so nice. Oh yeah, I read Gregory Bateson and all of these others. And I wrote this paper because they had ideas and myths about sexuality and all of this stuff that definitely weren't Western or things like this. And once again I got the same response: graduate school quality.

I was hooked on learning. I was hooked on the concept that you could use your mind to go into areas where you hadn't had specific training, but you could learn. You spend your time in these books and these other things and you come away a new person. That's what I did.

⁸ For an accounting of part of Gregory Bateson's hiring process at UCSC in regards to the history of consciousness program, see Cameron Vanderscoff, interviewer and editor, *James Clifford: Tradition and Transformation at UC Santa Cruz* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2013).

⁹ In reference to his 1936 work *Naven: A Survey of the Problems Suggested by a Composite Picture of the Culture of a New Guinea Tribe drawn from Three Points of View*.

Vanderscoff: So there was a huge broadening then, that happened for you at NYU.

Blake: And I dropped social work. Because social work didn't do that. Social work was essentially prescriptive, as I understood it. And I started that broader thing. The anthropology courses and the psychology courses and the teachers, and of course the French with Germaine Bree.

And then I'm doing debate, where every year you got a different topic and you have to be able to do the positive side or the negative side. You'd arrive at a debate contest and you didn't know whether you were going to be on the affirmative or the negative. They'd flip a coin. Whichever it was, you had to debate it. I was good at it. But it was intellectual growth.

Now on top of that, I am an extremely slow reader. So I had to apply myself in a deliberate and consistent manner, then and now. Then and now. But I loved reading and I loved learning because essentially it was the affirmation of my sense of self that broke every stereotype that had been applied. I had experiences as a child related to race I have never told to anybody—my therapist, my wife. I'll take them to the grave probably, I don't know.

But anyhow—all of that. Mr. Phipps' thing had come back. Now I'm doing all of this in another area but I'm still doing my Negro history stuff. Oh, yeah. But I changed from social work to sociology.

Vanderscoff: I think this might be a good point for us to rest before we pick up the thread and go on to UC Berkeley and everything else.

Blake: One final point. I just wanted to say that I had a philosophy professor, William Barrett. He wrote a book called *The Irrational Man*. And he taught a course in philosophy of religion and we studied world religions. We had to write reflective papers on whichever religion we would select. We would choose, if we could choose, our own. I took Taoism. He said I was the only person in the class that selected a religion other than his own—the one they grew up in. I went beyond. Things like that helped me to grow.

Years later I ran across him. He was retired at some college in upstate New York. I was at that time at Santa Cruz. He had this kind of professor-in-residence [job], like I got now. I couldn't believe it. I loved him. He taught this course and you could never understand from the way he approached things, what was his personal position. Because his position was he was a scholar and took an analytical approach and did not force his views on you or anybody else. (pause) Okay, we can take a break.

Vanderscoff: Shall we? We'll pause this for now, and we'll pick the record up at a future date. Thank you.

Graduate School in Sociology at UC Berkeley

Vanderscoff: Today is Tuesday, February 12th [2013]. This is Cameron Vanderscoff here for the Regional History Project with Dr. J. Herman Blake for the second part of his oral history project. We are conducting this session again in a conference room at the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston, South Carolina. Last time we stopped talking about your transition from social

work into sociology. At the time of your graduation from NYU, what sense did you have of what you hoped to do next?

Blake: Well, it was very interesting. As an undergraduate, like I said, I had gotten involved in the debate team. I was good at public speaking. I took one public speaking course, only one. I was working full time and when you're working full time and you're going to go to school full time you need some courses that aren't as intense as the others. So French became one of those kinds of courses because of my ability there. Public speaking was another. Those were the two main ones. But in the other classes I took, sometimes you had to do presentations. In anthropology class, or psychology class, and sociology class I would do presentations in which I talked about books we'd been assigned. I remember one of the books was *The Mark of Oppression*. I forget the author, but it impressed me so much.¹⁰ And you'd do a summary, like a book report. I had done that in sociology, and my professor, Katherine Organski, the demographer, was impressed. All of the teachers were impressed.

So one day Dr. Organski walked up to me in the hall of New York University and said, "Have you ever heard of the Woodrow Wilson Fellowship." I said, "No." She said, "I just nominated you for one." [train whistle sounds]¹¹ I had no idea what this thing was. But I looked into it and ultimately applied. I had to have recommendations. Well, the anthropologist, whose name I can't remember—he was a male; a psychologist whose name I can't remember, female; and Dr. Organski, sociologist; and Tim Costello, the guy in finance, all wrote

¹⁰ *The Mark of Oppression: A Psychological Study of the American Negro* was written in 1951 by Abram Kardiner and Lionel Ovesey.

¹¹ 'Train whistle sounds,' indicating not the passage of a locomotive, but that Dr. Blake has received a text message -Ed

letters of recommendation for me. And I got to the interviews. I had made it to the interview phase. This was a very competitive, very difficult national fellowship. I was surprised that I was being interviewed because I only had a B average at NYU and this was for the top graduating seniors who were interested in becoming college teachers. That's what the Woodrow Wilson was. It was trying to develop a cadre of college teachers.

I went to the interview for the fellowship. It was on the campus of Columbia University. The interview started with these words: "Your grades are much lower than are traditionally found in this competition. But your recommendations are extremely good. How do you explain the difference?" I talked about I was working full time at night and going to school full time in the day because I was supporting—at this time my mother-in-law and her three children were living with us, as well as my wife and my daughter and us. So I explained all of this: working full time, going to school full time, still maintaining a B average, the debate team, the Panel of Americans and other organizations. They seemed to be impressed enough that I got the fellowship. So before I graduated I knew I had support to go to graduate school. Before that I would have never thought about going to graduate school.

Now when you applied for the Woodrow Wilson, you indicated on the application if you were awarded a fellowship, where would you like to go. The fellowship was for one year: tuition and living expenses. Because it was not a scholarship; it was a fellowship. You got books and all of this. But the deal they cut was they would provide the institution that you went to with the full range of tuition. But the institution would have to pick you up for two years

subsequently. Well, they got top students who come with their first year—it was an automatic admission to graduate school. So I had listed Harvard, Princeton, Berkeley, and one of the Midwestern schools. It might have been Wisconsin. I was primarily interested in demography and population studies.

I had gone up to Harvard, took the train up, and had a nice interview there. And they were very good. They told me that they only accepted about ten or twelve students a year in this program—it was sociology and psychology combined—but that most of them graduated. They worked with the students. If the student came in they were committed to getting that student through.

But I had also indicated Berkeley as number one, because that's where Dr. Organski's mentor, Kingsley Davis, was. And the number one school in terms of social demography, as compared to formal demography, which is more statistical—the number one place was UC Berkeley, because they had Kingsley Davis, Judith Blake, his wife, and William Petersen, three of the top. So that was my number one school.

So when I graduated NYU I had been accepted into Berkeley and I knew I was going to be going to Berkeley. So my wife and I and our daughter, Vanessa, moved to Berkeley. My mother-in-law and her children went back to Texas for a while.

Bessie and I and our daughter, Vanessa, took about ten days driving across the country. We drove up and down. Went all sorts of places. Particularly I recall going to Yellowstone and spending several days in Yellowstone and all of these kinds of things. Places I would have never thought about going. I was very stupid or unlearned in the sense that I went, among other places, to Salt Lake

City, and went to the Mormon Tabernacle. Because I used to listen to the choir, and I loved the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. I got to Salt Lake City and went up to Mormon Tabernacle thinking I was going to tour the place. When I approached the entryway the man looked at me and I never saw such hate. I never *saw* such hate. I quickly realized I was unwelcome. I had to stay overnight. I couldn't find any place to stay. I finally ended up in a run-down motel where the door didn't lock. Couldn't even close it completely. We got enough sleep for me to get rested and I drove from Salt Lake City to Reno, Nevada. I never had an experience like this.

So when I graduated, again, I had the sense that I was going to go to graduate school and in four years I was going to have a doctorate and I was going to be a college professor. I had no idea what graduate school was like. But I went with that kind of excitement.

Vanderscoff: How did your family feel about your decision to go and pursue your doctorate?

Blake: My wife was passive. We were, like I said, supporting her mother, who was very ill. And I was glad to have that opportunity, because when her mother came to visit us with her three young children—my wife's mother had three different sets of children by the same father, but they would separate and they'd come back together and my wife was the oldest of the first set—when her mother came to visit us she brought her three youngest children, one of whom hadn't started school yet. The other two had gone through kindergarten, were in the first grade or something. She was trying to work as a domestic, leaving home before they went to school and they had to get there on their own. She had no

idea what was going on with them. And I looked at the youngest, who was a girl, and all I could see was a future life of premature pregnancy, poor education, and poverty.

My mother-in-law was very, very sick. She slept all the time when she came. She just slept. And we thought this was strange. We took her to see a physician and he said he couldn't understand how she was walking around alive. Her blood pressure was about to take her into a stroke. So we immediately adopted a regime that got her stabilized and healthy. But she couldn't work. And there she was. Well, they went back to Texas for a while and we moved across country.

But coming to my family, my wife was supportive. She was not anti, but worried about her mother and others. And I was moving away from the religious tradition in which I had been raised, she had been raised, and in which we had married. I had completely moved away by the time I graduated. I had left that faith and my wife had become even more engaged in it. So that was that potential split. So she was supportive but not enthusiastic.

My mother thought it was irresponsible. I had a good job. By that time I'd left IBM. I was working for a nephew of John Dewey, Gordon C. Dewey, who had a consulting firm. I had a good job. I was getting good pay for the time, doing the kind of work I enjoyed, a situation I enjoyed. My mother felt I had a good job; I had a family. What more do you want? A college degree. I mean, from their perspective that was all.

Now you've got to understand when I got out of the military, and I got out of the army, my father and my uncle, my mother's sister's husband, both

thought I made a serious mistake getting out of the army. Because as they pointed out, if you stay in the army you've got three meals a day guaranteed. You're going to have a place to sleep. And at the end of twenty years you've got a pension. So that's security. And what you have to understand is, given the instability of our lives—economic and otherwise—security meant everything. So I had what appeared to be security. When I was working at IBM, I had become the shift supervisor of the evening shift. And a couple of times my father came just visiting, dropped in, and he couldn't believe it. Here I was, running this big computer the size of a basketball court, in the window on the corner of 57th Street and Madison Avenue in midtown Manhattan and I had these white guys who I supervised. I mean, that's like heaven. So I'm giving that up, in his mind. Well, first of all I gave up the army. That, he thought, was unwise. Now I'm going to give this up to go to something he could not comprehend.

My mother felt it was irresponsible. She never said that in that way. She was always supportive of us in terms of education but what she saw in my stability economically was something she never had. I had a wife who was a registered nurse. She didn't have a college degree, but she had completed nursing school. So you got a profession. What more could you want? And my mother had had a stroke and so she was partly paralyzed and my wife was helping to tend to her and all of this. So what more could you want?

My family was proud of my graduation. They were proud of my academic accomplishments. They were proud of my work accomplishments. But they were uncertain about what future I was going towards. Totally uncertain. *I* was. I had

no idea. I thought when you went to graduate school you continued to do what you did at the undergraduate level. I had *no* idea.

Vanderscoff: And so, given that you had this security that was so valued by the people in your world, by your family, why do you think you chose to leave that behind to continue your school?

Blake: Because what the future offered to me in terms of graduate school was what I had discovered when I did those papers in demography and then subsequently other courses, and spent that time in the public library. What I envisioned was a life of the mind. Teaching courses like that professor of philosophy, and— Not writing books, that wasn't in my mind at that time. But becoming the kind of scholar of society, which is what I was thinking about, where I could do what I had envisioned as a social worker but a lot more. Because sociology was more analytical and comparative and you began to get to answers. Social work you administer the policies others develop and put in place. Sociologists did a critique, which led to policies and changes and all of this. I envisioned a life as a sociologist, a life in the mind—where I had never been.

Vanderscoff: Now you arrive on the West Coast. Did Berkeley and the East San Francisco Bay strike you as a different or new context for you, compared to New York?

Blake: Totally new. Totally new. When I got to Berkeley, while the university had housing for families, I couldn't get into the housing, the village immediately—Albany Village, just north of Berkeley. So I rented an apartment, a nice apartment on one of the streets in Berkeley. It was over near the Oakland-

Berkeley border.¹² Nice place. I rented it, and I started my life there. Well, one of the guys that I had worked with in New York at Gordon C. Dewey was visiting California and he came by to see me. We talked. And he wanted to know—he was white—well, he wanted to know, where was the ghetto? You know, the black community, which I knew in Harlem in New York. I said, "I don't know. Haven't seen it." I was *living* in it. But it wasn't a ghetto to me, because people had lawns. This apartment was a two or three-story building. It wasn't tall like the projects in New York. It was like a garden apartment, almost. And people had sunshine in ways that we didn't have, and more space.

You got to understand in New York City you'd have eight, ten thousand people in one block. And at that time there was a study done which showed that in many of these buildings there were more rats than there were people. I grew up among rats. That was one of the plagues of growing up in those places that I lived. Rodents were constant. Constant. My mother used to keep a pail of coal right by her as she would be sitting during the day—and that's to throw pieces of coal at the rat if it showed up. People stayed up because their children at night, sleeping, would get bitten by rats.

Well, we didn't have that. I didn't see that. So I didn't know I was living in the middle of the black community. To me, it was a community but it wasn't a slum or whatever. So I said I didn't know.

I got that place and stayed there for a couple of months until a place opened up in the university housing for married students. Then I moved over there.

¹² Oakland is directly to the south of Berkeley.

It was a very different place. Now, at that time there were protests going on in Auto Row in San Francisco, because they had this major street, I gather, between the Bay Bridge and the Golden Gate Bridge. It was an arterial that went from one to the other. They had a whole bunch of automobile showrooms along Van Ness Avenue. No blacks or minorities were hired in those places at that time. They were protesting that. I didn't get involved in it but I was aware of that.

But one did not, in Berkeley, sense any real hostility or discrimination. I did not. I'm sure there was, but I did not. [Dr. Blake's phone buzzes] Go ahead.

Vanderscoff: You mentioned that you had a conception that graduate work would essentially be a continuation of undergraduate work. How did the reality of what you found challenge that conception?

Blake: Well, first of all, my first semester I took three courses and had to write papers and study and do all of this. I'm going to school full time. I'm not working. I took three courses. I had to take an incomplete in one. I went to the graduate student advisor, who was somewhat perturbed that I was going to apply for an incomplete. First of all, at Berkeley and in graduate school, a B plus was considered a failure. You didn't get B's. And if you got a C you were out. If you got to the C level you were given one semester to bring your GPA up to at least B. If you didn't, they would ask you to leave. They didn't play. So the graduate advisor said—he was very candid—he said, "You get on the shit list if you take that incomplete."

Now you got to understand they admitted about a hundred students into the sociology program. I'm the only black—or Negro, at that time. I'm the only one. The only other minority was a nun in full habit. Everybody else was white

Anglo-Saxon Protestant or Jewish. And so, the graduate advisor wanted me to succeed. Everybody did. I had no sense that anybody was opposed to me. As a matter of fact he was teaching the course that I was taking the incomplete in. I took a course in history of sociology; I took a course in methodology, which was essentially statistics and doing research; and then this course *Sociology of Organizations*. That's where I wanted to do the incomplete. You only had one semester. The next time that course was taught you had to have resolved that incomplete or else it turned into an F. So I worked very, very hard to get that course done.

I realized very quickly this was a different world. You could get the university library to assign you a carrel, which is a little study space. Once they assigned you a carrel you could go there and study all the time. You could put books up there as long as they had a slip in them indicating you had checked them out. You could put the books on the shelf. If you didn't have the slip in there, they would remove them because they didn't know that they weren't in the stacks. But it was open stacks, and you talk about heaven, to be able to wander among the books. You might be looking for a particular book but in the process you might find fifteen others. It was just marvelous.

So I got me a carrel. I deliberately sought out—as I did when I was an undergraduate— When I was an undergraduate, when I would study I'd go to the library. I'd find the most remote part of the library and I'd position myself with my back to the door so I couldn't see who was coming in. I tried to be facing a wall rather than a window, so that there was nothing to distract me. I did that same thing at Berkeley. I went around that library in the stacks, up and down,

until I found that most remote section, the quietest section. And that's where I applied for a carrel. That's where I spent my days and half the nights, in the, you might say, the bowels or the bosom of the library. I was there with my books.

So I realized that three courses was more than I could handle. So I got the incomplete done and for the rest of that time I never took more than two courses. Well, first of all, the papers that I did were more like what I tried to do as an undergraduate—or I actually did—in demography. I tried to keep that level of quality up or higher. That was one thing. (pause) And while they might have exams it was still very, very different.

I developed a strategy that endeared me to the faculty. Now I didn't understand being the only Negro. I mean, I understood it at one level, but to me I was in my heaven. I didn't think in these terms. I was just doing academic work. But I did something none of the others did. Whenever I had to do a paper for a class I would always write a draft. About a month before the paper was due I would take a draft to the professor and ask for some feedback. And I'd always get it. What I did not realize at the time was if you take a draft and get feedback, the chances are you're going to really come through strong at the end. It also impresses people that you're serious and that you're not there for the grade, you're there for the learning. That became one of my hallmarks.

The other [hallmark] was in the history of sociology that we took, we had to write papers. Well, the first semester we did this everybody was trying to write a paper on [Karl] Marx or [Émile] Durkheim, or [Max] Weber. But the problem was, if everybody's—and you see, we've got a hundred students. If everybody wants to write a paper on Marx, Durkheim or Weber, who is going to

get the books? You might get a book but you've got to return it in two weeks, you know what I mean? You don't have time. My first paper in the history of sociology was on Georg Simmel. I had studied Georg Simmel in a course in sociology that I had taken under Katherine Organski. I loved his writing. I loved his thinking. So I wrote a paper on Georg Simmel. Nobody knew who he was. The professor called him 'Simmel.'¹³ At any rate, I got all the books. Never had to return them.

The second semester, when we did contemporary sociology, contemporary theory, I wrote a paper on Talcott Parsons. Well, I don't know if you know Talcott Parsons, but he's one of the most obtuse writers, I would say, in the history of scholarly work. A Harvard professor. Apparently brilliant, but he wrote these theories and they were just impossible to read. He was known as the American who wrote like a German.

Vanderscoff: (laughs)

Blake: You'd have a sentence that was eight lines long. Trying to figure out what that thing said—Talcott Parsons was an important theorist. And we had to read and learn Parsons, but nobody wanted to write about him. But I did. And I came with a draft. What I did not know was it marked me as being *super* serious. My colleagues, the other students, thought I was stupid. "You're going to write a paper on Parsons? That's hard work." They thought I was stupid. But I just loved it. Once again, the life of the mind.

¹³ Quotation marks reflect the different pronunciation the professor used, in which 'Simmel' is rendered with a soft English pronunciation instead of German (the latter sounding closer to 'Zamell').

So I'm getting into this stuff. I'm writing these papers. And I got all the books on Parsons. And I wrote. The other thing I didn't understand was the man who was eventually going to become my mentor and my friend and my doctoral dissertation director was Parsons' prize student at Harvard. So that became known.

So it was very, very different. But only two courses a semester. After the first year or so you began to get into seminars, where there was much more discussion. There might be eight, ten people. You had to present your own work. You were doing scholarly work very, very quickly.

When we came for the orientation, the graduate advisor said students usually go through three phases in graduate school. The first phase they come in and they act like an undergraduate. They take the courses and they look for the grade. And they do what the syllabus says. The second phase you begin to get into developing your own perspectives. Your interest in the courses was not simply to get the grade, but to get the knowledge and understanding. The third phase was you became like a junior partner with the faculty and you know you're going to get through. The only question is one of timing and when you get things done.

But the other part about Berkeley and particularly the sociology department—there was no such thing as a credit requirement. I mean, at Berkeley, when I went, the requirement for the doctorate—first of all, you didn't have to stop at the master's. You didn't even have to do a master's. You could go straight for the doctorate. That was one. Secondly, for the doctorate you had to pass some basic foundational courses: *Methodology, Theory, and History of*

Sociology. Maybe three to five courses. And then pass the oral examination and write a dissertation. So it wasn't like I needed so many credits. I would see later on people would say, "I got thirty credits, thirty hours towards my doctorate." That meant nothing to us because it wasn't a matter of a number of hours. It was a matter of learning. The whole thing was set up that way. I was into the learning. I would take seminars, and oh, I'd just get in there and write my papers and engage in discussions. We had study groups and all of those kinds of things heading towards the oral examination. Most graduate students took four to five years to prepare for that oral examination because that was a major hurdle.

The other thing that I found interesting was that there were people who had taken a master's degree in social work at Berkeley, because we had a school of social work, and a school of education. They'd do a master's degree and then they'd shift to do the doctorate in sociology. And they got no credit for the previous work they'd done. None whatsoever. You could have a master's degree in social work, or a master's degree in education from the University of California, Berkeley and if you went into the sociology department you started at ground zero.

**Malcolm X, Mexican Demography, and Political Debate:
Personal and Intellectual Trajectories at Berkeley**

Vanderscoff: During your grad school years were you involved in any sort of extracurricular activities or community work activities?

Blake: I really wasn't involved in community work, with one exception that was tied to our coursework that we were doing. But I did get involved with the

NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People]. I went to their meetings the first year. It was not a well-organized, well-developed group. Frankly speaking, it was a time when things were changing and things were very disappointing. We were angry, young, black—Young Turks, we called or considered ourselves. There weren't many black students on the Berkeley campus. I think they estimated at that time there might have been 110, 120, on a campus of 25,000, 30,000 students. And when I say 110, 120, this where they do it from the eye count. And they didn't know who was American or Caribbean-born or African-born, which made a great difference. And the Ethiopian students in no way associated with or involved themselves with blacks. They didn't speak to us. We weren't in their realm. They were Haile Selassie, it was— But you knew if people didn't meet your eye, never greeted you—that was Ethiopian. Very different today but at that time that was that way.

So there weren't that many black students. And frankly speaking, it was not an environment that knew how to welcome students in. We used to say, "They see three Negroes on roller skates, they think it's a race riot." They just didn't know. We'd hang around. There was a rather large number of blacks who hung around the cafeteria, or the Bear's Lair, as we called it, a coffee shop. None of them were students. Carrying briefcases, come up there and act like they were students. I thought they were students. I met a guy in engineering. He had a 3.4 GPA. But he was disappointed. He said, "Herman, I don't have a 3.7 or a 3.9." I'm saying, "He's brilliant." He wasn't even a student.

Vanderscoff: (laughs)

Blake: These guys are hanging around, most of them chasing the women. And they had time for that. I couldn't figure out how they could go to school, get those GPAs. Well, they weren't in school.

So there was a relatively small number of us. And I went to the NAACP meetings, didn't find them very exciting. I remember we had a couple of the faculty who were involved with us. They were really wonderful faculty. Really wonderful. A lot of the residual faculty, faculty who were in general categories, would often be in the speech department. And we found good friends there. There was a wonderful black professor, David Blackwell, who was one of the world's leading statisticians. He came to some of the NAACP meetings and talked with us. But he was never involved in anything, we thought—until we found out later on he was all the time behind the scenes working on our behalf. But he was such an *outstanding* scholar even though he had suffered discrimination early on in his career. He was really at the top. He just died a couple years ago. He was a tremendous source.

But we were angry young men and we didn't like the kinds of stuff we were seeing going on Berkeley, in San Francisco, in Oakland among the Negro leadership. We wanted to make a statement to the campus about 'the New Negro.' We were the New Negro. I remember we invited a guy, Roy Nichols. He was head of the Berkeley or Oakland NAACP. He was a minister. We invited him to give a talk on campus about the New Negro. And we pushed this thing. I'm not head of the NAACP. I'm just in it. And we pushed this thing and had this lecture on campus about the New Negro. People turned out and he gave a lecture about the New Negro. And we came away thinking, Wow. We wanted

him to talk about the New Negro but all we heard about was old colored folks. We realized that if we were going to make a case for who were, *we* had to do it. We couldn't expect somebody else to do it.

So we began to agitate for courses in Negro history and all that. None of that existed. There were only about two or three black professors on the campus, a couple of whom didn't really associate with us. They were friendly, they were supportive, but they weren't going to stick their necks out. It wasn't until Andrew Billingsley came, Staten Webster, and David Blackwell that we felt we had a few faculty that were on our side. White faculty—there were a number of them, some of them who were ready to lead us into revolution. But we weren't too keen on that.

Vanderscoff: And did you feel that this agitation that you were a part of—was the university responsive to what you were asking for in any way?

Blake: Well, there really wasn't agitation as much as talk among ourselves. There were no organized protests or any of that kind of a thing. The dean of students, Arleigh Williams, was wonderful. Always supportive. Always friendly. I dedicated speeches to him. He was always supportive. A very nice guy. We had good support from him.

But we weren't protesting anything. We were just standing around the fountain in the center of campus there talking all the time. Between classes you'd just gather and you'd rap—not rap. We didn't use that term. We'd just talk.

Vanderscoff: Did you see these sorts of conversations that you were having as related in any way to your academic work as a sociologist, or informing it?

Blake: No, not really. Because the kinds of stuff I'm dealing with, the theories with Talcott Parsons and Georg Simmel, all of that—no. I didn't do anything related to blacks. Only once in all my graduate career, in a course on socialization, I got behind and I wrote a paper on socialization in the Negro or something like this. Because it was an easy paper to write.

But other than that, I never did any race stuff in any of my work. I didn't because, number one, that was taking the easy route. And it didn't take me into new areas. So I didn't want to do that. I wanted to get these new areas, these other places. And I was a maverick. Just like I didn't hang out with GIs when I was in France, I didn't want to go where all the blacks were going. Everybody was going to Africa and going to study Africa. Not me. Because it's getting crowded over there—in my mind.

I became interested in Latin America. It was a default kind of a thing. I don't want to go where everybody else is going, so I'm going to go to Latin America. And I was not about to write about things that were profoundly personal and deep with me and expect the faculty to understand. So I didn't even bother. I didn't bother. So all of my graduate career, never—outside of that one paper in socialization—never did anything on blacks.

Vanderscoff: Hmm. And why were you interested in demography and the study of demographics in particular? What did you hope to do with that?

Blake: Well, once again, my undergraduate experiences with Katherine Organski, writing these papers and getting such a positive response. I began to realize that if you understood the numbers, the data, census data and vital statistics, you could analyze a society from the numbers. When I began teaching, I would give

students what we called an age-sex table: the population of a society or a country in five-year segments from zero to four all the way up to eighty-five plus—males and females. I'd give them this table and tell them, "Analyze and compare three or four different societies." It was so exciting. You could take numbers and begin to *see* things you never saw before.

When I was in Mississippi, [at Tougaloo College in the eighties], and we made this trip to Japan, all of us, led by the lieutenant governor—when we got to Fujisawa, hosted by the mayor, they handed out these brochures about Fujisawa. And it had these demographic charts. It's all in Japanese. Well, I read the charts, and when it came time for discussion after the mayor had made his presentation, I started talking about the future problem of an aging population. He got very excited talking about what they were doing as they were planning for this. And the other people looked at me, "How do you know this? You can't read Japanese." "I can read those numbers." So it was very exciting, in that sense.

Plus, I began to focus on Mexico. This is the early sixties. I went to graduate school in 1960. And as the data came out it became apparent that from 1930 to 1960 the population of Mexico doubled every ten years. It was the fastest rate of population growth in the world. That becomes a very exciting challenge. I began to focus on analyzing and understanding why the Mexican population was growing so fast and what social phenomena or patterns might in some way change that rapid rate of growth. So it was, once again, just like when I was an undergraduate studying birth control policy in Japan. I'm just extending this. It was the life of the mind. Absolutely fascinating. I'm still fascinated by it. Love it.

Vanderscoff: I'd like to talk about one or two more specific events from your time at Berkeley. In '63, you did an interview with Malcolm X at Berkeley as part of a sociology class. What sort of class was this in context with?

Blake: Well, first of all I met Malcolm X—whom I ultimately called El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, as he did—I met him in 1961, when he made his first trip to the Bay Area. By that time—and it's a long story—I had established positive relationships with the leadership of the Oakland mosque of the Nation of Islam. They said they wanted me to meet Malcolm when he came. Part of this was trying to convert me to the Nation of Islam. So when he came in 1961, we had arranged for him to speak on campus. A day or two before he arrived the university withdrew that permission. I got very angry at the vice chancellor for student affairs. Not the dean of students—the vice chancellor. It was a political thing. A really political thing. It was nasty. The university was wrong, wrong, wrong. And I didn't hesitate to say so.

But we arranged for Malcolm to speak in the YMCA across the street from the campus. The YMCA was named Stiles Hall. That's where I met Malcolm. When he came to campus I took him and I showed him the ballroom where we wanted him to speak, but he couldn't speak. And nobody knew Malcolm, so here I am wandering around with him and his Muslim friends. Then we went across the street to Stiles Hall where he was to speak, and maybe about forty or fifty people gathered. There wasn't that big a crowd. He wasn't that big a name. A number of international students. No faculty, as I recall. And Malcolm came and made a presentation there in '61.

Well, he was coming back in '63. I'd spent some time with him in New York in that summer of '61 or '62. I don't know—all the details are foggy. So he's coming back in 1963 and the same Muslim leaders in Oakland let me know that he was coming. And the university by this time—different vice chancellor for student affairs, Alex Sheriff, and others—they were willing to have him speak on campus.

In 1961, when I met Malcolm he was dubious. He looked at me askance. I mean, he really did. You don't know who to trust. Here comes this Negro who's on his way to becoming the next E. Franklin Frazier—that's what my professors were talking about in terms of me as a sociologist. And you don't know who you can trust.

It was clear that he had that sentiment. And as we were talking then I said there was a professor at Berkeley in sociology who had met Wallace Fard [Muhammad] back in the thirties in Chicago. Well, Wallace Fard was seen as the incarnation of Allah. And Malcolm said to me—I mean, his visage changed. He looked at me in a different way and more kindly. He said, "I'd like to meet that professor." He said, "Because I never met the master." The only connection between Wallace Fard and the Nation of Islam was Elijah Muhammad, who claimed that he'd met God and he walked with God. So that now here's this white man who met Wallace Fard and Malcolm wanted to meet him. This is all in '61.

So now he's coming back in 1963. The Muslim leaders contacted me and among other things we had him speak on campus. The dean of students handled all of that, made all of the arrangements. He spoke in Dwinelle Plaza. About

seven thousand people showed up. That was number one. But before he did that, I had arranged a private meeting between Malcolm and Herbert Blumer, the professor he wanted to meet in the faculty club. They had a private room like this, but a little bit larger, in the faculty club.¹⁴

But before he did that, I got Malcolm to agree to do a video in this course in which I was the head teaching assistant. They were teaching sociology on TV, the first time ever any course was taught on TV in any campus in the country. Didn't even have a studio. Just had a converted classroom with some cameras and stuff. You used to have fifteen hundred students sitting in a big lecture hall in the introduction to sociology class and you'd have these fifteen hundred students in the lecture hall twice a week, and then once a week they'd go into small group discussions for an hour. And the TAs would lead the discussion groups and read the exams. We did all of the grunt work. The professors gave the lectures. There were two professors: John [Leggett], who's on the video with me, and Philip Selznick, who was the major professor in the class.

So we wanted Malcolm to be on TV in a discussion that all of the students could see. So they would see it, what happened is instead of having all the students in a lecture hall, twice a week they would go to a small group room where we would lead a discussion which followed a presentation on TV. So the whole thing was in small groups. But the general lecture came through TV and the professors were live in the studio, or the converted classroom.

But Malcolm was coming at a time when we were not discussing race relations. We couldn't change the schedule. What they agreed was, "Well, let's

¹⁴ For reference, the conference room that hosted the majority of these sessions is small, with enough space for a table, six chairs, and space to move around the periphery.

video him and then when it comes time for the race relations we'll show that video." So that's how the video came about.¹⁵

So the plan was Malcolm was going to come. I was going to meet him. Then we were going to go and do the video. And from the video we're going to the faculty club, where he would meet with Herbert Blumer. From there we'd go to Dwinelle Plaza, where at noon in Dwinelle Plaza he would address the campus. And that's what happened.

So he came. I met them in the parking lot. I told Malcolm, I said, "You know you don't have to lock your car. We've got an honor system here." He laughed at me. I was so naïve. He laughed at me, he said, "Brother," he said, "I was a thief for many years. And as a thief you learn one thing. You never trust honest people." (laughter) "You never trust honest people." So I'm locking my car and we went on over to where we did the video.

And so that was an advanced thing that we were doing for the class. Interestingly enough, Malcolm expected and I expected that video would be erased at the end of the semester. They erased all of the lectures and everything else they had. That video would be erased. It was not erased. It was pirated. It's available to us now but that was not Malcolm's intention.

Vanderscoff: I have a question about how you initially came to be in dialogue with the Nation in the East Bay, and came to be interested in Malcolm X. Given that you were raised Seventh Day Adventist and at that time were a member of the NAACP with their own very particular, articulated vision, what was the nature of the appeal of the Nation and Malcolm to you?

¹⁵ See "Interview with Malcolm X" Originally recorded October 11, 1963, Lecture #22, Sociology 1-A, University of California, Berkeley. Available at the UCSC Library in DVD format.

Blake: Long story. But I'll try and give a reduced version. There was a group of African American males, some of them graduate students—actually law students. Two law students. But mainly a lot of guys that were just hanging around, who used to gather in the coffee shops and other things along Telegraph Avenue.

Well, one of these was a young gentleman and a superb law student. Came out of a Pentecostalist religious background. He was a good speaker and good Pentecostalist preacher. Sometimes at parties he would start demonstrating his preaching skill. I'd see him and I thought, "What the heck is he doing that for?" And he'd look at me (inaudible), and the look in his face was, "Man, you get on your side of the street. I'm running my thing here." By this time I'm head of the UC Berkeley chapter of the NAACP. And I was seen as a very promising potential scholar.

So this image comes to us on TV of this guy in Harlem who's talking about the white man as the devil, named Malcolm X. Okay, so now all of a sudden there's the Nation of Islam. Somebody had written a book about the Nation of Islam which got a lot of attention: *The Black Muslims in America*, C. Eric Lincoln. That book we were all reading. And one of the local ministers, Booker Anderson, was invited by the NAACP before I became chair to give a talk on campus about the Black Muslims. He came and did, gave a rather dramatic talk about "these people." And there was a kind of turmoil.

Well, a leader of this group wrote an open letter to the head of the NAACP which appeared in the campus newspaper. He was involved with CORE: Congress of Racial Equality. And that was a really different kind of a person. He wrote this thing challenging me to a debate about the NAACP and

how useless it was, and how the Black Muslims really represented black folk. Now, that was not his sentiment. That was another way of getting attention. Well, much to his shock and surprise, I accepted "your challenge." We had a debate in a major hall seating about eight hundred students on the Black Muslims versus the NAACP—and he representing the Muslim side. And it was a very interesting debate. He always talked about statistics: "Statistics say...!" He'd never quote a source, but he could create statistics. "Statistics say...!" And you know the saying "There's liars, damn liars, and there's statistics," which was my response. And we debated. And Wheeler Auditorium was jammed.

Well, into the back of the hall came four Muslim ministers from Oakland, because this guy is supposed to be representing the Nation of Islam. And we had this debate. It went on for almost two hours, answering questions back and forth. But his whole thing was, "Don't ever join the NAACP. Join CORE." Well, this made the Muslim ministers mad. He isn't representing the Muslims. He's saying, "Join CORE!" Which is where he had his little thing going.

And afterwards they came to me and they said, "Man, you're the only one that represents anything we would be interested in," by my position and my presentation and my criticism. They liked it. And the head of the Oakland mosque, a Muslim minister by the name of Bernard X—he ultimately got his name—he became Bernard X Kushmeer, began a relationship with me. He liked me. And they had to write papers for Elijah Muhammad. That was a part of their responsibility as Muslim ministers. He would come to me for guidance in terms of resources and books and things. We developed this kind of relationship. So that went on.

And that's how when Malcolm was coming in 1961. I was able to meet Malcolm and present him to the community at Stiles Hall. Well, these Telegraph Avenue guys showed up to challenge Malcolm. Some came with their white girlfriends. I want to tell you, when that evening was over those guys crept out with their tail between their legs. Malcolm destroyed them. I can't go into all of the stuff, but oh, he destroyed them. Not only did he talk about them, he talked about their women. And he did it looking them straight in the eye.

So all of that was done, and I had just began this friendship with Bernard Kushmeer. They were trying to get me to join the Nation of Islam. They kept saying, "You're Muslim already. You just need to come in and get your X." I wasn't about to. Malcolm came to my job. I was working in the computer center by then, '63, at night. He came up one evening and tried his best to convince me I should join the Nation of Islam. What you saw on TV was *nothing* like what we debated face-to-face, person-to-person.

That was a Friday that we did that video. And he spoke. We were together a lot Friday, Saturday and Sunday, and Sunday night, until he left to go back to his residence, getting ready to take a plane that Monday morning, going back to New York. I remember him leaving that little apartment where we had a reception that evening—long story behind that. I said, "Minister Malcolm, stay in San Francisco." And he looked at me and laughed, he said, "Brother, I'd rather be in an alley in Harlem than on a boulevard in San Francisco." And he strolled out. I never saw him again. Never talked to him again.

But that was Malcolm, and that's how I got to be involved with the Nation of Islam. They came to hear the debate and as a result of what they heard they

got interested in me and we began a friendship that continued after Malcolm split with Elijah Muhammad.¹⁶ Bernard Kushmeer brought me material and information that was not generally known to try and get me to not side with Malcolm, but side with Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam. I wasn't going get involved in it in any way. Bernard Kushmeer ultimately wrote a biography of Elijah Muhammad and I have an autographed copy.

Vanderscoff: Given that you came to know Malcolm X through your social work, your community work in your capacity with the NAACP, and he ultimately came to speak for your sociology class—did you start to sense some type of an intersection between the social community work that you were doing and the sociological work that you were studying in your coursework?

Blake: No. Nope, the closest we got to that was when we were doing a course in research methodology, particularly survey research, some of us, through community people in San Francisco—particularly a guy named Orville Luster, who headed up a youth-serving organization. His daughter became one of my students at Santa Cruz and ultimately did a doctorate at Stanford in anthropology. Orville Luster got us involved in helping him do a statistical survey of the Hunter's Point neighborhood. It was and still is, I believe, a set of old Naval barracks that low-income blacks began to live in. They wanted to sell it and turn it into a middle-income housing development. The people said, "We can't afford that." And they said, "Our statistics show that you can." We did a survey for Orville Luster of the community to provide competitive data. That's the closest I came to getting involved in community stuff.

¹⁶ This split became public in March 1964.

Vanderscoff: Later in your time at Berkeley, the Free Speech Movement kicked into motion. Was that something that was a presence in your life or something that mattered to you?

Blake: In 1963 when they had the Freedom Summer down in Mississippi, several things: one, I had a family. I was doing other things, trying to support my family and do my graduate work. One of the things, at undergraduate and graduate school, I never went to summer school. Not one day, not one hour, because they always, it seemed to me, the rush courses where they were trying to get people through—the *Reader's Digest* version. I never wanted that. I would not participate in that. So I was doing other things.

But I did not get involved in the Freedom Summer because of several things. I knew some of the people who were recruited for it, particularly some of the women. And I knew I didn't want to be around anything where those particular women were involved.

But to make a long story short, I didn't do those kinds of things. I was not an advocate of nonviolence. I felt that if there were going to be nonviolent demonstrations and I ran into a situation where I was faced with a person was going to do me harm, I was not going to be nonviolent. So I chose not to go there and get into that.

That was '63. By that time, I was essentially moving away from the campus. I was still involved as a graduate student, but most of my courses were seminars and other things. I'm working, and I did my work on campus. Mario Savio and all of that, and the Free Speech Movement—no, I was not a part of it. I felt that was their battle. They were constantly coming to us, wanting us to get

engaged. There were the Young Socialists and other socialist groups. But they had agendas that I didn't feel spoke to *us*. Even when they brought Stokely Carmichael to campus one time— Here comes Stokely Carmichael speaking on campus and we get invited to hear our leader. We got with Stokely, said, "What's going on? How is it that you are coming to speak to us, about us, and these are the guys who are your sponsors and bring you? I mean, you got to be more in touch with us." Malcolm was not that way. If they wanted Malcolm, they had to come to us. Malcolm would never have accepted an invitation from a white group. He'd accept one from a black group to address people.

So no, I didn't get involved in the Free Speech Movement, those demonstrations, or any of that.

Vanderscoff: In this social and political climate that you're discussing, how did you hone your interests, stay focused on your academics, and what ultimately did you chose to focus on for your thesis?

Blake: Well, once again, my interests were constantly being honed by seminars or workshops I was doing, lectures I would be going to. One of the key things happened in the summer of 1964, when the university's extension division offered a course called *The History That History Forgot*. It was the first course in Negro history taught on the Berkeley campus. They brought a whole bunch of outstanding scholars: John Hope Franklin; Hylan Lewis, the anthropologist; the poet from Howard University, Sterling Brown; and others. I was one of the key teaching assistants in this course. They may have had a couple more. I'm not sure. It was mainly offered for teachers in public schools. They flocked to the course. I was a TA.

I got to meet and interact with and talk at length with these scholars and be in more private, intimate discussions with them. I learned so much, so much. John Hope Franklin was a consummate gentleman. But there was a seething, simmering anger about all of this stuff going on. Sterling Brown was an incredible poet and spent a lot of time telling us the background of his poetry and other things.

You got to understand something: Sinclair Drake, who came to my class—I was also teaching the Peace Corps in '63 and '64, and Drake was one of the major leaders in teaching the Peace Corps—I developed a good relationship with him which continued until his death. I learned a lot as I sat and listened with them and talked with them. They saw me as an upcoming young scholar, and they were unstinting in terms of their generosity. Hylan Lewis, when he went back to Howard, would send me papers he was writing. He'd send me mimeographed drafts and copies of stuff that was coming out. I would be reading this stuff, which ultimately I incorporated into my classes at Santa Cruz.

But there was never any doubt that I was going to do my thesis on Mexico and the demography of Mexico. I worked with Kingsley Davis as a research assistant at the Institute for Population and Urban Research. Initially, illegitimacy was the question he wanted me to look at. But I never did much with it except to do the kinds of data collection and reporting that he wanted. His wife was much more interested in that, Judith Blake. Her doctoral dissertation was on family in Jamaica and birth patterns of women in Jamaica—what they called at that time illegitimate births.

So I did that, but mainly I focused on Mexico. I began to amass Mexican materials. Ultimately I bought, and I may still have in my files somewhere, the complete Mexican census of 1930, 1940, 1950, and 1960. And I began to analyze that stuff. So I wrote my master's thesis on urbanization and urban fertility in Mexico. William Petersen, the social demographer, was the director. Judith Blake, another social demographer, was a member of the committee. And Neil Smelser, who became the director of my doctoral dissertation, was also a member of the committee. I wanted Neil because I wanted him to direct my doctoral dissertation. So I did *Urbanization and Urban Fertility [in Mexico, 1930-1960]* as my master's thesis. I'm sorry, I could have showed it to you at the house. I've got them sitting there on that bookshelf.

That led to a doctoral dissertation on social change and population trends in Mexico from 1900 to 1960. Urbanization and urban fertility, I just did 1930 to 1960. That became a segment of the doctoral dissertation, which was a study of social change, which was Neil Smelser's specialty.

I focused on how those social changes led to demographic patterns. Basically, the Mexican Revolution of 1910 led to a redistribution of wealth and land and dramatic improvements in public health. Those improvements in public health led to significant drops in infant mortality. And when infant mortality goes down, population just explodes. So the children, who in 1920 were born and would have been dead because of the public health and water that was not clean, those kinds of things—those children would be dead by the time they were five. By 1930, they were living 'til they were fourteen. By 1950 and '60, they were living 'til they were forty-five. So they were living long enough to have children.

And that's why the population was doubling. But it was the social changes—the redistribution of land, the political changes—that created the demographic conditions.

And not only did I study that, I did a detailed analysis of Mexico City and the twelve statistical districts of Mexico City, showing that what began to change in terms of population fertility dropping was the education of girls. When they could go to the sixth grade or further, they then tended to get into the labor force. When they got into the labor force they delayed marriage. So instead of starting fertility and childbearing at fifteen, they might not start until they're twenty-five. If you look at this you would see that pattern: Education, labor force, and delayed marriage. Birth rate goes down.

Vanderscoff: And as you were working on this doctoral dissertation, what sort of ideas you were developing for where you wanted to go with that dissertation? Did you want to teach? What did you want to do next?

Blake: I wanted to get the dissertation done. Actually, I was beginning to get into other things already. I started at Santa Cruz well before I finished my dissertation. I should not have done that, but I did, because I was able to get the position. And so I was already into it. I wanted to teach. In 1963, I got a chance to teach a sociology course at San Francisco State. It was just one course but it was very exciting doing what I really wanted to do—and that was teach and challenge students with new ideas. They didn't like it and I had a hard time because it was not an environment that was educationally centered. When I say 'educationally centered,' people were ready to take courses and accumulate

credits. That's not what I was interested in doing. I was interested in pursuing ideas.

"We Got Through": The UCSC Hiring Process

Vanderscoff: So you mentioned that you came to UCSC well before your dissertation was done. Shifting gears slightly towards that direction, prior to your appointment at UCSC the university had been open for one year. In your time at Berkeley what impressions did you have of UCSC and what was going on there?

Blake: Well, first of all, the university was developing three campuses simultaneously: Santa Cruz—San Diego was already a graduate school and they were developing an undergraduate school—and I believe Riverside was the other one.

Vanderscoff: Irvine, I believe.

Blake: Irvine, yeah. And the whole notion was there were going to be some exciting things in terms of higher education. Pat Brown—I don't know if he was governor then or had been governor—I met him subsequently at Santa Cruz and he talked about what they were thinking about, what they were dreaming about when they were thinking about starting Santa Cruz. But it was known to be an institution that was going to focus on undergraduate education. There were many people at Berkeley who thought that was absolutely outrageous because it was not the highly focused research, scholarly emphasis that characterized the University of California.

The [1960 California] Master Plan had three distinct patterns: Community colleges were avenues into higher education. The state colleges, most of whom were teacher-training institutions or started that way, were the places where you got an undergraduate education. And the university was the research, scholarly emphasis. The country needed the kind of scholarship and research that could take place in university settings. Like, we had the Lawrence Livermore Labs and all of those kinds of things. They had big time stuff. Scripps Institute of Oceanography—I had the privilege of being mentored for several years by Roger Revelle, the founder of the Scripps Institute of Oceanography. And I got all of this stuff.

But I wanted to do undergraduate teaching. I kept thinking about my experiences as an undergraduate: open, receptive teachers who took me and molded and motivated me. That's what I wanted to do. And Santa Cruz was developing that way. Dean McHenry was on board. There was publicity about it. I didn't know anything about Page Smith.¹⁷

But there was a guy who taught at Berkeley in sociology by the name of David Matza. David, among other things, specialized in the sociology of adolescence. That was his research and that was his writing. He was seen as the kind of person they wanted at Santa Cruz because they're going to be getting adolescents. So his research could coincide with the demographic pattern and hopefully maybe a teaching pattern. They were trying to get him. Page Smith, apparently, whom I did not know, was trying to get him. I had already taken my

¹⁷ Dean McHenry was founding chancellor, and Page Smith was the first provost of UCSC's first college. They were crucial figures in early campus history. For more on Dean McHenry's involvement in UCSC, see Elizabeth Spedding Calciano, Interviewer and Editor, *Dean McHenry: Founding Chancellor of the University of California, Santa Cruz (three volumes)* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 1972, 1974, 1987).

orals and passed them and was beginning to work on my dissertation. I was in the utility room, the coffee room, of the Berkeley department of sociology, and David Matza walked in. We greeted each other. I knew him. I never took a course with him, but he was very friendly and I liked him. He said they were trying to get him to come to Santa Cruz and he really wasn't interested in going to Santa Cruz; would I be interested? I said, "I'd love it." He said, "I'll put them in touch with you." That's exactly what he did.

Page Smith called me up, invited me down. I drove down in this car which was coming apart. We needed a new car so badly that as I was driving back, almost getting back, the car went kaput. We had already made plans to buy another car.

But that's the way it was. I drove down to Santa Cruz. Never been there before in my life. Walked into the Cook House [at the base of campus], which was the headquarters. Dean McHenry had his office there and so did Page Smith. I walked into the Cook House and Page Smith invited me to sit down. There was no place to sit. Everything was covered with boxes. So he cleared a part of a sofa from the boxes and had me sit down. And he immediately started attacking sociologists as not knowing anything about the world.

Vanderscoff: (laughs)

Blake: Page was irreverent.¹⁸ "Here were all these demonstrations going on up at Berkeley and the last persons who could help out were the people who should—

¹⁸ For Page Smith's perspective on early UCSC history, see Elizabeth Spedding Calciano, Interviewer and Editor, *Page Smith: Founding Cowell College and UCSC, 1964-1973* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 1996). Available in full text and audio at <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/smith>

that was the sociologists. What is wrong with you people?" And so forth and so on. I took him on. Then he saw Byron and he said, "Byron! Come on over here." Byron Stookey. Byron came in with his taciturn, kind of dry way, and started *really* needling me—really needling me. Now it wasn't exactly like it was an interview. It was like a conversation. And I looked at him and I said, "Stookey,"—I said to myself—"Stookey," and I leaned over and I said, "You've got a relative in show business." He sat back, turned red, and he said, "Yeah, he's a distant cousin." Well, when I was at NYU I used to hang around Greenwich Village. I used to go to the Gaslight Café. And there was this guy who was always there singing. His name was Noel Stookey. And he eventually with this other guy who used to come in the evening, play the guitar, we'd all sing "Lloyd George Knew My Father." And this blonde beauty—they became Peter, Paul and Mary.

Vanderscoff: Huh.

Blake: But he looked like Byron. Byron looked like him. I just put the two together and it took the wind right out of his sails.

Vanderscoff: (laughs)

Blake: Then they introduced me to Dean McHenry and Dean and I had a brief conversation, not a long one. And I left.

I was on my way to Washington for a two-week seminar at the Census Bureau. I was a Population Council fellow. That was another one of the fellowships I won. I got something like nine different fellowships or scholarships during my graduate career. Applied for thirteen, got nine. One was a Population

Council, and one of the benefits was you got to spend two weeks at the Census Bureau with a small group of people—ten to twelve—all expenses paid. And they gave you a complete rundown of the Census Bureau and how it worked. It was a marvelous education.

I went to Washington for the two weeks. My brother was there in the military. So I got a chance to spend a little time with him. He was in the Marines. He was in one of those Marine guard details. He would look pretty and march around and all that sort of business. He never did the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier but he did a lot of other ceremonial stuff.

While I was there, Page called me on the telephone and said they wanted to offer me a position as an acting assistant professor. I was offered the position for the year Santa Cruz opened. My actual appointment is in 1965. But they gave me automatically the first year leave, so I didn't start until '66. But I signed my contract in '65. And that's what they did.

I said on the phone that was great. Then the next day a special delivery letter arrived at my hotel in Washington. It was a contract from Santa Cruz with those conditions. That weekend I went to New York, saw my father. My mother was dead by then. And I showed him this letter. My father could hardly read. But he memorized that letter. He didn't plan to memorize it but I'm saying by the time he got finished he could tell people what it said: acting assistant professor, et cetera and et cetera and et cetera. I didn't sign it and send it back. I wanted to wait until I got back to Berkeley to show it to my wife before I signed it and sent it in. Because it meant that we got through!

The plane ride—I've written this up and shared it with [UCSC Professor] Bill Doyle, nobody else—the plane ride from Washington back to San Francisco and ultimately to Berkeley was the most tense, anxious plane ride I've had in my life. I've always had a comfort with dying. I'm not fearful of dying. But I was absolutely terrified thinking that plane was going to crash. I would have an unsigned contract in my pocket and I would have never completed the circle, if you will, of ultimately ending up as an acting assistant professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz: the goal. The plane landed, I was all right. I actually did this analysis. See, that's my critical stuff. I do it all the time, more than I should, maybe. But I signed that contract and got it in, terribly relieved. Had the first year off, the next year [raps on table] started at Cowell College, preceptor in Beard House.

Vanderscoff: Is there anything else you'd like say on this section that we've talked about before closing off for the moment?

Blake: No.

Vanderscoff: All right, wonderful. Thank you.

Intellectual and Imaginative Dynamics: Reflections on Cowell College and Early UCSC

Vanderscoff: Today remains Tuesday, February 12th [2013]. We are in the same conference room at the Medical University of South Carolina, picking up the thread with your arrival at Cowell College. When you first came to UCSC, you were affiliated as a sociologist with Cowell College. Would you mind reflecting

on the Cowell environment in those early days, those early months? What are some stories that come to mind?

Blake: Well, as I recall it, the Cowell environment was a culmination for me of the dream that began to come into my mind when I had those academic experiences in the class of Katherine Organski and others at NYU as an undergraduate. That is to say, people were there who were interested in being academic, being intellectual. There were some great people. I remember a guy named Noel Oxenhandler, I believe, who taught literature or something like this. He didn't stay long. And what was unique for me about that was he left. I could never imagine anybody leaving this ideal environment. I think he went to Dartmouth. But the others, we were just—for me—in an academic heaven.

I remember, first of all, in terms of the residence halls, Betsy Avery, who was an administrative assistant, a tall woman, taking me around and showing me the apartment where I was going to be residing. Brand-new. And they were acting like, "This is where you belong."

That was true across the board. Page Smith was always welcoming. And Eloise [Pickard Smith] was priceless. But that was true of so many of my colleagues. You could just go down the list. They were always wonderful human beings. Now I had one incident where a faculty member slipped and called me a nigger in my office. And it caused me some upset, but not much. I noticed that he and a number of others used to get a little bit upset about the fact that these, as he put it, "white girls" were coming to my office. Well, they were my students. But sometimes they'd just come and sit because they were needy students. They looked for role models in others, and that's what we did. That's what a scholar

did, in my opinion, an academician. That's what I got from Margaret Benz when I was an undergraduate. That's what I got from other people. And that's what I extended to my students.

I remember talking with the biologist, Todd Newberry, and he was talking about his approach to teaching.¹⁹ And for him it was "All of me teaching all of you." So you had to take into consideration the whole student, and the whole environment. Those were great people. And here I was a part of it, but rather than being a receiver of the knowledge, I was one who was beginning to impart knowledge and I hope develop wisdom. So it was a very exciting environment.

We were living in the residence hall. Students were there and sometimes they'd come to my apartment. Sometimes I'd cook. They were very gracious. They always said it was great food. Now that I have learned something about what cooking is and what the food is like, it was absolutely abominable. But they made me feel good. (laughter) They made me feel good. That was a wonderful experience.

Vanderscoff: So given that you were not only teaching at the college but also living there, it seems to me that you were truly immersed in the college lifestyle at that point. Did you spend a lot of time teaching college courses or going to college events, College Nights, things like that?

Blake: Well, we all taught—two of our five classes were college courses. I don't recall all of the things I taught. I know I taught demography. I know I taught a

¹⁹ See Randall Jarrell, Interviewer and Irene Reti, Editor, *Andrew Todd Newberry, Professor of Biology: Reflections on UCSC, 1965-1994* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2006). Available in full text and audio at <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/newberry>

course on immigration. I taught introduction to sociology; I taught the family; I taught social theory.

And I did go to the college events. We used to have something called—not only College Night, but we'd have a weekend college festival or something like that. Culture Break, that's what they called it. Culture Break. And we'd have all these different people. I was able to invite Joe Boskin, who was a professor of history at the University of Southern California and did special work on the humor in the civil rights movement, particularly in Mississippi in the sixties. And he'd written a nice piece which appeared in the *New York Times Magazine*.

We had Joe up. He did a nice thing on humor and then came to my apartment and met with students. But then he saw my situation and he took me under his wing and really became a real mentor to me and published one of my first articles. I got an article in *The Annals of Political and Social Science*, which he was instrumental in helping make that connection for me. Joe still is teaching at Boston University. We've been in communication in recent months. Joe Boskin came, and a number of others. People I'd never expected I would meet, I did, and I interacted with all of the time. College Night and Culture Break were important kinds of things. I didn't know much about culture or Culture Break, but watching Mary Holmes and how she handled people and situations was always, always good. Yeah.

Vanderscoff: Now what about your board?²⁰ Was it quite a small board at that time?

²⁰ Departments at UCSC were originally called 'boards of study.'

Blake: It was a small board. A very cooperative board. It was combined anthropology and sociology. Richard Randolph was doing all of this research on Bedouins and Middle Easterners. It didn't seem to be very salient or relevant then but now it's right at the heart of what we do. He was a fine leader and gentleman. Dennis McElrath led sociology. And then we had others: Mark Messer. Mark didn't stay around long. He went on up into the mountains and became a mountain person, hippie, carpenter. But there were others: Bob Werlin, who was a new sociologist, very young. I remember Bob saying one day during a board meeting he finally felt like he was an adult. And I said, "What do you mean?" He says, "I'm spending more money than I'm making." (laughter) But he bought a house in town. His parents had loaned him the money and all of those kinds of things. They were doing all sorts of things. We had a lot of communication, a lot of interaction, and *a lot* of respect. That was very important. And I was one of the group, welcomed. But I taught. I mean, I really taught. I worked hard at teaching and I had good classes, good students.

Vanderscoff: And did you find that, generally speaking, the subject matter of the board, the scope of inquiry of the board—did you and the type of approaches you'd been taught at Berkeley and earlier at NYU—did you feel like those fit in there?

Blake: No. It was not a very strong research-oriented board at that time. People had their doctoral research and all. We were all young. People weren't developing research programs or trajectories that might require proposal-writing, grant-getting—and we had no graduate program. So it was a very different kind of environment. We were more, I think, fixed on building relations with the

colleges and with each other within the context of the colleges. It was looking more horizontally rather than vertically.

Vanderscoff: How do you think that impacted the quality of the education that the students had access to—those sorts of priorities that you were just discussing?

Blake: I can't say for others, but for me it was meaningful in the sense that I felt I was digging and delving into areas that were not normally perceived or seen. I taught immigration. But in teaching immigration I did a lot of history. I taught the family and other kinds of courses like this. I remember students would want to do term papers on personal matters. And I'd say, "You can't do that." One woman was in the process of getting a divorce. She was an older student, from Santa Cruz. I remember her well. She wanted to write a paper on divorce and getting a divorce, and I refused to allow her. I insisted that she write in another area.

I had another woman, who was a local resident, who was of Chinese descent. She'd just come with her kids to my class. I don't know how I met her. I just don't know how that happened. But she would come to the course on immigration and talk and interact with the students around immigration. I would have the students wear masks so that they would represent different immigrant groups that they had to become knowledgeable about and involved with. All of these kinds of things.

I felt that I could be more intense about the learning experience. Because you see, we also had the narrative evaluations, and the focus was not on grades

or exams. The focus was on learning. It was a constantly growing, expanding environment.

I had long-range desires. My goal was to write a book on Latin American demography, like Preston James' book on Latin American geography, which I had read very carefully. I wanted to collect census data and vital statistics and other data on all of the countries in Central America and then go on down to South America and build a continued knowledge and expansion of the demography of these countries. But that demography also included history, because in the course of my work I did a lot on the so-called Aztecs, and the indigenous populations of Mexico before the arrival of [Hernán] Cortés and the Europeans. I was studying the material that Woodrow Borah had developed at Berkeley on the precolonial populations of México. And I was fascinated by this. I wanted Woodrow Borah to be on my doctoral committee but he refused unless I would be willing to learn Aztec hieroglyphics. Well, that was a little bit beyond where I was. (laughter) But that was the kind of mindset I was constantly engaged with.

My classes were designed so that every semester, every time I offered a class, I changed about one-third of the lectures and the assignments, about one-third, so that every three years you had a new course. The whole idea was knowledge was constantly expanding.

I do that here at the Medical University. I don't do things the same way twice. I have to do it differently. Some people don't understand that. They'll have a set of my slides, and they say, "Well, we're going to put your slides on." I say, "Wait a minute, I got new stuff." They say, "Oh, wow." I'm right now working

with some people. I said, I don't do it the same way twice, because that's not constantly expanding. At Berkeley one of my professors had written a biography of Max Weber. And the minute the book came out he said he was no longer interested in that. So he was off onto something else. You submit your work and then you move on, constantly developing, constantly developing. I loved it but I was doing it in the context of undergraduate learning.

Vanderscoff: And was there significant, for you, interdisciplinary collaboration or intellectual interchange going on? Were you learning from people in disciplines besides your own?

Blake: Oh yeah. John Dizikes and I taught a course together, called *The History and Sociology of Nineteenth Century America*. And we found we spent as much time informing, educating each other as we did teaching the students. It was a wonderful course. John's a historian.²¹ I'm a sociologist. And when we got to the last lecture—one would lecture one week, one the other week—I think we had that in the syllabus. We got to the last lecture. We talked and talked and talked. What we did was we outlined the last lecture, eight—maybe—key themes or ideas. And we alternated between giving the themes. And we did not, did not review the ideas we were going to present with each other in advance. So we walked in the class. John went, then I went and so forth. Students gave us a standing ovation. They were absolutely thrilled by this intellectual—I won't say

²¹ For John Dizikes' take on early Cowell and UCSC history, see Cameron Vanderscoff, Interviewer and Editor, *John Dizikes: A Life of Learning and Teaching at UCSC, 1965-2001* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2012) Available in full text and audio at <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/dizikes>

tour de force, but it was, for me. John always likes to say they gave us a standing ovation because the class was over.

Vanderscoff: (laughs)

Blake: But I think it was more than that. I taught a course with Dilip Basu, once again a historian, on the role of violence and nonviolence in social change. I came at it from the [Black] Panther perspective. He came at it from the Gandhi perspective. It was a tremendous kind of experience, building relationships. We, even now, recently communicated and said, "We ought to pull that material out and write it up and publish it."

Then there were the college courses, the core courses, which were all interdisciplinary. The Oakes College core course involved seven faculty from all sorts of disciplines. We weren't trying to integrate the disciplines. We were trying to get the students, we were trying to give liberal arts professors an avenue to articulate their discipline within the context of the liberal arts, in a kind of a cross-disciplinary way. So it was horizontal and vertical at the same time, which is what a good humanities, liberal arts thing ought to be.

Vanderscoff: We've been discussing some of the material that you were teaching students. I'm curious about what you learned from students and the types of questions and conversations they had with you in those early Cowell days.

Blake: I don't think I learned anything from students. I don't think I was listening to them. I was so busy developing my own perspective I really wasn't listening. I'm not sure I had as much respect for students as I ultimately came to have. So I can't say that I learned a lot from them. Certainly I learned about their

social settings. I learned about their family settings and personal histories but it did not impact me to a great degree in terms of my intellectual growth and development. That's my immediate reaction.

Vanderscoff: Addressing your intellectual growth and development in those terms, in the late sixties your research interests were, to quote your [curriculum vitae], "social and cultural patterns of communities in the Sea Islands of South Carolina," and "black militants in urban areas." Did you find collaborators or dialogue or interchange for these two interests in your colleagues, or in students, in those early years at Cowell?

Blake: Well, you got to understand, when I started at Cowell I didn't know anything about black militants except my knowledge and interaction with El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz. I had not gotten involved in the Sea Islands. So what you read from my CV is more recent.

The Sea Islands and the militants were both serendipitous. Remember, I didn't do any graduate work on African Americans, but I always knew I wanted to teach a course. Very early on at Cowell I taught a course on the black experience in America. That was one of my early things. It was a signature course; it became a signature course. But in dealing with the black experience, I also touched on immigration and other kinds of comparative issues that give you more insight. So I was doing that but that was substantially historical and less contemporary—but substantially historical. It was stuff I had to develop. I had to learn. So that was a part of that.

But that was not how I started out. And I did not seek collaborators, others to be involved with. First of all, there was nobody doing research in those

areas. I was the only African American faculty member for a long time. There just wasn't.

I started at Cowell in 1966. In the spring of 1967, Carl Tjerandsen, who was the head of the extension division, came to my office at Cowell and said he was the secretary of the Emil Schwarzhaupt Foundation—the board. They had funded the work of Saul Alinsky and Myles Horton in Chicago and Johns Island, South Carolina. That was in the late fifties, early sixties. They were looking for someone to spend some time in these areas and do an evaluation of the long-term consequences of the money they invested in these communities. So he walks into my office and says that that's what they were thinking about. I'd never seen the man before in my life. I said to him, "Well, I got relatives in Johns Island." He said, "I don't believe it." Well, on my desk I had two wedding invitations from cousins with the Johns Island postmark. So I showed them to him. He fell through the floor and immediately engaged me to do this.

So in 1967 I came to South Carolina to spend six weeks—actually I went first of all to Highlander [Folk School] in Monteagle, Tennessee—and then down to South Carolina. This is with the blessing and the support of the Emil Schwarzhaupt Foundation. So after spending that period of time here [in South Carolina] with a car I rented—when I went into different communities like Daufuskie Island and others and I wanted somebody to accompany me, I hired my brother as a consultant. I paid him a hundred dollars a day. Blew his mind. He was a minister and all I wanted him to do was help give me authenticity and access in the community because people trusted the minister. He was good at it.

I'd get to talking with some of the people and he'd go off with some of the men and go fishing. And so that became a part of that.

Well, I got very interested in the Sea Islands and subsequently became involved with [writer and biographer] Alex Haley and what he called the Kinte Library Project, which gave me a financial foundation for getting more involved in the Sea Islands. That's how I brought Sabra Slaughter on board as a research assistant and Juanita Jackson as a research assistant.²² Juanita Jackson ultimately graduated from Oakes College. She was in, I think, the first graduating class. So that's how I got that engagement. I got the money from Alex Haley and then got some research money from Santa Cruz and started that project.

But it was right after I started that that [Black Panther leader] Huey Newton had the altercation with the police officer [John Frey] in Oakland and I was able to become involved in his defense as an expert witness on the African American community. One thing led to another and I ultimately did the book on the Black Panther Party and I still continue to write and analyze some of the material I collected. But that was not a part of a conscious, developing research trajectory. Those were serendipitous, but they've become very deliberate and conscious.

Vanderscoff: Now, I'd like to ask two questions that deal with these years on a bit more of a macro level. You stated in a talk you gave in 1980 called "Future Directions," at Cowell College, that Cowell was, quote, "Your intellectual foundation" and the place for your "social development as a scholar." In

²² Sabra Slaughter was an early student affiliated with Stevenson College.

summation on some of things you've already been discussing, what sort of intellectual and social basis did Cowell provide for you in your work?

Blake: Well, it was the continued interaction with colleagues of all disciplines and backgrounds whose response to me implied that I was good at what I did, in terms of my thinking. It wasn't like we sat down and compared notes. It was more like they encouraged my freedom of thought and development. Page Smith promoted that all the time and he promoted that by example, if nothing else. Now, I don't always think the examples were good because Page was in his own way arrogant and elitist. You want to know about women? He wrote a book about women. But he could write a book about women—he wrote a book about the egg and chicken. I don't know if you know that.

Vanderscoff: Yes, the chicken book.²³

Blake: The chicken book! Page would go just wherever his mind would take him. He and Paul Lee opened a restaurant in downtown Santa Cruz.²⁴ Paul Lee was the maître d' and Page was back in the kitchen washing dishes. And when you came to the restaurant Paul Lee would take you through the kitchen, where you would have an intellectual conversation with the dishwasher before you got to your table.

Vanderscoff: (laughs)

²³ In reference to *The Chicken Book*, an interdisciplinary, across-the-board review of the chicken thru history, co-written with UCSC professor of biology Charles Daniel.

²⁴ Paul Lee was a professor at UCSC. When he was denied tenure in 1972, Page Smith resigned in protest, an event detailed in Smith's oral history.

Blake: And then the Penny University: the whole thing where ideas had living, creative realities not constrained by degrees or who taught you, but liberated by imagination of any human being.²⁵ That's what Page stimulated. And he had as his sidekick Jasper Rose, who was crazy in the most beautiful way. We'd have a faculty dinner and Jasper was always serious about these faculty dinners. Get ready for faculty dinner. You'd be in your office at eight o'clock in the morning on the day that the faculty dinner was going to be at seven o'clock. Jasper would go around and visit everybody and say "Hello," [in British accent] and greet you, and have a greeting about something or other. He'd have a miniature, miniature rose in his lapel. An hour later here Jasper would come saying "Hello," and greeting you, and he'd have a little bit larger flower. An hour later here comes Jasper again, with a little bit larger flower. By the end of the day he'd have this *huge* dahlia on his lapel, pulling his coat down.

Vanderscoff: (laughs)

Blake: And you never said a word about the flower. You'd have this conversation about some concept or idea. You can't take yourself seriously in that setting, but at the same time you got to take ideas seriously in that setting—but seriously in a human and a humane way. So we'd have the faculty dinner, and Jasper, with his big dahlia, would sing German *lieder*. He'd sing German *lieder*. And he'd go find a secretary from the office to accompany him on the piano. He'd always find a secretary who hadn't played the piano in forty years,

²⁵ The Penny University was, and is, an off-campus discussion group/salon that was co-founded by Page Smith in 1974.

who was leaning over this music, tinkling at this stuff, and Jasper would just sing German *lieder* (howling/singing). He's just going on.

Vanderscoff: (laughs)

Blake: He'd finish and we'd clap real hard. And somebody would say, "Don't clap too hard or he'll do another one." (laughter) So we started clapping real silently and Jasper would look at us over his glasses and say, "There's more." (laughter) And you'd have more.

Barbara Sheriff, who was Dean McHenry's administrative assistant secretary or something like this, used to refer to UCSC—she would never answer the phone this way. But it was the "Universal Collection of Scholarly Comics." So it was serious academic work, but also joyous human work. And in the setting from which I came, okay? Which we talked a little bit about, from that setting here I am in this apartment doing these things. I bring Margo St. James to Page Smith's high table. I bring a belly dancer to the Beard House whatever-we-had. Those kinds of things, all the time. It was the joy of being alive; being alive in a way that you didn't feel you were constrained by race, economic status, or gender. You were just great. Occasionally we'd have a visit from John Vasconcellos, who was a state legislator who was in that vein. He would have been a wonderful faculty member at Santa Cruz, if he could have ever figured out what he could teach, besides just being who he was.

Vanderscoff: So at Cowell there was this idea of intellectual work and imaginative creativity, and the idea, perhaps, that they weren't mutually exclusive.

Blake: They definitely were not. Because Eloise Smith was doing her thing with tie-dying. She introduced tie-dying to Santa Cruz and a lot of other stuff. She didn't have classes. That was all in the garage of the Cowell Provost House. You couldn't put a car in there because you had all this art and other stuff.

Tobacco Road, Part 1

Vanderscoff: My second question, on a bit more of a macro level, comes from a document from the early seventies called "College Seven History," which was based off a talk that you gave at one of the very early College Seven faculty meetings, in which you reflect back on your time at Cowell, saying that, "the governor and everyone else was trying to get my job, and I was enjoying the whole uproar.... I really enjoyed being the Head Black Radical. But I didn't do any professional work of the sort that I find satisfaction in today." Thinking back now, does this statement still ring as an accurate assessment of those early years at UCSC?

Blake: Yes and no. I don't recall all of the details but I recall enough to know what I was talking about. I don't think I would label myself now "Head Black Radical," but I think I had to do it then in contradistinction to the Black Liberation Front in Santa Cruz. They were up there, essentially mau-mauing the university, I mean, trying to get things out of the university in terms of things for black people that I don't think a university should get caught up in politically or socially. Academically and intellectually—yes. They were the ones who first proposed that you have a black college. And they began to mobilize for all of this stuff. Maurice Natanson, who taught philosophy, took up the cause. Well, you

got the black radicals from the community and this distinguished philosophy professor, and here I was. Well, I had to out-radical the radicals. So that became an important part of it in order to maintain my credibility, but also, it seems to me, to introduce a quality of—if I were to call it—intellectual sanity, so that we would focus on what an academic institution is supposed to *be* about.

On top of that, Ronald Reagan twice tried to get me fired. Dean McHenry was priceless in his defense of me but Ronald Reagan wanted me fired. The *Hayward Review*—the newspaper in Hayward—had written an editorial claiming that I was violating the law by advocating arson and I should be dismissed for that reason. When they got a letter from my lawyer, they published an apology which was larger than the editorial. Dean McHenry sent me a handwritten note of congratulations for having accomplished that. What happened was before the summer of 1967 a psychiatrist, Price Cobbs, organized a one-day symposium at UC San Francisco, the medical center, on something like violence in black communities. And he organized this around the notion that there was going to be another red hot summer—conflagration.

I was asked to give the keynote address. And I did. I had been doing this writing about and research about the conflict between the black community and social control agencies, and particularly the police. I had analyzed a couple of dissertations written by police officers, lieutenants, and others, who were getting doctorates in criminology, in which they did research on attitudes of police toward the community. And it was clear: not only did they have bad attitudes, they had bad perceptions. You see a Negro and it's obviously a potentially violent person. So if you're going to accost him you got to do so in a manner that

makes it plain who's in charge, which is the kind of a situation which leads to a conflagration.

They'd had all of this down in Watts. I had looked at demographic data, I was still following the demographics, and I had data which showed that in 1965 the population in Watts had lower family income, lower levels of education, than they had in 1960. We had the data that showed things getting worse. The *data*—census data. And once again you see, having spent time at the Census Bureau and knowing how to access data and all of that sort of business, I got all this going.

So I gave a speech in this symposium that Price Cobbs had put together, and it was based on the song by Lou Rawls, "Tobacco Road." He talked about Tobacco Road being the community he loves. And he's gonna burn it down, but then he's gonna build it up.²⁶ I called my speech, "Tobacco Road, Part One." I talked about the anger and the rage and the desire to burn down all of these structures that represented your powerlessness, your *nothingness*. And I did that paper. I mean, I read that paper. *I read a paper*. I didn't just come up there. I read a paper. But I was dressed in an orange and black dashiki with an orange and black skull cap. And I mean to tell you I read that paper. And people who saw it—it was on public TV all over the state. People in Santa Cruz saw it and everywhere else saw it. I got a standing ovation.

But the newspapers and others just saw the revolution was coming. Here I was going lead it from Santa Cruz. People in Santa Cruz—somebody had a store right there on Mission Street, or Pacific [Avenue], and they were all opposed to

²⁶ I recommend looking at the lyrics of "Tobacco Road," and listen to Lou Rawls' version, for further context. —Ed.

the university. They had, all the time, these articles and stuff. They put this thing out, this black radical—they had me. I got all sorts of hate mail, which I still have. Dean McHenry got some, which he just destroyed. He said, "You don't need to see it."

But what I had done was I wrote the paper and I sent a copy to Dean McHenry before I ever delivered it. Dean McHenry saw what I wrote and saw what I said. But everybody heard what they wanted to hear. So *The Hayward Review* wrote this editorial saying I was advocating arson. Well, when you looked at how they organized some of the lines and some of the paragraphs it looked that way. But that's not what I said.

Vanderscoff: And do you feel that through these tensions the university, administrative figures like Dean McHenry, and other figures like that in the university, were supportive of you as these events unfolded?

Blake: Unequivocally. Unequivocally. I did not violate the principles of academic freedom. I brought my data. I brought my reasoned analysis. My delivery was not in a calm manner. My delivery was very different. But yes, Dean McHenry supported me 100 percent. I don't know of anybody who didn't support me within the university who was an administrator. I heard from faculty. I heard from Brewster Smith and Bert Kaplan. Bert Kaplan just went on about how he and his kids watched it in utter fascination. I got a lot of positive feedback. And if you knew Bert Kaplan you would know if he had read it, it would be very different. (laughter) He was a nice guy.

A University that Serves the Community: Thoughts on Cowell's Extramural Program

Vanderscoff: (laughs) We've been talking a lot about some interior views of Cowell and UCSC and we're just starting to get to talking about larger issues in the state. I'd like to talk about some of the outreach efforts that happened at Cowell, such as the Extramural [Program]. Could you explain what these types of projects consisted of and why you thought they were important?

Blake: Well, there are several things about outreach projects. And I want to give a little bit of a context. I always believed that the university should serve the community. By that, I meant serve the community in terms of what the university had to offer. The university had to offer an excellent undergraduate education. And that's what I thought they should do.

I had started working at Neighborhood House in North Richmond, running a program of motivating junior high school youth. We were able to bring those youth to the campus for two weeks during the summer. The university gave me every break in the world in terms of price and everything. That's how I met Ron Saufley and opened it up as a way in which we could teach. Some of those young people ultimately graduated from Santa Cruz. But they had never been on a campus like that, or anything like that. So I was able to do that and it brought the university and the community together.

Well, some of the adults in that community started pressing for at that time what they called credit for life experience. They weren't talking about Santa Cruz, now. They were talking about other colleges around the Bay Area. "I can get up to two years credit for life experience," you know. They would want me

to write a letter in support of their effort and I wouldn't. They got angry. I felt that life experience, while it was educational, it was not academic and university education. You weren't learning critical perspectives. You weren't learning the idea of bringing data to support. It was just life experience. So I felt I didn't want to support that.

I was accused of being elitist but I didn't feel I was. I felt what we had to do was open the door and let people in, but hold them to the same high expectations of scholarship we owe everybody else. But we shouldn't say because you didn't graduate high school, or you don't have this kind of a GPA, you can't come in the door. You can come in the door. My position was you come in the door wherever you are, at whatever level you are. But when you walk out this door with a degree, it's got to be at the same level of competence and performance of anybody else, even though some may have started at a different level. It might take you six years but you're going to come out strong. So I did the kind of outreach through my community work at Neighborhood House in North Richmond.

But then I came to South Carolina to do the report for the Schwarzhaupt Foundation. It was about that time that Page Smith was talking about getting some students doing work in communities. Page had a different idea from mine. Page had been through the Civilian Conservation Corps in the thirties and he talked about his experiences learning from being in that setting. He thought the students could learn from the same kind of a setting. But his idea was you send the students off into the community, turn them loose, they gather data and come back and write reports and stuff. My question was, "Well what does the

community get out of it?" Page never addressed that question. You turn the students loose in the community. Well, in my opinion that was nothing more than middle-class voyeurism. It might be in middle-class communities. But it wasn't like saying, "You have invited me into the community." I show up and expect you to be responsive to what I'm doing.

I had done this teaching in the Peace Corps. I had sent Peace Corps students off to communities. I'm not free of blame. We'd give Peace Corps students fifteen dollars and send them off on Thursday with a community name. You got to get there, you got to spend the weekend, and you got to come back and write a report. And you only got fifteen dollars. You got to learn that community. I mean, if you're going to India, or English-speaking Africa, West Africa, you've got to be able to function. So I had done that.

But I was not in favor of this middle-class voyeurism. And having spent time in the Sea Islands doing the evaluation, I had become very, very familiar with the views of [educator and Highlander cofounder] Myles Horton, come to know them much better. And [community organizer] Saul Alinsky in Chicago—Saul and I spent a lot of time together, had incredible arguments, but we loved each other.

So I objected to Page's idea. Vocally, and in faculty meetings I argued against turning students loose in the community. Instead I came up with the idea: Let's figure out ways students can live in the community, and serve the community, and in the process of *living* they will get an education—and *serving*. And that way the community will get a benefit and the student will get a benefit.

That's when I came up with the idea of sending students to Daufuskie to live in the homes of the people on Daufuskie and work on projects. They built outhouses and did other things. People thought it was awful. You got California students going all the way across the country to build outhouses for blacks who sit and watch them. No, they weren't going to build outhouses. They were going to live in the home of Frances Jones, or live in the home of Ervin Simmons, or others like this, with sometimes dirt floors. They were learning but they were providing service. And it's not in communities where they had other kinds of benefits.

I can take you down the road here to a major health center in Okatie, South Carolina, a major health center which serves hundreds of people. Santa Cruz students typed the proposal. They did not develop the ideas. They didn't articulate it because they weren't supposed to be running things. You serve. But they lived in that community and typed the proposal. Others then came and worked in that health center, so that many people who ended up in medical school did so because they came and lived here and worked in that health center serving the community. So that we have this [UCSC alumnus] Kimberly [Ephgrave], who's now dead, but she became a major surgeon, associate dean of the Carver College of Medicine at the University of Iowa, who said she came down here when she was nineteen. She said, "I came with an interest in medicine. I left with a *passion* for medicine." But she lived with a family in Ridgeland. And a few years ago, after she became dean, Kimberly Ephgrave—she recently died—she came and we were able to hook her up with the family. It was incredible.

And it wasn't like there were two or three—there were dozens. One couple, a young man and a young lady, they were both Jewish. They planned to go to medical school and become psychiatrists. So they wanted to have this experience. They were in Beaufort County. We put them in places where they couldn't really get together. They were here to learn and serve, not to be romantic. He lived in a home and he got involved with the guys in the house and their attitudes toward women. "I mean, come on, man, you're interested in their minds? No, man...." You know what I mean? He didn't understand all of that. He got interested in their religious views and he became deeply involved with the Sunday School. Well, those two young people did go to medical school but they became family doctors, not psychiatrists. Challenging your values—but the educational experience.

On the other hand, I would say out of these various communities I could probably name fourteen people who got their degrees. Out of the communities—Ervin Simmons is one. Juanita Jackson is another. They didn't all come to Santa Cruz but we got them into different schools. They became interested in learning. So it was back and forth.

But the students' experience of learning was living in the community. You didn't live, shall we say, in a separate housing, like a hostel, where the students could come together and do student stuff. No, you lived in the community. They learned to cook and the cuisine. They learned the religion. They were doing it. One young lady said she heard a lady talking on the phone, saying, "My daughter's in the kitchen, doing something or other." She looked around. She realized, "Oh, that's me." Yeah.

Kimberly Ephgrave told her students at the medical school, I remember, after she'd been down here she was talking about getting them involved. Well, she was nineteen down here. She went out with the family and they were in this car. They got stopped by the sheriff for some reason or other, I don't know what. The sheriff came and looked and here were five or six people crowded in this car, and in the middle there's this white girl. She said he looked at her, leaned in there and looked. When he realized she was there because she wanted to be there, she wasn't no captive or nothing like this, his first reaction to her was, "Your ass is grass." Because he was going to do whatever he could to make it uncomfortable for her.

A couple of years ago I got to go to and be involved in some political activities in Beaufort County Courthouse. This old judge could hardly move. He was so big and so slow. He said, "Doctor Blake, we always respected you and your students. You sent these wonderful young people and they did so much good in the community. We didn't know you. We didn't know who you were. But we knew about you." Now, that was about three years ago. That's still going on.

Vanderscoff: Those ripples are still happening.

Blake: Oh, my goodness. You saw Sabra Slaughter.²⁷ Now what Sabra did not tell you was that he served at Penn Center. He sure did.

²⁷ Herman introduced me to Sabra during my time in Charleston. We spoke for a brief time, and he gifted me with a palmetto rose. He currently works as the Chief of Staff of MUSC and Associate Professor of Family Medicine at MUSC. -Ed

Vanderscoff: Now, for this extramural program, these outreach projects that you had going in the Sea Islands—and I know you were also doing work in Richmond [California], among other areas at the time—for students to participate in these projects, was this a class or was this something they signed up for? How did you integrate this into Cowell and the UCSC structure?

Blake: That was the Page Smith side. That was the Page Smith side. I'd get the community assignments. Page would go get—he took three courses a quarter. Page would get the faculty, who would sign the students up for independent study. But as independent study you didn't have to write reports and do all that, because you were learning out there. And sometimes some faculty were able to make trips to the community. But they took it for granted. Page did that. So every student got full credit for a quarter, and they were in the community for a quarter.

Vanderscoff: Before we move forward, are there any other reflections that you think are important in understanding what the extramural program was doing at that time?

Blake: No, I think we pretty much covered it. You see the repercussions, the ripples, okay? You got Sabra Slaughter sitting here [at the Medical University of South Carolina]. You have Ervin Simmons. And the thing about Ervin Simmons coming to Santa Cruz and going to school at Oakes College was he had so many friends throughout California who had been to Daufuskie Island.²⁸ And they

²⁸ For Ervin Simmons' reflections on his transition to Oakes College and his time there, see Ervin Simmons and J. Herman Blake, authors, "A Daufuskie Island Lad in an Academic Community:

would come and they'd encourage him and do different things to support him. It wasn't like he was a stranger. He was in a strange land, but he was not a stranger because he had friends. And we had that with people from Newark, California, Mendota, and Firebaugh over in the San Joaquin Valley, and other places. We just had these connections. The first American Indian, who identified himself as an Indian, who graduated from Santa Cruz, Joe Barroso, came out of Stanislaus County, out of this program.

Vanderscoff: As a way of coming to a close on this section of your early years at UCSC, I have two questions about your thoughts on what students do with their education and their role in education and then a general concluding question. The first two are drawn from the '69 Cowell and UCSC commencement. In your '69 Cowell commencement address you urge students to reach out, to, quote, "stay involved in mankind." Keeping in mind these things that you've just been discussing, what do you think the relationship is between the university and the community, at its best?

Blake: Just that: stay involved in humankind, where the path from the university to the community and the community to the university are open paths. They are cooperative paths, supportive paths, and non-exploitative paths, because community people will exploit the university and often try to run guilt trips. And university people will exploit the community and not feel any guilt or responsibility at all as they preempt or co-opt resources, intellectual and others.

So I think it's that positive kind of movement back and forth that you see, or that we *can* see.

I saw some of it when I was at Oakes [College] for the Fortieth Anniversary [Celebration] and I heard these young people speaking in class. And some of them, they were from Asian countries, and their parents were here. In one class this young man just cried, realizing that he could be here and his mother also.

I saw Latinas' parents come to Oakes for orientation. We would invite the families for orientation. We'd send out a letter, English on one side, Spanish on the other side, when we were doing orientation for the students. And Don Rothman always would speak. He'd always give them a writing assignment. Always give them a writing assignment. And they had to write—sit there and write. Now he would never collect it or anything like this. But he wanted them to understand and get a sense of the anxiety their student might feel and understand why we wanted them to stay the weekend and put more time into studying. I remember one Latina coming up with her paper in her hand and balling it up because she was going to throw it away. She said, "I didn't know you'd put me to write. I didn't know you'd put me to write." She was so happy that she didn't have to give it up. But at the same time she was happy that she had the experience. Oh yeah, we were constantly moving back and forth.

And it wasn't just the black community, Latina community—all the communities. I remember one young man was in Oakes and he was pushing for something or other, I don't know what it was. He thought it was time for the blacks and the Latinos—or maybe he said Chicanos, I don't recall—to get their

due and they should have all of this. I said, "Well, come on, what about you?" When he realized that he was included, he was very excited. He thought everybody—other people should have it, and he was willing to step back because he was, "white." But my whole point was that that's not the issue. It's just not the issue, in my mind. So, oh yeah, it can be a very meaningful, beautiful thing.

But it's not without its problems. It's not without its problems. I started a program at another university, where I set it up that it couldn't last more than ten years. Because once it became successful it began to take on a different cant, a different patina. And some people began to expect certain things from the university that had nothing to do with the program itself. It was just like—I want to line my pocket. No, that's not what we're about. You can forget it. We set up so that it would sunset. Two years after I left it sunsetted. They had known right from the beginning it was going to sunset. You couldn't keep it going.

Vanderscoff: So in some ways it's quite important for these university-community reactions not be set in stone, but to be dialogic and responsive to change.

Blake: That's the creative side. Once you begin to get this process going you don't need these other kinds of things that will stimulate and start. And those can fall away and people can still be engaged.

Reflections on Student Protest, Disruption, and the Early UCSC Experience

Vanderscoff: My second question about students is more of an interior one. I think it speaks particularly to the political climate of the 1960s. The day after that

Cowell commencement that I just quoted there was the UCSC commencement, the campuswide commencement, in which the ceremony was taken over by student speakers who declared it a, "people's ceremony," where they made speeches against the Vietnam War and awarded an honorary degree to Huey Newton, which you accepted on his behalf. What do you think the role is of student dissent—even to that extent, or perhaps lesser—in shaping an institution? What did you hope to accomplish by accepting that degree? What does that sort of activity engender?

Blake: Yeah, yeah. Well, that was an interesting experience. First of all, I knew a little bit about some of the students who led that protest. I didn't know a lot about them but I knew a little bit. They were what I would call upper-middle class, if not upper-class, angry white kids. The university became the symbol of the parental control against which they were rebelling. I'm being very candid with you. One young lady was an oboe player in one of the (raps on table) musical groups they had going. I mean, she was a really good musician, had been well-trained. And she used to frolic in the nude in the pool at Cowell, trying to make people upset. I don't know what was her problem. And her boyfriend—they led this thing. Now, this is not saying they weren't angry about Vietnam. I'm not saying that. What I'm saying is the personal and the political become intertwined. I felt that way sometimes when Page would take on students and oh, he'd be putting them down. I'd say, "Page, why did you have to be so harsh?" I don't know what that was about.

So they took over, and McHenry stepped back. He didn't call the campus police. He just stepped back and let them do it. He let them do it. Now I believe

before they started they had come to me and asked if I would accept the degree for Huey. And I agreed. But I didn't know they were going to do what they were going to do. I wanted to see that thing end. So when they declared it a whatever-kind-of-commencement it was and they conferred this honorary degree on Huey Newton, I was glad to take it. Then that's off the agenda. Now, I'm not saying at that time I had that consciousness to the degree I have it now. I'm not saying that at all. But I knew I didn't want to see that become what it became. I wanted it to end because you're violating the integrity of those who came for the real reason. And that was, I think, a kneejerk reaction of some angry young people whose anger they themselves didn't understand.

Vanderscoff: Do you think—

Blake: Now you asked me a different question about the role of student activism.

Vanderscoff: Yes, do you think there have been constructive instances—

Blake: Oh, yes.

Vanderscoff: —of student criticism, say at UCSC, in those early years, or in your experience? Where do you draw that line?

Blake: I think there are real good instances of student criticism. But what I'm concerned about is so often the criticism is not informed. Is not informed. So many people were angry at Santa Cruz because they thought Santa Cruz was built to siphon off the anger from the Free Speech Movement. Santa Cruz was in place long before that. But you know, you make these assumptions, then they act as if the assumptions are correct. The Black Liberation Front in Santa Cruz—

black militants—were no more interested in black militancy than the man in the moon.

There was one guy there whose wife was working on the campus. And he had organized a group of black students down in the community, and they were coming up on campus and they were essentially engaging in rape. Sure, they would confront the women in the lobbies or wherever, in the dorm. And the next thing you know they were uptight— It was a very delicate— This man's wife was working as a secretary [on campus]. I helped to get the police to get those guys out of there as I learned about their intentions, went after them, went after them. And he swore he was going to kill me. He would sit down there in town and talk about, he's going to kill Herman Blake. People kept saying, "Herman, he says he going to kill you." So I walked in there. We had the Catalyst then. The Catalyst was a sandwich place, eatery. They made big sandwiches. Sort of like a New York deli. I remember, I went down there one time for lunch, and I just went in there. He was sitting there with his friends, and I went and sat there at the next table, ignored him. Bring it on. I wasn't ready to engage in battle. I didn't care for that. But I knew about the bluffs, running that guilt trip.

We had that with some of the Latinos. We had to work out some things with some motorcycle gangs after Oakes got started. But it wasn't done in a confrontational way. It was done in a community-building, educational way. Part of that is recognizing the needs and desires of the students and moving to meet those before they get co-opted by somebody who's got political goals or other goals and will use the university. It requires that you stay on top of and in touch with your community.

But we had—it may not have been protests, but certainly disagreements, in which the students educated us. That's how we got the apartments at Oakes. Oakes was the first college in the country built with all apartments for residences. The *first*. And after we got started, Kresge tried to make a shift in their architectural plans.

And that was because we listened to the students. But in listening to the students we had to make sure they were informed, so we organized a class. They had to read and learn material about higher education and liberal education and what it was about. So when we took the class to San Diego to visit Third College, our students who thought they knew what they wanted got down to Third College and found out that they had gotten what they wanted and what it ended up with was them fighting each other and fighting the provost, throwing rocks through windows and everything. They stayed overnight in the residence halls and they got to listen and hear. They came to me, said, "We don't want that. We don't want that." But they didn't know that that could be a consequence. That's where my community experience as informed by Myles Horton and Saul Alinsky and others worked.

Saul Alinsky was one of the most hostile anti-establishment people you'd ever want to meet—ever want to meet. When I met Saul Alinsky he was wheeling his wife, who had some neurological thing, through the halls at the University of California, Davis, where he came to speak to my class. He treated her like a princess. She had to go the bathroom. He asked me to stand and monitor the doors while he took his wife in there, the ladies room. He didn't want anybody coming in and finding a man in there. But he wasn't going to let

no woman take her in there. He wasn't going to let nobody take care of his wife but him. She didn't live in Chicago. She lived out in Carmel, because that's where she could survive.

The man was a marshmallow. Soft as they come. But when you see that brutal, rough exterior you'd think he hated everybody that walked on the earth. But Saul wanted to make sure the people who walked on the earth didn't trample him. You have to learn how to touch that kind of a thing.

Howard Thurman, whom I met at Santa Cruz, always said to me, "Every person has a center. And if you understand your center and the other person understands their center, you can try and connect in that way." Gullah Geechee people say, "You got to look'n m' face." It's not simply looking in the face. It's connecting to those centers.

Vanderscoff: And so, going with that notion of centers connecting, do you think there have been times of productive interchange between students and administration, students and faculty, community and university, that have found ways to somehow mutually improve or create spaces for mutual growth?

Blake: Yes. I'd say almost every good liberal arts college in this country can give you examples: Swarthmore, Earlham, Santa Cruz, Dartmouth—yes. There are other parts where it's very, very tangential and sometimes destructive. But not necessarily so.

Vanderscoff: I have one question to conclude this section. Returning to the idea of the original UCSC structure and the original UCSC experiment that we have been discussing through many of these questions—the centrality of the college,

the board, that residence life, narrative evaluations—do you think, sum of the parts, that that experiment was successful in those early years that you were there? Is it possible to give a simple yes or no answer to this question?

Blake: Yes. I would say that it was enormously successful. That's two words. Yes. I can give many examples, but yes.

Vanderscoff: Was there anything else you'd like to say in reflection on those early years before we bring it to a close today.

Blake: I'd like to say a lot. (laughs) But you don't have time and I don't know what the thoughts are. I'm responding to your questions.

Vanderscoff: Hmm. Well, I—

Blake: Let me just say this.

Vanderscoff: Yeah.

Blake: That human, humane approach to education that was represented by small residence halls, small colleges, a close interface, interaction, and high level, high quality education represented the ideal for me that represented what I saw as an undergraduate. Bill Hitchcock and his teaching in the core course in Cowell. And others. The academic side of Jasper Rose. And the other side. You know, one of the things Jasper did was those students would learn and sing 'The Messiah.' All the students—they would learn 'The Messiah.' And he'd be coming out of the dining room at Cowell practicing. (howling) He's got this thing in his hand, the music, and he's practicing, singing to himself. Jasper never taught

without his academic robes. Always wore his academic robes, which I don't think ever saw a cleaner or a laundry in all the years he had them. But he'd wear his robes going—and he took his hat off and bowed to every woman. And she might be going way over there, and look, here's Jasper. He's not going move until she reciprocated. You can say that's humorous and it's fun—and it is. You didn't "graduate" until you went through the ceremony. Until that time you were 'graduand.' (deep voice) All these words, oh....

Vanderscoff: (laughs)

Blake: But what it was—it was about not taking yourself so seriously you end up abusing another person, but instead looking to lift them up. We would do the extramural program. We had a program in Stanislaus County and we'd bring the young people from Stanislaus County up to campus and they'd do a variety program for the students at Cowell out of gratitude. Jasper said, "Oh, what do you bring these people up here to entertain us for? We ought to go out there to entertain them." So we ended up taking a crew from Santa Cruz to Stanislaus County—except we left Jasper. (laughter) We didn't think they'd think it was very serious. But it was his idea. That was an extraordinary experience. But we didn't have sufficient knowledge and understanding of how it worked in a research university to make it work. Particularly in terms of changing academic and intellectual and economic times.

Vanderscoff: Next time I'd very much like to discuss the seventies—not only College Seven, but also broader changes that happened in UCSC in response to

those factors you've just discussed. And so, at this time I'd like to bring this session to a conclusion. Is there anything else you'd like to say?

Blake: No. I get to talking. I don't need any more. I'm tired.

Vanderscoff: Well, then all right. We'll close this off for now.

Debate, Dialogue, and Decision-Making in the Planning of College Seven

Vanderscoff: Today is Wednesday, February 13th, 2013. This is Cameron Vanderscoff here for the Regional History Project with Dr. J. Herman Blake for the fourth part of his oral history interview. We remain in the conference room at the Medical University of South Carolina, Charleston, South Carolina. Would you mind relating how you first heard about the demand for a black studies college and what your involvement was in those very early days?

Blake: I don't know when I first heard about the demand. Excuse me, I've got a little bit of food in my mouth, but I need it. But I knew about the so-called black community in Santa Cruz. I say "so-called" because there weren't many people. At that time being a black militant was kind of stylish. Every city had one or two. And one of the leaders of the NAACP in Santa Cruz County was considered by some to be that kind of a guy. He was older, and he claimed to be an angry black man. Lived in Watsonville, which is twenty miles south of Santa Cruz. And he was a worker on the sanitary trucks. He picked up garbage. But as head of the NAACP he'd worked it out—his name was Sy Rockins—he'd worked it out with his supervisors that whenever he was making an appearance for the NAACP he could do it on company time as long as he wore his company uniform. So here

you got a guy, a maintenance worker in Santa Cruz, out making speeches before the Rotary. Interesting contrast. Nice man, nice man. When I arrived in town he immediately tried to co-opt me: "You know you're one of us." I had been head of the NAACP at Berkeley.

For a long time the national president of the NAACP was white. They always had this tradition of a white president of the board and a black executive secretary. That's the way the NAACP was—and a lot of people, including Malcolm, criticized it. You know, "Why do you got these white folks running you?" So here you've got this kind of thing where you're going to have a black in charge in NAACP at the local level, which was traditional.

And here comes another local black militant. He was in charge of the Negroes, or blacks, in any sense, because he was militant. And this activist was more militant than the militants. Except there was me and I was in the way in the sense that I was on the campus and I was—whatever. By that time the video of Malcolm had become available. I had used it in a class and people were absolutely, absolutely fascinated by the fact that I knew and interacted with Malcolm.

And Martin Luther King was assassinated. It was about that time colleges and universities around the country turned to see what they could do. And before anything could be developed at the University of California, Santa Cruz campus, here comes this thing from the Black Liberation Front in Santa Cruz: "We want a black college, with a black provost, black faculty, black curriculum, black students. All black." Which made absolutely no sense at all. In the spirit of

Martin Luther King? That *really* made no sense. But I couldn't say this. And I never did, until this very day. It made no sense.

So they made this claim for a black college and put it out there, and Maurice Natanson on campus said that seemed reasonable. "We ought to be able to have a black college," and so forth and so on. But I'd been teaching and doing things in a very different context and I was very discomforted by this. On top of that we were in a more Latino than we were black community. There weren't many Latino students. There weren't many black students on campus. And the Latinos said, "Well, what about us?" And the Black Liberation Front in Santa Cruz would say, "Well y'all can have a Chicano college later. Y'all can be the next college. We'll take one college, y'all take another college," without specifying anything.

So that's when I first heard about it. I knew I had some legitimacy with the community and with the university. But I was in between. And I also knew I had a belief that you don't build a house for yesterday's rains—which is an African proverb. I didn't use that at the time; didn't even know it. But that's essentially my whole thing, we're going toward the future. I had been doing consulting for the poverty program up and down the San Joaquin Valley. I had been in Chicano communities, Filipino communities, low-income white communities, and low-income black communities. I saw the same thing all the time. When we were in my cousin's house on Sunday and you saw that picture of FDR?²⁹

Vanderscoff: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

²⁹ The previous Sunday Dr. Blake and I, after service at his family church, paid a visit to his cousin Allen on Johns Island, South Carolina. Among pictures of family, his cousin still keeps a picture of FDR hanging on his wall. -Ed

Blake: I saw that in the home of a Chicano family in the San Joaquin Valley, out in the fields. They had FDR up there. The old man of the house talked about Roosevelt. That was his hero.

I couldn't handle it. I mean, I just couldn't go into the black thing. So I heard about it from Santa Cruz black militants and somehow or other I attended some meetings of the Black Liberation Front. I heard the conversations, heard the debate and argument. I was not in any way a part of it in terms of convening, participating. I was just there listening. And one leader was going on about this black thing. And I never felt the man was honest or true. I just never did. I thought he was trying to push his agenda out of his need. And the university, so many of the faculty and students, particularly, were responding to the Black Liberation Front's demands in a kneejerk, guilty way. That was not what we needed in an academic setting.

So then I wrote this essay on a black college or something like that, which became sort of helping to define and sort out some of the issues and focus it more on ethnic rather than black. And McHenry picked up on it, I believe. I don't know. I never talked with him about it. Never did. I certainly knew that the Black Liberation Front couldn't come back at me and say, "Wait a minute, we want a black college, not this." They wouldn't get anywhere because they couldn't get by me. And I didn't think much about it. I just went on and wrote it. You asked me how did I hear, but that's the way it went.

Vanderscoff: When you put forward this position of an ethnic studies college as opposed to a black studies college, did you find that the idea gained much

traction among the student body and the faculty and the administration, as opposed to this original proposal?

Blake: I don't know. I think it did, but I wasn't paying any attention. I know I became a consultant somewhere along that time to the people down at UC San Diego who were trying to put together a Third World college. At that time among the people leading that was Angela Davis, who was a graduate student at San Diego. That's where I met her. They invited me down to talk. I came out publicly saying—I had already written my paper up in Santa Cruz—but I was down there saying I didn't think it was wise to approach things the way they were. They wanted a Third World college, which would be named after [Patrice] Lumumba and [Emiliano] Zapata. Lumumba-Zapata College, and they were pushing that kind of stuff. I didn't get to know Angela very well, but I didn't think that was wise.

Up in Davis, they were trying to pitch for a Native American Studies college. They even seized some property and tried to start a Native American college up there named after, among others, Quetzalcoatl, a Mexican god or spirit or entity—it was more than Quetzalcoatl, there was another name hyphenated. Like Lumumba-Zapata, they had something-Quetzalcoatl.³⁰ Only to learn that the spirit that they were using and talking about, in the true religious tradition was so sacred you didn't pronounce his name, let alone put it on a piece of paper.³¹ So all of these trends are going on throughout the university, contradictory political—I argued that Lumumba-Zapata was the wrong name. I didn't say that. I just said [if] you build an academic institution for political

³⁰ Deganawidah-Quetzalcoatl University.

³¹ As a result of this, Deganawidah-Quetzalcoatl College was often referred to as D-Q College.

reasons with political purpose, when the political reason's gone the rationale for the institution is gone. You've got to have an academic rationale because that is embedded in the heart of the university and that stays with them. I don't know how the students felt. I didn't care.

Vanderscoff: Ultimately, you and Ralph Guzman were appointed co-chairs of the ethnic studies committee, which was put into action by Chancellor McHenry. How much later did this event occur? Were you surprised that an ethnic studies committee was appointed?

Blake: Yes I was. First of all I didn't know McHenry and I didn't trust him. I really didn't. And I didn't know Raphael [Guzman] very well. He had come to campus shortly after these things began to develop. A political scientist. I wasn't opposed to him. I just didn't know him. And the idea of an ethnic studies committee with me and Ralph as co-chairs? Before McHenry did that he sent a representative from his office to meet with me and interview me and talk with me, essentially trying to smooth the path for me to become involved. And I got the sense that what they wanted was not a token. They didn't want to have somebody up there who could be a symbol and quiet the masses and then they go back to business as usual. Getting that signal from McHenry through his representative, I felt I could participate in this. And I agreed to it.

Vanderscoff: Your co-chair, again, was Ralph Guzman. I'd like to start talking about this collaboration. Had you worked closely with him prior to this appointment?

Blake: I hardly knew him. I hardly knew him. We got to know each other in the process of building this. You got to understand a couple things. He was, I think, one of the first, if not the first Latino, at least in the social sciences—faculty member. I'm the first black in the social sciences, the first minority faculty member outside of Asians. There were Asians, but in terms of black and Latino and Native American I'm the first one on the campus. I'm there the second year.

What people don't understand was both Ralph and I—and I'll say this about Ralph because it was very clear to me—were terribly insecure. Terribly insecure. We had a lot of self-doubt about our academic capacity. So we're trying to work ourselves into the system on traditional grounds, with traditional material. I'm teaching all this demographic stuff and introduction to sociology, and I'm building my thing on excellence in teaching in an undergraduate institution. Not research and graduate stuff, which is what my colleagues coming out of Berkeley, when we came out, were going into. They're going into research schools and starting to build their careers.

Uncertain at home and on the campus. At home because, you know, my family and other personal things were going in a *very* different direction, so there was no comfort there. No comfort. I'm not saying there was hostility because there wasn't. There was just no understanding. It happens when you've got a spouse—regardless of race, cultural, whatever—one spouse is in the academy and the other one is in someplace else. Somebody will come up, "Why do you do it like that? In my company we'd just fire him." Well, you can't do that in higher education. You consult. You don't make [arbitrary] decisions. You have shared governance.

So what I'm saying is at home you don't have any sense of understanding or comfort and on campus you're going through all of this stuff. You're getting lots of props from students but ultimately students graduate and leave after two, three years. Or one or two years. That's gone. Students may love you and may be loyal to you, but they aren't *there*.

So Ralph and I both are going through these insecurities and we get this appointment through Dean McHenry. And we did a lot of time sorting things out together. I'd go to his house. He lived up in Bonny Doon. He'd bought a house there. Had a nice veranda. We'd sit up there in the sun and talk for hours about our different experiences and our different hopes and dreams. It was there we began to realize we had common goals, common dreams, and we could work in common purpose because it wasn't a zero sum game: if you win I lose. We all won.

On top of that, we were both in various ways engaged in Latino communities in the San Joaquin Valley, he from whatever he was doing with Latinos, me from whatever I was doing with poverty programs. We saw there were ways we could do some things and it became a way of opening up the university. So we agreed not only to collaborate, but to model. So we made it our business to walk around the campus together. We made it our business to each day when we were working together to eat lunch in the dining hall of a different college. So we'd go to Merrill College or we'd go to Cowell College or Crown College. And we'd just walk in and get a meal and sit down and eat, talking to each other. Knowing we're being watched and knowing what they were seeing was a Latino and a black in cohort. Now I had already had some establishment

with the Latino community because Arturo Torres—I don't know if you know him.

Vanderscoff: I've interviewed him, actually.³²

Blake: Okay. Well, he was the first to graduate. And he and I had established rapport because I became sort of like a counselor-advisor to him. So we had these foundations.

Vanderscoff: I'm curious about what sort of consensus emerged between you and Ralph in those early conversations, those walks, those meals you shared, that you were presenting at the ethnic studies committee? What were your plans going forward?

Blake: Well, we didn't have plans in the sense of strategies or policies. We only had ideas. I had this incredibly loyal commitment to liberal education and that the principles of liberal education were of great value to anybody—but particularly of great value to people coming from low-wealth, vulnerable, so-called disadvantaged communities, like I had seen going through the military and then my undergraduate and my graduate experience of continued intellectual growth. I was absolutely and totally committed to that. Ralph had no problem with it. I don't know if he shared my passion but he certainly shared my understanding and my goal. So that was important.

We were thinking about building a college in which we would have a different student body, recruit different students, but not exclude anybody. Those who were already there and those who were traditionally coming would

³² In reference to a June 2012 session for an alumni profile on behalf of Stevenson College.

be part of it, and we would recruit, particularly, Latino and black and Native American students. And I argued for poor whites. Get 'em all. If you leave anybody out you begin to create the same thing that happened that led the Black Liberation Front to argue we needed the black college, and then the Chicanos saying, "Well what about us?" And they're saying, "Oh, you wait." No. You don't wait. Everybody comes.

The place where we really hit—and in a beautiful way—was in terms of the need of the community to control their own destiny. What we constantly heard in the San Joaquin Valley and in the urban areas—Los Angeles, San Francisco, Oakland, Berkeley: "We want our own community. We want to take over our community. We want to be the mayor. We want to be the whatever—police chief."

We supported that notion. The problem with that notion was that everybody was in criminal justice or the social sciences. And we could make the rational argument, "How are you going to run your community if you don't have scientists? If you don't have engineers? If you don't have medical people? How are you going to run your community?" Oh, okay, so if you're going to have your own community you got to have people trained in *all* of the disciplines required to provide political and social, economic leadership. And that means we've got to do the sciences. But we never did the sciences; that's not where we were. I'm in sociology. Ralph's in political science. And that's where we agreed. We needed to build a situation where there were scientists involved. That was the consensus.

Vanderscoff: I'll have some questions about that just a little further down the line here. For the moment, I'd like to talk about some of the make up of the ethnic studies committee. Who were your collaborators on this committee? How did their opinions inform this vision you've just been discussing?

Blake: Well, we had to have a planning committee. That's what was expected, so we had to get other people to join us. And we had no academic legitimacy, in the sense that we weren't a board of studies; we weren't anything. We had no positions. So if we were going to get anybody we had to get people from within the campus. We literally began talking about who was around.

I don't know the details, but Bob Crespi came to our attention and he became very interested. He was committed to the liberal education thing, the high expectations, the whole thing. He was an outstanding scholar, as well as out of Spanish Harlem. What we liked about him was he wasn't a cultural nationalist tied to one ethnicity, position or whatever. Be broad. He was one. And I'm not sure how Dilip Basu came to us, but Dilip, historian, interested in civil rights and nonviolence and Martin Luther King and all of those things. He also came to our attention.

But we had no white faculty. Ralph and I figured we needed to recruit white faculty. We sat down. We made a list. It must have been twenty or thirty people we thought would be interested in what we were doing. Many of them in the social sciences, a few in the sciences. We went around and we went and talked to each one of them, made an appointment, went and talked with them, told them about the development of what was going to be College Seven, which was originally planned to be an urban college, a college focusing on the urban

experience.³³ So the Black Liberation Front downtown thought, well that's our college: urban—black folk. So implicitly in that they agreed to a time lag, which gave us a chance to do a lot of other things, including to develop some policies and strategies.

We went all over the campus. We picked out some of the most liberal, radical—perceived radical—white faculty, and went and talked to them and got turned down by every single one of them. Every single one. They weren't hostile. They just weren't ready to risk their careers on what was essentially a non-entity. And most of the faculty were young and still starting out. A couple of them were associate professors, had reputations for dealing with minorities in an effective way. They all turned us down, with the exception of Bill Doyle.³⁴

I knew Bill and I said to Ralph, "I think Bill is a good person." And he said, "Well, if you think he's a good person we ought to approach him." Ralph didn't know Bill. And when all the others that we both knew turned us down we couldn't figure this out. And when Bill Doyle accepted—I knew—I always felt Bill was for real. Ralph couldn't understand that. Ralph wanted to know, "What's wrong with him? Everybody else turned us down and he didn't. Must be something wrong." But it was something *right*. And eventually Ralph came to see that, because as we began talking and we expressed our views, Bill said the one thing that they had never been able to do at Santa Cruz was teach the sciences in the colleges. They didn't have the facilities. And if there was anything

³³ "Originally" in reference to the initial UCSC plan, in which starting in 1965 a new college was to be added every year with a different focus. College Seven, therefore, was intended to open in 1971, several years after the Black Liberation Front's 1968 demand.

³⁴ For Bill Doyle's perspective on this process, as well as his broader involvement in UCSC, see Bill Doyle, author, *UC Santa Cruz, 1960-1991: Campus Origin and Early Program Development in the Sciences, with Special Emphasis on Marine Sciences* (2011).

you could to do that was unique and special it was to figure out how to do that. We did, and it marked us in a very positive way, atypical way. Essentially it undercut a lot of that negativity that was perceived around the campus.

Vanderscoff: You mentioned a moment ago that many professors declined to join in on this ethnic studies college that you were promoting at that time because they felt it would be risking their careers. Did you personally feel like you were staking your career on this venture?

Blake: No. No, my career was already solid, in the sense of a good teacher with high ratings and evaluations as an assistant professor of sociology. No, I didn't feel I was risking my career. You don't think about those things. You really don't. I don't think Ralph ever thought about it. You have an opportunity to make a major change in the way things are done in the university. You don't pass up that opportunity.

Now, you got to understand, there was no place in the system where any of this was happening. No place. The thing that was happening down at San Diego was fraught with politics—fraught with it. Somebody who ran for some legislative position in San Diego opened his campaign on the campus of UC San Diego with one of his major goals to prevent the college the students were arguing for—Third World College, which was essentially the third college. They were developing it at UC San Diego. I mean, the politician takes it as his target. We never had that. Didn't want it. But there was no place in the University [of California] anything was happening. So doing this was indeed risky, very risky.

Vanderscoff: Given that the impetus behind this push for this new college came from this association in the community, the Black Liberation Front, did they continue to be involved in the planning process, or influence it in any way?

Blake: No. It became a completely campus thing. They watched us from the outside but what can you do? What can you do? And frankly speaking, I didn't ignore them. I wasn't hostile to them. What I tried to articulate was, "We will fulfill your dreams. But we will fulfill it on our terms." That is to say, we will have a college which is open, not closed. And there was no way—no *way*—they could define the curriculum. The *faculty* would define the curriculum. We felt if we could bring in a different cadre of students, a more comprehensive, complete cadre of students, and offer them the finest traditional liberal arts education, we were already breaking the mold. Those students would have an impact. But they couldn't define the curriculum. And it wasn't going to be a black studies or a black college. So they were peripheral, sort of like observing.

But we quickly formed—Ralph and I—a planning group of students. We organized a class. Must have had about forty-five students in that class, as I remember. And that was one of those new kinds of things you could do at Santa Cruz, where we offered a course called *Higher Education and Social Change*. I was the principal instructor in that, in which I dealt with the history of higher education, principles of liberal education, and the nature of a university like the University of California. Students had to learn that, because how can you bring advice and counsel if you're not informed? And that was a part of it. Now, we had students who became involved in that. I remember a guy [who] was a musician, a drummer. Black guy. Had a Japanese mother, black father. Oh, he

was one of the most militant and he thought I was a sell out. He accused me openly of being an Uncle Tom and he finally dropped out. He dropped out of that course, dropped out of that program, and dropped out of the university.

Years later he wrote me a letter to say he was so angry at me for what I was doing there. What I was doing there. And so he dropped out and he went to Africa so that he'd become more familiar with his ancestry. He found the Africans didn't want him and he wasn't African. So he went to Japan to see his mother's people and his ancestors, and found out they weren't interested in him. This is what he wrote. They weren't interested in him. So he eventually came back, went back to Oakland and started working. Eventually became a successful real estate agent and after Oakes opened and we were in our facilities he showed up in a Mercedes-Benz one day, came in with a rather substantial check. We talked and had a nice time and then he left. I don't know whether the check was for a thousand dollars or ten thousand dollars, but it wasn't ten dollars. I don't know what ever happened to him.

Vanderscoff: Prior to the drive for what became College Seven, Merrill College had been founded in '68 with a focus on, "the international Third World," in other words, taking steps beyond white Western culture and Eurocentrism. Did you and Ralph draw on Merrill or other existing academic templates in the planning?

Blake: Absolutely not. We had our own template. We admired Merrill. John Marcum and John Isbister and others who built Merrill did an extraordinary job. That was an extraordinary place. I don't know if you know about Merrill but they didn't hire any faculty who hadn't lived abroad for at least two years and

worked abroad. They had a different gestalt in that whole thing. It was outstanding. It was not that we were opposed in any way, but what we were doing was focusing on a different set of intellectual challenges, political issues, and all of the like. I think Ralph was in Merrill College. I was in Cowell and he came to be in Merrill.

Vanderscoff: Ultimately a decision was made to step away from the rhetoric of ethnic studies entirely. And given that the original notion from the Black Liberation Front had been to have a black studies college, what did you hope to gain or focus by shifting the basis of the college from ethnic studies?

Blake: What I hoped to gain was an academic institution that would nurture and develop the very students envisioned for the ethnic studies college but lead them to places none of us ever anticipated they could go. No, I was never enthralled by the holistic ethnic studies approach—never. I was the liberal education approach. It was the kinds of things that Page Smith would talk about, at his best, or Bill Hitchcock, or John Dizikes, or some of the women [faculty]. They were very, very good. At profound levels, insensitive and unknowing about the ethnic experience, but not hostile to it. We had to merge those two different strands of intellectual pursuit, if you will. Bob Crespi understood it well in his political way, in Spanish literature. So no, I felt that what we were going to gain was an outstanding institution.

Now you understand I'm doing a lot of stuff with minority schools, black colleges around the country. A good friend of mine was the vice president of Talladega College, in Talladega, Alabama. He was from Boston and he was a musician, an organist. Talladega would introduce those students to all of the

kinds of classical music. We had black composers who did classical music. Dillard University was known for its engagement with the German tradition in music: Bach and Beethoven. So here you were in historically black colleges, and that was the tradition. When I met Sterling Brown teaching that Negro history course at Berkeley in the summer of '64 that I mentioned before, Sterling Brown at Howard University had wanted to teach a course in jazz. And he was denied by Howard University, denied, because it was considered jazz was not an appropriate subject to teach in an academic institution. He was fighting all of this foolishness of black institutions trying to be more white than white institutions in terms of the intellectual—not that that was bad, because a lot of good came out of it. Tougaloo College in Mississippi: first-rate efforts in liberal education.

So I had these traditions all around me. And this whole thing about ethnic studies—*then*, my problem *then*, was I couldn't say what I really felt. I couldn't say it at home. I couldn't say it on campus. You just lived in agony hoping you would be able to overcome the opposition on the campus and eventually get to that point where it could become appreciated.

And you know when I felt that very strongly? It was when I went back to Oakes this last time and I was in that class where this white man and black woman were teaching a writing class.³⁵ And I looked at those students and one guy who was not even in Oakes College said he could come there and feel at home and articulate some of the issues they were dealing with in terms of food. He started crying. Started crying. I understand that sentiment because you are in constant, constant tension.

³⁵ "Last time" in reference to an April 2012, visit to UCSC featuring a weeklong schedule of talks, discussions and lectures. The class was *The Politics of Food*, taught by Robin King and Mark Baker. I was his scheduler and assistant on this trip. -Ed.

As I was leaving UC Berkeley, I wrote an article that was published in *The Negro Digest*, "Racism at a Great University: The Agony and the Rage." If you had asked me about my experience in Berkeley, which was a part of this article, all I could tell you about was the negative, in spite of all the positive things that happened with the professors and others. I was constantly dealing with this agony and rage inside. It came out when I gave that speech at UC San Francisco and Reagan was trying to get me fired, and others were saying, "Wait a minute." You become aware that you can use the traditional academic structure to promote radical, creative, and hopefully innovative ideas.

Vanderscoff: Mm. To contextualize the founding of College Seven, Kresge College was in motion at the same time, and opened its door a year before Oakes. I'd like to do a brief compare and contrast of these two endeavors to get some context for what the drive for College Seven went through. Do you feel like the campus community, the campus administration, were receptive to Oakes in the same way that they were to Kresge?

Blake: Ultimately, I think they became more receptive. Dean McHenry—and I saw this in meetings of the provosts—Dean McHenry had the notion that once you were appointed as provost and you were leading and building this college, you had to have maximum opportunity to succeed as a consequence of administrative support. And if you did not succeed, you couldn't argue it was because the campus opposed you. If you didn't succeed, it had to be because of some other things.

Kresge had that support. But they had a provost, Bob Edgar, who tried to build a college around a community model that reflected his personal dynamics,

but didn't pay attention to all of the other kinds of things. And the guy who joined them, Matthew Sands, a scientist—he eventually became a vice chancellor of the sciences. They were running Kresge. I don't know if you ever heard of a Kresge graduation. They would have the nautilus shell. They'd all sit and whoever had the nautilus could speak. Their graduations would go on for hours; when people get the nautilus they can go whatever path they wanted to go.

We had a situation where our students planned the graduation and white students, coming from their backgrounds, wanted to make it like a camp. You'd sit around and sing camp songs and play the guitar. And Latino students, particularly, came to me distraught because they spent all this time going to college and they're going to go to a camp ceremony?

We were able to bring the students together, and once the white students understood what this meant to those Latino and black students, they *mandated* caps and gowns. Got mad at one Latino professor because he showed up in a suit and didn't even sit up on the platform. He only did it one year that way. They did a lot of other kinds of things, including bilingual programs. And when these white parents began to say, "Well, this is America. Why aren't we doing this in English?" it was the white kids who were carrying the argument. That was the *community*.

What I'm saying is as that began to develop it was a community rather than this strange—and I'm not saying it was wrong—I'm just saying that Kresge came in with this kind of gestalt of touchy-feely to the max. It was almost anti-intellectual. I'm not saying it *was*. I said "almost." This was Kresge College after College Five, which had its own unique qualities including students who were

in—so-called—the arts and building these slides at whatever residence halls they had. We even had a student up there die of an overdose of drugs or something like this, or get arrested, and find out his mother was a prominent politician. Those kinds of things were going on. While in Oakes they'd say, "You don't want to go over there with them people. All they do is study." That was the reputation.

Vanderscoff: Another important idea which you outline in the document "College Seven History" is the counseling component of College Seven.

Blake: Yes.

Vanderscoff: In this planning phase, what sort of community did you hope to facilitate by placing such an emphasis on counseling in the foundation of the college?

Blake: That wasn't in the planning phase. We never thought about it. We were talking about the academic thing. To the degree that counseling was taking place—I mean, put it this way: there are two kinds of things that happened. There was peer counseling, which was new.

The other counseling that *was* a part of the planning—I take that back—that was an awareness that many emotional and interaction issues were going to come out of the heart of the communities where many of our students came from. Building communication and interaction among students across the chasms that existed because of their history and their background would require a sensitive awareness of what they came with and what they were going to do.

Every college was given the money for a counselor. But Ralph and I felt we would need at least two and maybe three, because we would have to spend more time dealing with these emotional dynamics.

It wasn't as conscious as I'm making it here. It was more like we felt it. I think we felt it because we were suffering from it—both he and I. Ralph would get hives—I guess—we called them hives—he would get bumps around his wrists from tension and anxiety. Some people wrote us negative letters in Spanish and he'd bring them in and read them to me and translate them, opposed to him even working with me or us building a college. They'd say, "All they ever do is let you clean toilets. Why are you trying to build a college? You're just going to end up cleaning toilets." And he'd break out. I'd know when Ralph had a bad day, a bad night. He'd arrive and there'd be all these little bumps around his wrists. That anxiety.

So we knew that we needed those qualities in the college. And we were able to persuade the administration that we did. We tried to get the other colleges to pay attention to these issues and they *never* did. We argued that they needed that kind of counseling. One provost of one college wrote us and said, "No, we won't do this. When you open your college, we'll think about minority faculty and all this stuff." What they wrote was, "We understand each other because we come out of the same background." They didn't put it in those crass terms, but that basically was it. There was all these subtle understandings and that was the attention we wanted to get. They wouldn't do it. Wouldn't do it. And we knew if we were going to make it we had to do it. And we did.

We had extraordinary counselors. We had Josie King, who could sit and listen forever but was never caught in the racist cultural nationalism of blacks. She could build bridges. And Juventino Esperza—Tino was a part of the Mexican-American graduate studies program at San Jose State, which they'd just cut out because it was once again a nationalist kind of a thing. And as they saw it began to take shape, they knew they had to get rid of that thing before it got really entrenched. Tino came to us and bought right into what we were saying and doing. Juventino—when he was born his parents separated and his mother married a Japanese guy. And he grew up, spent some years in a relocation camp speaking Spanish and Japanese. Then as a young adult had a bar which featured jazz in San Jose somewhere. So he came with this jazz, Japanese, Latino, black background. You couldn't figure out anything, except he didn't play. Tino could take 'em on, everywhere.

And then Ray Charland³⁶, who was so—I don't know, I guess you would call him a good, nice Lutheran minister type. Pleasant and so forth, clueless—you *thought*. But sensitive and sharp as a razor. One time he had a situation where some black students were all upset and carrying on and he went over to try and deal with it. One of the women said, "But you're white! You can't deal with this." He said, "You're hurting. That's why I'm here." Never backed down. Those were sensitive people.

But then we added to that when Bob Bosler joined us and he started talking about peer counseling. This is after we were open. I didn't understand

³⁶ For a multi-perspective take on College Seven/Oakes, see Roseanne Shensa, Interviewer, and Randall Jarrell and Irene Reti, Editors, *Oakes College: An Oral History (with J. Herman Blake, Roberto Crespi, James Gill, Don Rothman, Ray Charland, Gwen Lacy, and Kathy Cowan)*. (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2011). Available in full text at <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/oakes>

that. But we eventually built a program where deeper and deeper in the interstices of the college the capacity to listen and communicate was indeed institutionalized to some reasonable degree. It was bridge-building.

Vanderscoff: I'd also like to talk, before we get too deep into College Seven and Oakes in practice, about site selection. Did you pick the physical site for Oakes?

Blake: Had nothing to do with it. They had already decided where the colleges were going to go years before and had started putting in the infrastructure. When we were starting to talk about College Seven, they took me out into a cow field and showed me a manhole cover, which led to a sewer. And that was how they knew where College Seven was going to be. We had nothing to do with it. What I did pick was a site for the provost's house. But the site for the college had nothing to do with it.

I think the guy who was building College Eight didn't like the site they had for him, and he wanted a different site—a totally different site. And McHenry tried to argue against it because we already had the infrastructure. But he was very, very stubborn, wanted a different site and ultimately got it because McHenry was cooperative. But it meant that the money they had was less and I don't think it ever came out and worked out the way they wanted it.

Vanderscoff: And, of course, College Eight wasn't built until the nineties.³⁷

Blake: That's a part of that.

³⁷ For more on the planning and building of College Eight see Irene Reti, Interviewer and Editor, *Growth and Stewardship: Frank Zwart's Four Decades at UC Santa Cruz* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2011). Available in full text at <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/ucsc/growth-and-stewardship-frank-zwarts-four-decades-at-uc-santa-cruz>

Vanderscoff: Well, moving forward from the site to what was built there, would you mind reflecting on the process that led to the layout and the building design of College Seven?

Blake: Well, first of all, I told you we had this planning class of all these students. And serendipitously and accidentally I listened to the students. I thought I had an understanding. I was not always as aware as I appear to be now. We were planning and working on this and I was thinking about curriculum.

But there were two kinds of issues. When they started talking about ethnic studies or a black college, they wanted it built with a black architect and all of that sort of business. Well, they'd already selected the architect; long before they had selected the executive architect. He was on the faculty at UC Berkeley, as I recall. So we didn't have any part of that but as we began to shape the college they brought in a consulting architect, the executive architect did, brought in a consulting architect that I knew extremely well, by the name of Ken Simmons. He was, I think, probably the first black architect on the faculty at UC Berkeley. Ken was one of the activists with us during the early sixties around Berkeley. Lovely guy from Oklahoma, came from a fairly wealthy family. His family were among those blacks who ended up on land that had oil on it in Oklahoma.

And not only that, his grandfather was an Indian. And he had these sentiments, you know, that a lot of things that a lot of people took for granted "Pop would never like—" His grandfather never learned English. When Ken was growing up and his parents brought his grandfather to live with them, he wouldn't live in the house with them. They had to have a separate structure because he didn't want to be around white folks. This was this Indian. This is

Ken Simmons. He used to talk about how when he was a kid they used to go see the 'cowboys and Indians,' and always the cowboys would be pinned down by the Indian fire and then the cavalry would come and everybody would be cheering. And Ken would always talk about "Pop wouldn't like this. Pop wouldn't like this. He was very uncomfortable with all this."

Ken became the consulting architect. Very sensitive person. Very sensitive person. What Ken kept pushing with us in the planning committee and with the students—because we never really dealt with the executive architect, we dealt with the consulting architect and the campus architect, Chuck Carrs—what Ken kept pushing was, "You have to have a sense of humility as you go into the business of building a structure. Because the people who will occupy it are not the people who plan it." So you have to really think with humility about the future. That was an important part of it.

Another important part of it was Jasper Rose, who in his own way was a strong proponent of what we were doing. Jasper argued that physical space had to be very carefully thought through, because given what you want to happen in that physical space, you have to plan to have it such that it doesn't constrict, if you will, intellectual development by poor architecture.

So you got Jasper talking about this in ways I didn't understand, didn't know. You got Ken talking about us being sensitive and thoughtful. You got Dean McHenry and Chuck Carrs backing us up in terms of giving us support. And then you've got these students, one of whom is still around, Susan Lindheim—incredible. She's now a pediatrician in Oakland. Her mother was an architect. I knew and worked with her mother. Her mother was on the faculty at

Berkeley but in addition to being an architect she did a lot of architectural work in health centers and medical institutions. The parallels and the ways in which this came were incredible.

And those students said, "One thing we don't like about where we're living is when you have to go to the bathroom, or prepare, you have to come out of the hall or your door. You look at a hall, and you go down this hall of doors to a bathroom where people want to know how you prepare your hair and this, that and the other." And you know, black women are very uptight about how they do their hair and don't want nobody asking nothing. Essentially they were saying, "We want more privacy." And Chuck Carrs and the others said, including Ken Simmons, well, they thought they could build the college with townhouses: upstairs, downstairs. They drew up some architectural designs, one of which had a beautiful image of Angela Davis—not her face, but certainly that hairdo and everything. You knew it was Angela as a part of this. There were all these politics going on. Not politics, but you know, subtle things going on.

The students thought it was wonderful. I always said, "You got to be out of your mind. You have dormitories," or what we ultimately called residence halls, and they have bathrooms at the end. But nope, we ended up with these apartments, which the architects designed. Think about it: we got apartments: five students to an apartment with two bathrooms. And we got a science center where we could teach science and students could do research and a few faculty could do research, right in the heart of the college. That apartment complex, that came from the students. And it came from my ultimately learning I better listen to the students, as a result of the input of Ken Simmons, whom I knew in a lot of

other settings. Trusted him and he trusted me and respected me. That was very important.

Then Ken went on the site. We have a beautiful photograph of the students on the site with Ken Simmons and [the student] Marcellus Collins, Diane Lewis, the [anthropology] faculty member, is there.³⁸ They got the thing out there planning where the buildings are going to go. And given that we had that meadow and the overview of the bay, students wanted the bay view. So they put the academic building and the faculty offices up towards the woodsy side, and [the students] had the view in these apartments, with the laundry place in between and essentially the patios where they could gather and barbecue and do other kinds of things. We'd have gatherings on Friday evenings. The students would sit there and watch the sunset and applaud God: "Yay God! God!" (laughs)

Vanderscoff: (laughs)

Blake: They did all those things. And then the burnt orange curtains in the drapes, so that when the sun was setting and hitting the windows they would pull those drapes and they were all burnt orange, and that cedar shingles— It was an absolutely ideal setting. But the placement of the buildings, the apartments and all of that, came out of the students.

³⁸ Marcellus Collins played a role in the physical layout in proposing a "small hilly mound," to quote the *Oakes College: An Oral History*, to separate the administration and residential buildings. It was named the Marcellus Barrier. For an oral history with Professor Diane Lewis, as well as other Oakes staff and faculty see the series of oral histories deposited in Special Collections at the UCSC Library. Interviews in the project were conducted by UCSC students enrolled in Oakes 72, "Oakes Oral History Project, the first ten years: building the strength to love and dream". The course was taught in Winter Quarter 2013 by Leslie Lopez.

Vanderscoff: I'm curious about what sort of a faculty balance you hoped to establish at College Seven in regards to [academic] divisions.³⁹

Blake: I knew I wanted more scientists than one might expect but I didn't know in what disciplines, or anything like that. I also knew I wanted more people in the humanities: literature and others, the influence of Bob Crespi, but also the influence of undergraduates. I took courses with this philosopher, Sidney Hook, who was always arguing. Oh, I mean to tell you, he was an incredible philosophy professor. He wasn't the one who wrote the book, *The Irrational Man*—that was a different philosopher, [William Barrett]. But Sidney Hook and the others. And I thought these were— Well, let me put it this way: science would give us the emphasis on the applied—not necessarily that they were only applied, but thinking about the kinds of things you have to do to take over your community. You have to do science. So that was the important kind of a thing. And the humanities was the realm of the ideas, which I thought were so important to the development of the mind and the intellect. But without saying it's going to be this discipline or that discipline or whatever—but humanities.

And then there was the serendipitous stuff. Eduardo Carrillo came to our attention. I had a student at Berkeley by the name of Barbara Goldberg. She was the young lady who came and told me that her sister had married this artist, and they were living in southern Mexico, where he had built this art program. And they did everything in terms of making shoes, clothes, and everything from scratch, if you will. His name was Ed Carrillo and he was interested in murals.

³⁹ 'Divisions' at UCSC referring to natural sciences, social sciences, humanities and art (the last two having initially been in the same division at that time).

He came to our attention. We were able to bring him on board. But by and large, that was a part of the serendipitous nature of what we were trying to do.

In the sciences, one of the early ones we got was a woman named Luisa Tan. She was Filipino, spoke Tagalog, and she was an outstanding PhD in chemistry from Berkeley. We ran across her because she was also working in the EOP program at Berkeley. She was sort of the director in her upper graduate years. Josie King knew Luisa Tan. What we were offering was something Luisa was interested in and could do from a minority perspective. She came out of one of the labs of one of the best chemistry professors at Berkeley. When he wrote recommendations you couldn't turn her down. She was very outstanding. The first four chemists we employed in Oakes College were all women.

But others came as a result of the joint connection we had with boards of studies and the things they were going to do. A couple of them we brought to the board of studies, like Victor Rocha and others. Frank Talamantes came through the board and we had to go through some negotiations to get him on board and keep him. But it was all of these kinds of delicate things, and it would help to have the commitment of Dean McHenry and for a long period of time, a vice chancellor, a Latino biologist, Eugene Cota-Robles. He died just a year or so ago.⁴⁰

Vanderscoff: Speaking of these constituencies, I notice that in the document "College Seven History" you emphatically reject the notion that College Seven

⁴⁰ For more on Eugene Cota-Robles see Irene Reti, Interviewer and Editor, *Professor Pedro Castillo: Historian, Chicano Leader, Mentor* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2013). Available in full text and audio at <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/castillo>

had any type of ethnic quotas in regard to faculty and students. Would you mind explaining why this is such an important notion for you?

Blake: Absolutely. It came up really early. We argued that there had to be equity, in whatever sense defined, in the college. And there were a group of black students, and maybe even the Black Student Alliance, which agreed with that. And they came out with a position—even a position paper. I remember there was a young lady who developed it, who read it, presented it somewhere, that in terms of having equity we ought to have 20 percent of every group: 20 percent black, 20 percent Latino, 20 percent American Indian, 20 percent Asian, and 20 percent white. That way we'd have all of the groups in the college—20 percent of each—and that the colleges should allocate its resources and its slots that way.

I was emphatically opposed. They no sooner came out with that than I went after it. I went after it because I had learned along the way that quotas *in that way* ultimately create dissension. I think they tried that at Third College in San Diego and that became a point of contention. Because if you have 20 percent of each group, it gives you no flexibility in dynamic situations where you need flexibility. The idea of bringing in 20 percent American Indians struck me as being not an ideal we could reach very quickly. Now, if we're going to have, say, 8, 10 percent of American Indians, and we're going to reserve 10 percent of the spots because we don't have Indians, but we've got Latinos or whites, it gets to be a problem. I didn't want people doing nose counting, monitoring, trying to control in that sense. It didn't make any sense. It didn't allow you to focus on building community. That wasn't tied to a quota. That was tied to a gestalt that spoke of community.

So I *immediately* came out against that because I didn't want to be saddled with the notion you had to go and hold slots, or if you came up with a few extra additional blacks, all of a sudden, "You can't come here because we've filled your quota." That made no sense to me. I thought it would create all sorts of dissension in the college and I emphatically came out against it. You're right.

But it was one of those ideas that came from students and that one I immediately rejected. And they went along with it. They never made a fuss about it. They thought they were being reasonable and supportive of what we were doing and I pointed out it would have destroyed what we were trying to do. I argued differently. What I felt, one, was we would know we had reached good levels when people felt reasonably comfortable in the setting.

We had a situation where, among the Asians, the Filipinos started saying, "We got to have Filipinos. And you got to be a 100 percent Filipino. And you can't have one Filipino parent and another non-Filipino parent. No, we want pure blood Filipino." Wait a minute. We're talking about Asians, okay? Now you're saying the Filipinos had to be pure Filipinos. You know, that kind of madness. As a matter of fact, the student who promoted that and pushed it ended up marrying a white guy and they ain't thinking about Filipino in that sense. She's still around. Still hear from her every now and then.

What I'm trying to say is, they were trying to deal with deeply felt needs. But it's sort of like the constant growing and learning; once you meet that need, you've got other issues. You know, Reinhard Bendix, the graduate professor I had who did the book on Max Weber. The minute he finished the book on Max

Weber he was off to something else. They were constantly growing. How are you going to have a quota and be constantly growing? So I argued against it.

Vanderscoff: And perhaps there also, your training in understanding shifting demographics and demography may have played some sort of a role.

Blake: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. I saw it. We were beginning to deal with a new set of people. And the fixed focus on any race or group meant that you very often didn't see the other group. I mean, here we are in California, which came as a result of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo [when California was] taken away from Mexico. Many of the people that were Latino were always there. They never crossed any border. The border crossed them. How are you going to talk about this as if it's *our* country? You got to think more broadly.

Vanderscoff: Still within the planning phase here, prior to College Seven opening its doors, Ralph Guzman opted to return to Merrill. What led to his decision after the duration of his involvement?

Blake: Ralph was a troubled man in many ways. I think his decision to return to Merrill reflected both his disappointment at not being selected as provost, as well as his respect for what he knew we had to do. Ralph and I really thought we were partners—and we were. And we thought we could have a co-partner provost[ship]: a Latino and black—one provost, but two people. McHenry never bought that idea. Never bought that idea. And at one point I decided to leave and take a position at San Francisco. I was offered a position at UC San Francisco in sociology. I was going to go and take that because I felt it was reaching a point—and this not something anybody really knows—where Ralph and I were

going to have some real serious problems in the sense of administration. Because Ralph didn't have the same kind of, if you will, gumption, backbone that I did. Not that I had much more. I'm not saying I was ideal. I felt he was caving in to many situations.

I felt he was also maintaining a pretense. I'm very good with words—extremely good. And we had hired a couple of secretaries. One was Bert Ardantz, who was Anglo, with a little dog. And we had a Latina. I can't remember her name. She had worked up at Merrill. She couldn't even do a letter, but we struggled with her. And I would sit and work until late at night and dictate letters on a tape recorder, which they would come in the next morning and type up. I kept a constant correspondence. That's why email has killed me, because I can't deal with the volume. Ralph tried to emulate me and this became an example of where it wasn't going to work. Ralph felt he should dictate letters onto the tape recorder like I did. So he would sit there and write those letters out in hand. Then he would read the letters into the tape recorder, so that the women would come thinking that he sat down, picked this up, and dictated this. I saw more and more examples where it wasn't working for him.

I decided I should get out of the way. I was recruited by the sociologists at San Francisco to come and join the faculty there. I was seriously considering it. I let Dean McHenry know and that's when Dean McHenry decided he was going to not go that route. He told Ralph, apparently on a trip to San Diego or a Los Angeles regents meeting or something, that he was going to appoint me provost. Ralph wrote me a beautiful handwritten letter in which he said he prayed for me and he wanted me to get it. I knew he was bitterly disappointed. But one of the

things about being bitterly disappointed and wanting to do this was he resigned and returned to Merrill. He resigned from the planning committee.

This then opened the door for the Chicano nationalists, a substantial group of them, to attack me and the university for not bringing the Latino perspective to greater fore. They ended up suing the university. And you know who was their lawyer? [Future Secretary of Defense] Leon Panetta. He was in Monterey. Had a law business there and he became their legal representative. They sued the university.⁴¹ Got nowhere, because we had all these other positive things going. And a number of those who were opposed to me—Latinos—Louie Campos was one in our first graduating group, I got a beautiful letter from Louie after I was out there this spring, talking about all of this—I'll have to bring it out—and how they didn't trust me. They didn't trust me and ultimately they went along with me because I didn't seem to be hostile to their needs and their goals. And I wasn't.

But Ralph resigned. He ultimately became provost at Merrill and suffered some very difficult personal crises, which ultimately led to the massive stroke [in 1985]. And he died. Tremendously sad. But he went back to Merrill. He gave the first Oakes commencement address. He was the speaker. But Ralph was torn because the Chicano nationalists were using him and building on him. He even

⁴¹ See: April 26, 1972 "Letter from Leon Panetta of Thomas, Panetta & Thompson to Chancellor Dean McHenry," which reads in part: "As you know, representatives of the Chicano Community of the nine counties being served by the University of California, Santa Cruz made a formal complaint to the Office of Civil Rights, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in the latter part of February, 1972. The complaint alleges violations of both Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Executive Order 11246 in that the University failed to provide equal educational and employment opportunities to ethnic and racial minorities. We believe the facts clearly establish a pattern of discrimination by the University against all minorities but particularly against the predominant minority in this area—minority students." See University / Archives Ephemera Collection (UA70) in UCSC Library Special Collections, Folder 10 "The Chicano Complaint."

signed the complaint against the university when they sued the university, but he made it plain to me that it was one of those things of trying to be a part of his people, but not being a part of their sentiment.

Vanderscoff: And so when you reflect on Ralph Guzman and his presence and his contributions to that foundational phase of College Seven and on you personally, what comes to mind? What stories do you think of?

Blake: Profound respect and gratitude. We could have never made it without the support of Ralph. I shouldn't say—it would have been very hard, because we would have been fighting the established people in the faculty who didn't want us to *ever* come into existence, as well as Latinos. We never had to battle the Latinos.

You have to understand, when it came time for the Academic Senate to vote for the academic program of Oakes College, there were key people—[professor and founding Crown College provost] Ken Thimann was one of them—who tried their best to keep that thing from happening. They used every avenue they could, and I sat there and watched them and listened to them. And it was the chair of the senate, Ted Youngs, a mathematician, a beautiful man who gaveled them out of order and said that *Robert's Rules of Order* was designed to promote business, not prevent business, and made sure that thing went through. The faculty voted us in. The faculty was generally in support. But Ken Thimann was one of those who was adamantly opposed and Thimann was not a

lightweight.⁴² Now Dean McHenry was on the other side. But Ken Thimann and others like this—no, they didn't want it. Those are the anxieties we had.

I will have to say, I didn't have that battle with Latinos. Never did. Years later, I'd go to Cinco de Mayo celebrations down in Beach Flats and they'd say, "Hey, Herman Blake! I remember when—!" And guys would say, "You know, I went to Oakes, I graduated. Now my kids are going to Oakes." All of that stuff. No. I've been a hero in that community. But Ralph *is* the hero. I have profound respect for him. I'm glad they named one of the rooms in Oakes after him.

Vanderscoff: So coming towards a conclusion for this section, as of the time of the opening of Oakes, when you reflect on these diverse constituencies that had a voice at different points—the Black Liberation Front, these different nationalist movements that you've been discussing, different campus politics—did you feel like you had a strong base of support for going ahead with this college? How did you feel looking forward?

Blake: I had felt I had an incredibly strong base of support, particularly from the administration and all the way up to the president's office. The vice president, Angus Taylor, the vice president of the university, his daughter was one of my students in the Extramural Program. And he saw what happened. She went to Beaufort County. He saw what happened to her. And he's up in the president's office and he's got inside information on the kind of person I was and what I was

⁴² For Thimann's take on early UCSC history, see Randall Jarrell, Interviewer and Editor, *Kenneth V. Thimann: Early UCSC History and the founding of Crown College* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 1997) Available in full text and audio at: <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/thimann>

doing. Tremendously supportive. He eventually became chancellor, Angus did.⁴³ I had tremendous support there.

Dean McHenry, he sent Bob Bosler to work for me. Bob Bosler just showed up one day. I didn't know who he was. Well, first of all he was on McHenry's budget and never took a dime from Oakes. Secondly, he was a brilliant young man who had completed a master's degree in aeronautics from MIT at the age of twenty-one. And he was a good person at doing detail. And he just did the detail. I did the ideas, Bill Doyle did the faculty, and Bob Bosler did the detail. And he was good at it. Extremely good at it.

Vanderscoff: So before we come to close for this section, is there anything you'd like to say that you feel we haven't touched on about those planning years for what was then called College Seven?

Blake: Oh, the only thing I would say at this point in terms of the planning was it was an education for me. I had no idea how things worked. (Dr. Blake's phone buzzes) Can you put that on pause?

Vanderscoff: Mm-hmm. (recorder turned off for Dr. Blake to check his phone; record resumes shortly thereafter)

Blake: It was tremendously educational for me. I knew nothing about how academic administration worked. And I began to see these plans for admissions, enrollment, facilities and all of these things. I sat in these meetings under the leadership of Dean McHenry, a guy named Howard Shontz who did the

⁴³ See Randall Jarrell, Interviewer and Editor, *Angus E. Taylor: UCSC Chancellorship, 1976-1977* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 1998). Available in full text and audio at: <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/taylor—Editor>.

admissions, Hal Hyde, who was business and finance—all of these people.⁴⁴ It was a constant learning. That I never anticipated, didn't know anything about. It took me away from being a sociologist, a scholar. I don't regret it because what I became was an architect of lives.

The Naming and Funding of Oakes College

Vanderscoff: Today remains Wednesday, February 13th. We are in the same conference room at the Medical University of South Carolina, Charleston, South Carolina. Last time we were discussing the planning of College Seven. Now we're going to talk about College Seven in practice. When the college opened its doors, what hopes and what doubts did you have?

Blake: Well, you know, the idea of 'opening its doors' (pause) implies almost like a ribbon-cutting ceremony. That never happened. The college kind of eased into existence. The Academic Senate, the Santa Cruz division, under the leadership of Ted Youngs, approved the curriculum. It wasn't a particular curriculum. It was the right to offer courses for credit in the University of California. We were in temporary facilities, initially in the Communications Building. Ralph and I had an office with our secretaries and that was it. But we moved to temporary office and administrative space, faculty offices, in College Five. Our students initially were housed in Married Student Housing, where the Kresge students were housed.⁴⁵ So we didn't have any place that was *our* place.

⁴⁴ See Randall Jarrell, Interviewer and Editor, *Harold Hyde: Recollections of Santa Cruz County* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2002) Available in full text and audio at <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/hyde>

⁴⁵ Married Student Housing is now known as Family Student Housing.

We opened in the fall of 1972 with about two hundred students and a small cadre of faculty and administrators. But we were all over the place. We just started, okay? So we didn't "open its doors" and that concept. We'd been moving along. We'd been putting people in place—faculty—and we'd been recruiting and bringing students on board. And there we were. We didn't even have a place where we could gather as a college. So we started having retreats at the orientation time. We'd take them off for two days or so, faculty and students. That's where we did the orientation and the introduction to the college and all of that.

At that same time, we had already begun negotiations for the naming gift. That was almost a two-year process. Extremely secret, but it was that case. So basically, I'm going along knowing that there was support and interest and commitment out there, and that there was support, interest, and commitment within the academy, in the campus—but also knowing there were people who were opposed to us.

Now, a part of that opposition to us was the tenuous position of Santa Cruz in the whole panoply of UC campuses. We had one vice president for academic affairs come to one of our early convocations and say, "I'm glad to be at Santa Cruz junior college." That kind of stuff. So what I'm saying is there were levels of certainty and uncertainty, security and insecurity. And within that we were also insecure. I was. But I had a kind of confidence that it was going to work. I wasn't fighting the administration. And to the extent I was fighting the faculty, I knew there were a lot of others who supported me. Ted Youngs will

always be a hero in my mind. Probably nobody in Santa Cruz knows him. I don't know if you've heard of him.

Vanderscoff: I have heard of him.⁴⁶

Blake: He was great. And there are a few others. There were some who were so opposed to us. One guy—he was in physics—I mean, it was like we had brought the destruction of the university and put it right in the middle. He was so opposed to us. He had a heart attack. By the time he recuperated he couldn't do enough for our students. Had a change of heart. So I can't say what kinds of hopes or doubts or fears—they were all over the place. But they were institutional; they were personal. They intertwined and you didn't have a chance to think about that because you were constantly working to keep things going straight.

Vanderscoff: You mentioned a minute ago the naming process. I'd like to go into greater detail on that, because the original proposal had been to name it the College of Malcolm X. That was the stance of the Black Liberation Front. How did you feel about that name—how did it come to initially to be referred to generically as College Seven?

Blake: Well, it was always College Seven generically, because they named the colleges by number as they were coming online. And this was the seventh college. So it was College Seven, always. I thought that was great because in terms of numerology, seven is just right for me. So that was good. I didn't want it

⁴⁶ Ted Youngs died in 1970. He was referenced briefly in an oral history I conducted with Professor John Dizikes, and has an undergraduate mathematics prize at Cowell College named for him. -Ed.

to always be College Seven. It had to have a name, not a number. So that was that.

When the Black Liberation Front argued that the college should be named Malcolm X, I was opposed from the very beginning. Never supported that. They couldn't say the college should be named after Martin Luther King or other extraordinary heroes of the black experience and education in the black community. They went for Malcolm X. That was, in my opinion, provocative, as well as showing their own insecurity and inadequacy. So here we go; we're going to name it Malcolm X. But I was opposed because I knew El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, and the thing that hit me was, one, Malcolm X was not who he was when he died. Secondly, having seen what had happened in San Diego when they were trying to get Lumumba-Zapata College off the ground, politicians running against it, too. And also the kinds of problems they had in Davis when they couldn't figure out [Deganawidah-Quetzalcoatl University]. They were all off base. They had the need internally but it just didn't fit the cultural understandings. And it didn't fit the political environment.

I felt that naming the college after Malcolm X would, one, have a depressing impact on what we were trying to do academically because people would be caught up in the name, not in the other kinds of things. And I was aware that there were some people on the campus—staff, not faculty—who really wanted me to bring the Black Panther Party to campus. They thought I was going to turn this into a Black Panther college. The most stupid ideas of people who had no understanding that an academic institution at its best is a

place of the learning and development of the mind. The social setting—definitely. So I didn't want to take on that political battle. I thought that was wrong.

But more important to me than anything else was Malcolm X was once Malcolm Little. And he was, as Malcolm Little, a criminal. As he said to me, he was a thief for many years—that's a criminal. And he went into jail as Malcolm Little. There he was converted to the Nation of Islam. He developed new understandings and new insights. And when he developed new insights and understandings, he changed his name from Malcolm Little to Malcolm X. And later on he changed his name again to El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, symbolizing a change in his philosophy and his perspective. If we were going to honor anything, we had to honor that. Furthermore, that change in his philosophy and his perspective was informed by his experiences on college campuses, which reflected liberal education and liberal learning. He constantly read. He was a very well-read man. And he was constantly challenged. And he came to understand that some of those challenges he dismissed as being white people were in fact not challenges of white people—that was his perception. And when he changed his perceptions he changed his *name*.

I think if you were to look in the Bible—I don't know if there's a Bible around here, anywhere—I know I don't have one in my office. One of his favorite scriptures was in I think the second chapter of Revelation [Rev. 2:17]. Revelation—the last book of the Bible. You know, the kind of cataclysmic book in which it says there would come a time when you would receive a white stone, and on that white stone would be a new name. And no one would know that name except he that received it. He'd use that scripture often in his debates and

his conversations and discussions with people. And I knew it. He didn't tell me it was his favorite scripture but I know he went to that scripture. *A new name* and on that stone nobody would know that name except he who received it. So I just was opposed for political reasons, for academic reasons, and frankly speaking, because the people in the Black Liberation Front in Santa Cruz didn't know El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz. That's it.

Vanderscoff: So staying with the different developments and debates over what College Seven might be called, would you please elaborate in greater depth on the process that you went through to get the name *Oakes College*.

Blake: Well, very early on Dean McHenry's development staff came to me because they were trying to name College Five. The naming process had gone through to Merrill College—corporate. Crown College—corporate. Cowell College—founding. Stevenson College—sentimental, never resulted in much money. College Five—jumped over. Kresge College—corporate.

They came to me and said they had found essentially a donor prepared to make a gift of substantial sorts to the campus, which would lead to a name for College Seven. We talked about it and I said to them I could not accept that name. I could not agree to that. I had a choice. I didn't discuss this with the faculty. I didn't discuss this with anybody. To this day, I have not discussed it with anybody. To this day—not even Bill Doyle. I said that this was a name that reflected the exploitation of people at the bottom. Not just black people—Americans. And people who had used that exploitation to build a financial empire. I said they were our exploiters. I could not accept that our exploiters would become our benefactors. So I said no.

The problem was you don't get these kinds of gifts very often, of that magnitude. They didn't know when another one would come along that would be interested in a college with the composition and the development that we were developing in College Seven. You're putting together some very impossible phenomena. But my argument was we could not take the position we were taking academically and have that name. There was no way in the world. You couldn't do it. So I said no. That was one of the times when I felt like I was confident in my decisions. The administration did not agree with me nor did they oppose me. It was my decision and they went along with it. That name has never come to Santa Cruz. Never come to Santa Cruz. *Never* come to Santa Cruz. Why, I don't know. I know it wasn't going to come to the college that I was heading. I would have had to resign.

Then Gurden Mooser came to me and said there was this guy in San Francisco who was interested in what I was doing.⁴⁷ I was invited to have lunch with him. It was Dan Koshland and he worked in the Wells Fargo building in San Francisco.⁴⁸ So with Gurden Mooser I went up and had lunch with him at the Wells Fargo building. They had a nice restaurant in the basement that was available to the general public. It wasn't a Wells Fargo restaurant. We went down there and had lunch. I had never met Dan Koshland. He was a very nice gentleman. I didn't know anything about him and I didn't really know anything about development and fundraising.

But we went down there and I knew I was with a person who had clout when we arrived. They escorted us to a table—Dan Koshland, myself, and

⁴⁷ Gurden Mooser was assistant chancellor and a founding figure in UCSC's University Relations.

⁴⁸ Daniel Koshland was a biochemist at UC Berkeley, and inherited his fortune from the Levi Strauss Company.

Gurden Mooser—and we sat down at the table and then they moved the three or four tables around away, so nobody sat near Dan Koshland. We sat down and were just holding this nice conversation.

I didn't know what to order. I looked at the menu, big menu, all this stuff. I didn't know anything about this. I didn't know anything about this kind of stuff with my world. He ordered a Shrimp Louie, so I ordered Shrimp Louie. I didn't know what a Shrimp Louie was. I liked shrimp, and so forth. First time I had a Shrimp Louie. I've had many since then.

And we were going on, going on, and he said, "Gurden Mooser told me what you're doing and I really like what you're doing. I'd like to help out. How much money do you need?" That's exactly what he asked me. And I near went through the floor. What do you say? What do you say? Do you say, "I need five thousand dollars?" I hadn't thought about it. I didn't know what to say. So I didn't say anything. I ignored the question.

We went on in conversation. He said, "They've been telling me about what you're doing and I'm very impressed. I'd like to give you seventy-five thousand dollars. Will that be all right?" That was all right with me. So I agree, and we had this nice conversation and then we left. I didn't have nothing to do with no paperwork or nothing like this but the seventy-five thousand dollars came to the campus. And we used that money, among other things, to hire Don Rothman. Because we couldn't hire him on hard money, because he was going to teach Subject A.⁴⁹ And you couldn't use university money. We used that money to hire Don Rothman. It was the first thing we did with that money.

⁴⁹ The Subject A Requirement was a statewide effort mandating certain writing proficiency from entering students. As of 2013, it is known as the entry-level writing requirement.

Well, Dan Koshland was on the board of the San Francisco Foundation. And John May, whom I had come to know very, very well, was the founding executive director of the San Francisco Foundation. John May was not only founding executive director of the San Francisco Foundation; he was also the founding member of the Council of Foundations. He founded that. He was a key leader in initial philanthropic developments of a larger set that impacted higher education. John May and I got along very well. He had, through the San Francisco Foundation, funded one of the programs I was doing in North Richmond, where I brought the students to Santa Cruz. John May had provided that funding in an informal way through Neighborhood House in North Richmond. It wasn't to Santa Cruz but we used the money and so forth. So John May and I would meet and talk. And he and Dan Koshland were very close.

Well John May, after twenty-five, thirty years leading the San Francisco Foundation, was retiring. And when I say "leading," he brought other people in. He brought in, in his operation, black women and minority men in positions where they had influence. One of his black staff members was so impressed with what we were doing in Santa Cruz, she sent her daughter there. Her daughter graduated. She's a Santa Cruz alum. Her husband, who was an engineer, had his doubts. You know, "Who's this guy? What is all this stuff?" You know, "rhetoric and superficial," until he looked. Then he became a strong supporter. But this woman was just a secretary until she ended up like super manager of the San Francisco Foundation.

The San Francisco Foundation did not give money for bricks and mortar. They did not give money for endowments. And they did not give money outside

of the San Francisco Bay Area. All three of those were proscribed. John May was retiring and working with Dan Koshland, who was on the board. They were able to tap into the Oakes Fund, which they had in the San Francisco Foundation. The Oakes Fund was started by a lawyer who had gotten into some way in which he and his wife got a lot of money from interests in the oil industry in Oklahoma and other places. And he had died, Roscoe Oakes, [and his wife Margaret Oakes], had died without children. Had no children, no family, and left all his money to the San Francisco Foundation. They used it to fund the museum in Golden Gate Park. There's a large Oakes Collection there. There's an Oakes room in that museum.

Vanderscoff: At the de Young [Museum], or—?

Blake: Yeah, that's right. So John May and Dan Koshland worked it so that the Oakes Fund was opened to John May's interests because John May was retiring after all these years. So his reward was he was able to negotiate a gift for bricks and mortar, for endowment outside of the San Francisco Bay Area. (sound of conversation in the corridor outside the conference room) And this is our man, Dan Koshland. But in order to make that work they had to persuade the other members of the board beside Dan. Dan had given us seventy-five thousand dollars of his personal money, but this 1.5 million dollar gift which we requested had to come from the foundation, the San Francisco Foundation, the Oakes Fund.

So for the next year, year and a half, I found myself going to concerts in San Francisco, or sometimes in San Jose, and I was meeting and hobnobbing with the board members. They were getting to know me and I was getting to know them and they were building confidence in me. I was creating confidence in them,

talking about what we were doing. I knew full well that if they made a gift it would be naming.

What I liked was 'Oakes' is not a corporate name. And if you think about it, even though it's spelled O-A-K-E-S you could think about the trees on the campus, still. So you're not getting caught up in a dynamic which has negative implications. Furthermore, there's no family. There's nobody around to say, "Oh, you're not following the family's interest," or, "This place is becoming something we don't like." None of that. None of that. So essentially you got a clean bill of goods for a naming gift.

We just worked that until they came to the board meeting where it was presented. And it was like a paragraph in the board documents. There was one guy in there, a black guy—and the only black guy on the board—whom I had gotten to know well. I knew his wife before. She was a graduate student at Stanford and I had done speeches there. She was so impressed. I met him and he was very adamant about that gift, that he only wanted it to come to Oakes if I was going to be the provost of the college. I was already the head but he didn't want the gift to come and then all of a sudden I'm gone. And he expressed that in several settings and I heard him. Wanted to make sure that that happened.

The Oakes gift came and the name came. There hadn't been a gift that large to the Santa Cruz campus—1.2 million dollars. We asked for 1.5. We got 1.2 for endowment and physical facilities. Now, I knew that once this came out it would cause some excitement, because the people who were trying to raise money to name the college after Malcolm X had raised about seventy-five thousand dollars. And I, with Gurden Mooser's review and approval, and Dean

McHenry's review and approval, confidentially brought the student government leadership into this process, in the sense that they knew what I was doing, and they knew what the outcome was going to be. For this long period of time they kept it secret, because if it became known, if it had been leaked, the foundation would have pulled back and we would have lost the money and the name. So they knew what the consequences were and they maintained confidentiality.

Then when it came out Santa Cruz had this 1.2 million dollar gift; it was going to be a naming gift for this College Seven and it would be Oakes College, not Malcolm X College, people said, "What's going on?" The student government said, "We knew all about it. And we approved it."

Now that seventy-five thousand dollars they raised to try and develop this Malcolm X College went into what they called the Malcolm X Memorial Fund, which became a part of the endowment available to the provost of Oakes. I said to the faculty that as long I was leader of the college, I would not spend from that seventy-five thousand dollars. I would just allow it to continue to grow. I would never spend from it, and for twelve years it grew, I guess. I never followed it. I know subsequent provosts have talked about how good it has been to have independent money that the university doesn't control.

Vanderscoff: You mentioned how that first gift from Dan Koshland enabled you to do things like hire Don Rothman. What are some examples of the projects or programs that these sorts of external funds enabled at Oakes?

Blake: Well, they enabled us to expand our counseling program, so that we had three counselors rather than the one that the other colleges had. We were able to develop programs in the sciences through hiring additional people who had

faculty roles. We never hired anyone who could not pass the approval of the traditional boards, so that whatever courses they offered were considered meritorious and acceptable for academic credit within the university. So when we went out to hire Ed Clemens in biology and others—we had two chemists, biologist, a mathematician, as I recall. And we had Don Rothman. That's five faculty. They became supplemental to our faculty, so that our faculty could provide guidance but still continue on their research, scholarly track. They didn't have to sacrifice themselves on the altar of this research commitment versus a teaching commitment. They could do that. But Clemens and the others that we hired with that extra money came in for the sole purpose of being faculty in regular science courses and science programs and research, doing the kinds of things that we needed to happen.

So apart from the counseling and the science effort, that's where we put our money initially. We raised additional money from the Sloan Foundation. We raised additional money from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education. But in all of those cases, those gifts and those funding agencies always made sure that the administration, through the chancellor *and* the president, were committed to the Oakes enterprise. David Saxon, as president of the University of California, committed, I don't know, close to half a million dollars a year to Oakes, that came directly to Oakes out of his operation. Went through the chancellor's office, but they couldn't siphon any of the money off. That came as a result of him seeing what all the others were doing, okay? And them seeing what we were doing, and the need to get money to us to do the extra things that you need to do to maintain a faculty and a student body in a

University of California setting. He did that. But the other side of it was his vice president for academic affairs, Angus Taylor, had had a daughter at Santa Cruz who had gone on my [extramural] project to South Carolina even though she was never at Oakes. So all of those dynamics were working to our benefit.

Vanderscoff: You mentioned last time that Oakes was the only college to have its own science center. Was this a part of the funding that enabled that science center to happen?

Blake: That 1.2 million dollars. The other colleges built libraries. They had a provost house and they had a library. An example was the Cowell College Library. We decided that we would use our money to build a science center, which had classrooms; which had labs; which had quick-disconnect units that you could move around and do things in the main floor; and other kinds of things like that in the center of the college. We deliberately designed it so it was between the two different housing blocks—A and B and C and D—so if you went from one to the other, you had to go past the science center. We had big windows in there so that people could see science was going on all the time. We tried to make it a part of our consciousness. Yes, that's what we used the money for. David Saxon supported us. Dean McHenry supported us.

**A Space for "Constant Learning":
Collegiate Academics and Teaching at Oakes**

Vanderscoff: I'd like to talk in greater detail about some of these academic programs. College Seven—Oakes—had, instead of the core courses of other

colleges—a core curriculum. What was the rationale for this? What did you hope a “curriculum” could accomplish?

Blake: Well, all the other colleges had a course that everybody took and it kind of defined the college. We did too, ultimately. That wasn't the way we started. We had what we called a core curriculum because we wanted to offer at smaller levels a variety of courses that would fit the kinds of expectations we had, so that scientists could teach in the college and could teach science. We got essentially two courses from every faculty member. We tried to have them build the kinds of courses that would fit what we were trying to do.

For example, we had Charles Daniel. He was not a member of the Oakes faculty, but he offered a course on the biology of cancer. We had courses in literature that Bob Crespi ran. I did the ethnic studies course that became ultimately the central Oakes core course. But I didn't start it out that way. I just started it out as a course in the core curriculum and it became so popular that the student government went to the faculty and said, “We want to make this a mandatory course.” The faculty fought it like crazy, said, “We don't want mandatory courses.” The students said, “We do.” Which was quite a surprise.

We then built this core course that had seven faculty in it. The idea of seven faculty from different disciplines teaching together with different disciplines as background became a model of building the community, the community of learners. We would have then said “community of scholars,” but now I say “community of learners” because it incorporates the students, incorporates the faculty, and incorporates their always-expanding vision of the intellect. All of those things were designed to essentially reach students in

whatever way we could and whatever their needs were in that particular kind of setting.

We didn't want to have remedial courses or other special things. But we had different ways of meeting these kinds of needs so that we could react to these kinds of things. Our math teacher, Peter Nemes, would sit in on courses in English and other disciplines that Oakes students were taking to see just how he could incorporate some of those concepts or ideas into his teaching of math. Ray Charland, who was a counselor, would sit in on courses that the students were taking to see the kinds of demands put on them that would lead them to have personal kinds of confrontations or issues that they would have to deal with.

Basically the idea was to spread the pattern of intellectual growth and development from the classroom to the residence hall to wherever people gathered and make it constant learning. So example: the faculty agreed to a policy that every college course had to generate some kind of activity that was required of the students in the course and available to everybody in the college. So a course in—I forget, where somebody dealt with in political science. He basically had a movie series. Now our staff member, who was handling what we would call student activities—which we then renamed college activities—would work with the faculty member to develop a movie series related to the course. The faculty member didn't have to spend time doing, thinking about the movies, getting them or anything. That's what the college activities coordinator did. And they ran things like Jimmy Cliff, *The Harder They Come*, and other kinds of things. These were movies related to the course. Well, when they were shown in the Oakes auditorium there, it was available to the whole campus, and people would

come to see the movie. But then there'd be a discussion afterwards and the students in the class would be particularly interested in the discussion because they knew that was going to become a part of the coursework. So you're building a community, while at the same time you're doing this academic thing. It's going back and forth.

Charles Daniel, as I said, offered this course called *The Biology of Cancer*. In that course it worked out that every student had to do a presentation in public. So the college activities coordinator advertised this, put up a poster, 'a series on cancer.' These different students would come and make a presentation, some of them scared out of their wits, because they were [for the] first time doing a science course. And then they would find people would come and want to talk with them afterwards. They felt a greater confidence in their learning. What we discovered—I didn't know this in advance—there was hardly a family that hadn't been touched by cancer. That interest was very broad and general. And it wasn't tied to race or ethnicity. But in the emphasis on the students who were in the class, the race/ethnicity thing was a part of the consciousness, but it was not a limit. It became a springboard. That's what we were constantly trying to do, in every way saying, "You learn."

Don Rothman developed courses in Shakespeare and tragedy and was getting busses taking students to San Francisco to see *King Lear*. I came out of my office one day and here are these fifty, sixty students, Latino and black and others, going to see *King Lear*. I said, "What the heck do you want to see *King Lear* for?" Because they were taking tragedy with Don Rothman. And what Don realized, and the students realized, is that in the process he was teaching the

students, but as the students came to own the material they were teaching him. It became a partnership in the learning process and everybody became a learner.

Vanderscoff: I've looked back at some of the course catalogs from those years, and in addition to your administrative duties you were still teaching courses. Would you mind doing a compare-and-contrast with the difference between being a teacher in Cowell College in '66, and being a teacher in Oakes College in that founding year? What had changed; what remained constant for you?

Blake: What remained constant was my passionate love of teaching, of bringing new creative ideas wherever I was, and in the process trying to incorporate the students' perspective into the learning process. There was no formula for that. You just had to 'listen eloquently' and begin to relate to students. That was important.

The other part of it was in Cowell I never had to think about anything administrative, even to the point of getting support for teaching assistants. When I did the big course in Cowell, the eight hundred students. I had teaching assistants. They read the papers. They wrote the initial drafts of the narrative evaluations. They did all of that work. And that was very, very important. What they did was they freed me to be a teacher, and hopefully a beginning scholar.

At Oakes, your teaching became an extension of the administration and the administration became an extension of the teaching. And when we first started in Oakes—that first, I don't know, [quarter] or two—I don't recall that I taught. I was too busy doing. I had this young lady who was my personal secretary, Diana Rogers. A Latina married to an Anglo. And Diana, she'd tell me about my appointments with different people. And I'd say, "Well what's his

problem," or "What's her problem?" She once looked at me, she said, "Do you always think of students as problems?" And it hit me like a ton of bricks. When you're an administrator sitting in the office, generally when you see students it's because they have a problem or they are a problem. It begins to structure your perceptions. You don't see the students who are doing well and succeeding.

I felt I needed to get into the classroom so I could see the whole panoply of students, so that when I was dealing with the administrative issues, even though it might be a smaller number of students I had to think about the larger collectivity of students. So that teaching became an experience with students that informed what I did in the office of the administration.

I really didn't consider myself much of an administrator. I was more like a leader. I had some good people around who did administration: Bob Bosler, Ron Saufley, Gwen Lacy. They made things happen. They did the detail and I developed a broader picture and tried to be an inspirational leader—although I wasn't very conscious about it. But that's what I did.

Vanderscoff: I'd like to talk at greater length about teaching in Oakes College in those early years. When College Seven was founded in that forming year, it had very few senior faculty. One document that I referred to said there were only two tenured faculty at the time.

Blake: That's right.

Vanderscoff: And you addressed this a little bit earlier, but would you mind going into greater depth about concerns that you and others had about faculty getting tenure and what steps were taken to pave that way?

Blake: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Well, first of all, there was this expectation of scholarship. The teaching load at the University of California is based on an expectation of scholarship. And that was no less in Oakes College. We recognized from the start that if our faculty got engaged in teaching in a way that was going to be required to move those students to where we wanted them, their professional lives were lost. They wouldn't get tenure. Nor would they have the kind of research or scholarly foundation that would lead them to good jobs in other institutions. So it's a lose-lose for them. So we had to provide support, and through these external funds we recruited—the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education and other places—we made it possible that for the first four years or so of the college, every untenured faculty member coming in got summer support. So they didn't have to try and work to cover their summer salary. That was one thing.

But we tried to give them summer support and reduced teaching loads because we had these extra people we were bringing in. And if you could give them summer support and reduced teaching loads at the right points, a person could get summer support and the fall semester with only one course, which was essentially a non-classroom course. That gives you five, six months of time to work on your scholarship. The other time you had to do regular teaching. And that course relief was often releasing them from the college course they would normally be expected to teach. We just didn't offer it.

Summer support, course release. We had an extremely skilled grants writer, who was available to faculty and wrote grants for them so that they could recruit funds. Very often on my travels I would visit with foundations or other

places where our faculty had proposals, to solicit support, inquire questions and so forth. All of those were strategies to provide the time for faculty to do their research. And of all of the faculty we hired, I think when they came up for tenure only two didn't make it. (pause) But our position was if you join us, we can't guarantee your tenure. What we can guarantee is when you reach tenure, if it doesn't work it won't be because you didn't have the support.

Vanderscoff: Do you think that Oakes College placed particular expectations or hopes or demands on its faculty, relative to other colleges or your time at Cowell?

Blake: Absolutely. We didn't put it in words or policy. But when you stepped in there you stepped into a place where the expectation was you were going to make the kind of commitment that would encourage and develop these students, spending time talking to them in your office, or engaging them in classroom work, writing letters of support. Essentially, just saying, "You matter. You matter to me, and you matter to life." That was an expectation. They probably did it in the other colleges without being conscious of it. But here you had to be pretty deliberate.

Vanderscoff: So reflecting on those demands, do you think that the various boards of study were supportive of their faculty participating in Oakes?

Blake: It varied. It really varied. There were some boards of study which were absolutely hostile. Cooperated with us and worked with us to recruit faculty, and when the faculty were on board they said essentially, "If you want tenure you better shift your college." That happened in more than one case. And the faculty

sometimes were very upset about it. But they would do it. They would continue to be of encouragement to us and our students. But they had to do it. And I think of people and I can give names, people who told us that happened that way. There were others who came and who built things designed to support students. Barry Bowman. I don't know if you know him. He's still there. You ought to talk to him. He's incredible. He and his wife—biologists—built a whole operation designed to motivate, recruit and encourage minority students. And that was very important.

But yes, I thought there were some boards that were just hostile to what we were doing. They were basically hostile to Santa Cruz, because they didn't want narrative evaluations. They wanted this emphasis on teaching— And it was frustrating in the sense of, you got to do all this other stuff, but you don't have graduate students. That's a *Santa Cruz* problem, and that's a serious problem if you're trying to develop a research focus. I find that to be a problem with me here. I'm a social scientist and I want to work in certain areas and I do. No graduate students.

Vanderscoff: I noticed that your own dissertation was published in '74. Given that during your time with Oakes you were very much focused on your provostship and teaching, did you at all find it difficult personally to get tenure?

Blake: Well first of all, my dissertation was not published. I'm not sure what you're referring to.

Vanderscoff: Completed, perhaps, is what I mean, then. Yes, pardon me.

Blake: Yes, it was completed in 1974. That's when it was approved. The answer is no. I had no difficulty getting tenure. Almost before Oakes opened I think I had—and I never applied. Page Smith and others paved the way for me. I came to Santa Cruz as an acting assistant professor. The policy in the University of California was as long as you didn't have your dissertation you could not be a regular faculty member. You had to be acting. I was acting assistant professor. Page Smith and others paved the way and without my even being aware of it I ended up acting associate professor. That gave me, essentially, tenure. I learned later that there were people in President Saxon's office who joked about my completing my dissertation, because they didn't want me to complete it. They wanted me to be the first acting professor in the University of California system. (laughter) And in terms of moving from associate to full rank, I don't know all the details. But Bill Doyle and [Professor of Education] Art Pearl put that whole thing together and made that work. So I completed the dissertation and I was appointed professor. I think to a great degree it was based on service and institutional building.

Vanderscoff: And as far as the teaching component of your time at Oakes goes, what sort of courses were you teaching at the time? What were you trying to teach the students in that way?

Blake: (laughs) You know, I tried to do everything. And it didn't work. But I had a good time failing.

Vanderscoff: (laughs)

Blake: I taught a course on immigration that turned out to be enormously successful. I don't know if it was popular. It was a small class. I just remember I had a good cadre of students who worked with me around issues of immigration. It was important for me to do that because it gave me a chance to explore and expose students to the experience of European immigrants. While I incorporated that into my core course, here I was able to get into some depth. People don't know in detail the European immigrant experience, and how much it parallels more recent and contemporary experiences—or differs from it. I thought that both were important to understanding.

That one was great. And a part of that was the interaction among the students. José Orozco, who is now a professor of history at the college that Nixon graduated from down there, [Whittier College], in Southern California, José Orozco took that course, and there were some Anglo students who challenged him. He was always going on about, "Gringos, gringos!" Ah, they wouldn't buy it. They wouldn't let him put them in categories any more than he wanted to be in a category. And the debate and the discussion in that class between José and the 'gringos' led them to the point where he would say sometimes—they'd say, "You know, what are you?" "Well, today I'm Chicano," or, "Today I'm *Mexicano*," or, "I'm just José." You have of all these dynamics. And he respected them and they respected him. It was that kind of stuff that was going on in the class. And I liked it, because what they were saying is, "We've had these different experiences."

I don't recall all of the different courses I taught. I remember requiring the students to read *Giants in the Earth*, by Ole Rølvaag. This was another small

group course. I had an American Indian student in there. She's now an MD on a reservation somewhere out there. She came to me and she said, "I don't want to read about white people. Don't want to read about them. I've had enough of this." But in my course she had to read *Giants in the Earth*, by Ole Rølvaag. I said, "Well, you've got to read it. Gotta read it." And she did. She later on came to thank me, because there were certain parts of that book where there was interaction with American Indians. And she found a lot of respect in the book. Latinos—I would say, "When you come to class, read a paragraph that particularly impacted you." And several of the Latinos read paragraphs about working in the fields in the early morning when the fog comes over the field and it's cold and damp and you got to go out there and pick, or toil, and so forth. What they saw was their lives in this book about Norwegian immigrants. Well, there's a human connection constantly going on. Taught a course with Dilip Basu on the role of violence and nonviolence in social change. Earlier I had taught a course, before Oakes began, with John Dizikes, but that was another kind of a thing. I can't remember them all. It was just a wonderful experience of bringing my intellect to the students and hopefully motivating them to explore their own intellect and expand in knowledge and understanding.

Vanderscoff: As a closing note on teachers and teaching for this exact moment of our discussion, over the course of your involvement at Oakes how successful was that college at retention, both in terms of faculty leaving the college and being denied tenure—beyond just that first group you've already discussed.

Blake: I think it was very successful in terms of faculty retention, because we moved people to tenure. Some people did leave, but we were able to replace

them, as I recall. Bill Doyle handled a lot of that. I was not peripheral, but did not get into the nitty-gritty of putting together dossiers and all of that. Bill Doyle, Ron Saufley, and others did a lot of that. I thought it was tremendously successful, because not only were the faculty that we had as Oakes faculty, we helped to bring other faculty to the campus—attract other faculty to the campus. One of them was named Clifton Poodry. I don't know if you've heard that name. He was a Mohawk Indian, PhD in biology. He has now got a high position with NIH [National Institute of Health] in Washington, D.C. And he tells people, "Herman gave me my first job." Which was not exactly true, but I was an important part of that recruitment. And the vice chancellor, Eugene Cota-Robles, was very helpful with us in that. Frank Talamantes became a part of the college, and he became a super scientist. Almost killed himself with his work ethic and his smoking.

Another gentleman in biology, a black guy, and several Latinos who came in biology who weren't a part directly of Oakes, but were engaged with us in a variety of ways, our students, and working with them. It all became a part of creating another dynamic. I mean, George Blumenthal taught astronomy and through his influence we sent the first Latina to go to Harvard's PhD program in astrophysics. These kinds of almost individual successes, which began to multiply and multiply and multiply, with people just continuing to grow. Peter Nemes was priceless. He wasn't a traditional faculty member. He was one of those extras we hired. But could he teach chemistry. And he opened the door to a lot of students going on in chemistry.

Vanderscoff: We've been discussing many aspects of the faculty. I'd like to talk about people like the gentleman whom you've just discussed, and Don Rothman—these people who were brought in with this [external] funding and the work they did in areas like the writing classes, the writing program, and others. What sort of impact did this group of people have at Oakes College?

Blake: Oh, they made it possible for us to be successful. That's the bottom line. We had the guy in physics—Alan Stewart—he was a black graduate student in physics. He was a musician, and he used to use a spectrometer to show music chords, organ chords or guitar chords that the students would know from their gospel singing and work in terms of music. But it became science. It helped them to make that transition, get them more committed to studying and learning. He was one.

Peters Nemes' course in *Introduction to Chemistry* became one of those where we just had to prevent people from coming. Now the Oakes courses we never limited to Oakes students, because we knew that the minority students would get into those—and we didn't want just minority students. So we always kept about 10 percent or so of the courses without being numerically that way, but trying to attract and bring in students who weren't from Oakes, but who were white or whatever. It was very important.

Peter Nemes taught probably the most difficult course in *Introduction to Chemistry* on campus. When the class ended on Thursday you would have forty hours of problem sets to do by Tuesday, when it met again. Well, initially a lot of students didn't like that that. That was a lot of work. But Peter Nemes would always be around during the weekend. He always wore a bicycling cap and

shorts and long socks. Regardless of the time of year, he was in that bicycling cap and those socks. He'd always be there. He seemed to be there all the time to serve and serve. And when I say the impact on students and on building a community, it's hard to put into words unless you experienced it. Here we had Peter Nemes making *Introduction to Chemistry* so hard, but also being there to make sure you could succeed if you committed to study.

So you got forty hours of problem sets. Well, you don't be going home, you don't be partying. You stay there doing problem sets. That's why the other people would say, "Oh, you don't want to go to that college. All those people do is study." That's right. It's what we had to do, because we were overcoming historical limits. Peter Nemes did it. And I remember some black students coming in my office and banging on the table: "That course is designed to keep black folk from going to medical school." Because it was so challenging. Well, later on some of those same students said that *because* of Peter's course they got into medical school. Because Peter Nemes, if you could get through his *Introduction to Chemistry*, you had many fewer problems with organic chemistry. And organic was the gatekeeper for medical school.

Vanderscoff: Yes, O Chem.

Blake: So you get through his intro, you're going to go through O Chem. And they came to know and understand that.

Some of the students tried to run this guilt trip on Peter Nemes, about, "He didn't know nothing about being black." And he didn't. He never said he did. He was of Hungarian background. And they ran this stuff on him. And one

day he told them something about freedom. He was from Hungary. He was a young child in the Hungarian Revolution of the mid-fifties. And his family decided to flee Hungary and the Russian soldiers. And they'd set out and travel at night, except when there was a full moon, trying to get to whatever border they were trying to get to. After a couple of days of walking and hiding, they finally got to the border one night. And they made it across the border desperate, hungry, cold. After they got across the border they went to the first house they saw and knocked and asked for help. The family welcomed them in, tried to give them some water. He remembered this from being a child. Then the young lady of this family where they stopped at this house made a telephone call. And they soon realized that she was talking to a Russian soldier on the telephone, who was like a boyfriend or companion. And they were something like three miles still inside the border. They hadn't reached what they thought was the border. And this soldier showed up at the front door and escorted them to the border. So they escaped.

Tell him something about freedom that he doesn't understand, that he's giving you this hard work to keep you—I'm sorry—from advancing? Don't come with your stories, however real and however true, and expect somebody's going to reduce the expectations. Now be careful—I didn't say lower the standards. I said reduce the expectations. Standards are often used as barriers, expectations as hopes. Peter never lowered his expectations and his students succeeded. Those who didn't want to meet his expectations failed. And he never looked back, because we didn't.

Then you had this guy Ed Clemens, who was just around. He just hung around. He was always around, everybody's friend. Biologist. And he ran all of this, helped you set up experimental things. These are all people hired on what we called soft money, but they did the hard work that made it successful.

Don Rothman—I don't know how to put it in words. And that's why I could not speak at that memorial.⁵¹ I would not have missed the memorial, but I wasn't going to speak. And his first quarter he was failing. I'll never forget. I may have told you the story, I don't know. But it should be known.

I'm sitting in my office. Don is teaching writing. And these three black students—one of whom was there in the spring [at the memorial], Carmen Hawkins—they come rushing in my office. And I mean they were breathing fire. "This man down the hall—" And you got to understand, our offices and our classrooms are in these temporary facilities in College Five, so nothing is right. One of these temporary facilities was like a residence hall. And so it just didn't fit. And this is about 1973, '74, I don't know.

They showed up: "The racist! The man was a racist." Well, I want to try and contain the conflagration. I don't want them going back over into the Married Student Housing where our students lived, talking about this professor—in this college with this philosophy—is a racist. So I at least calmed them and told them I'd deal with it and so forth and so on. But I didn't want to go and upset him. So I had a brief call that evening with the executive committee of the college: Bill Doyle and two, three other faculty. And I told them what I experienced with the students. They advised me to go and talk with Don. I got

⁵¹ Don Rothman passed away on November 28th, 2012, two days before he was to meet with me to inform this project, and shortly before he was to begin his own oral history project. His memorial took place in January and was attended by hundreds, including Dr. Blake and myself. –Ed.

their backing, their approval. "We don't want to make mistakes. We don't want to upset people and so forth."

So the next day I went to see Rothman. I really didn't know him. We'd hired him, but you know, you're still learning about him. Went to see him. The first thing he said was, "I know why you're here." And he told me about the reaction of these young ladies in the class. We talked. Well, he was trying some new approaches to teaching, writing and learning. And he had them reading what he thought was a good writer: Eldridge Cleaver. I guess *Soul on Ice*, I don't know. Eldridge was another one of my contacts. Stories about him and me is another story. I still interact with his widow, former wife, Kathleen. Her mother is crazy. (laughs) I had a good time with her mother.

So anyhow, the point is he assigned this thing. But you don't have black women reading and expected to discuss an essay by a black writer, male, talking about his desire to rape white women. To them, the black women, "This man's a racist." Because he didn't understand what was going on in their hearts and minds.

Don Rothman, I concluded after that conversation, was an innovator who was failing. He was not a racist. But he was an innovator. And apart from this, I had done work in my evaluations of poverty programs for the Office of Economic Opportunity in Sacramento and Fresno, in the San Joaquin Valley. And two of the most outstanding organizers and workers in these communities were some Anglos I met who had had dramatic failures in Mexico and in these communities, but who learned from their failures and became very successful Cursillo Movement organizers. And I saw that in Rothman: an innovator, a

creative mind, who hadn't worked out the strategies to connect the two. So I encouraged him, told him I was behind him. And I went back to the faculty and I recommended that when he came up for reappointment that we give him a double jump in his salary. Because if he's an innovator, and experimenting, he should not be negatively sanctioned for failure. But he should be positively promoted for being innovative. And we did that.

Six years later, when Don Rothman wanted to take a sabbatical—he'd gotten security of employment and all and he wanted to take a sabbatical—black students near wanted to kill me.⁵² "You can't let him go. We need him." They didn't want him to go. Well, we had a black guy we were going to hire to replace him. They didn't care. They wanted Rothman.

That's the transformation he made, the constant growing. He taught tragedy. Latinos, male and female, but particularly the males, began to realize—What he did was he taught the students in such a manner that they came to know and own the material, because they would give back the material as interpreted through their lives and their experience. Which he did not know—but he would then be informed and educated. So it became a partnership in the learning. What they came to realize was that the experience of the person who was the subject of the tragedy was often a source of alienation and disconnection from society and family and friends. And they saw this. And they came to understand absent fathers or other kinds of things, which they wrote about. And they informed Rothman. So it was like, "This is what I love and I'm sharing it

⁵² For lecturers like Don Rothman, security of employment (SOE) is the parallel of tenure for professors.

with you. You show me what the mirror shows. Explain to me what the mirror shows so I learn." And it was this back and forth, back and forth.

Shortly after I left Oakes we did a presentation at the American Association for Higher Education in Chicago or somewhere. Don came to talk about his teaching tragedy and I presented. It was only Oakes people. And we had a Latino, young man, who'd graduated already and was at Harvard Medical School. And he came and spoke. I remember he had his papers up there. He couldn't hold them. He was so nervous. And the audience seeing that, they were just right with him, right with him as he was talking all nervous about studying tragedy. And I remember Charles Muscatine, who had developed Strawberry [Creek] College, or one of those undergraduate colleges at Berkeley, which ultimately the faculty killed, Charles Muscatine was there and he got up and he said, "Well, they always tell us that when you have courses for Latinos and blacks they have to be relevant. So you got to have people who look like them and it's got to be a subject—you say, 'No.'" And this young man from Harvard Medical School in his first year and Rothman were talking about owning the material, and the growth that comes. And in the middle of this, this guy gets up and talks about being a student at Oakes and now he's a professor at Whittier College—it was José Orozco. The circle closes.

I could go on and on about Don Rothman. They asked us to write about him at the memorial.

Vanderscoff: Yes.

Blake: I mean, I shed many a tear that evening, and I made notes. I made notes of seventeen experiences—seventeen—where his life impacted me and that I can

talk about directly influences what I do even here [at the Medical University], with the doctors, recently. I can do that. And that's Don Rothman, because he was creative. He was in the life of the mind. And he wasn't following any formulaic pattern except "all of me teaching all of you." And that's what defined Oakes in many respects, so that people went outside.

I used to lecture about Gullah Geechee culture and the kinds of experiences I was having here [in the Sea Islands]. I talked about the old practice of making Christmas in the Sea Islands. And I remember three Anglo women, just as Anglo as you can find anywhere in the world, coming to talk to me about taking that Gullah tradition and transforming it a little bit and making it an Oakes tradition of "making community." Well, black students didn't like it, because you see, you're expropriating their culture. None of them were from the Sea Islands—that's not the point. They didn't like it.

But I encouraged these young ladies, and they went on and mobilized the student government and others, and they finally had this thing one night. It was a two-night thing, "making community." I was living in the provost house at Oakes, and I remember stepping out of the house to head to my office. And I see one of the black students who was so angry about this, I walk out and here he is, running across one of those things between the apartments, "Herman! Herman! It's working! It's working!" They were opposed because they didn't want it to fail. Because if it failed, they wouldn't have to say, "I was a part of a failure." But when they saw it was working! They couldn't stop. And that's what we were doing constantly, all the time. (pause)

Vanderscoff: I'd like to put us on hold for a moment. (recorder turned off; after a brief conversation, the decision is made to close off the session)

Reflections on Staff and the Oakes Community

Vanderscoff: Today is Thursday, February 14th, 2013. This is Cameron Vanderscoff here for the Regional History Project on Valentine's Day with Dr. J. Herman Blake. We are in a conference room at the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston, South Carolina. A different conference room than last time, same building. Dr. Blake would like to start out today with a statement.

Blake: Well, I was thinking about some of the things we talked about yesterday, and one of the questions you asked me was about this money we raised, the independent funds we brought in and the kinds of programs and activities they allowed us to do. The one thing I forgot to mention was that we had enough money to underwrite faculty positions. I talked about special faculty we brought in. But on more than one occasion we had a very promising faculty member who the board wanted and we wanted, but there was no position available. And we could use Oakes money to essentially bring that person on board a year early, until the hard money opened up, for the hard money position. And that allowed us to bring in some minority faculty and others that we could not have otherwise recruited. Eugene Cota-Robles, out of the chancellor's office, and Bill Doyle did most of these negotiations. He worked them out. But he knew he had flexibility that normally was not there. That was an important part of us building the kind of diverse and creative faculty we were able to build.

It wasn't only for minority faculty. As I recall, in one case we underwrote a guy who didn't even come to Oakes. He was in molecular biology, and they really wanted him. He was a UC Santa Cruz graduate but now he'd done his doctoral work. And they really wanted him, and it was a question of him or somebody that *we* wanted. We were able to get them both. That money was very, very helpful in that kind of negotiating. But it also helped to demonstrate the seriousness and commitment to the university mission that was characteristic of Oakes, even though people looked at the population—not many, but enough to make us uncomfortable—and they didn't like it.

Vanderscoff: Thank you for that addendum. I'd like to start out today, on my end, continuing with the story of Oakes College, the shaping of Oakes College, and in particular addressing the role that the staff played in that process. Who comes to mind, what stories, what positions, what projects—as far as the staff goes—when you think of that aspect of the college?

Blake: Well, first of all we didn't make the abrupt demarcations between staff and faculty that characterized other parts of the university. We saw them as all a part of a whole. And in that regard even people whose names I don't know, I never met, were important, like the women who cleaned the common parts of the residence halls. Most of them were Latinas. And we'd say to the students, "This is like your *abuela*. You treat them with respect." I guess it was [maintenance supervisor] Lowell Burton who got to those women, and those women understood that the students had to go to school.⁵³ So they would say,

⁵³ For an oral history with Lowell Burton as well as other Oakes staff and faculty see the series of oral histories deposited in Special Collections at the UCSC Library. Interviews in the project were

"You can't lay in your bed in the morning because the housekeeper will come by, and the first question they'll ask is, 'Why aren't you in class?'" Well, you can't say, "I don't have class," because then they'll say, "Why aren't you in the library?" And our point was, every person who touched a student had the capacity to teach in some way. So here's the cleaning woman saying, "Why aren't you in class?" And that was an important part of it.

We got our clerical work people working at the desk there, to place emphasis—we placed emphasis on learning students' names. And not only learning their names; learning their names the way they pronounce them. So many of our young people were used to getting into situations with Anglos who would say, "Why'd your mother name you after Jesus?" Well, it's Jesús. And I used to say, "Can you think of a better role model?" But some people thought that was sacrilegious, who were not from Latino culture.

So our staff, we argued, had to learn students' names; learn students' names the way they pronounced them. And it wasn't just the Latinos. It was anyone. Because so often people who had Greek names, they were used to shortening them and Anglicizing them. So somebody would come and say, "My name is John Pappas." Well, you'd say, "Is it Pappas or Pappandreas?" Well, it's really Pappandreas and that's what they'd like, but to make it easier for everybody they say Pappas. "No, we'd say, Pappandreas. That's your name, we'll call you by your name." That was an important part of creating the sense of community.

You take it a little bit further. We said everybody was a teacher, so you don't engage in small talk just to pass time or whatever. Somebody comes in, and if they've got a textbook that shows they're studying German—this is among the staff, now—you ask them, "Well, how do you say this in German? How do you say that?" In other words, ask them some questions that would in a way stimulate their learning, reinforce their learning. And we kept talking about this. But I didn't talk about this with the staff. We had this great guy who handled all of the facilities, Lowell Burton. I remember somebody coming and saying, "I thought Lowell was the provost." You heard so much about Lowell from the students. Lowell was always promoting education.

We had a night proctor. I saw him at Don's memorial—Woody—big guy with flaming red hair and a big beard. He was on at night and I didn't see him very much. But Woody understood his role as an educator. We didn't make those differentiations.

Sometimes on Friday we'd have a wine and cheese thing in one of the rooms near the coffee shop. And I remember somebody from another college came by and they were talking to this woman who was in charge of our steno pool. They asked her about what she was doing. She says she ran the steno pool. And the guy said, "In my college you wouldn't be here." But why not be there?

I had a secretary, Sharon Durcan. Her daughter ended up working at the college years after I left. Well, Sharon's husband, John, was a sergeant on the police force. I became very friendly with John. We used to jog all the time, jog together along the cliff. So when we'd have these wine and cheese or other events, the faculty would be there, an occasional student—not many students—

and the staff. And John Durcan always liked it when somebody who didn't know the college—you know, like we had an accreditation team, an evaluation team. We'd have a reception. And they'd come in and say, "Well, what department are you in?" He'd say, "I'm in the police department." They couldn't figure him out.

But you see, with that kind of relationship it made it possible for us to build a sense of community. So much so that if our students got into trouble in some off-campus situation and a police department had a warrant for arrest or something like this, they would come to campus and explain to the campus police they had this warrant. Well, when they got to Oakes College, the police would bring them to my office. We didn't let them go into the residence halls with their weapons and all that sort of thing, even as plainclothes, to arrest a student. We'd bring the student to the office. They'd place them under arrest and take them there. It was a more peaceful, less confrontational, less public kind of event. But we could do that because we had those positive relationships with the police and the police department. I served on two search committees looking for a chief of police. And it built real rapport with the police department. I think that was a part of my being able to get at least two students out of prison and back into school.

I haven't named a single staff except Lowell Burton. But then we had all of the professional staff, and we had people grow. One of the first people we were able to hire when we finally got the full strength, or getting toward the full strength, was a woman who was sort of like the office manager: Gwen Lacy, Gwenneth Lacy. And Gwen—we just put her on a, if you will, a professional

growth track. Involved her in faculty meetings and other kinds of things where she could see where she could make a contribution. Gwen then developed the other staff. She was the one that carried the message to that office staff: you learn students' names; you treat them with respect, et cetera and et cetera.

And people used to say—I remember coming out of my office one day and here sat this woman, actually the daughter of J.C. Penney, who was a friend. I used to stay in her house in New York. She was traveling, driving up the coast and visiting friends, and she came by to see me. She stayed overnight at my house that night. And she was sitting there. I came out of my office. I said, "Carol, why didn't you let somebody tell me you were here?" She says, "Oh no, I'm just sitting here listening to the warm noise." Talking about the interaction she was sensing and feeling.

When we built that college we deliberately built a fireplace in the lounge. I don't know if you've seen that fireplace in the entry.

Vanderscoff: I have.

Blake: We had one on the first floor and one on the second floor. The one on the first floor was built right by the mailboxes. So if you went and you got junk mail you didn't want, you could burn it right there. But we also kept a fire in that fireplace, particularly on gray, foggy, cold days. It became a place where you could go and feel warm. That was very important.

Gwen Lacy was very, very key. Early on when we were in temporary facilities, we had a woman secretary who didn't go with us when we went into the permanent facilities and I don't know whatever happened to her. And I'm glad she didn't. She was kind of high-strung, very emotional, and didn't handle

crises well, pressure well. And it just wasn't going to work. I don't know what happened, but she brought on board from Merrill College this young lady as a secretary, and Ralph really wanted her because we needed some Latino presence. Sometimes it would be a half a day before she could get a letter typed without errors. But we kept her in a patient way. It was about building some relationship, some representational kinds of things.

But when we were finally in our full facilities it was Gwen Lacy who led and very often employed a lot of those people that handle housing and other things. I'm sure she was the one who hired Lowell. I don't know how Lowell got there. That wasn't where I was making a contribution or getting involved. All I know was the people were good. I used to tell them about a time I had been at the University of Colorado in Boulder. I had been there a couple of days, and I went into the cafeteria. And you know, you order your food and you're going through the checkout stand. And the clerk could look down at your tray and put in the numbers and give you a price and never look at you. Never knew you. You go all the way through, and they'd never look at you. And I contrasted that to Cal State Los Angeles, where the vice president for student affairs said to staff, "If you see a student more than twice you've got to learn their name." And so you go, they look in your face and they welcome you and they greet you. It's a big difference. And Gwen and others picked up the notion that you do that.

And then one day Bob Bosler showed up. I have no idea what led Dean McHenry—I do have an idea—to assign Bob Bosler to Oakes College. Bob came and said that the chancellor had said he should work for me. And he became my executive assistant. He was good at detail. He's the guy I told you who did a

master's degree in aeronautical engineering at MIT at twenty-one. And he was also crazy in his way, because he said that when he announced his thesis that he wanted to write, they said he could do it if he went to the counseling center and got therapy in the process, which he agreed to. But his thesis in the department of aeronautical engineering at MIT was on romantic love in the English novel. (laughter) He was a unique person, unique character, just like Byron Stookey was in the office of Dean McHenry when Dean was building the college.

You know, Dean McHenry in his early years would only hire staff people who had been in things like the Peace Corps. He'd get those returned Peace Corps volunteers, because there was a quality about them in their interaction and their understanding that was an important part of the building the college he had—with the campus. So he had returned Peace Corps volunteers in his operation. And John Marcum and the people in Merrill College had faculty who had lived abroad. It was, at very subtle but very important levels, diversity and creativity—without it being slogans.

So Bob Bosler showed up. And Bob Bosler was good at detail. He loved detail. Loved detail. I'd lay something out in terms of some ideas. Next thing I know he'd worked out all of the policies and the procedures and the forms. I never had to think about that, and hated it. He loved it. But Bob was also interested in peer counseling and he brought the peer-counseling program to us. It became an important part of student interaction. I think it was very, very important. Some of the black students were cynical about it, you know: "We got all of this peer counseling. Kiss thy neighbor." Well, in a place of people making the transition out of adolescence into adulthood, particularly with some of the

family issues they might deal with—they were problematical. And the peer-counseling program became very valuable and very important as an extension of the more formal thing that we had.

We built offices for the counselors in the administrative complex at Oakes. We had three offices near the back, which were soundproof. They were built so people could go there. They were soundproof, and then there was a backdoor where you could leave if you didn't want to be seen leaving. We had three of those soundproof offices. They're probably still there. They're not used for counseling, but they're soundproof, designed that way.

I had my office on the walkway with big picture windows, which every subsequent provost, I understand, hated. I know the one who followed me thought it was awful, because you're sitting there and everybody can see you working. Well, that's the way it was in the central administration building. You could be walking there, and you could look at Dean McHenry sitting in his office working, or meeting with people. I thought it was such a great idea. He just had narrow slits, but you still saw him.

I always sat with my back to the window, so I wouldn't be distracted by people going back and forth. But they'd know when I was in town. They would know when I was having a meeting. And I had curtains. If I needed a private meeting I could pull the curtain. But mostly the windows were open, and they could open up and you could speak out the window. I'd be sitting there working and somebody would come up to the window and we'd have a chat. Linda Noguchi used to always come by. She had a prayer list and she wanted to know

who did I want to put on her prayer list. So she'd stop in. You got more business done that way, and it was a good thing.

So Bob Bosler, on Dean McHenry's payroll, became an important part of the scaffolding and architecture of the interaction. He hired Bob Lim, who became our finance person. Bob Lim could squeeze a nickel until the buffalo roared.

Vanderscoff: (laughs)

Blake: The students couldn't stand him. He was lovely, he was very friendly, but he certainly made sure they did it right. He made a trip down here during the extramural program, went around, came back with a whole bunch of firecrackers and all that stuff, because you can buy them on the street down here [in South Carolina]. But Bob Lim was another. Kathy Rocha—she eventually married Victor Rocha, but she was hired as a student activities coordinator. She developed very positive rapport with the faculty. We changed it from 'student activities' to 'college activities.' The activities became an extension of the learning. And we spent a lot of time making direct contact between the learning and activities. I forget the name of the young lady who handled housing. I understand she died. But we had her.

We had a policy that caused a lot of concern in other colleges. And that is, as these young women gave birth, they could bring their babies to work. We had a playpen. And sometimes they'd be there and students would take them off and tend to them. But you could have your child in the office. Now, others argued that—people in other colleges, women, if you will—argued that was irresponsible, because they wouldn't do their work. They'd be just tending. That

was absolutely the reverse. They were so concerned about people thinking they were goldbricking that they worked harder at doing it. But I felt like, you know, you just don't want your child to take its first step, or have other kinds of things, and they're in a day care center or with some kind of caregiver. So they used to bring their kids to work. I remember my son Sidney would sit and sing lullabies to them in their playpens, because I'd sing lullabies to Sidney. So Sidney would sing lullabies to them. We had them all around, all around. Mary Joan Rodriguez just became addicted to the students in the most positive way, so much so that she actually went beyond her limits, in the sense she started giving them advice and counsel. And she'd talk in faculty meetings, "I told them this." They'd say, "Oh, God, that's the wrong advice!"

Vanderscoff: (laughs)

Blake: And she didn't understand. But she was committed. And she still is. She was there the night we did the thing with Don Rothman, and other things. She was very heavy, very heavy. But she went on a weight loss program. And I remember she was, for two years, trying to lose this weight. We kept pulling for her and finally she made her weight goals. And oh, we had a celebration. Don came down. I think he had two covers from pots from somewhere and he was clanging them together like cymbals.

Vanderscoff: (laughs)

Blake: And we marched down the hall. Mary Jane had made her weight goals.

So we had Bob Bosler, and I was able to bring on board Ron Saufley after we were getting started. Ron had been at the university working in the

development office. That's when I met him. I don't know where he did his bachelor's degree, but he was in law school. He found he didn't like law school. And he gave it up and went on and did a master's degree in art history, and was working in the development office. This was before the college opened, and while we were still planning it. I was doing my thing with the people in North Richmond. And we brought the students down for two weeks. We had them on campus in the residence halls. This was in Stevenson College. They lived in the residence halls, ate in the dining room. And they couldn't believe it. You could just go up to the machine, put the thing under there, and get soda. You didn't have to pay or any of this sort of business. They loved it. But then they had problems with other things. "Raw meat!" (laughter) The steaks. And the mushrooms and the gravy looked like things would be stompin' in there. (laughter) Oh, they had to make some adjustments. But it was wonderful.

Ron Saufley worked out all the details. I think the university gave us no rent for the rooms. We had to pay for meals and all of this, but it was a really nice deal. John May and the San Francisco Foundation funded that. And that's how I got friendly with John May, which ultimately led to the major gift in Oakes through Dan Koshland. Because John May and Dan Koshland were really good friends. John May founded the San Francisco Foundation and the Council of Foundations. He was a charter member. Later on, after he left the foundation he became the advisor to Bill Hewlett, who founded the Hewlett Foundation. I remember going to John May's office one day—this is afterwards—and he says, "Look at this." He just threw this piece of paper at me. It was a handwritten

check for ten million dollars that Bill Hewlett had written and given him. (laughs) Oh, I tell you, these guys—he was a wonderful guy.

But he funded the operation out of North Richmond. Ron Saufley as a member of the development staff and other kinds of general things you had to do to help put it together. And Ron came to me one day. He says, "You know," he says, "I'm a good proposal writer. I do all of these kinds of things, fundraising. But I don't deal with people. And I hate it, because I don't deal with people. I'd like to get into a situation where I'm using my skills to help *people*. And I said, "This is great."

So I put him in touch with the leadership of Neighborhood House in North Richmond. My good friend, Jessie Smallwood, was the executive director. Jessie had been running a poverty program in the San Joaquin Valley in Modesto when I first met her, when I did the evaluation. All of these things just kept getting intertwined. Ron went up there and talked about what he could do and what he had to offer. She thought it was great. And the board and others said, "No. We don't want no white folks." They were just as racist as—they didn't want a white guy in there writing proposals or raising money. They needed that, but they didn't want no white people. Which I thought was gross stupidity, because the program I was running with them was underwritten by a women's group in Oakland led by the daughter of one of the most conservative politicians. So it didn't make sense to me. But they said they didn't want a white guy.

So then I contacted my friend Ben Payton, who at the time was president of Benedict College in Columbia, South Carolina. I contacted Ben, and Ben interviewed Ron by telephone and hired him. And he went to Benedict and

wrote proposals and helped develop that college right up the road.⁵⁴ And then when Ben went on to the Ford Foundation, Ron stayed and went to Atlanta where he worked for a consortium of black colleges and raised the money for the big library they have in this consortium of five black colleges. That's what Ron did. And then Ron decided he wanted to come back to California. Oakes was then in its second year, and we were able to bring him on board. And he became an important fundraiser.

Now look at all these trails. I got the contacts with John May, who was close to Dan Koshland and the San Francisco Foundation, and ultimately the Hewlett Foundation. Ron had worked for Ben Payton at Benedict College, and Ben Payton ended up going to the Ford Foundation to run a multi-million dollar program for historically black colleges. And we got complete access to Ben Payton. But Oakes College and UC Santa Cruz was not a historically black college. So Ben just gave us the money otherwise. We got grants out of Ford. We never wrote a proposal. We'd just write a letter. We'd write a letter and send him a report, and he'd circulate it around among friends. The fundraising was incredible.

In other words, every time we wrote—not every time—most of the times we wrote a proposal to a private foundation the money was already committed. The proposal was written to justify the money. I remember going to the Sloan Foundation in New York and I visited with the executive vice president, Robert Kreidler. They funded a substantial part of our science program. And so I'd meet

⁵⁴ Columbia is roughly two hours northwest of Charleston via Interstate 26.

with Bob Kreidler, and he finally said, "I know what you're here for. You want our money, and we'd like to help you."

And he assigned one of his staff to Oakes College, and that guy helped us. He and Ron shaped the proposal for our science program. Ron would get the faculty together. He'd closet them in a room, and make them think through—he kept asking them questions like a lawyer. You'd get so mad at him. But he's trying to get to deeper and deeper insights and understandings. He didn't know science. But he wrote proposals which were very persuasive. So he did this with Kreidler's aide out of the Sloan Foundation. And when we got our proposal draft, Kreidler sent it to a group of people who were consultants to him. They tore it up and showed all of its faults. And Ron and the Sloan guy got together and re-did the proposal.

I'll never forget, I went to a Sloan meeting at the Sloan Foundation in New York, and Kreidler was telling me the process they were going to use. I knew [professor of earth sciences] Jim Gill was coming to New York. And I asked Jim to go and visit with them. Well, when these guys are getting ready to do some support for you, they ask you some hard questions. And they ask you hard questions because the board's going to ask *them* those questions and they've got to answer them. Oh, I tell you, they put me through more changes with these questions. Jim Gill came in and he left. He was so angry they were so hostile. I remember he came back and said to the faculty, "Herman says they're going to give us this money. They're not going to give us a thing."

Well, it wasn't so long after that that we had a \$350,000 dollar grant. When they took that grant to the board, and the board came with all these questions,

they had been handled by these other consultants they'd paid to essentially preview our proposal. So it wasn't a cold document going in the room. Ron Saufley handled a lot of this. A lot of the fundraising—that was his specialty. Bob Bosler did one thing; Ron did another. Now a part of this building this community—and you heard Ron speak about Don Rothman [at Don's memorial].

Vanderscoff: Yes.

Blake: Early on, Ron was an alcoholic. I didn't know it. I mean, I saw all these signs, but I didn't know them. I mean, I didn't drink. I didn't have my first drink until 1970. I was thirty-six years old before I ever had a taste of beer or anything, coming out of the Seventh Day Adventist Church. Ron was an alcoholic. One of the staff [Sandy Wyman] pointed it out to me. I knew he drank heavily. I missed the cues. But people pointed it out to me. And this is where you see the community coming together. Because Ron was—at that time it was clear he was an alcoholic. It became clearer and clearer. But Ron was working very, very hard. He was an excellent proposal writer and he was doing very good work.

Bill Doyle and I talked, and Victor Rocha, who had become friendly with Ron. And Don Rothman may have played a role there. I'm not sure. But I know Victor Rocha did. We decided to confront Ron—confront him, because we cared about him deeply and he was a part of our community.. So Bill Doyle and I asked Ron to have lunch with us at the Crow's Nest, over on the [Santa Cruz] harbor. So Ron said, "Fine." And Bill and I went together to this lunch. This is what bonded us.

We went together to this lunch. And when we got there Ron was already there. He had already had two drinks. But he had his pad. He was ready to work,

get from us whatever instructions for what we wanted him to do while he was in Europe. And we sat down. It was the first time I'd ever done anything like this. I was not good at being hard on people. I just wasn't. We confronted him because we valued him so much. We said, "You're an alcoholic, and we want to see you address that." He was stunned, absolutely stunned. He said he was not an alcoholic; his *father* was an alcoholic, and his father died from all of that drinking.

We sat there. We said, "Well, we have arranged for you to be admitted to a rehab facility for alcoholics this afternoon. And we want you to go in there and start working on rehabilitation." We had done all of the whatever you had to do to get him in there. And we pressed him. Bill was—I don't know how to say anything about Bill. He was super. He was more than super. And between Bill and I, we persuaded him he ought to try this place and go in there. So he finally agreed.

And I think Bill drove his car, and I drove him home to his house. He was right down Mission Street, living in this little place. And he got to the house and went in, and he hadn't been in there one minute before Victor Rocha rang the bell. And there was somebody else. And I don't remember who the other person was. Like I said, it might have been Don. And they stayed with him all night and escorted him to the place so he couldn't get out. He went, and we started visiting with him. And he went through a detox. He had some setbacks, but ultimately he gave up drinking. And you may have heard him at the Rothman thing, or at the

Oakes thing last year, and he said we saved his life.⁵⁵ And he was dedicated to the whole college operation. Ron says he's been thirty-five years sober.

Now, as we were coming to the end of this period at Oakes College—I think I've mentioned all of the staff that I want to mention: Lowell Burton, Gwen Lacy— Oh I've got one other: Diana Rogers. As we're coming to the end of this whole thing I applied for a Mina Shaughnessy Grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education. Mina Shaughnessy was a writing teacher at CCNY, City College of New York. And she had died in some way, I don't know. But she had such an impact on the whole business of narrative writing that they developed a grant program whereby if you got a Mina Shaughnessy Grant you got a whole year off to complete a writing project. I applied and got a Mina Shaughnessy grant. But I was on my way then to Tougaloo College. And we worked it out with the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education that administered this that the grant was actually used to pay Ron Saufley's salary for a year. And he and his wife, Patricia, at that time—I'm not sure they were married—but they went off to [Italy]. She did studies for her doctorate and he wrote a book-length manuscript on Oakes College. But he had the money. That's how we were building this whole thing.

Now let me just mention one final person, Diana Rogers. I think I mentioned her yesterday. She was Latina, young—I mean, she was really young. But they hired her as my personal secretary, and I did a lot of stuff with the secretaries: dictated letters and all of that. We didn't have computers, all the stuff

⁵⁵ "Oakes thing" is in reference to Dr. Blake's April 2012 week-long visit to UCSC, which included a series of talks, dinners and events at Oakes and across campus. I worked as his assistant, scheduler and driver. -Ed.

we have now. And she handled all of my stuff, appointments, all of that kind of thing. She did an excellent job. I had these students who would come in: Martín Martín, who's now a professor at UCLA Medical School, and others. I was working with them, mentoring them, working with them on their statements for medical school and all of this sort of business. Not only them—a lot of others. I'd write these letters of recommendation. I could sit down and dictate the letter of recommendation. It would be eloquent and detailed. She was writing letters of recommendation for people who were her age. She finally came to me and said, "You know, you've been writing all these letters and we're doing all these wonderful things for these young people. I decided I'm going to do something for myself." And she quit and went to school. I don't know what happened to her. I assume she got her degree. That's the kind of people we had. And we were constantly promoting their growth and development.

It wasn't a large staff, but it was a good staff. Julie Chang, who graduated from Oakes and then came back and worked as an assistant financial officer under Bob Lim, she was one of them. She was at the thing with Don. Beautiful young lady. These are people whose children now have graduated from Santa Cruz.

Reflections on the Role of Students in the Oakes Community

Vanderscoff: So you've just been talking about this almost family-like sense of togetherness among the staff and the role that they played in influencing Oakes. Would you mind reflecting on the role that students played in influencing Oakes as the years went forward, some impacts that they had?

Blake: Well, first of all, we had this class. That class became the planning class. And out of that planning class came the first cadre of students who enrolled in College Seven as it was starting. Because we opened with only about 200 students, 220 or so. And we had a few who were seniors. I think our first graduating class had six to eight students, two of whom were there last April: Louie Campos and an African-American woman, Sharon Flin.

So when we opened, they elected a student council. We always had a student advisory group, before we had a college, and the student advisory group was everybody who took the class. They were the ones who counseled us about the apartments and the placement of the buildings and all of this. And they played a little bit of a role in reviewing faculty. It was very, very important. I remember we were looking to try and bring on board—he has a Latino name, Hispanic name, but he was an American Indian. Very distinguished American Indian anthropologist, worked for the Smithsonian. Can't think of his name now. I interviewed him on his ranchería in New México. He was married. He was at Princeton at that time. He went from the Smithsonian to Princeton. He was interested in coming and we were interested in getting him. So when he flew out to come to Santa Cruz for interviews we had some of our students meet him. And some of them were American Indian. And they met him in full regalia in the airport. Everybody couldn't believe it. I mean, there were about four American Indians—and one of them was a grandson of Chief Joseph. Interesting young man.

So anyhow, these students advised us and counseled us. So when we opened the college, they formed a student council. They elected seven people to

be a student council (sound of recorder being moved over table). And they started meeting with me. I met with them regularly, talked about everything. That's where we ultimately went into this confidential thing about the [naming] grant we were working on. That student council was the one that I worked with and who kept the confidentiality.

Well, they would come to faculty meetings and we gave them a vote. Everybody else had one vote. We gave the student council one vote. They would come to faculty meetings. Well, they soon found out that there was nothing interesting about a faculty meeting. It was utterly boring. But they were being conscientious representing students. They were the ones who pressed us to turn my course that I was teaching on social change—or whatever it was called—in America. They liked it so much they felt it should become a required course of all students. I remember they once came to us and said, "We have one vote in the faculty meeting. But we don't know who should be the one who votes. There's seven of us and you got one vote." So we ultimately discussed it, and we gave them seven votes, which, given the size of our faculty, was a substantial block.

But they quit coming to meetings very soon. Too boring. What's more—I can't say this for sure—but I don't believe we ever took a vote. I think the twelve years I ran that college we didn't take a vote at faculty meetings. We didn't vote. We'd talk until I had the sense of the meeting and then I'd proceed. But that was building that community and building that trust.

The students were very mindful of things. We had orientation and they were always involved in it. We were pushing academics. We were pushing academics and they bought right into it. Of course, there was a lot of sex and all

that stuff going—undergraduate stuff, you know. [UC President] Clark Kerr used to say he hated it, ultimately, because that was the quotation he was most remembered by. I don't know if you know it. They were told, "How do you be a successful college president? Sports for the alumni, parking for the faculty, and sex for the undergraduates." (laughter) Oh, Clark hated it that people would introduce him and talk, not about the master plan or his creative thinking, but his little mantra.⁵⁶

One black student ended up with a white female from a fairly substantial family. And they decided to get married. I learned about this, and somehow or other I interacted with him. I said, "What are you talking about, 'married?'" And he brought his wedding license in there. It was written on a piece of brown paper. Somebody had torn a paper bag open: "Know all men by these present that" whatever-his-name-is and whatever-her-name-was...and then they put "that's it." That was the wedding. I said, "You got to be crazy." And I tore into him, as I did with a lot of students. I mean, I really wanted them to be responsible and committed to their academics. I didn't want to get into their personal lives; I certainly didn't want to do that. But I didn't want this madness. And he was a pinnacle of it.

And I don't know, something happened to him, because we were having an orientation with the students—a new student orientation. There he was, leading the conversation. And I'm watching. I sure didn't want him using his student government whatever. He went to the blackboard and wrote out a slogan that was going to be their theme for that year: "It's not your aptitude, but

⁵⁶ For Clark Kerr's take on UCSC, see Randall Jarrell, Interviewer and Editor, *Clark Kerr and the Founding of the University of California, Santa Cruz* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 1988). Available in full text and audio at <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/kerr>

your attitude, that will determine your altitude." And he started talking about organizing yourself, study groups, never missing class. We had this thing: you don't miss class. You don't miss class. I don't care how many times your grandmamma died, you don't miss class! You go to class. All of those kinds of things. I was shocked. I was shocked.

We had two brothers, black guys from Oakland who came. And they were thugs. There was no other way to put it. They were thugs. I talk about some community people, [inaudible]—they were thugs, engaged in all sorts of activities. I couldn't figure out what was going on. But you see what happens, you got whites coming and Latinos, and they're together for first time. You can make some mistakes. And we made a lot of mistakes. That's why it was good to have somebody like Juventino Esparza as a counselor, and Josie King. And we decided that these two guys had to go.

I went looking for them, like on a Thursday, and they weren't there. Went looking on Friday, they weren't there. Weekend, they weren't there. And Monday they were in a college course that Bill Doyle was teaching. I don't remember what the class was, but Bill was teaching it. Never forget. Now you don't interrupt a class. You *don't* interrupt a class, and you do not interrupt a class. You let classes— But I wasn't about to let these guys go. I went in and Bill was shocked I'm coming in the door. I mean, this is like an elementary school principal or something like this. But this is a college. He was shocked. And I said I wanted these two guys, and I took 'em out. Brought 'em to my office, dismissed them, had the campus police there. Took them back to their apartment, took their stuff, took them to the edge of the campus. They were gone.

About a year later I'm going through downtown Oakland walking, going somewhere in the center of the commercial district in downtown Oakland, business district. And I hear somebody yell, "Herman Blake! Herman Blake!" And I looked up. It's one of these two brothers. And I said, "Oh. Now I'm going to have a confrontation. I have to have to fight right here on the street in Oakland, because he—" "Herman Blake!" He came running across the street and grabbed my hand and almost shook my arm off. He said he was so glad that I threw them out of school, because he was following his brother's criminal activity. And when he got kicked out of school he decided he wasn't going to follow his brother's criminal activity anymore. His brother was in jail and he was going to community college. And he called me and came over and thanked me.

We continually engaged ourselves with students in hopefully creative ways. I worked with the American Indian students, the five or six we had. Jim Willis was the lead one. Tall, like you are, like an arrow. Beautiful man. He graduated with honors. He came in with a D-minus GPA out of high school, never read a book in his life. Never read a book. He graduated with honors and became the first American Indian to win the Danforth Fellowship for graduate school. Last I saw him he was consulting with Indian tribes up in the Northwest, in western Oregon. Tall like an arrow. Wonderful students.

Problems—we had some major problems. I had during the course of my provostship, I think, seven or eight students die. That was hard. That was very hard, because I never delegated to anybody the responsibility for the actions related to the death of a student. Had a student die in one of the classrooms right there in the college, overdose. We had a student killed by one of those serial

murderers one Thanksgiving.⁵⁷ Police came and told me. I was the one who contacted her parents. Then when they came up I hosted them and stayed with them. I didn't delegate that. We had a student die while on study abroad in Europe. Then we had a student who was killed in an automobile accident. I spoke at his funeral, and then maintained contact with his mother for a long time. He was her only son. She had three daughters, and they had come to Oakes, too. But he died and I just felt that was such a tragic loss. Every year on Mother's Day I'd send her flowers. Her daughters always appreciated those little gestures. They were important.

But in addition to the students who died, there were the students who flourished and did well, like those young ladies who organized that 'Making Community' program ceremony/activity.⁵⁸ It was all about bridging gaps—bridging gaps and bringing people together. Yeah? You read that article by Ervin Simmons and you see how much that meant. And he's still friendly with those people.⁵⁹ José Rios, from Soledad, eventually went to Daufuskie Island, and Carla Shaw, the woman—he and Jackie went to her home for Thanksgiving or whatever. She eventually went to Daufuskie. And they couldn't believe him in the water. He is a skilled crabber and tosses a superb shrimp net. You know, it's hard to toss that thing so it opens up wide. That's a skill. And they'd see him stand up there and move that little—what we call a bateau—move that little bateau, almost sinking in the water. You move it like you would move a bicycle.

⁵⁷ In reference to the convicted serial killers, such as Herbert Mullin and Edmund Kemper, who independently committed murders in the Santa Cruz area. There was a concentration of killings in 1972 and 1973.

⁵⁸ In reference to the 'making Christmas' anecdote from our previous session.

⁵⁹ In reference to the previously cited article, "A Daufuskie Island Lad in an Academic Community: An Extraordinary Journey of Personal Transformation."

They weren't used to seeing that side. They never knew that side, as compared to what they saw at Oakes.

I'm going on and on. I'm just rambling.

Vanderscoff: No, thank you for those reflections.

From Collaboration towards Conflict: Personal and Collegial Impacts of Changes in Central Administration

Vanderscoff: I'd like to return to the notion of administration and address central administration. During your time as provost, you went through several chancellors: McHenry, Christensen, Taylor, and finally Chancellor Sinsheimer.⁶⁰ I'm curious, was the central administration, going through these different times, an important and helpful resource for the growth of Oakes? Where and where not?

Blake: Priceless. They were priceless. McHenry was very clear. He didn't understand a lot of what I was doing. He didn't understand a lot of what I was talking about. And when we started talking about recruiting faculty, he didn't think we would be able to find faculty of the quality that you needed in the University of California who were minority. He was very open about it. He was not hostile. But we happened to be catching the crest of a wave that happened in

⁶⁰ In addition to Dean McHenry, both Robert Sinsheimer and Angus Taylor have conducted oral histories with the Regional History Project, as has Mark Christensen's special assistant, Daniel McFadden. See Randall Jarrell, Interviewer and Editor, *Robert L. Sinsheimer: The University of California, Santa Cruz During a Critical Decade, 1977-1987* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 1996) <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/sinsheimer>; Randall Jarrell, Interviewer and Editor, *Angus E. Taylor: UCSC Chancellorship, 1976-1977 (1987)* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 1998); Randall Jarrell, Interviewer and Editor, Irene Reti, Editor, *Daniel E. McFadden: The Chancellor Mark Christensen Era at UC Santa Cruz, 1974-1976* (Regional history Project, UCSC Library, 2012). <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/mcfadden>. See also Randall Jarrell, Interviewer, and Irene Reti, Editor, *UC Santa Cruz in the Mid-1970s: A Time of Transition. Volume I* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2014). <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/ucstimetransition>

the late fifties, early sixties—and never happened again in the same way—of all these minorities going into graduate school. And we were able to snatch them just before they finished their graduate work. We brought a lot of them on board without their dissertations done. But McHenry, while dubious, mentored me, encouraged me, sent this Bob Bosler. Brewster Smith, the vice chancellor for social sciences, Matthew Sands, the vice chancellor for sciences—all of them were supportive. Hal Hyde was just priceless.⁶¹ Everybody knew that McHenry was committed to us. And therefore they had to be committed. Never forget. As soon as McHenry stepped down, some of those long knives came out from lower-level staff, who wondered, "How can you get away with this? You're traveling. Do you have permission to travel?" I said, "What are you talking about? Who do I get permission from?" No, McHenry was completely supportive.

The next guy, Mark—

Vanderscoff: Christensen.

Blake: Christensen. He was supportive, but he didn't have a clue. I mean, he was just in another world. He was just in another world. He'd been chair of the Academic Senate at Berkeley and they all gave him a lot of good recommendations. But he was just out of his realm. And the faculty senate and others voted no confidence in him. I did not participate in that and did not get into it as a provost. By that time I was interacting a lot with David Saxon as president, and I saw all of that fallout, all of that fallout, how negative it was.

⁶¹ See Randall Jarrell, Interviewer and Editor, *Harold Hyde: Recollections of Santa Cruz County* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2002) <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/hyde>

Now the society is going through changes too. Enrollment is dropping. Proposition 13—funding is changing.⁶² And [following Christensen's tenure] Angus Taylor came as a caretaker and Angus was just a jewel. Angus had to deal with the cultural nationalism among the Latinos, particularly Roberto Rubalcava, who was the head of EOP and financial aid and all of that stuff. He was just the sweetest, nicest guy when we interviewed him for that position—it was central administration—I remember Ron saying, "Wow, he's got all the right answers." And he did, until he stepped into that position. And he became just a total racist—anti-white. He didn't claim to be anti-black, but he was only pro-Chicano. Some of the American Indians swore to kill him, he was so negative. Mark Christensen had brought him on board but didn't have the guts to deal with him. Angus Taylor did and ultimately fired him. And the Latino caucus in the state legislature was very upset. Arturo Torres was one of that caucus. Angus Taylor had to make several trips to Sacramento to deal with them, meet with them. I always went. Angus was priceless in terms of—you know, you just don't have this kind of person in your administration. So he was very supportive. And I'm going out and doing all this fundraising.

Robert Sinsheimer was one of the worst, absolutely worst, people we could have ever brought in for the college system, and in my opinion, for UC Santa Cruz and everything else. When we were looking for a chancellor after Angus agreed to step down, I was a part of the search process. I don't know how Sinsheimer ended up getting appointed. He came out of Cal Tech. They brought in two chancellors from Cal Tech that year. One became chancellor at UC Santa

⁶² Proposition 13 was a 1978 state proposition which restricted property taxation and set forth new rules about future taxation. Among its many disputed and debated effects, it negatively impacted education funding.

Barbara, ultimately went to jail. And [the other was] Robert Sinsheimer. But the notion was high-level, high-research, all of that. All of those kinds of things. But they were just ill-suited to be a chancellor.

But when we were going through the search one of the people they got interested in was my mentor, who supervised my dissertation, Neil Smelser. Neil Smelser was then and still is now one of the most highly regarded faculty members in the University of California system. He's one of the most highly regarded faculty members in the country. When Clark Kerr wrote his memoirs he chose Neil to write the introduction. Oh, yeah. Neil read all 3000 pages and wrote the introduction. And he just wrote to John Rickford and accepted the invitation to speak at the tribute for me.⁶³ Yes, he did. But Neil Smelser was known for his teaching. I learned a lot from him. Known for his teaching.

And they came to me and said, "You think he'd be interested in being chancellor?" I said, "I'll approach him." And I did. He agreed to be in the search. Well, the minute that became news, everybody wanted to close down the search. We have our chancellor. He had been a vice chancellor during the Free Speech Movement and helped handle and orchestrate a lot of the negotiations with students and resolving those situations. He was superb at that. But a consummate intellectual. Neil had joined the faculty at Berkeley in 1958 as a new PhD out of Harvard. By 1963, they made him full rank. In five years. During that time he wrote five major books, all of them major contributions to the field. He

⁶³ In reference to the J. Herman Blake Tribute Dinner, held as a part of Alumni Weekend at UCSC in April 2013. Dr. Smelser spoke in honor of Dr. Blake. Other speakers and attendees included many people referenced in these sessions. See <http://hermanblaktribute2013.wordpress.com/tributes/> -Ed.

was just brilliant. He still is—still is. If he can recover from some surgery he's going to have at the end of this month, he's going to be there in April.

So the minute they became news, that was it. No more search. And then as the process started really beginning to gather steam Neil called me and said, "You know Herman, I'm going to withdraw." He said, "I am very good at undergraduate education. I know that and I can do a good job at Santa Cruz." He said, "But that is not my priority." He's a scholar. His research and his writing are what he's about. They expected him to go back to Harvard and take Talcott Parsons' place as the world's top theorist. And he turned *that* down because he wanted to stay and do the kind of research and stuff he did at Berkeley. Neil Smelser, as a sociologist, was the first social scientist to become a University Professor. They were doing that kind of stuff in the seventies. A University Professor—you know about that role?

Vanderscoff: The rank six thing, the higher rank?

Blake: A University Professor was appointed as a professor in the university, not in a campus. You could teach at any campus you wanted to and the administration had to provide all of the support you needed to do that. And when we were developing Oakes College, and all of these naysayers were carrying on in the way they did, Neil says, "I'll come teach for you." This is before we needed—I mean, Dean McHenry was still chancellor. Neil said, "I'll come teach for you." He became not only one of my faculty; he became the mentor to the social scientists. He'd come and teach a course.

We taught a course together. That was another one. We taught a course together on theory of social change. He'd just finished a book on it. I had used it

for my dissertation. And so we used the approach to social change and social movements to develop theory for the students as well as focus on the Nation of Islam, the Black Panther Party, and other social movements. It was a great course. But we had to keep the faculty out—not Oakes faculty, faculty from other parts of the campus. If Neil Smelser was on campus, they wanted to be in his presence.

So he withdrew. Now, as a University Professor, they had to supply a way for him to move about. So we drove him down once a week. I'd send a car up and pick him up and bring him down, so he didn't have to drive, and take him back. The person who drove him was Sabra Slaughter. He got so interested in Sabra he helped Sabra get into graduate school. Oh yeah, all these circles intersecting.

But he withdrew, and then I was able to bring another person that everybody got excited about, Kai Erikson, who'd been head of Trumbull College at Yale, master of Trumbull College. Taught me a lot about funding and dealing with being an independent entity in a larger setting. Trumbull College had their own money so that they could do what they wanted to. They could thumb their noses at the Yale Administration. So that's why I was glad to have that Malcolm X money sitting there—even though I wasn't spending it—and all this other money I was getting.

Dean McHenry used to say—there were seven provosts—he said he had six lapdogs and one hunting dog. I was the hunting dog. I remember one of the provosts went to New York and was going to go to the Ford Foundation or some place to talk about money. He got to New York, got into the hotel and called up the foundation. They didn't commit the money on the phone. He never went. But

that same provost, in one of these settings with Dean McHenry was talking about how I was getting out there, going after the money. He said, "Well, Herman's used to taking welfare." That's the kind of stuff you had to sit and listen to. Oh yeah. I never answered, never responded. Never said a word. Just went out and raised more money. When that 1.2 dollar grant came down, oh I tell you—oh, I don't know.

So I was able to recruit Kai Erikson, son of Erik Erikson. I had known not only Kai; I had known his father. His father used to come to my lectures when I was teaching part time at Mills College. Students would come in the class and here was Erik Erikson sitting there with his wife, Joan. He was such a distinguished presence that you couldn't ignore him. (laughs) They'd want to talk to him. He said he came to see me teach. He was great. Nobby Brown used to come to my lectures, too. Nobby loved to come to my lectures. I loved Nobby coming to my lectures.

But Kai came, was interviewed. I remember taking him to David Saxon's house. I got my kids, I said, "We're going to go up there." The President's House was on a hill in Berkeley. I don't know you've ever seen it.

Vanderscoff: I've never been.

Blake: It was old. It was a former nun's convent. A beautiful place. Formal gardens. They used it as a place to plant formal gardens. I went up there with my kids. And it was called the Blake House. The Blake House! And we took Kai up there to meet with the president. While he was talking with the president, me and the kids hung out in the formal gardens. We left there and took Kai back to the airport or wherever we went, or the hotel. And they said to me, "We'll never

set foot in Blake House again." They said it looks like something out of that TV show where they had the dead people.

Vanderscoff: Like *The Adams Family*?

Blake: Yeah, that's it. They'd say, "That's Adams House!" (laughter) David Saxon had a book of fairies and it had pictures of fairies on plants and everything. He says, "They're real fairies, they're real fairies." And he also loved and did bonsai planting, which I understand is very, very difficult. But he maintained his bonsai plants. It was interesting.

I don't know where we are. What did I say?

Vanderscoff: Talking about the candidate Erikson, who you were putting forward for the chancellorship.

Blake: And then the faculty then decided Kai was too nice. They said what was needed was somebody who would run the place with a firm hand. The faculty said that. David Saxon said it. Because you know, once they declared no confidence in Mark Christensen, the faculty and the administration relationships were often strained. This shared governance was very often strained. And some of the faculty from some of the other campuses were just—I mean, they lived to be negative. They said to me, "You get along with administration, but we have to oppose them. We have to fight them, like the loyal whatever." I don't know. I couldn't understand it. I mean, you might disagree, as I did, but that doesn't mean you have to be negative all the time.

So they felt they needed somebody who was less collegial, if I can use that expression. And somewhere in this process Bob Sinsheimer emerged. His

daughter had been a student at Santa Cruz. She graduated from Cowell College: Kathy Sinsheimer. People were quite excited having somebody from Cal Tech. But he had a notion of what a university was about. And the first shock we got was when we were sitting in a meeting and we pointed out to him that even though we had that maze and all of these other kinds of things where people used to come up and run around, we had never had a suicide at Santa Cruz. We had a number of attempts, but had not had a successful— He was shocked. He said, "We have five or six a year at Cal Tech. We get such bright, capable students. Things don't work. They commit suicide. So you know, you got to expect—that's a part of the game." You know, it doesn't fit. That's not what— Anyhow, that was one of those clues.

And then he just couldn't figure out Oakes College. Couldn't figure out Oakes College. One time we were having a conversation with him, the faculty and others, and we were talking about developing student values. He said, "Well, I wouldn't want them to have the values of Harlem." He said that. He said that to the faculty.

He was not the most engaging person individually. He might have been brilliant as a scholar, and did a lot of good things, I guess. I don't know. But I could not stand him and I knew I had to leave. I could not stand him. And frankly, I don't think he could stand me. What we stood for and what we were doing just struck him as being antithetical to academic excellence. We pointed out when Jim Willis graduated with honors—he'd come in with a D-minus average—had never read a book, and he accomplished so much. Well, to Sinsheimer it was criminal to have somebody who had never read a book come

into your college. The fact that he comes out having read all of the books, and with honors, was not the point. I was working on a national project on higher education under the leadership of the secretary of education, and we were dealing with issues of value added: the most important kinds of places where the students come here, and they end up there. That is a lot more valuable than a place like Stanford, where they might come here and come there. (gesturing relative proximity of point A to point B with hands) We actually had one study which showed in some school like Swarthmore or something like this, the students were so bright that by the time they finished they manifested a lower level of intellectual excellence than when they came in. They were dumbed down.

Vanderscoff: (laughs)

Blake: So you know, you can spend time twiddling with the top tier, which we heard a lot about. But that was a different kind of story.

Vanderscoff: I have two questions about campuswide rearrangements, and the second one will return to some of the changes that happened under Chancellor Sinsheimer. So we will get back to that. First, I would like to ask if reaggregation, or the clustering of faculty by disciplines [in] colleges—did that impact Oakes?

Blake: Yes it did. It did. It put pressure on those who didn't want to do it. It put a great deal of pressure on the special programs we had. But basically it said that the rewards—tenure and promotion, research support—were being centered in departments, which ultimately were going to replace boards. And we're going to have athletics, which is another part of Sinsheimer's thing. You know, intercollegiate athletics. We're going to do the kinds of things regular people do.

Yes, it had a very negative impact in terms of the whole gestalt. We knew we were under the gun. The man said we were trying to teach the values of Harlem and we were bringing in people who were incompetent, unqualified, should have never been there.

All of that, and then we had these faculty he thought were awful. [Professor of Community Studies] Nancy Shaw—he was opposed to her tenure. Everybody else voted for her tenure, and he slapped it down. Would not. We sued him. And she won. I used my discretionary money to engage an attorney to support her. The Regents couldn't figure it out. "We got a university attorney. Why do you want to use your money to hire an attorney? Why not use the university's?" I said, "Because I want to sue you." And they agreed that it was a legitimate use of my discretionary money. I wasn't misappropriating it or anything.

So we hired an attorney to represent Nancy Shaw. Because he argued her stuff was just investigative journalism. It wasn't scholarship. To him, the only kind of scholarship was if you started with a hypothesis that was developed from all the other research and then you continue to search and develop this. I'm oversimplifying his position, but you had to have that rooted in history and all of that stuff. But what happens when you're coming up in settings and situations where the people and the research and the scholarship has never been a part of that panoply? You follow the same principles, in my opinion, of establishing your starting point and amassing your data. And you're critical and objective as you can be. And you have your peers review it. But if it's a new area, you don't say—like what we were. We were just not appropriate.

Vanderscoff: So going further with reaggregation and then under Chancellor Sinsheimer, reorganization, which is something you were just alluding to, with authority over hiring and firings being devolved from the colleges to the boards, among other shifts in emphasis—how did reorganization and the ensuing shift of emphasis from the original college-based experiment affect Oakes?

Blake: Well, it destroyed us. By then I was...how to put it? I don't know how to put it. Ready to leave, and was thinking about leaving. I saw my faculty drawn to other places. And I could use names of people who came and said, "I don't want to do this, but I have to do it. It's my career." You got people like Barry Bowman and his wife, who came with a commitment and made that commitment work. There are others who stuck with it as much as they could. But basically it was taking away, kicking the support, the legs, from under the college. I mean, having that Science Center—the fact that they completely disemboweled that whole program. It's now a learning center, education center, but that was built to teach science. And it still could be a very, very effective operation that way, as a springboard into the major departments or programs.

I don't know what's happened since. I left in 1984 and basically I haven't tried to be engaged since. I have not tried to be engaged. I even had students who would call me and write me at other places wanting to get my opinion. I would never even answer. I didn't want anybody to go and say, "I communicated with Herman Blake." I didn't want even anybody to think I expressed an opinion. But I just saw the handwriting on the wall.

You said the "experiment." That's a term I never use, because experiments are expedient. I never felt that what the college system was and what we were

doing at Oakes College—which was in my opinion manifesting to a greater degree of fulfillment the plans and dreams of Dean McHenry and Clark Kerr—I didn't see that as an experiment. The data were long in about the effectiveness of that approach to education. We added to it by opening that quality of excellence to a different set of clients, but we never altered the principles or the content or the values of liberal education. But we were in a research university. And the mission of the university was to do something very different from what we were doing. I didn't feel we were in any way going away from that mission. I thought we were enhancing it. No, it got to the point where I couldn't be in the same room with Sinsheimer.

Vanderscoff: So when you think of that collegiate endeavor, if you will, what word comes to mind instead of 'experiment.' Is there a word that encapsulates what was going on there for you?

Blake: The experience. Not experiment, but the experience. The experience of people who love teaching and learning, sitting down with people who sought to learn, along with others who sought to support that effort, and it becoming a fantastic educational experience like Clark Kerr imagined and Dean McHenry began to implement. Clark Kerr said to me on more than one occasion he thought that Oakes came closest to being what he envisioned for Santa Cruz.

Clark became a mentor for me even though he wasn't president. I could go to him and he would contact foundations. I got into foundations because he called and said, "You ought to see him when he comes to New York." And he was constantly wanting to know more. Even in his nineties he would ask me, "When you come to California, do take the time to come by." And I would. I'd

call and arrange and I'd go up to his home. And we'd sit out there on the veranda overlooking Berkeley and the Campanile, and talk. And when he came to Swarthmore, where I was for a while, he would come to see me and we'd sit in my home in Swarthmore—the home that Swarthmore provided—and talk. He became a very, very important kind of a link.

Vanderscoff: And as a way of moving towards a conclusion on this section, in your later years as provost of Oakes, I understand that alone among the provosts of the different colleges you retained hiring and firing power over your college faculty following reorganization. How did that come to be?

Blake: It was more Bill Doyle and people like that, Jim Gill and others, doing the negotiating and the work. I represented and I was the visual articulator, but it was behind-the-scenes work. [Professor of chemistry] Todd Wipke, Bill Doyle, Jim Gill, and all those others negotiated those things, and particularly with the engagement, to the extent that it was possible, of Eugene Cota-Robles. That's where all of that was going on. We were able to do that.

But I was also a very, very forceful presence, in the sense that they just couldn't come and cut me down. I had learned from Page Smith and others, including Kai Erikson over at Yale, the importance of the symbolism as well as the creative things we were doing. There were people around the country who were saying I had created the best elements of a historically black college in the heart of a white research 1 university. That didn't exist. Charles Muscatine had started that Strawberry Creek College up at Berkeley. And Charles Muscatine came to Santa Cruz to try and talk me into coming and joining his college in Berkeley. When I explained to him and he saw what we were doing, you know

what he said? "Maybe I ought to come here. Maybe I ought to come here." He was destroyed by the faculty at Berkeley, who didn't think you should have that kind of education or that focus. So that's the general gestalt. I don't know how it happened.

Thoughts on Affirmative Action and Opening the Door

Vanderscoff: Before we go into retrospective questions about Oakes, I have one more question that deals with these years we're discussing. In the middle of your years at Oakes in 1978, right around the time this reorganization occurred, *Bakke v. Board of Regents* was decided in favor of [Allan] Bakke, rejecting the affirmative action system in a public school context. At that time you argued in a UCSC forum on that matter that the defeat of affirmative action meant the damaging of hopes of what you term "non-traditional students."⁶⁴ What do you think the consequences of this step from affirmative action have been for Oakes, for UCSC, more broadly, if you like?

Blake: Well, I can't speculate on the general picture. I don't want to. And I don't want to because there were so many dynamics going on, so much confusion. Charles Lawrence wrote a book on the Bakke case. I didn't know Charles Lawrence, really. I knew his daddy and his mother. Very close to them. Their daughter is a very distinguished professor at Harvard. I think she is retired now. But anyhow, Charles Lawrence wrote a book on the Bakke case. And we did

⁶⁴ See Bakke Case Forums, University of California, Santa Cruz (videorecording). "Three forums, held at the University of California, Santa Cruz on 6, 13, and 17 October 1977, on issues surrounding the U.S. Supreme Court case of Allan Bakke vs. the Regents of the University of California." The second forum included J. Herman Blake as a speaker. Available in the UCSC Library Special Collections department.

have that forum. I was concerned about the impact on the gestalt, the sentiment. We kept saying to faculty and the administration, "A change is gonna come. A change is gonna come." Aretha Franklin used to sing that song, "A Change is Gonna Come."

Vanderscoff: Yeah, and Sam Cooke, yeah.

Blake: Yeah. And I tried to get them to see. We'd say, "Look at the composition of the elementary schools in Los Angeles and San Francisco. That's your future." And you can't make a shift like that.

Now, I accuse many of the minority and majority people for distorting the concept of affirmative action. By "distort," I mean they kept saying affirmative action was essentially a pattern to make you hire people who might not cut the mustard: people who were minority. So they'd say, "We're going to do an affirmative action hire." "What are you talking about?" "Well, that means we're going to hire a minority." I don't know if you've ever heard that. But that was common. People would say, "We're going to do an affirmative action search," or "We're going to do an affirmative action hire." That was not *my* concept of affirmative action. Affirmative action wasn't saying you appointed or admitted. Affirmative action said you open the door so that people might come through. But they had to measure up. The way they talked about it, "Oh, these people who can't make it—so we're going to do affirmative action." That was, in my opinion, a distortion.

We got an affirmative action goal, which got quickly perceived as a quota. I was never in favor of that. I think that was wrong. But affirmative action meant you had to open the range of possibilities in a way that you never did before.

That's a difference. I used as my model the hiring of Jan Willis. I don't know if you know about Jan Willis. We hired Jan Willis. I met Jan Willis while she was still a graduate student at Columbia. I was on the Danforth Foundation Selection Committee, selecting people for Danforth grants. And this woman came across in one of these reviews doing a doctorate at Columbia. I think before that she had done her undergraduate work at Cornell. She was on the way to becoming one of the nation's leading Sanskrit specialists. Born and raised in Dothan, Alabama, the hometown of Angela Davis. Parents Baptists, father a Baptist deacon. Here she comes out of that area as an outstanding science student, and got a full scholarship to Cornell University to do science—physics, or something or other. She was so bright that she was the best student in her county in Alabama, the top student. And the Klan came and burned a cross on her lawn because here she is in Dothan, Alabama, the best student. And to them you can't be black and be best. They burned a cross on her lawn. That's the adolescence. She went on to Cornell and excelled, and from Cornell she went to Columbia and she was doing this very abstract work in Sanskrit and focusing on Tibetan Buddhism, had become close to the Dalai Lama. Had complete access.

I wanted to bring Jan Willis to Santa Cruz. Here's where affirmative action came into play. They were building the program in religious studies. I don't remember what all the details were. And they were looking for somebody to lead that development—the university was. And we had half of that position. And the department or the program in religious studies, the developing board, had the other half. We all agreed they needed somebody to lead it—administration. These are the kind of negotiations you have to go into.

So I bring Jan Willis' dossier—a brilliant scholar dealing with these very important but rare texts in Sanskrit and translating them, writing books on them. Her dissertation was published. And they brought a Sanskrit scholar who was an older, white, Anglo-Saxon male who could develop the program. So they said, "We want to develop the program, right? She's just getting her doctorate." She actually didn't have it at that time, but she would have had it at the time she started. "She can't develop the program. She can't become a senior administrator." Which is true. "So we won't even bring her for interviews. We'll just go with this guy and people like him."

And this is where I got involved, because I was the one who brought her dossier. I knew about her—as we were learning about so many of the other candidates—minority. Before anybody knew they were even on the market, or interested, we were roping them in. Gene Cota-Robles and others, we'd meet them and we'd rope them in. I went to the vice chancellor and said, "Look, according to the principles of affirmative action you must interview her. She's female. She's minority. And she fits that mold. That doesn't mean you got to hire her. But you must consider her."

I won. They invited her to campus. Well, they first had this other guy. He came, did the talk, students went. He was wonderful. He was good. And they questioned him about some abstract text that he discussed. The following week here comes this little, slight, African-American female. And she gives a talk, mild in her way. And they questioned her about the same thing they questioned the other guy. She had a different interpretation of the text. And they said, "Well, you know, there's this interpretation and your interpretation." Well, I don't

remember all of the words, but she said, "Well if you go from Urdu to English," or something like that, "you get this kind of a translation. But if you go back to—" some other kind of word, which was even more rare, "—and you look at that and you trace the words this way, you come out with my conclusion." She constantly was overturning the cart of intellect. So they walked away and said, "She's brilliant." Well, in a university that's desiring to be a first-rate research university, you got this brilliant young scholar, you don't let her go, right? But she can't develop the program. So they said, "Well, we'll figure out a way to hire them *both*." Nobody loses. But I remember them saying, "But if we bring them both, he'll develop the program and she'll be in it. But she's so much more intelligent and sharper and brighter than he is. He'll get depressed and he won't stay. So let's not hire him at all." So they took somebody on campus, made them interim director to develop the program, and brought her.

Vanderscoff: Wow.

Blake: I said to Jan, "You're going to make tenure before you're thirty." She was teaching Sanskrit. But for us, in Oakes, she developed a course called *Three Generals in the Lord's Army*, which looked at slave revolts and slave leaders of slave revolts and how religion underpinned their revolutionary views. So she was using her study of religion, and indeed, Buddhism in Tibet and all of that, to understand how religious ideas fuel revolution. So that's what she was doing at Oakes. And she was great.

My point, going back to Bakke and all of those other things, is that we were able to insist on opening the funnel, or the door. They would have never invited her for an interview, looking at the paper, because what they needed was

not what she brought. But when they saw what she had, they couldn't turn away from her.

She made tenure when she was twenty-nine and I advised her to leave. Because the minute she made tenure, the people in Student Affairs wrote and asked her if she would be willing to consider becoming a counselor, an advisor, and among other things, to minority students. I said, "No. Go. You don't need a specialist in Sanskrit who is African American to motivate and advise students in student life. Others can do that who might be African American or Latino or white, but you've got a special knowledge and a special skill. And you're in a situation where there aren't enough people around to help you develop that."

So she went on to Wesleyan University, where she got hooked into a Harvard, MIT, Yale kind of a consortium. She's written eight or nine books in Sanskrit. She's the nation's leading Sanskrit scholar. *Time Magazine* pointed her out as one of the developing minds for the twenty-first century, selected her in the top hundred. Last time I communicated with her I was doing the piece with Ervin Simmons and we wanted to get her permission to use her name. So I sent her an email. I remember I was over in the headquarters, and she wrote back. I sent the copy of her email to the president and vice president, because she wrote back from a Tibetan monastery. Can you imagine, they've got the Internet in the Tibetan monastery? (laughter)

That's affirmative action. Now let me add another part to this. When the Bakke case came down, it was clear that you couldn't use some of the strategies they were using to do what they were doing. Now remember, John Watson. He was a chemist, black chemist, on the faculty of the medical school in San

Francisco. He and a group of others got together with the dean of the medical school, a guy by the name of Julius Krevans. Used to call him Julie Krevans. They decided they had to do a more deliberate effort at recruiting students for the medical school. So they convened meetings of faculty and other key people at San Francisco State. I didn't know about what happened there. And they went to San Jose State. And the questions they were asking in these meetings—and they may have gone to other places, I don't know—was, "What can we do to support what *you* do to get students to the point where they can be competent for review and admission to medical school? Tell us what you need to put together and we'll help to figure out how we can develop funding and programs."

Well, then they came to Santa Cruz. I remember them sitting down with the Oakes faculty, among others, asking, "What do you need to develop students the way—"I remember Victor Rocha saying, "How many do you want? We've already got the program. And we've got the students. How many you want?" Because we had the science program. And we were developing the students. As a result, they developed a program whereby our students in the sciences, at the end of their sophomore year, would spend the summer in San Francisco doing research in the labs of the faculty in medical school and living in the residence halls with the medical students, and getting that mentoring and development. This was a time when they were making the transition from teaching science in labs to doing research in labs. They were arguing that by the time you get stuff from the research side to the teaching side in terms of the laboratory, it's already obsolete. So you give up the teaching labs and just have the research labs. And

you have your medical students in— So they were saying, "Your students are already into the thing that we're going into."

I saw that when I did a review of the UCLA Medical School. And this is the kind of thing I would do. I'd go to UCLA Medical School and I'd take three or four dossiers from students up at Santa Cruz, Oakes, just for them to look over and give me some feedback. I remember one associate dean saying he so much loved it, he said, because he'd gotten out of the process of even selecting. So he didn't know what was coming along. It gave him a chance to be in touch.

The Bakke case created this thing where the College of Medicine came to us and we developed a direct pipeline so that Martín Martín and all of those other students, they ultimately went to Harvard, Stanford, and other places. And they had letters of recommendation written by MDs from the UC San Francisco Medical Center. So I'm not saying the Bakke case helped us, but we tried to turn a lemon into lemonade. I was more concerned about the overall gestalt and the pall it cast.

I was equally concerned about the distortion of the concept of affirmative action. That distortion continued. They still think it's what you do for minority students. I hated it when I had people say, "We're going to do an affirmative action hire." I *hated* it. People used to say to me, "Oh, you made it. You were promoted. You were at full rank before affirmative action even was heard of. It was not even a term. You made it on your own." You're right. I wasn't opposed to affirmative action. I was fully in support. But it was in terms of opening up the door, expanding the pool of candidates.

Vanderscoff: Well, thank you for those reflections. I think at this point would be a good moment to bring this particular section to a pause. We'll pick up the thread soon.

Blake: Okay.

Vanderscoff: Is there anything else you would like to say?

Blake: No.

Vanderscoff: All right then.

**"Community Morality" at Oakes:
Looking In and Reaching Out**

Vanderscoff: It remains Thursday, February 14th, 2013. Cameron Vanderscoff here with Dr. J. Herman Blake to continue his oral history project. Your twelve-year tenure as provost of Oakes College is one of the longest, if not the longest, in campus history.⁶⁵ Other founding college provosts served relatively short times: Page Smith for five years, Charles Page only one, Philip Bell four years, so on. What are the pros and cons—personally, collegially—of such duration in that leadership role?

Blake: Well, Oakes College did not fit any mold of the other colleges in terms of the students we recruited. We weren't the only college recruiting low wealth and minority students, but the other colleges in no way attracted them like we did. Indeed, we often encouraged students to go to the other colleges. And I

⁶⁵ As best as I can determine as of this June 2013 editing, only John Isbister's 1984-1999 tenure at Merrill is longer. -Ed.

remember when a young lady came to my office and said that when she and her parents were looking at Santa Cruz and they were interested in Crown College—they met with me and I encouraged them to do that. And they didn't know about Oakes. She said, "You didn't say anything to me about Oakes." I said, "No, I thought it was good that you went to Crown." She was very angry. Her parents were too. They wanted her to be in Oakes. What we had to offer she didn't need, except the social setting. But that's what I'm saying. It was unique in that regard.

Bob Bosler had something to do with my [long] tenure, at one level. He always argued with me that it took a long time to institutionalize values like we were talking about at Oakes. I was aware of this because I was in touch with Bob Clark, who had written a book called *The Distinctive College*, analyzing Swarthmore and several other very unique places, and how long it took them to develop strong academic programs. Swarthmore: forty years, two presidents, each of twenty-year tenure. So I had that kind of a model.

I also had the Page Smith model. Page Smith felt you have your planning class, you come in with your planning class, and then you stay four years and then you move on, but you stay on the campus. And that was, for many people, the model. Well, we weren't, in my opinion, just repeating a Cowell College model: have a provost house, have a library, a core course, and all of that. I saw this as very, very different. We didn't have a library. We had a science center, a science program, and we were trying to build rapport and relations between groups which had a history of some very difficult problems and challenges, even here in California. And like Bosler said, it takes a while.

So I said to the faculty when we got started, I anticipated serving a minimum of seven years as a part of getting those values in place. I had parents come to me and say, "I went to a historically black college. And this is as close to it as I've ever seen outside of that environment." And I understand that. And the community we were building among faculty was an important part of that.

So I felt it was going to take a good seven years to begin to really institutionalize processes and values. By values, I'm really talking about almost a gestalt, a collective consciousness which goes deeper than simply a set of shibboleths on the page. So I said I'd stay a minimum of seven years, and a maximum of ten. That was my view. And when I got to like about nine years, maybe eight or nine years or so—

There was another part to this, though. I said I would never spend the income from the Malcolm X memorial fund.

Vanderscoff: Yes, I remember you mentioning that yesterday.

Blake: Let that continue to grow. That could become a resource for anybody who followed. I never touched it.

So about eight or nine years in I said, "I need to make a transition." The faculty agreed. I took a year's sabbatical. I believe it was [physics professor] David Dorfan who became acting provost for that year. He was on the faculty. And when I came back they said, "We still don't have our processes in place. We are still uncomfortable with making this transition." so, with their encouragement, I stayed for twelve years. But I really wanted to go sooner than that.

But I also knew I had to leave the campus because it would not have been good for any subsequent provost to have my presence around. I said, "You don't need the ghost of Christmas past." I knew I was a kind of a force, however you might want to articulate it, measure it, describe it. I also knew that if I stayed around I would be in the hair of the person following. Dean McHenry felt that. When he stepped down, he went and got an office over in the library and he just was not a presence on campus. Well, given my activities and activism, it would have been in the way. So I felt I needed to leave. I really didn't want to leave Santa Cruz, but I wanted to preserve Oakes. And I didn't want to get into any controversy, any difficulty, with anybody who might follow, because once you step away from that you can't control the variables. You can't control the forces. And if what you put in place doesn't last, then it wasn't meant to last. So I had to leave.

Vanderscoff: In *Through the Hourglass, Darkly*, an assessment of Oakes that was conducted in 1980, eight years into your provostship, the coauthors—you, Ron Saufley and Kathryn Cowan—write that there was an attempt to develop a "community morality" at Oakes. I think you've been alluding to this in many of the stories that you've been telling. In summation of those narratives, how would you characterize the community morality at Oakes?

Blake: Several ways. I always said to the students, "When you get to the table and you know that you're a full part of the process, the institution, where you've been denied in the past, don't just feel good about having succeeded. Think about who's not there. Always ask yourself the question, 'Who's not here?' Because there may be somebody else who seeks but isn't apparent. And you

have to be sensitive to that." It was sort of like Ken Simmons coming to us and saying, "You've got to have a sense of humility as you're planning, because the people who will occupy are not the people who plan. So don't plan for yourself; plan for the future." I used to complain about the architect of the colleges that preceded Oakes, that they were designed by architects who said to themselves, "When I was in college, I wanted—" Well, already that puts you twenty years behind. So we developed a different part.

So that community morality, among other things, meant caring about others and seeking to provide space and opportunity for others. That community morality meant caring about each other, respecting each other. I had a wonderful wife who was a superb cook. We always kept a couple of frozen casseroles in the refrigerator, and sometimes you'd be walking across campus and you'd meet a student who was in a depressed state. You'd just invite them home for dinner. Thaw it out and go ahead. I tried to meet the parents of the students, or have them meet the faculty or others—of the students. A way of building that sense that you got to care for one another. (Phone rings) That's what came out of, if you will, the whole slave experience. You reach out and take care of each other. The Harriet Tubman syndrome, or the work of Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth and others, Mary Church Terrell, who always talked about lifting as you climb. It was not only the intellectual growth and development, but the social growth and development. Not only horizontal, but vertical in terms of intellectual and so forth, horizontal in terms of social. But those two axes don't define the experience because you got all sorts of angles and ways in which these things come together.

But really caring for one another was very, very important. We had a case where two young ladies' mother died. They had no father. I don't know where he was. They got word that their mother had died in a hospital over in San Jose. And they were—it was just them. They were very distraught. And the students around—you know, it wasn't like *we* got the word the mother had died. It became apparent there was this kind of a circulation, disturbance among the students. Not in a negative sense, but upset. And we learned that these two young ladies, two sisters, their mother had died. So I brought them to my office to see what we could do to serve them. I always use the term "serve," not help, but serve. I've never said, "How can I help you?" It's, "How can I serve you?" And they didn't know what to do. They did not know what to do.

So we called the priest that looked to their mother, that they knew. And a part of this, they had gotten some call from somebody in the hospital or somewhere, asking if they could do an autopsy on the mother. I contacted the priest and I had them talk with him. But I said I was going to stay on the line. And I did. The most insensitive priest I ever heard. He started talking about them agreeing to do the autopsy. They just learned their momma died. They're talking about doing the autopsy? He said they won't scar the body or damage the body. You could still funeralize her and she won't be disfigured. Yeah. Well the mother had a brother that she wasn't close to, and he lived somewhere in Southern California. She lived in San Jose. And that was the only one next of kin.

Well, I moved those two young ladies into the provost house, kept them overnight while we finally made contact with the uncle, who started to make his way to San Jose to help them. Then I drove them to San Jose to their home. And

between the uncle and this insensitive priest, they began to deal with their circumstances. And from then on, I kept, through Gwen Lacy, stayed in touch with them: "We want you to come back. We're waiting for you. Your place is here." Well, it's a model—to the extent that you can say it was a model—of how you care for somebody that the other students can see. Doing all of these kinds of things. I could use other kinds of examples. But caring for one another. That's the community morality.

We had young people who were in those residence halls who were so into their studies they never did a thing, never met other students or anything like this. It was all right. There was nothing wrong with that. But they were anomalies within that larger context. And because you had the Narrative Evaluation System rather than the competitive grading system, cooperative learning was very important.

Vanderscoff: A criticism, I find, that one hears articulated again and again, from many different quarters—and it's with a strange persistence—is that Oakes is somehow isolated, or that it has a clustering effect in some way [in regards to minority students]. Have you heard this criticism aired and what do you say to that?

Blake: Oh, I've heard this criticism aired. Oh yeah, there's no question about it. It's a dilemma. It's a dilemma I have as I deal with Gullah culture: How do you share the culture and preserve it, when the very act of sharing it changes the dynamic?

I don't think Oakes was isolated in the sense of wanting to be isolated. There was very clearly, in my mind, a sense from the very beginning, people

didn't want to deal with us. I mean, when a provost says, "Herman's used to taking welfare." Or in another case, a provost saying, "Well, you know, we won't hire any minority faculty but when you open we'll promote your faculty." I mean, I have this in writing. And I can name you the provost who said it. You don't feel like you're in a situation where you're welcome. You don't. And in that sense, I think then there's some ingathering, looking inside. Bill Doyle can tell you stories—I don't have to speak for him—that indicates that we were, "isolated." For many of our students, Oakes became an oasis. There's no question about it. It was an oasis, not only at Santa Cruz but in terms of the larger society.

But if you look internally, you had all these people with all of these cross-connections. We had some of the wealthiest families in the country deliberately send their children to Oakes—white families. Some of the wealthiest, and at the height of the Patty Hearst kidnapping and all of that controversy. Some of our students had bodyguards. Yeah. Nobody talked about it. But I knew what was going on. So you had these cross-circulations, you know what I mean? That's going on *inside*. That's not isolation from each other. But there's no question in my mind that some degree of insularity existed and perpetuated itself as a result of people feeling they needed a place where they could be "at home."

If you look at that *Through the Hourglass*, or some of the other kinds of things, one of the points we pointed out was that the function of liberal education is to make you discomforted, to take you *out* of your comfort zone. But we were never totally successful in getting there. I don't think we could have ever been successful. I just don't know. But I think there's some substance to that criticism. I think there's also some self-fulfilling elements of that criticism, people

saying, "They were isolated," meaning "They didn't want me around," or "I don't have to go over there." The other part of it is we didn't have a dining hall like the other colleges did. You just couldn't drop in.

We had a basketball team, and it was a very good basketball team. The basketball they played had to be co-ed. I think two members of the team every time on the floor had to be female. We were winning left and right. People were saying, "You've got to break up that dynasty." I don't know what you do about that. It was Doug Rivlin who led up our pep squad with the boom boxes and all that sort of business.

Vanderscoff: (laughs)

Blake: And his mother speaks even now—I got an email from her right after I was out there [in April 2012]—speaks even now about what a wonderful experience that was for him. That's another person. You know about her, Alice Rivlin, founder of the Congressional Budget Office. Strong friend of Oakes.

Vanderscoff: I've that noticed that—staying with this idea of UCSC and Oakes, that relationship—I've noticed that prior to the founding of what was then College Seven you and Ralph Guzman made the case that outreach to what you've termed "non-traditional students"—minorities and women, for instance—was not only College Seven's responsibility, but other colleges and boards still had an obligation to stay engaged. Do you think that Oakes' efforts in practice were in any way reflected in the practices of other colleges?

Blake: Absolutely not. I think it was the reverse. "Because Oakes is so successful and draws so many, we don't have to do anything." That's what I think

happened. That's what I think happened. No, we wanted everybody to be engaged. And people wrote us and said, "Oh you know, when you get started, all right. You can do that, but we're not going to." That wasn't McHenry's position. But that sure was the position of a lot of the provosts.

Vanderscoff: So that being said, during the time of your involvement as provost of Oakes, how do you think Oakes impacted or changed UCSC as a whole?

Blake: Well, I don't want to say it impacted or changed UCSC as a whole. I don't want to claim that much credit. I think that's going beyond what was the reality. But I think what it did was it said that UCSC was a welcome place for the people who sought to become, I probably used the term "non-traditional students" at that time, I don't use that term anymore. I think Oakes paved the way, if you will, broke the path, for those students who were in the elementary and secondary schools, who ultimately made up the population in California. And when I was out there last year and I saw what that place—the whole place looked like Oakes. The whole place. They're all over the place: Asians, Latinos—[to a] lesser [extent] African Americans—but they're all over the place.

What I think is very upsetting is they built these minority centers and programs which are designed to so-called "make people feel comfortable." I met somebody from Santa Cruz who came to Indiana when I was there, talking about she was developing this black thing because black students needed a place where they could feel comfortable. That was antithetical to liberal education. I talked a little bit to George Blumenthal about it. You don't build those islands to make people feel comfortable, because that's not what education is about. And I think they've had those—everybody has them. I fought it at Indiana University, fought

it successfully until I left. The minute I left people said, "We need our program." What program? You had more integration. You had more success of minorities without having these other things. They say, "We need it." You got it here. It's crazy. Crazy.

And when I first got here [MUSC] in my first year, I brought in this guy who'd written this book on doctors in Mississippi during the civil rights movement, the Freedom Summer. White guy. Wrote a beautiful book. So they invited him to give an address during Black History Month. I brought him for that reason. And then they were so impressed with the idea that they decided they were going to make Black History Month a big lecture each week of allies. So a Black History Month for four weeks, have white speakers. But then as soon as that's over they go back to black speakers. And this month in the department of medicine they always have a black history series of grand rounds. This past Tuesday—I wanted to go but I didn't—they had a white speaker. But the rest of the time they have all black speakers. And it's sort of like, you know, you have all the black speakers in February. That doesn't make sense in terms of the transformation of a social setting. But for people who can't accept, or don't agree, it's easy to say, "Y'all go on over there and be by yourself and I don't have to be bothered with you." I think there's a lot of that. People won't admit it but I think there's a lot of it. I think a lot of it is unconscious. You've got be very deliberate about breaking it up.

Vanderscoff: And so would you characterize Oakes, at its best, as a more dialogic enterprise than that, in regards to liberal education?

Blake: I would hope so. Certainly that's what *we* tried to make it. And what little I've seen I would say that happened in a number of ways, yeah.

Vanderscoff: As a closing question on this section of Oakes for now—we'll pick it up at the very end of our sessions—but for now, upon your departure from the provostship and UCSC altogether, what challenges and projects do you think were there for your successor?

Blake: I think the major challenge and prospect for my successor was dealing with Bob Sinsheimer and holding onto the, if you will, the community morality we tried to promote. And I don't think that was going to happen. Because even in seeking my successor, he sought to try and get that whole thing destroyed. I think that was the major challenge. Beyond that there was nothing else.

Vanderscoff: Before moving on entirely to your post-UCSC career, I'd like to ask one last thing by charting two points in your time there. How was the Oakes experience of '82, '83, '84, different from the College Seven experience of 1972? Or was it not?

Blake: It was very different. In 1972 we were building on a sense of hope. We anticipated not only administrative support; we got it. And resources were flowing. By the 1980s, resources were declining, and the central administration was hostile to the whole place. I felt we were fighting a rearguard action, just holding on. Sort of like Reconstruction, where you had the compromise [of 1877], and after emancipation and the beginning, development of the society go backwards. I saw that as happening with respect to Oakes.

From Tougaloo College to Iowa State: Frustrations and Fulfillments in Higher Education

Vanderscoff: So in '84 you leave Oakes and UCSC, and the job you then took up was as president of Tougaloo [College] in Mississippi. There you headed a college that went back to the days of Reconstruction. How did Tougaloo confirm or challenge the administrative style and curricular goals that you'd helped develop at Oakes?

Blake: Well, it wasn't Tougaloo—it was Mississippi and the South. Tougaloo was built on an old cotton plantation. The administration offices were in the old plantation house. There used to be a commercial put out by the United Negro College Fund, a fundraising commercial saying, "We used to pick cotton on Smith Plantation. Now we go to school on Smith Plantation." There was a gestalt there that I found overwhelming. When I'd stand in my office and look out the window, and see the students going from building to building, class to class, [I'd] say, "It wasn't too long ago that whoever was standing here looking out this window was looking at the ancestors of these students going to pick cotton." It was a cotton plantation. I had no concept, could not fathom to any reasonable degree, how much that historical gestalt was like a blanket of fog over that campus.

And my freewheeling administrative style, my openly welcoming kind of style, was the wrong style for that setting. I wasn't used to the very formal, distinctive style of the historically black college, where you have a family, if you will, at one level, but you also have profound distinctions. And there was some

considerable tension between blacks and whites on the faculty. It wasn't a black-white thing as much it was simply tensions of faculty, faculty dynamics. It was a very complex situation that was not ultimately very satisfying.

Vanderscoff: I'd like to ask a question that addresses the positions that you held in the years after you were president at Tougaloo. You've been Visiting Professor of Social Change at Swarthmore, a vice chancellor for undergraduate education at Indiana University-Purdue University, a professor and director of African American studies at Iowa State, among other things, among other capacities. How did your work at these different institutions inform or evolve your educational philosophy and your thoughts on education and teaching?

Blake: Well, first of all, my experience at Oakes and the extraordinary success of the students, so many of whom came from very modest backgrounds, was constantly reaffirmed, strengthened by every place I went. Tougaloo had incredibly fine students. Very poorly prepared, but very hopeful. Some of the most promising students I found were among those who had the most difficult earlier experiences. Hardly any of those students who came to Tougaloo had more than one year of high school English. It wasn't because they were unintelligent. It was because they came from school districts that only offered one year of high school English. Things like that. But once they caught the fire, as we were able to light the fire at Tougaloo, it was incredible. The retention rates just shot up astronomically high. Freshman to sophomore, sophomore to junior.

When I got to Swarthmore, I got there with the blessings of their most distinguished and wealthiest alumni, Eugene Lang, who over the years has given

probably over five hundred million dollars to Swarthmore.⁶⁶ Gene's got a lot of money. Very nice guy. Really nice guy. Very nice man. I had the position of the Eugene M. Lang Visiting Chair of Social Change. I was given residence on campus at no expense. All I paid for was the telephone. And given a full time assistant, who came with me from Tougaloo, who had gone to Tougaloo with me from Oakes: Annamarie Melodia. They moved me and all of my family there. I taught one course once a week. And they complained to me that I had let seventeen students into the class. They said, "We don't like the students to be climbing over each other to get to the professor." It was a very affluent situation. Swarthmore was considered one of the number one liberal arts colleges in the country.⁶⁷ The faculty and the administration were absolutely marvelous. Tremendously supportive. And I enjoyed it. I really did. I enjoyed my teaching there.

I found that for one, Swarthmore had probably the best honors program in any undergraduate institution in the country. It still continues that way. An extraordinary honors program. Very expensive—but an extraordinary honors program. And they bring bright students. Very bright students. There was a young lady who came the first year we were there, who came from Mississippi. She had done so well on the SAT they went and found her and brought her to Swarthmore. Lovely young lady, African American.

The problem for me was that the African American students were good, they worked hard, but they were content. I felt that they should take the challenge of greater opportunity. Not a single one of them would get into the

⁶⁶ Dr. Blake arrived at Swarthmore in 1987, after a 1984-'87 tenure as president of Tougaloo.

⁶⁷ Clark Kerr's intimate, accessible undergraduate experience at Swarthmore in the late twenties/early thirties was a part of the inspiration for UCSC's collegiate model.

honors program. The honors program was going to demand more of you. And they were doing well in the regular program. And even though I had a three-year appointment, which could have probably been renewed for another three years, and morphed into a regular faculty position, at the end of my first year I decided to resign. I started sending out resumes. I decided to resign because I was in a, as I said to Gene [Lang]—well, I don't know if I said this to him, but I certainly indicated it to him—a rut is a rut. It may be velvet-lined, but it's still a rut. I was meeting wonderful black students who were content with doing normal work. They weren't doing poor work. They weren't doing substandard work. What they were doing was turning their backs against the most extraordinary honors program I ever saw. But that meant you had to do some other things. No, they didn't do it. What was I doing there? I was just gilding the lily. They were going to succeed whether I was there or not. So I decided to leave.

Now before I went to Swarthmore, when it was clear I was going to leave Tougaloo, Bill Plater, who was the vice chancellor at Indiana University-Purdue University in Indianapolis, tried to get me to come to IUPUI, as we called it. I couldn't understand what kind of place this was. I said no, I just wouldn't. I went on to Swarthmore. And like I said, I had a very easy gig. Very easy. All the support I wanted. If I wanted to travel anywhere I just went to a travel agency and made the arrangements. I got tickets and I went. I was doing things all over the place. Ran into the provost one day at a conference I went to. "It's nice to see you. I never see you on campus." (laughs) He was really a nice guy. Really a nice guy. I remember going to his office one day, and I was saying, "You know, I don't know what kind of budget I have." He says, "Get out of here. Your job is to

make the bills. My job is to pay them. Just go." That's the kind of situation. And I resigned. And Gene Lang was, "Why would you resign?" Because there was no real challenge in terms of the substance that I'm trying to deal with, opening up opportunity. If I'm there helping people who are already going to succeed, that's not expanding the pool.

But the problem hit me like a ton of bricks. I sent out resumes indicating I was interested in being looked at. I kept getting these letters back, you know, "We need a director of affirmative action," or stuff like this. And I realized, "These people—what they see is a skin color. They don't see a talent there." I was really angry. At the same time Bill Plater and people at IUPUI had brought me on as a consultant to help them think through things. And it was really without portfolio. I'd go on Wednesday afternoon, stay 'til the following Tuesday, because my class met on Wednesday. So I'd leave Wednesday evening. And I met and saw that this was a very creative place. The leadership was brilliant and because it was such an anomaly it took a lot of communication and interaction to make it work.⁶⁸ And they were making it work.

So when I indicated I was ready to leave, they offered me a job as associate vice chancellor in the academic affairs arena. I accepted it. And as soon as I accepted it they changed it from associate vice chancellor in the academic arena—and they brought this assistant who'd gone with me to Swarthmore, Anna Melodia. Moved me and all of that—they changed it to vice chancellor without portfolio. They said, "Come, spend two years, and figure out what you want to do. Then we'll work it out."

⁶⁸ IUPUI is a campus partnership of both Purdue and Indiana University.

That's what I did. We worked out a number of things. It became a very, very successful vice chancellorship. I had a chance to do some really good teaching. Able to hire some good staff. I became vice chancellor for undergraduate education and converted a counseling/advising unit into a two-year program that ushered people into upper-division things. It had three thousand students. In general, it was sort of like what we were doing at Santa Cruz but I was able to do it in a different kind of way. Not with the faculty and others—it was real hard breaking through that. It's one thing to start something *ab initio*. It's another thing to try and transform something already ongoing.

So I was there for a good ten years. Got divorced, then remarried. And when I remarried, then my wife, who had her own career and her own skills—things didn't work out in Indianapolis like we might have wanted—much to our benefit. Iowa State learned about me. They wanted me to come over there and run their black studies program. I was not at all interested. Not at all interested. Brilliant president, interesting guy. Iowa State was the place where George Washington Carver had gone. They were thinking about developing a George Washington Carver Chair. I said, "If you develop that chair I'd be interested in being considered." They never did. Haven't done it as yet. But they had a lot of money in his name. But I wasn't interested in running any black studies program.

So they recruited Emily [Moore].⁶⁹ They came, and they literally sent the dean of education and the dean of liberal arts—flew to Indianapolis and spent two days talking with us. Then they went back and they made us an offer. They offered Emily full rank position status in the graduate school, teaching doctoral

⁶⁹ Dr. Moore is Herman's wife, and currently, as of this June 2013 editing, works at MUSC as the Associate Dean for Academic and Faculty Affairs, College of Health Professions.

and master's students in her discipline. She'd been in liberal arts colleges at the undergraduate level. She had not had a chance to work really in a research university and this was a chance to develop her research. By that time I was at the point where we had agreed that her career would be the defining career, and wherever she went I would follow along. So they recruited her. But it was a way of getting me to come run the black studies program. So I went. Director of African American studies. Nothing much to that. But I built, with Emily's support, a very strong, very strong academic emphasis, so that the graduation levels of the students went up rather dramatically, by about 46 percent over five years.

Vanderscoff: Did you make an effort to incorporate your belief in a liberal education and try to advance that component of the African American studies program?

Blake: That's why it was successful. Yes indeed. Raised the level of expectations and challenged the students intellectually, constantly, constantly. But it was very limited. But I got cooperation from faculty in other areas, as they saw there were ways in which we could cooperate. But it was basically a very limited situation. You had a very strong sorority/fraternity campus. Very strong athletic programs. So it was a very different kind of a situation. (recorder turned off for brief conference; record resumes presently)

Vanderscoff: So you've been discussing all of these different institutions you've been affiliated with in the time after Oakes, up until around ten years ago. How would you generalize your trajectory in that time? How much did it confirm

notions that you had when you were working to found Oakes College and to what extent did it challenge them, or make you reconsider them?

Blake: I think it's confirmed every notion I believed in, of the constant growth intellectually and the expansive social arena of diverse people coming together in creative and constructive ways. It's also reaffirmed for me the rigidity of historical boundaries that I wish weren't so rigid.

Let me tell you a story I may have told you before, I don't know. When I was doing the Oakes, what ultimately became the core course, *Values and Change in a Diverse Society*, I ran into this situation where I came to realize how little I understood. I don't know if I told you about this. I used to give an examination at the end of the course where I'd ask the students to write an essay about their own group—we talked about these different groups—and then from that carry that into a discussion of a very different group. Contrast and compare. It was not that simplistic; what I really was trying to do was see if you could step into the shoes of another. And I got the papers. It was always a take-home exam. I never give sit-in classroom writing exams. A take-home exam—use all the books and notes you want to use—and if you have to turn to books and notes you're already lost.

At the end of this I got it back and this one young lady who had been sitting through the whole class wrote—because I always say, "Students are not required nor expected to agree with the views of the instructor—she wrote and said, "Look, you don't know what you're talking about." She didn't put it in those words. She said, "I've been sitting in your class all semester, and you say, 'Write about your own group.'" And she told her story. Her grandmother was

Chinese. And her grandmother had married a "white man." From this marriage her mother was born. Her mother who was—we would have said, "half Chinese and half white," whatever those things mean. And her mother had married a "white man." And here she came, blonde, blue-eyed, but raised by her grandmother, speaking Chinese, cooking Chinese cuisine, and engaging in Chinese culture. She came to my college, as she put it, because she thought that was a place where she would be welcome. She found the Chinese students were uncomfortable with her and she with them, because she was more Chinese than they were—the Chinese Americans. She didn't fit. But she didn't fit amongst the European Americans because of her unique qualities. I'd looked at her and I had always thought she was white. That was my assumption in my lectures and all of this. She always had a furrow in her brow, indicating, "What is this about?" And she says, "I come to your college and it just doesn't work."

Well, afterwards I called her in, thanked her, gave her a very good evaluation, appreciated the criticism and asked if I could use her story—not with her name, but wanting to use her account. She said, fine. I incorporated that into the class. And in incorporating it into the class, I said, "I'm not going to make any assumptions about who you are. You tell me who you are. But I'll make no assumptions." People would come to me and they say—this still happens now—they say, "Is he black or white?" I'd say, "I don't know." "What do you mean, you don't know?" I said, "Well, I didn't ask and he didn't tell me." "But can't you see?" "Oh yeah, I can see. But that's not what you asked me." They say, "Is he black or white?" I say, "You're asking me about a cultural dynamic, which you think is symbolized by a physical presentation. I don't know." Oh, people

get mad at me. They think I'm unreal. All this stuff. But we did this at Oakes. And for a period of time just before I left we were trying to not use these terms: black, white, Chicano, whatever. I told you about José Orozco. They'd say, "What are you today?" "Oh, Chicano," or, "*Mexicano*," or, "I'm José." That was that way. You know, tell me who you are.

So, when I started getting these letters from people saying, "We need an affirmative action director," I was angry. That confirmed to me the rigidity. But at the same time I walked into Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis, and the chancellor and the vice chancellor intuitively understood what I was about. And even though they didn't know all of the ways in which I was going to work things, they had to give me a chance to work. They told the vice chancellor for finance, "Herman has no deficits."

One of the things I did, I found a young man who was a superb mentor/tutor in math. African American, living in the international house, a Vietnam vet. I put him on the payroll and put him in the student union to tutor math. We developed a whole program where minorities and other people were excelling in math. You come out of your math class; you come over here and do problem sets. I realized one day they had put together a brochure, called it, "The A Team." Literally. Like it was athletic, but it was A Team. I had to stop the guy. He's now president of a college in New York, Scott Evenbeck. He wanted to put out a brochure saying, "If you come join the A team, if you don't do an A or B in your math class we'll refund your tuition." I said, "You can't do that."

Vanderscoff: (laughs)

Blake: "You can't do that. If the faculty learn that they'll flunk every one of them." But he was naïve. But what I'm saying is, at one level that was just beautiful, and with my colleagues they understood it.

Then in that capacity I became the special assistant to the president. But I refused that terminology. I said, "I'm just a consultant to the president." That was an additional task. We had eight campuses in Indiana University, and I worked with the president around developing these things. He'd had a guy who did diversity or minority whatever, and that guy left and they asked me to come in. I said, "Okay, I'll be the consultant."

We had a gathering one day. They had people from the eight campuses, about thirty people sitting in there talking about different things. The president and I were sitting up front. They were asking him about this black program they were developing at another campus, limited to black students and faculty. The president said, "I have been persuaded that for a time it's all right to have these kinds of programs with these kinds of emphases." I'm sitting next to the man. He obviously didn't know a thing about me. Tom Ehrlich. He's out at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching now. He'd come to the presidency of Indiana University from law at Stanford. And he's back at Stanford, essentially. Well, Tom says, "I've been persuaded."

So when he finished I said, "We're not going to do that." I said, "We're not going to do that." I said, "It's illegal. It's immoral. And we're not going to do it." They looked at me. The president just said we're going to do that. And I said, "We're not going to do it." I didn't even look at him. I don't know what kind of look he had. I said, "We're not going to do it."

Now, he could have fired me (rapping on table) for contradicting him. But he had enough sense to know that if he had said, "Well we're going to get rid of this guy." [inaudible] "He's trying to integrate the university and you've got these racists who want to go backwards." Basically, he backed me. Not only did he back me, he gave me a presidential medal when he left. I got it in my home, the Thomas Hart Benton Medal.

What I'm trying to say is, in each case or situation I find tremendous openness, but also tremendous rigidity. You just kind of balance these kinds of things and try to work through them. I've run into it here. The president here—I told you, they give me free rein. I've run into some wonderful faculty, black and white, who understand. But a substantial number of the blacks, a substantial number of the blacks, are still cursed—and I don't blame them—with that mentality which says, "They really don't respect us. And they don't think we're that good." And you see it. You see it. I got cousins who used to work here [at the Medical University of South Carolina] and think it's the worst place in the world. They can't understand how I get along.

But anyhow. I don't know what your question was.

Vanderscoff: Tracking the changes and continuities in the vision that you had at Oakes, and then how that's been tempered by your experiences.

Blake: Sure. Indiana University, Iowa State University—each one of them confirmed and expanded, confirmed and expanded. One of the reasons is because I will not be confined. I choose not to be a victim. And I choose not to make anybody else a villain. Now you may be a villain, but at least I'm going to approach you in a way that looks at you as—whatever.

I'm on the board of directors of my property owners association. This is a group that elected Newt Gingrich over Mitt Romney. Newt won the Republican primary in South Carolina by a huge amount by reverting to a racist point of view. And I'm in the middle of it. All right. I'm not going to talk politics. But when they elected me, I made sure they understood who they got. So I distributed my paper on Huey Newton, [and] other things. Not one person has said a word.

Vanderscoff: Well, thank you. I think this a good time to bring this particular session to rest. We'll pick up the thread later.

Blake: Okay.

Towards Humane Assets and Understandings: Personal Educational Philosophies

Vanderscoff: Today remains Thursday, February 14th. This is Cameron Vanderscoff here for the Regional History Project with Dr. J. Herman Blake, for part eight of his oral history project. At this point in the afternoon we're going to talk about your educational theory and some of your thoughts on teaching. I'd like to start by saying I've noticed that you've frequently used the terms "humanistic" and "humane" in your discussions of academic institutions, scholarship, and teaching. What does it mean for an educational institution to be "humane?"

Blake: I consider the term "humane" to refer to action and behavior, "humanistic" to refer to study, the intellect, and analysis. One is cerebral, the other is

individual or collective action. For an educational institution to be humane, I feel it has to pay a very close attention to the way in which its actions impact its participants. This means in every way, from having appropriate facilities for people with disabilities, to being sensitive to so many other things you just take for granted. There's a guy I used to work with—I can't think of his name now—who used to go around campuses and look and see the ways in which things were laid out, signage, and other kinds of things, which sometimes can confuse people. He'd look at things like benches, and places for seating, and places with lawns and things of this sort.

Now these are physical arrangements, but those physical arrangements can be conducive to positive interaction, or they can be barriers. When I first went into the new student union at Cal State LA, right after they opened it, they had lots of little places where people could sit in small groups of three and four and study. They had the capacity to do things in the evening and at night, since they had a commuting population.

So a humane institution is one that tries to create ease in terms of interaction, action, and access. It also does that in terms of the ways in which it staffs itself, and has prepared to be responsive. When the Cal State LA vice president for student affairs said, "You meet students, you learn their names," that's humane action.

But in too many cases, it can be just the reverse. I mean, you come to the Medical University of South Carolina and go into one of these parking lots, you're lost. You're lost. That's not a humane situation. I've seen some staff at the Medical University of South Carolina who make no effort to assist or help people

who may be lost, and seeking relief. On the other hand, I know that the administration of this university and the leadership have absolutely the opposite approach and philosophy, that you do everything you can to ease the situation. I've seen people who have literally gone out of their way to make sure people get to where they want to be, in some cases even taking them home with them, if they're a family that has a medical emergency of a member of the family and they're caught here at night and things like this. Those are humane actions in a situation, and where that is encouraged, supported—that's what I mean.

Vanderscoff: I have a question about one particular area of the academic institution that I think relates to what you've just been talking about. As of the founding of Oakes College, the UC had a policy where, quote, "the special admissions limit is only for 4 percent of the entering student body," which you brought up in a meeting with faculty in '72—the document "College Seven History." What do you think the relevance is of special admit figures in a public university? Is that part of what you talk about when you say "humane"?

Blake: Yes. That's one aspect of it. But I wouldn't say that policy itself is humane. It depends on how it is ultimately implemented. That policy is designed to get the kind of students that they feel they need. At most of the campuses it was for athletics, athletes who might not meet their criteria for admission. But on the other hand, it's sometimes used to get students with special talents in music or art, who might not fit the traditional or usual frame of reference. I think it's very humane in that way in its application. Definitely so.

Vanderscoff: You've written, "that there is no known limit to the capacity of human mind to learn, develop, grow, and change." What makes you think this way, in terms of not endings, but horizons?

Blake: I think that way because that's been my experience. That's my philosophy of learning. I developed it from thinking about how I had come to a realization that there was no known limit. I often used the concept of the 'idea emotion,' a concept I got from Horace Cayton, who was a very good friend. He used to talk with me at great length. Horace Cayton was a friend of Richard Wright. Very close, personal friend of Richard Wright. And Horace once raised the question with me in a conversation, "How is it that Richard Wright can write an autobiography called *Black Boy*, that covers the first eighteen years of his life, and it becomes a best seller, a nationally respected statement about American society. Who writes an autobiography covering the first eighteen years of their life?" Well, Horace said that that was a reflection of the fact that Richard Wright had so many concepts and ideas he wanted to deal with that were tied to emotional issues, not just cognitive but emotional, that he had to tell his whole story before he could begin to deal with the other things. So he writes his life story, and in that you see the unfolding of his ideas that came in later works. That's the 'idea emotion.' It's an idea that is so powerful that you can't understand it without understanding all of the emotional foundation.

You know, I started out in my younger years to become a number runner. When I was growing up, that was the person who was admired in the community. Not necessarily desired to be emulated, but you know, they wore nice clothes and they were always young, polite men. They didn't wear overalls

and dirty clothes. They didn't work in the coal yard or in the garbage truck. Nice guys. And you know, you think, well, there's always a new set every now and then that seems to be upwardly mobile. Started out to become a young petty criminal, if you will, and from there ended up going into the army and then going to college to become a social worker. And then becoming a sociologist, and thinking I'm going to be a professor. And become a professor, and all of a sudden you're an administrator. And become an administrator—constantly worlds opening. Constantly worlds opening.

I used to use this with young people: The peak-peek thesis: every time you reach a new P-E-A-K in life, you get a new P-E-E-K. And that peek from the new peak shows you a world you never saw before. You're driving and you see these mountains. And the mountains are your goal. But when you get on the top of the mountains, what do you see? Mountains beyond mountains, as the writer once said. So when you start thinking in these terms, what are the limits? There's no age limit. There's no physical limit to the development of the mind. I felt that given my experience of constantly expanding horizons, I developed this philosophy of learning. Then it became a part of my teaching, which meant that you had to constantly push your students—but not only push your students, push yourself.

I tried to get to the point where every year I changed my course, the lectures and the material, by about one-third, so that every three years I had a new course. Here at the Medical University I'm doing the same thing as I'm doing presentations and other things. And they all say to me—I just got an email from a person related to the workshop in the end of life care, and they said,

"These are your slides from last year. Do you want me to mount them for this next workshop?" And I wrote back and I said, "No, I've got to listen to the tape. But I can't do the same thing." I went into another class that I've been lecturing in and the instructor put my slides up on the screen. He says, "These aren't the slides you used last year." And he really was concerned that I had taken another tack. Well, I'd expanded my ideas, but I was not trying to reach the same goals. But you improve your material. So I just don't believe there is any known limit. I challenge people to find the limit. If you can't find the limit, why are you limiting yourself?

Vanderscoff: Why is the notion of having 'high expectations' such a profound and consistent term in your rhetoric about education?

Blake: Well, we find from research, it's well documented that students will rise to the expectations of the faculty. And that if you have high expectations and respect for your students, you will find that they will try to meet those expectations. If you combine high expectations with the continual learning and intellectual development, what you end up with is a person who's constantly growing, constantly growing. And so, high expectations is a very important part of that. When we did the report for the secretary of education, looking at the conditions of excellence in undergraduate education and undergraduate learning, we reached the conclusion that the most important condition is high expectations. And then you develop strategies to manifest or implement that concept of high expectations.

But when you have high expectations and the students respect you, they'll rise to that level. I've had students who've walked out of my class. The first class

I taught at Indiana University, never forget it. When I came in and laid out the syllabus—it was a sociology class—there were two young ladies in there to take the class. They were friends. And one of them, when she saw the syllabus, got up and walked out. And she was very clear about it. She can get the same amount of credit for a lot less work. She walked out. The other one stayed. And as she continued to meet my expectations, what came out was she was an extremely talented young lady, who had been on her own from the time she was about thirteen or fourteen, independent. I don't know the whole story behind it, but by the time she was eighteen or twenty she was managing a TCBY in Indianapolis, and doing it very successfully. And did it so successfully, with people who were much older than she was as staff, TCBY came to her to ask her to help develop a training program for all of their staff.

Well, I got this young lady sitting in my class. We put her into another situation and asked her to develop a whole mentoring, counseling program. And she did, did it so successfully that they named it after her. That's where high expectations lead you. The young lady who walked out, her friend, ultimately realized how much she had lost, and apparently talked to her parents about it. Because her father, who knew my chancellor, wrote to the chancellor and thanked the chancellor for having somebody like me in the classroom, and said his daughter had really missed out. That's kind of a nice compliment to get unsolicited from somebody you don't even know. But those high expectations work. Let me put it this way: they work if the student buys in. But I've had many situations where students say, "We're not going to do that." When I was at

Swarthmore, students said, "We're not going to do that. It's not like—we're not going to fail. But we're not going to go that route." Oh, yeah.

Vanderscoff: Do you think there is anything an educator can do if the student does not opt in, in that way?

Blake: I'm sure there is. It relates to the educator. It relates to the subject matter. And it relates to the students. All are variables there. And I'm sure there are ways in which one can get past some of these barriers. But I wouldn't say it's formulaic.

Vanderscoff: I'd like to talk about the idea of addressing students in terms of [student] assets. What type of relationship does this language enable with the student, as opposed to other modes of language that address [student] deficits or things in terms of their 'remedial' nature?

Blake: Well, when we started Oakes College we really thought that students were going to come with deficits and we had to help them overcome their deficits. We started with the notion, we've got to figure out a way of dealing with the deficits without getting into a remedial mode. I think remediation and the concept of remediation is ultimately self-defeating.

So how do you deal with that? We didn't know. We worked very, very hard at getting students to succeed. And we were successful. But when we began to look at *why* students were succeeding, we realized that they often were plugging into assets that we didn't know. We just didn't understand. And it wasn't necessarily our work that got them through their deficits to success. It was their calling upon strengths: family, social group, peer group, attitudes and

beliefs, that led them to persevere and succeed. And we realized—and I wrote this up shortly after I went to Tougaloo College—we realized that we needed to focus on the assets that the students brought. And if you focus on the assets that the students brought and begin to push them to higher levels of achievement, they will deal with the deficits.

Donald Rothman was perfect in this, in helping us understand when you read a student's paper, they may have a lot of grammatical errors. They may have spelling errors or other errors. But you don't sit down and go through and identify all of the errors and say, you got to improve. What you do is you show them the good parts: "Here's a great idea. Now, you can strengthen this idea in this way." And when the student realizes they had good ideas, but the language, grammar, and spelling was clouding those ideas, then they want to learn how to deal with those things that are clouding the ideas—but they hold onto the idea.

Vanderscoff: You've mentioned this, actually, just in the course of our discussions here, and in the past in a talk you gave entitled "The Challenges of Diversity." You said that, "alienation, disaffection from one's home or previous experience can be an important part of a good liberal education." What role does discomfort in developing creativity and learning?

Blake: Well, we're not trying to promote discomfort. But one of the consequences is discomfort when you're moving from a place where you're at ease and where you're at home into a situation where everything is variable. That's an area of discomfort. But you can't create new perspectives and new understandings if you don't move that way.

And what we found with students, very often, early in their career, in the academic program, they were in places where they felt comfortable. And there were others who said, "Well, you got to have a place where they feel comfortable, and you got to promote that comfort." Our position was, "They got to move on." And in moving on, they come into—well, like you say, get out of your comfort area. That's discomfort. And it's not to be seen as something to be avoided, but something to be challenged and accepted.

We had a guy that got out of prison and came to Santa Cruz named James Carr. And in prison he had taught himself all the way through advanced calculus. Well, Jimmy Carr went to prison and for six years he didn't have a visitor. None of his family, nobody came to see him. He was at the [men's] colony in San Luis Obispo, where it was divided into quadrants. So they had little interaction. Well, he's in a situation where there's this ambiguous kind of thing. And sure, guys hung out on the yard, they lifted weights and all of that stuff. But Jimmy Carr said he would get in his cell, and he'd put a stopwatch on the bar. And he'd say, "I'm going to study this calculus for two hours." Now he didn't understand it, but he just went over it and worked at it, until it began to make sense. He constantly grew, and developed his knowledge and understanding. That's moving out of your comfort level into your discomfort level. Now you create new areas of comfort, but you also become aware that that movement is a part of the positive aspects of intellectual growth.

Leaving Space for the Limitless: Thoughts on Liberal Education and Professionalization

Vanderscoff: Throughout these sessions we've been having, you've often discussed the value of liberal education. In summation for all of these discussions that we've been having, what does a liberal education entail to you that other forms of education do not?

Blake: Well, I think any good education is liberal education. And I don't know what you mean when you say "other forms of education." I make a difference between learning and training, education and training. You hear people talk so much about going to college to train, to get trained. And that, I'm talking about, is learning a set of skills, very often manual or whatever, and being able to do that. That, in my mind, is not education, although I believe in the process of learning these skills you're using your mind. And if you understand that, you can begin to use the mind for other things beyond those particular skills. That's when it begins to become education: utilizing one's mind in an open-ended manner.

Liberal education refers to both the content and the process. The content meaning a broad range of topics designed to stimulate the intellect. Example: Plato's allegory of the cave. Well-known story, and utilized. Well, if you read W.E.B. Du Bois' second autobiography, *Dusk of Dawn*, in chapter two, the autobiography of race concept, he's got a section there on a story about a group of blacks caught in a cave. They can't get out. They see other people going by, and they try to attract attention, assuming they will help them get out. And the other people finally begin to look and look and figure there's something wrong

with those people there, and just keep on going. They never stop to help them. The people in the cave begin to beat on whatever that transparent barrier is, and ultimately break through. And as W.E.B. Du Bois says, "They break through to find out they are in the middle of people who are scared by their very existence."

This is a different allegory of the cave, but it's still the allegory of the cave. That's Plato, and that's Du Bois. Then you read Martin Luther King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," the cave notion that out of the recesses of darkness and the lack of light can come understanding and insight beyond, is, I think, good liberal education, liberal learning. I don't like it when people come and say, "I don't want to study Plato. I want to study something, "relevant.'" The development of the mind is relevant in any subject. Any subject. So in that sense, liberal education is utilizing one's mind, continuing to push the limits of knowledge. And one way you push the limits of knowledge is you introduce new knowledge, new modes of learning from all sorts of places.

And you never know where one thing is going to lead to another. I mentioned I did this research and writing on Talcott Parsons. I had no idea that when I started to work with Huey Newton I was going to meet a man whose ideas as articulated oft-times were as vague and circuitous as anything you'd ever want to see. And I found, having spent so much time putting Talcott Parsons' ideas together so I could understand them, Huey Newton's ideas were simply a piece of cake, if you will. They weren't simple, but I was more comfortable with that. Well, you would say, "Studying Parsons helps you understand the Black Panthers?" Yes. But people would say they couldn't see the connection. The connection wasn't Parsons and Panther; the connection was

learning how to handle complex, convoluted ideas and articulate them in a more systematic manner.

Vanderscoff: So perhaps liberal education having something to do with learning how to make connections between seemingly unrelated things and finding relevance in them. Is that a part of it?

Blake: I would say that's a part of it. I don't get caught up in the concept of relevance. If it's learning how to make the connections between difficult ideas and complex ideas—that to me is sufficient.

Vanderscoff: You were talking a minute ago about this increasing trend in professionalization in the university and in education. In the seventies and going forward, it seems to me that there has been a trend of speaking of education in degrees, in terms of jobs graduates can get, and in terms of their preparation for the labor force. What do you think the consequences are of this professionalization, compared to the liberal education you were just talking about?

Blake: Well, I'd say professionalization and commodification. I think the consequences are a decreased emphasis on intellectual development. Some years ago the American Association of Medical Colleges and Schools, back in the mid-sixties, they convened a task force and they did a report, called a GPEP Report: *The General and Professional Education of Physicians*. And what the American Medical Association argued in this report was that the future of education in the medical field was going to become more and more complex because there was more and more to learn. We were learning more about the human body, and

there was more and more to learn. Now are you going to expect your students by memorization to absorb all of this material? They concluded that you could never absorb all of the material, and what you have to do is learn how to learn, learn how to utilize complex concepts, analyze, and seek more understanding. So they argued that the future of the general and professional education of physicians was more in terms of learning and learning to learn—what I might call in some respects, liberal education or liberal learning.

I think that speaks to the challenge of constantly professionalizing everything. You train. You know how do this. You know how to do that. At one point I was on the UC Systemwide Health Education Committee put together by the UC President. And there were some faculty who argued with the president that they ought to not have schools of dentistry as a part of the university, because they said these were high-level skills, but they were technical skills. They weren't the development of the intellect. They urged the university to drop its affiliation with schools of dentistry. Some of them argued that dentists who are on the faculty should not be eligible for tenure, because what are they doing in terms of the learning curve and the constant growth and development? And so they argued against dentistry.

My own feeling is continually utilizing the mind is really, really an important part of the creative process. At Pikes Peak Community College, in Colorado Springs, I was looking over some of the programs and curriculum, and came across a welding professor who had developed a whole program of videos and other things where students could learn welding at different times of day and night that were convenient to them. And what I found was his approach to

becoming more creative in terms of reaching his students meant that he was learning more about how they learned. It was applied to a particular skill, but it was in a context of continually learning, and the students continually learning as they came to realize they could do welding. Well, then you could do a lot more. It's not easy or simple, but it's that constant pursuit of excellence and more knowledge that continues to push us.

Vanderscoff: So, does this turn towards professionalization in any way relate to putting some sort of limits on education in relation to what you're talking about just a couple questions ago—the idea of putting in limitations, perceived limitations, when as a matter of fact there need be none.

Blake: I'm not sure I understand your question.

Vanderscoff: You were talking maybe ten, fifteen minutes ago about the idea of the mind being a potentially unlimited thing.

Blake: Yes.

Vanderscoff: And viewing, perhaps, liberal education as a vehicle for that process, does professionalization, then, relate to that in that it can put in perceived limits to learning, or perceived boundaries to what is germane to education?

Blake: I think that the notion that there's only so much you can learn about a particular subject in terms of professional skill can indeed be limiting.

Vanderscoff: Hmm.

Blake: But I think what is possible and valuable is a concept of learning that, but then raising the question, "Is there more? What's beyond the horizon?" And thinking of it that way, not that, "I've accomplished all of this, and I know all of this. Therefore I don't have to learn any more." A good professional education has a potential of mining and developing into a good liberal education.

Vanderscoff: In the course of doing oral histories in the past with other professors, I've had several conversations about the advent of electronics culture, and how it's transforming education. Do you think that the electronics revolution, particularly in terms of the Internet and the information boom that has ensued, has impacted education and students who you interact with?

Blake: Oh, yes. I can't say that I have a complete understanding, but I think it's one of the most important and potentially creative developments in education. I think that the concept that understanding the technology and the limited skills could lead one to think that that's where knowledge ends. But I think it opens up, actually, vast amounts of knowledge or information which can lead to incredible levels of knowledge.

Thoughts on Working with, Learning From, and Grading Students

Vanderscoff: Throughout your career, so much of your educational work, it seems to me, has been focused on undergraduates, whether in administration or teaching. Why have you focused so much on engaging with undergraduates in particular?

Blake: Well, it's not only undergraduates. It's lower division. I'm interested in being a gate opener, meeting people where they are and opening vistas beyond where they are. So my commitment to, and my passion has been, illuminating, lighting the fire of the mind in those people who don't think they can learn, or don't think they know or think that what they learn, in terms of limited frames of knowledge, is in fact wisdom or knowledge. So I like to be frontloading, if you will, be right at the beginning part to help people get a lift-off.

Some years ago the Lilly Endowment was trying to get more minority students into graduate school and into professional schools, and indeed, higher education. They developed a program where faculty could hire students in their junior and senior year to work with them on projects during the summer. I remember the program officer going to one of these gatherings they had where the students came and talked about what they experienced and learned. And he was disturbed to learn and realize that so many of those students weren't interested in further education, graduate education, intellectual development. Some were, but the vast majority were not. They had gotten involved in that program because there was a check involved.

And what I argued was you wait two years for them to decide what they want to do in terms of discipline, and then you try to get them into the larger pattern. I said, "Start right when they arrive, when they're still trying to sort through ideas, showing them how the search for ideas and involvement in that realm can be very exciting." So that by the time they get to the junior year they're interested in something for the sake of the knowledge and understanding, not because it brings a paycheck. So the foundation was looking at the intellectual

outcomes—the students were just looking at financial. Didn't have the success or involvement and excitement at the levels they anticipated. I argued that they started too late. Now I may have been wrong. I don't know, because we never tested it.

Vanderscoff: What relevance has engagement with graduate students had in your career? Have you supervised dissertations or anything of that nature?

Blake: Not to any significant degree. When I got to Iowa State, I ultimately served on a number of dissertation committees. I did that in other places too, but I have not played a big role. I supervised one dissertation. I think that's been a hole in my career, in my own understanding. I was so passionate about lower division and undergraduate education and opening up the door that I really never got deeply into involvement with graduate students. I figured they were already at the place where they were ready to go forward and continue to grow, and I wanted to get more people *to* that level than to be in that level. On the other hand, involvement with and engagement with graduate students can be an important part of one's own learning, and in that sense I have not benefitted from it.

Vanderscoff: Mm-hmm. Now you've already spoken at some length about the narrative evaluation, pass/no record system. After your time at UCSC, you've been affiliated with a number of institutions. How has working with letter grades there changed or affirmed the way that you felt about narrative evaluations and the pass/no record system when you were at UCSC?

Blake: Well I was very passionate about the narrative evaluation. And I still am. I used narrative evaluations through all of my teaching career. Every place I went. What I did was, they were required a grade at the end of the semester, but I never gave a grade during the semester. The evaluations were all narrative. I had them write papers and we would write summaries of our comments. Me and my teaching assistants constantly did this. And at the end of the semester we'd gather those narratives and put together a larger narrative, which became a narrative evaluation. And after I collected those I'd look at them and pretty much decide what kind of a grade I was going to give for the registrar. But the students, by that time, very often were engaged in the narrative evaluation process, and therefore the grades became less significant.

The other part of it was I had to raise the level of expectations. The students who weren't really interested in the learning educational experience would leave. They wanted to know what their grade was. I'd say, "You'll know whether you're doing well or not doing well by these narratives, but I can't tell you what a grade is. I don't know."

Vanderscoff: You've dedicated, it seems to me, a lot of time to many different projects professionally, institutionally, professorially and so on. How have you balanced and prioritized these presences in your life?

Blake: Prioritized them in terms of...?

Vanderscoff: In terms of what mattered most to you, in terms of where your primary—what were, what are the criteria for something to have your primary attention, your primary focus?

Blake: Yeah. I think it's really around learning and opportunity. Am I reaching people for whom new opportunities had not been there? Here [at MUSC] I'm dealing with students who've already made it, and I feel less passion about trying to do that. But I also feel like I'm at the end of my career, and I don't have to apologize now for being engaged with people who are going to make it. But opportunity and academic, intellectual growth have been my primary kinds of concerns. (recorder shut off; after a brief conference the decision is made to end sessions for the day)

The Weight of A Name: Reflections on El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz

Vanderscoff: Today is Friday, February 15th, 2013. This Cameron Vanderscoff here for the Regional History Project with Dr. J. Herman Blake for part nine of his oral history project. We are in the original conference room at the Medical University of South Carolina, Charleston, South Carolina. Dr. Blake would like start out today by making a statement.

Blake: Well, yesterday I was thinking about what we've been talking about El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz and how he'd gone from Malcolm Little to Malcolm X to El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz. I mentioned a scripture he often quoted. And I didn't recall the exact scripture, so I went and looked it up this morning. I want to read it, because I can't say it was his favorite scripture, but I heard him use it so much that it helped to underscore things. I just wanted, for the record, to have it exact.

And it's in the Bible; this is the King James version. It is in the New Testament in the Book of Revelation. And it is the second chapter and the

seventeenth verse. I heard him do this more than one time, usually challenging ministers who challenged his being Muslim and all these other things. Yhis is before he became El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz. He was just talking about—he didn't know his African name, so he took 'X' to indicate he didn't know his name. But I thought it was also predictive—but I didn't think it at that time. I was just realizing. Revelation Two, chapter seventeen, it says, and I quote, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the spirit sayeth unto the churches. To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna and will give him a white stone. And in the stone a new name written which no man knoweth, saving he that receiveth it." That's the entire verse.

Now the point is, Malcolm would say to people, "You'll be given a new name, according to scripture, and nobody knows what that name is." Names become important. When I read that this morning, I kept thinking about that spiritual which Nina Simone sings so beautifully, "I Told Jesus It's All Right to Change My Name."

And there's one that the Gullah Geechee people sing very frequently—Herbert Middleton, who recently died—he was an outstanding leader in the usher anniversary marches—Herbert Middleton, I heard him raise it so beautifully. It's called, "I Know I've Been Saved, The Angel in Heaven Done Changed My Name."

So the emphasis on name and being called by the right name is very important. Because, people say, you have your names out of slavery. Booker T. Washington says that after Emancipation there were many slaves, one of the first things they wanted to do was to change their name so they were no longer

having the master's name. Others kept it, as my family did. I'm not arguing for or against; I'm just saying the name is very important in black culture. It's very important. I say to people when they address blacks, instant familiarity, calling people by their first name, not remembering their name, and all of this is very often very painful and insulting. So that's El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz and his new name.

Vanderscoff: I'd like to start out with a question on El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, actually, today, by discussing some of the people whom you've learned from in your life, and some of the areas that you've been interested in asking questions of. In a talk you gave at Stevenson in '75, you related that you were friends with Malcolm X, but your, quote, your "greatest respect was for El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz."⁷⁰ What does that second name and what it signifies teach you that that first name, Malcolm X, did not?

Blake: Well, first of all, Malcolm X was his second name. He was born and raised Malcolm Little. So what does El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz teach me, as compared to Malcolm X? That is very clear in my mind. Malcolm X was a racist. He could see no merit in anyone who was, in his mind, white. The first time I ever saw him was on TV when I was in California, and they were showing a clip of him on a news program speaking on 125th Street and Seventh Avenue in Harlem, a corner I know extremely well. That's where Mr. Michaux used to have the bookstore and they used to have all these soapbox debaters and speakers. Malcolm X called white people devils. They were all devils. In his speech he was giving there, he

⁷⁰ See "J. Herman Blake on Malcolm X" sound recording. Lecture given in Stevenson College core course on November 17, 1975. Available on DVD in UCSC Library Special Collections Department.

talked about "Somebody looked that devil into his blue eyes." Malcolm was a master at delivery—the dramatic pause—he was one of the best. Even better than Jesse Jackson, who is very good, or Cannonball Adderley, who was very good musically. But he made that statement. "He looked that devil in his blue eyes," and stopped, because he knew what the people were hearing. The devil was white because he had blue eyes. And the audience, after that pause, erupted and cheered.

When I first heard Malcolm speak in 1961 at Stiles Hall, there were a number of people who came to argue that his form of Islam was inadequate, incorrect, because they were very light-skinned. They were white and they were Muslims. He was arguing they couldn't be Muslims. You had to be black. He took that position. A number of other things he did impressed me but that troubled me, that he had that rigidity.

And he changed. He changed before he made that trip to Mecca, if you believe Alex Haley. I don't know if it's in the book. I don't think it is. But Alex told me about it. Malcolm had become, in his moving around, speaking after getting out of prison and all of this, he was encountering a lot of people that didn't fit his image of the white man, if I can use that expression. Because he dealt with whites in prison. And that is almost a different group of people, as compared to college professors and college students. Now I'm not putting down whites in prison. What I *am* saying is in prison white and black were almost always confrontational.

Here he comes out and people are more accepting. And so Malcolm X had become friendly with—to the extent that he could have a friend. If you see that

[interview] video, I asked that question: can a black man have a white man as a friend? And he says that a white man will be friendly, but can't be a friend. He had become friendly with the *New York Times* journalist-reporter Maurice Handler. This is what Alex told me, that when he was interviewing and talking with Malcolm, at one point Malcolm said, "You know, I was talking to this devil—dev—dev—" He stopped. And he said, "Mr. Handler." He stopped in the middle of calling him a devil, and said, "Mr. Handler."

Now these little clues indicate something was going on in his mind. I think—this is my interpretation. And this is before he ever went to his hajj. I think so often Malcolm was so used to a hostile reaction from a white person that when he got a friendly reaction it kind of threw him off balance, made him think. He told Alex that sometimes he wished he hadn't been as harsh to some of the white students he met as he had been on campus, just insulting them: "You can't be involved." Just being very insulting and putting them down.

Malcolm, I always argue—and I don't know if I said that in that speech in Stevenson—but I always argued that Malcolm was one of the most liberally educated people I ever met. And by that I meant he was one who was willing to listen to contrary evidence. He got to that point. And in my debates with him, I just couldn't buy his racism. I couldn't buy his eschatology. He'd say to me all the time, he'd say, "Well, let the evidence dictate the conclusion." That was his mantra. "Let the evidence dictate the conclusion." I'll put my water down. You put your water down. We'll let the community decide whose water's clean. Let the evidence dictate the conclusion." Well, I argued, "Well, Malcolm, the evidence does not support your conclusion." And he'd go off with talking about

this deity who had created white people and how wrong he was and so forth. But then that became faith. That wasn't evidence. And I didn't buy his faith. But he kept saying, "Let the evidence dictate the conclusion."

I think he was being more and more disturbed by evidence that didn't fit his conclusion. So I set up the meeting with him and Herbert Blumer. And after we left Mr. Blumer he said to me, "That's a very wise white man." He didn't say devil. He gave me his business card and he said, "Tell that professor if he ever wants an appointment with the Honorable Elijah Muhammad I'll personally set it up." But he said, "That's a very wise white man." Not devil.

Later on we went into the office of the historian [Kenneth Stampp]. He wrote *The Peculiar Institution*. I was just thinking about him the other day, recalling his name. We went into his office after his speech in Dwinelle Plaza, and we were waiting for the crowd to disperse. We had gone to that office before we went to the speech and we just went back there. The police asked us to wait until the crowd dispersed and they could escort Malcolm to his car. We were waiting there and the professor came in. He came in and Malcolm was cordial but reserved.

So my respect for him as El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz was when he was willing to own up to his being wrong and change, he changed his name. That name change signifies to me willingness to grow in the way that I talk about in terms of liberal education. He read. He read voraciously, read very widely. He always had a briefcase with several books in it. And in that interview we did, at one point he forgot something about where something was in the constitution. Then he came back later on and gave the specific place. Well, while the camera

was not on him he reached under the chair, where he had a briefcase, pulled out a book, looked it up. He was always ready. So that's my hero: El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz. And interestingly enough, he and my mother are buried in the same section of the same cemetery. So when I go visit my mother and my grandmother, who are in the same grave, I can just step over a few yards and visit with El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz and Sister Betty. So there.

Thoughts on Oral History, Interviewing, and Transcription

Vanderscoff: Before we go further into this topic I'd like to ask a question about a thread that runs through it. As a sociologist, interviewing subjects has played a substantial role in your own life. And as we go through these sessions here I'd like to ask you, what do you think is the value or merit of the oral history interview as a way of engaging with personal or collective past?

Blake: Well, I had two thoughts about that. I think the oral history interview is extremely important. Extremely important. You say, "As a sociologist doing interviews." Well, I am a sociologist. I think my sociological training and whatever I know about psychology, which I think is not just rudimentary, but I can't say in a formal sense—I think they're all important. And as a graduate student I was involved in a couple of research projects of other faculty of the faculty, where I did interviews, primarily of black adolescents. Maybe that's where the sociology came in.

I found that the interview worked best if I could make them feel comfortable. And I don't know exactly what I did, but it was important for them to feel comfortable, feel that I wasn't being critical or judgmental, and that way

getting them to be open and candid and forthcoming. So I think the interview is important to make a person feel comfortable. I think the interview process, as *we're* doing it, is extremely valuable when you have an interviewer who has a wealth of data and information that the subject may not know, or may have forgotten. And I think that's good.

But I think the interview and oral history has to be informed by documentary history, because there's also the tendency, in my opinion, of the interviewee to create the past and the way they want it to be, or the way they think they remember it. And some times it isn't that way. Lots of time it isn't that way. So the oral history has its limits. You really have to get to the documentary history, in my opinion. But on the other hand, I think the documentary history is extremely limited, because it's limited to the perceptions of the interviewer or the historian. Take yourself as an example, and I urge you to think about it and reflect on it.

Vanderscoff: Mm-hmm.

Blake: How much did those questions you researched tell you? And how much more have you learned from stimulating me to go into the mind and the experience? If you went from those questions and the literature to try and write up what was going on, where would you go? Speaking of that—and I really want this transcript, because there's a lot here that I need—in addition to the

interviewer and the interviewee there's a transcriber.⁷¹ Let me give you a couple of anecdotes that will show you the value of understanding that.

Vanderscoff: Please.

Blake: Somewhere in the literature—you may have seen it—was an article about my confrontation with Eric Hoffer. I don't know if you read about that.

Vanderscoff: I don't know that I've seen that.

Blake: Oh, my goodness, I didn't know that. I just assumed you had it. I gave testimony in 1970 or so—no, it was 1968, because it was before Huey's trial—before the president's National Commission on the Causes and [Prevention of] Violence in Washington. President Nixon had appointed a high-level task force to do hearings and come to develop a report on the causes and consequences of violence in urban communities as a result of the outbursts we were seeing around the country. That commission was chaired by Milton Eisenhower, the brother of Dwight Eisenhower. So you've got the brother of Dwight Eisenhower appointed by Richard Nixon, a Republican president. That immediately gives the commissioner a lot of cachet. His vice chairman was a black jurist, a judge, Leon Higginbotham. It had on it several other distinguished citizens—not politicians but citizens—and included Eric Hoffer, the intellectual longshoreman, author of *The True Believer*. Eric Hoffer was seen as the intellectual longshoreman. European descent, origin, spoke with a very heavy accent. They wanted to interview Huey Newton. Well, Huey Newton wasn't available, couldn't be

⁷¹ In this case the transcriptionist is also the interviewer. It is worth noting that these are distinct roles, and having been the interviewer by no means makes transcription less of a representation of the audio or ensures immunity to errors of ear –Ed.

brought. He was in jail. He had not yet come to trial, but they weren't going to let him out to be interviewed.

So they asked me to come, and they were going to question me about conditions in urban communities. That was fine. They played a transcript of an interview somebody had done with Huey Newton. Before I was called to the stand I was sitting listening to this tape they were listening to. They had the transcript on the screen. The transcript was going on as the tape was. And these transcripts said something about, "We were going to do something," Huey was saying, "We're going to do this. And then the people will hate and they will begin to protest and have these outbursts." Well, I'm sitting there looking at this transcript going across the screen and I'm listening to Huey. Newton did not say "the people will hate," but that was on the transcript and it fit the perceptions of everybody about Newton. Newton said, "the people in Haight." He was talking about the Haight-Ashbury section of San Francisco.

Vanderscoff: Oh. Wow. (sighs)

Blake: The transcriber heard, "Will hate," and put it there. It fit everybody's perception, and here they were getting ready to walk away with an inadequate understanding of what Newton said. So when I was called to the witness stand the first thing I did was correct that transcript. Now I don't know if it ever got really corrected or anything like this. I know I put it on the record. So when we're talking about what we're doing here, you know—

Now in my work with Huey, I recorded him all the time. Newton had a lot of rhetoric. He was always talking, always talking. I had students who worked for me who did the transcription. One of the students was a white female.

Well, the other part of this—and I want to talk with you when we're finished—is what this does to the hearer. What are their emotions and how does that impact interpretation, understanding? Because this young lady, and I don't why—Huey would be talking about social change, social change, social change. And he said change—every time she typed 'change' it came up C-H-A-I-N-S. C-H-A-I-N-S. And as I reviewed the transcript, I said, "You know, there's something wrong here, okay? We need to get somebody else." Sabra Slaughter, whom you met the other day, was one of my assistants working with me on this. Because we did everything three times: I'd interview Huey. The person would transcribe. Sabra would review the transcription. Then I would review Sabra's review because I didn't want any mistakes anywhere. So we were constantly—so I said to Sabra, "It's not good. We need to find somebody else."

So he went, talked to some of the students, and hired a black student. Her name was Delois Burbie. And she came and she started. Huey talked about social change, she came out C-H-A-N-G-E. But in all of his rhetoric Huey would talk about omnipotent administrators—omnipotent administrators—talking about politicians. He kept calling them omnipotent administrators and Delois was constantly typing 'Methodist minister.' You can't win.

Vanderscoff: (laughs)

Blake: You can't win! You can't win! She didn't know anything about omnipotent administrators. That wasn't in her mind. She couldn't deal with the concept. So it came out 'Methodist minister.' I said to myself, we have to be more careful with checking. Go ahead.

Vanderscoff: (laughs) So do you think that that's one of the limits of oral history, that difference between the ear and what's said, and different experience in that way places some sort of boundaries as to what oral history can do in understanding an individual?

Blake: All history. All history. It all goes through the perceptions and the intellectual-emotional, or other constraints, of the interpreter. Whether it's documentary, or whether it's oral. That would be my argument. I played for you a transcript the other day. Now, if you had gone to that as a documentary historian, what would have gotten? Or what more did you get from hearing it, okay? I think you get more. And being able to hear and put the ear there, you get more eye, if I can use that interpretation. But otherwise you don't.

A classic example is a young lady Katherine Charron, who's written a biography of Septima Clark, *Freedom's Teacher*. Now Septima wrote two autobiographies that she told to other people. And if you ever knew Septima you would realize the two autobiographies that went through the minds of others, or the biography that she didn't speak to, are all inadequate. They are all inadequate because Septima had a modest sense of self. And there were many things that were important in her life that she didn't put down. Her father was a slave for Peter Manigault and she tells that story and lots of beautiful stuff. But there's a lot that's not there. And as you talk to her you realize that.

Katherine Charron, however, went to the documents, came here and spent time in Charleston and every place else. And in her book, *Freedom's Teacher*, she has a picture of Septima Clark standing with two or three students—one of them has a bicycle—at the UC Santa Cruz campus. We had Septima there for two one-

month periods. She spent a lot of time talking with students. And there's a beautiful picture of her talking with the students, a picture from the Avery Archives. There is *nowhere* in that book that says anything about Septima Clark ever being in Santa Cruz. You got a picture saying, "Here she is in Santa Cruz talking—" Nowhere in that book.

But yet and still she spent two, one-month periods there. She visited the headquarters of the Black Panther Party. She talked with Black Panther Party members at a time when Bobby Seale was running for political office, mayor of Oakland, a position he almost won. She went to the prison in Vacaville and did an incredible presentation to the inmates there that led to an incredible response, including a musical tribute instantaneously composed and sung by one of the inmates. All of that said. It's not in the book. You don't know it. But in that thing she did for those inmates, she gave me an incredible lesson about how you communicate and interact with people from another world. That's a story I'm going to write. But what I'm upset about is, it's not in the records. It's not there.

Now the other side of it is, while she was in Santa Cruz she did a handwritten essay which she gave me. And she entitled it, I think, "From Montgomery to Washington: The Civil Rights Decade." She talks about from 1958 basically to 1968, when King came to public notice and so forth and so on. Beautiful handwritten essay. I've got the only copy of this handwritten essay. Well, as I've looked around I've found there are other handwritten copies that she has done of that story. And apparently she did this in several other places. So it's not the only one in existence. I thought I had the only one. I'm a little bit upset that I don't. But the reality is that I don't have the whole story either and I

shouldn't pretend to. You have to sort that out yourself, in terms of— I think oral history is extremely important, and I'm glad that the university is doing these oral histories. But I think that unfortunately you can never recreate the past in the way the past was experienced. That's the bottom line.

Vanderscoff: Thank you for those reflections.

Reflections Huey Newton, and *Revolutionary Suicide*

Vanderscoff: Continuing with something that you were just discussing in regards to Huey Newton, you've written one book, *Revolutionary Suicide*, cowritten by and about Huey Newton. What about this particular individual struck you so, to invest your time in a book-length commitment?

Blake: Well, first of all Huey Newton was brilliant. I don't think he was given credit for that and I don't think he really manifested it. But he also was revolutionary, anti-establishment, and with an incredible desire to overthrow those who were hostile to and would imprison others for political reasons. But there are a lot of people like that. I can't say that I was particularly attracted to Huey for his qualities, that I would devote that much time to a book. I was attracted to Huey for his revolutionary actions. And I don't know, did I give you a copy of that tribute that I wrote to Alex Haley?

Vanderscoff: Yes, I've read that.

Blake: When I first met Huey he was in high school, or just finished high school, in Oakland. And he had this reputation for throwing hands, throwing hands. He could throw hands. He was just an angry fighter. He was a ghetto kid. And I, of

course, was always trying to get young people like that to turn their anger toward more positive goals and channel it, use that anger as a motivating force. I think that's what happened to me. That's why I get so passionate about people having opportunity and also passionate about them learning. So I didn't pay much attention to this kid. I really didn't. I was getting into my graduate work at Berkeley and I didn't pay much attention.

Well, it's a long story. And among other things, I met Eldridge Cleaver when he was in jail in Soledad State Prison and we had some interaction. He actually wrote me two or three letters, which I have somewhere in my files, one before he got out and two right after he got out. And when he got out, Eldridge Cleaver and a black poet who's still around the Bay Area, by the name of Marvin Jackmon—he goes now by Marvin X and a few other names, he and Eldridge established a place called the Black House in San Francisco—they were probably living there—where radicals or militants would gather for parties on Saturday evening, Friday evening. But the party was usually drinking some wine or something else, and having these intense debates about the white man and solving our problems. Oh, I mean the white man was everywhere in our minds—and in our presence, because there was a lot of oppression. A lot of it. A *lot* of it. So we would do these things. And here Huey started showing up with Bobby Seale.

Huey had a shotgun with bandoliers, you know, the shotgun shells across his chest. He actually looked like Emiliano Zapata, whom I was writing about for my doctoral dissertation. And Bobby Seale with this .45. Bobby always carried a .45 pistol on his hip. And they'd get involved in these discussions. Usually

Bobby was the stand-up comedian; he'd always be doing Stagger Lee or something like that, trying to put people in the dozens. But he was also more serious than I had seen him before, because they were talking about the police and confronting the police, and protecting the community. I thought they were absolutely crazy. I would have never done that. It was just not in my notion that I would use or pick up a weapon. But he did, and he was constantly confronting police in the community—not confronting them, but just going and standing and observing them.

And I got a good sense of the impact of this when I was at his murder trial, where I sat through the entire trial. At one point a police officer was on the stand, an Oakland police officer, who talked about how, when he was on patrol and he stopped somebody for something or other, Huey Newton came up with his shotgun and surrounded him. And [Newton's lawyer] Charles Garry said, "Are you saying that Huey Newton surrounded you? You're not saying others? Just Huey?" "Huey Newton surrounded me." So Garry made the police officer come off the stand and stand up, and he asked Huey to come stand next to the police officer. Huey came up to the guy's shoulder. And Charles Garry said, "Is it your testimony that Huey Newton surrounded you?" He said, "It is my testimony that Huey Newton surrounded me." Which is a—he discredits himself, right? Huey goes back to his seat and [the officer] goes back to the stand.

Here's my point: standing with a shotgun in the presence of police, in support of the African-American community was a revolutionary, death-defying act. I couldn't help but admire him, as did many of us. We might not follow him, but we admired him. And I think it was more than a small number of people

contributed to his work, or his program. So when it came that he had this confrontation with the police—and I didn't know anything about it in terms of what the truth was. He had this confrontation with the Oakland police, and he was wounded, arrested, and ultimately incarcerated.⁷² He was going to go to trial for first-degree murder.

Well, the question is, "How do you defend him?" Of course, there's money being raised for his defense and all of this, lawyers. And the first thing is, "We've got to have a black lawyer—black lawyers." And there're several black lawyers who were around. Weren't that many, but there were several. Problem was, they didn't have the resources and I'm not even sure they had the skill. But I can't say. They certainly didn't have the resources to mount an investigation and defense of Huey in a way that he needed. So they ended up with Charles Garry, a white lawyer, and his major partner, Faye Stender, white female, who was wonderful. And they were going to be his defenders.

But you knew from the buzz in the black community they wished he had a black lawyer. This is this way. And so you find yourself compelled as an African-American scholar to become a part of the defense team. And a colleague of mine, who was a graduate student at Berkeley and then went away and came back as a young assistant professor, Bob Blauner—Bob Blauner became part of the defense. It was his job to sit and observe potential jurors and pick up vibes from them as they were going through the voir dire process. Bob called me and said, "You know we really need somebody who's black to help us on the stand and so forth." And I willingly volunteered.

⁷² In reference to an October 28, 1967 confrontation in which Newton was pulled over by Oakland police officer John Frey. A shoot-out ensued, resulting in the wounding of Newton and a second policeman, and the death of John Frey.

The first thing they did was have me go and visit Huey Newton in prison, sitting there in his white denims. And we talked back and forth. I indicated I would be on the witness stand, if possible, as a analyst of the black community, not of the incidents, but of the larger context—contextualize, if you will, the defense theory of the crime. We went back and forth. And that's what I did. That's what I was interested in and that's what I was willing to do. He was not convicted of first-degree murder. Some people tell me my testimony was important in that regard, because the foreman of the jury was the only African American on the jury, who looked almost like a relative of Huey. They had very similar physical features. No connection, though. I don't know what he did. I can't say. I never met him. He was one of those. And they said my testimony was very valuable.

Well, Huey didn't get the gas chamber like he anticipated. He told me he was preparing for the gas chambers, mentally. Given the way in which Charles Garry practiced yoga and other relaxation skills to help prepare himself for trials and confrontation in the courtroom, I have no doubt that Huey was preparing himself to go the gas chamber. And he didn't get it.

Then when his brother called me and asked me if I would be one of the ten on his visiting list, as I reported in that article, I willingly accepted.⁷³ I just saw it as an extension of what I was doing already. I've constantly made myself available to the African-American community, or to the community, all the time, in many different ways. I've been exploited. I've been used. I've been humbled. But I've also had some triumphs.

⁷³ "Article" in reference to Dr. Blake's account of these meetings, "The Caged Panther: The Prison Years of Huey Newton," *Journal of African American Studies*, 2011, DOI 10.007/s12111-011-9190-1

So it was not only Huey that attracted me, it was his actions at the time in that setting—that revolutionary thing. And not only did I write *Revolutionary Suicide*, I wrote most of the articles in that small anthology *To Die For the People*. Huey had great ideas but he didn't articulate them well. He wasn't a writer. I was the writer.

Vanderscoff: One last question on this topic. You've written in [the Caged Panther] article that Huey Newton developed the idea of revolutionary suicide in conversation with you. Did you then, and do you now, think it is a useful or empowering idea for enacting social change?

Blake: I don't know. I'd have to think about that a lot more. I have mixed emotions. And a part of the mixed emotions is the way in which it was developed. Huey was one who liked to play with ideas. I don't mean that in a superficial way. He just liked to work with ideas and words, liked to stand on the corner and rap with the brothers, drinking red wine out of paper cups, you know? Allegory of the cave, this, that and the other. He knew Durkheim, the sociologist, that much. And when he developed the idea, the concept, it was another one of those ideas in a string of ideas. Somebody had given him the article that appeared in *Ebony* on black suicide. I forget who wrote it, but the name was a familiar name among writers. And he read it and he was very troubled about it. And his whole thing was, people get depressed and they take their lives. But when you get depressed, you need to take the life of the person who caused the depression. You got to move against the system.

And he always used the example: they were in jail talking amongst inmates and a guy was saying he was in a police car and they were taking him

across the Golden Gate Bridge. And he thought about forcing the guy to stop, and going and jumping off of the bridge and killing himself. He always said, "You don't do that. If you're going to stop the car and get out, you take that guy with you. And you may jump over there, but that guy has to understand his imprisoning you and oppressing means he's taking *his* life in his hands because you are suicidal. But you're going to take him."

So he played around with these ideas of society and the pressures and where the pressures come from, and the different kinds of suicide. And he went through Durkheim's categorization of suicide and indicated that one that they called altruistic suicide, if you take it further you would lead to not just killing yourself because of your commitment to the emperor, which is what the kamikaze pilots did, but your commitment to freedom means that you will go against the system, even though that may mean you die. But you go against the system.

The way Huey crafted it, a good example of revolutionary suicide would have been this rogue police [Christopher Dorner] in southern California. He felt he was wronged, right? He's going to get justice or revenge however you peg it. He knows he's going to go down, but he's going to take three, four, five of them with him. What are they doing now? They're reinvestigating the whole process by which he was dismissed. They're not just saying he was crazy, he was wrong. They're saying, "Maybe *we* were wrong."

Now I'm not trying to justify it in any way. What I'm saying is that is the way that might be interpreted. Do I see it as empowering? Not necessarily...not necessarily. I think it is tremendously enlightening. And in many respects the

whole range of actions of Martin Luther King and those millions who marched against segregation and racism, promoting nonviolence, was revolutionary. And they did so at risk of life. Many of them died. I'd see that as revolutionary suicide. But they didn't try to take life. Now I don't know how Huey would work with that, okay? I'd not even thought about it until you raised the question, but it's one I'll be reflecting on. I don't particularly like the idea of—I'm just thinking this through. I'm really just working these ideas through.

Vanderscoff: Yes.

Blake: I don't particularly like the idea of revolutionary suicide because (coughs) because I've become totally committed, totally committed to the concept of nonviolence. So if revolutionary suicide implies you engage in violence against another I'd have to not buy it. I can't. I'm just thinking this through. You asked me if it's an empowering idea? It depends on the reader, the hearer. They're going to bring to it what they've experienced. I could easily see people saying, "This is what I'm going to do. I'm going to kill and be killed." I don't say that. You resist, you oppose. And if you're killed, you don't take life. (pause)

An Ongoing Education in the Sea Islands

Vanderscoff: At this point I'd like to talk about a huge area for you that has come up several times in this discussion—I'd like to go in a little more detail now—the Sea Islands and the culture of the Sea Islands. You have been visiting and studying the Sea Islands since '67, and you now live on Johns Island, not that far from where we do these interviews. I'd like to ask a broad question with a broad framework and invite you to reflect on it. As a child of the city, as an

academic, and now as a resident, what have you learned from spending so much time in the Sea Islands?

Blake: That's a good question. And I'm glad you asked it, because I'm working on that idea right now. First of all, I don't agree with you, that I've "been visiting." I can understand that perception, because I really never made my first trip to South Carolina until 1967. By then I was an acting assistant professor at Santa Cruz. So I was an adult. But on the other hand, the Sea Islands had been visiting me in terms of all of these relatives who were here: Cousin Queenie, Cousin Louisa, Aunt Rebecca, all of them—Aunt Lydia—had come to New York. I knew them from that context, particularly my Aunt Rebecca, the one whose home we visited there with Alan [on Johns Island]. She was an important force in my life as a child in many ways. So I think you're right, in the sense that I'm visiting, in the sense it's new, in terms of my engagement here.

But I would say one of the first things I would articulate is I began to become more immersed in a culture that I knew intuitively, but I didn't know in a larger context. I remember the first time, one of my early visits, before I started doing the study, I was at my Aunt Lydia's house. We went by Aunt Lydia's house the other day when we drove.

Vanderscoff: Yes, I remember.

Blake: I was going to stay overnight. And my Uncle Ed came over. Now my Uncle Ed is Joe's father.⁷⁴ So I was sitting there in the living room kitchen, and we

⁷⁴ Joe is Herman's cousin. I met him at a church service with Herman the previous Sunday on Johns Island, and he was gracious enough to greet me after the service, make me feel welcome, and show me around the church. —Ed.

really rarely sat in the living room. If you went to my cousin Joe's house you wouldn't go in the living room. I always wondered what the living room was like. And one day I went out of the family room and into the beautiful living room. But it's not for living. It's for exhibiting. (laughter)

So I'm in Lydia's kitchen, whatever, and the bedroom's right off the kitchen, you know. And my Uncle Ed comes in the back door. I said, "What are you doing here?" "I wited here, I wited here. And I said, "Who you witing? Who you witing?" I'm talking Gullah. He's saying he was invited here. And I immediately picked it up and responded, "Who you witing?" In other words, who invited you? It took no time at all to begin to fall into that pattern.

But let me go back to the point of what did I learn and what have I gained out of it. We'd be talking all day and all night—and I'm writing a book on it. But let me just reflect on the family. I showed you that picture of that slave family. That is an incredible picture and the documentarians say that repeatedly. It's used very frequently in the literature. Because slaves were separated. Slaves here were separated. I could have played you the tape of a woman talking about how her family was separated. Her daddy was sold three times. I interviewed her right there on Johns Island. Never forget it. Miss Phoebe, she said her name was. But nobody could say Phoebe, so they called her Sippie. So I called her Miss Sippie. And it's always interesting because I told the story a couple of times, and then people kept, "Tell me about Mississippi." And I'd get very upset because I think I'm clear in what I say, but I want people to *hear*. I can't take responsibility for what they perceive but it just painfully reminds me of the challenge of

meaningful communication. I'm not saying they were wrong, I'm wrong—all I'm saying is the challenges of meaningful communication.

I remember Miss Sippie telling me—my cousin was there, Solomon, who's now dead; my uncle had brought me, Uncle Herb—she was one hundred and seven. And she told me her daddy sell. "He sells three time," she said. "He sells three times. And every time you sell you got to change the trimmings." That is your name. You got a new owner now. You change the trimmings. She told me about how he was branded using the seals that they put on the cotton bales to identify the plantation where the bales came from. They would heat those to a very high heat and brand them on his leg or his arm. My cousin in the background, Solomon, saying "Brand?" She said, "Brand," and how she, as a child, would play by tracing her finger through the brands he had. She went on and on about this.

One part of the family was Brown, one part was Washington, and I forgot the third. But three different names. And she went on and talked about how they worked hard to find each other. There might have been different mothers, but that was still they daddy. Still they daddy. And so, "After peace declare," as she put it, they found each other. And they talked about how, she talks—and I can play this for you, you can hear—how they worked hard to identify each other. Because some would be much older than the younger ones, but they wanted to make sure they had the same family. They said, "When we gather—" She didn't use that term, but essentially she's talking about congregating. And she said, "We bind and cry. We bind and cry." We hug and cry.

And I've noticed in some of my family—not all—they don't use the term 'stepbrothers,' 'stepsisters.' They're all family. They're all family. And my brother would say, when he'd introduce me at church, "We had the same daddy. We had different mothers, but we had the same daddy." Now you hear this sometimes on the radio in black communities, where they say, "He's a brother from another mother." They're usually talking about whites who are part of the community, "A brother from another mother." But the concept of family, which transcends bloodlines, if you will, transcends. If you were to hear Emory Campbell [of Gullah Heritage Consulting Services] do his tours, he says, "Gullah people give their children away. Where there's a need, that's where they send their child. Or others will take the child." It's not giving away; it's sharing.

I saw that happen more than one time on Daufuskie Island, where children and families— Little Earl, people came bringing little Earl to the island because Little Earl's momma had to go the hospital. Little Earl gets out of the boat. They run him up to a family, run back to the boat, gone. You go the next day over, you can't figure out who's who. Little Earl's a part of them just like everybody else. That happened to me as a child. You read that piece "Lilacs," you see that.⁷⁵ I never understood, but in my opinion that's a Gullah phenomenon of the extended family, the fictive family as community.

Now what I am watching—and I will only make brief mention to this now—what I am watching is a community where among the elders there was considerable conflict. And among the younger people, who come from these different couplings, they're working to transcend and transform their

⁷⁵ "Lilacs" being the piece Herman wrote about his mother, referenced earlier in these footnotes.

relationship into a positive thing in terms of that history and culture. What I'm trying to do is articulate and write about the values that lead to that pattern. And that's what I'm finding. I'm finding—and it's well known and it's still found in various places—a community-based conflict resolution process. Community-based, called the just law. You've heard of it.

Vanderscoff: I've seen a little bit of the stuff that you've written on that.

Blake: Well, some of the older people still talk about the just law. As I look at some of these younger people, what they're trying to do is use the just law to figure out how they deal with each other. Still, in some of these communities—and it's not something people talk about—when Christmas time comes, they engage in this practice of 'making Christmas,' going house to house. They don't miss a house. It becomes a conflict resolution, peace-promoting kind of practice. Well, I thought it had died out to a great degree. And not too long ago, about three months ago, I was sitting in the home of middle-class family on Hilton Head. And the woman in the home began to talk about how the women make house visits and still go to one another's house in support and encouragement. They do that. The benevolent societies.

What I'm learning and seeing, at a very profound level, are ways in which people build community, resolve conflicts and differences, and build relationships and empower themselves, that don't fit our traditional notions of society, justice, organization, or patterns of interaction. It's not easy to articulate or express, but it's very, very real. You see it—when we went to my cousin's house after church. And here my cousin was there, May. They look after Alan. Alan doesn't cook. They look after Alan. Now she lives what would be about two

blocks away. And then Joe lives right next door. But Alan's taken care of. Now when he goes totally into dementia, he ain't going into no nursing home. No way. They'll take care of him, as he took care of Uncle—oh, can't think of his name now—but he talks about it. They'll take care of him. That is, that is—it's hard to put in words. You just do it.

So I'm looking at and seeing and sensing deeply rooted values that have been obscured by these superficial treatments of Gullah culture. They are definitely rooted in the church. There's a documentary being done that's going to show on the 28th of February initially, but it's going to eventually be across the country, called *Homegoings*. I think I sent you the link this morning. It's done by Christine Turner, who is the daughter of Kathy Turner. Kathy Turner was one of my freshman students at Santa Cruz. She was Kathy Owyang, Chinese-American. She married a black guy, Charles Turner. Their daughter, Christine, has become a filmmaker. She's doing a film on funerals and going home and family, because at the age of fourteen or so she had to go to two different funerals, one of her mother's mother, and one of her father's mother. And they were vastly different. So she's doing the thing about funerals and homegoing in the African-American community. She's doing it through a mortician in New York who got his start here in South Carolina, and who in talking about this says, "This is not about the city or the urban. This about the cotton field." He's talking about rural roots, rural roots.

Memory and these involvements are unbelievable. You talked about it yesterday. You talked about it with that lake with your name, your mother's

name.⁷⁶ That's more than a lake. That's more than a piece of property. That's a heritage and a legacy that doesn't fit the two-dimensional space of the written page. Now what it is, I don't know. You asked me about Gullah culture. I can tell you about it. But more importantly I can have you experience it, as you got just a little tad on Sunday. And the people made you feel good, because you made them feel good—because you celebrated.⁷⁷ Sorry.

Vanderscoff: (audibly moved) Thank you. So what we've just been discussing has been you engaging in the Sea Islands with the traditional, and understanding traditions and how they change, and how they get submerged, and how they return. And what we were discussing just a little earlier with the Black Panthers engaging with the revolutionary—what, if anything, bridges the traditional and the revolutionary in your interest, or in your conception of that?

Blake: Well, I would argue that it's in the concept of the people. And I mean the people at the most fundamental level. Now I have problems with the Black Panthers, and some of Huey Newton's actions, beliefs and all of that. But still the notion that there amongst the grassroots is a quality of wisdom, quality of insight, and understanding. One of the anthologies that I pretty much wrote for Huey is called *To Die For the People*. He kept that concept there. At one point he took the title 'Servant.' He took 'Servant' because it comes from the scripture: "He who is greatest among you, let him your servant be." And he was arguing he was going

⁷⁶ Dr. Blake and I spent time well passed discussing our families both in terms of people and in terms of places and roots. The lake referenced is Henjum Lake, in Arctander Township, Minnesota, where my maternal grandfather, Stanley Clifford Henjum I, was raised on a farm that's still in the family.

⁷⁷ In reference to the church service at St. Mary's AME on Johns Island, where I had the privilege of being welcomed to attend service and meet Herman's relatives and other people from the community.

to be the most humble, because that's the way you'd be a servant. As soon as he took the title 'Servant' he also started carrying a swagger stick.

But my point is, he recognized, and I thought he saw, the value in, as they say around here, "the least of these." That's a statement, a phrase you'll hear from a lot of the people in Gullah culture: caring for "the least of these." That was very, very important. When I was growing up, one of the skills that I had that was very valued in the community, particularly amongst people from the Sea Islands, was I could write. My Aunt Rebecca would write letters to my daddy or others, but she would never address an envelope. I'd be often called into people's homes, "Back this envelope, back this envelope," meaning, "address this envelope," so it could be read. My father would do the same thing, "Back this envelope!" But there was communication and interaction and you had a role.

But that's where I think about the bridging, when I think about it. When Newton started confronting police in defense of relatively unlettered, unlearned people in the community who were being stopped, that was very important. We're seeing people now who confess to things because they were manipulated by police and investigators. That's exploitation, oppression, and it's down here all over the place. If you learn how to listen, you'll hear it. I even think it's in a place like this, at the university, where there's no intention, no intention whatsoever, as far as I can tell, but there are the unintended consequences that come sometimes from sincere actions. That's the part that I'm trying to articulate: the unintended consequences of sincere actions. So my cousins won't walk in

here. Or when they put clinics in the community people wouldn't come to the clinics, because they had fears.

Those young people in Daufuskie came and brought testimony before the Gullah Geechee Commission a week ago today. I set it up and organized it. And Ervin Simmons, a graduate of Oakes College, came, did a wonderful job, and then got sick for four days. There's something else going on there that I don't understand. That's what I'm trying to learn and know.

And the others who were there just said, you know—it's incredible the reaction and the response I've gotten. Read Ervin's tribute in that website, because what he says is he was color conscious, and he grew.⁷⁸ I think he says in there when he came to Santa Cruz he didn't know things. He didn't know people didn't eat rice every day. And he began to relate to Frank Smith, as well as John Rickford and Don Rothman, Ed Dirks—something else.⁷⁹ But in the process, Ervin is writing about things he'd picked up from his grandparents and great-grandparents that he never knew he knew. My only problem is he's writing it and giving it to me, and I have over five hundred pages of text that he's written me in emails. He doesn't think it's worthy of publication or any consideration. He's given it to me, but not for me to have, but for me to save for him. I can't use that as my material, or in any way. But I've got to try and get him to the point where he can articulate it. I don't know if I will.

But the record is there. And when you see it, it's extraordinary. His Grandfather Jake could neither read nor write—could neither read nor write. But

⁷⁸ In reference to the online event page for Dr. Blake's April 2013 tribute dinner at UCSC, which included space for people to express their tributes and memories.

⁷⁹ Ed Dirks was a UCSC professor and administrator. Frank Smith and John Rickford were students, and Don Rothman, as has been mentioned before, was a writing lecturer.

his Grandfather Jake made sure his grandchildren never missed a day of school. *Never missed* a day of school. And when the electricity went out, as it frequently did in the island, because they only got electricity in the 1950s, 1956 or so, when the electricity went out you had kerosene lamps and you studied. You did your lesson. Now here's a man who can't read or write. There are others. Go ahead.

Collaboration with Dr. Emily Moore

Vanderscoff: I'd like to move forward and discuss some of the writing that you've done in recent decades on retention strategies, on things like co-curricular programs. I noticed that you published some of this work in collaboration with your wife, Dr. Emily Moore. Would you mind discussing the nature of your shared interests, how her perspectives have informed yours, what this work has been about?

Blake: Well, her perspective is extremely valuable. First of all, she's had different experiences from mine. She is an only child of a mother who was very sickly. My wife was one of twins. And when her mother got married, the doctor said, "You can't have children," and urged her, apparently, not to get pregnant. But she did. And she had twins. But only one survived. That was the only pregnancy and that's my wife. She is a child of that kind of a situation. And her mother died many years ago of ovarian cancer. Well, I think that whole knowledge and experience—growing up and seeing your mother constantly in this kind of a situation—and that was a time when children couldn't go in the hospital. They would take her to the parking lot and she could wave at her mother up in the hospital. I think this created a dynamic that I don't know how to describe. I mean,

you saw it when you came to the house. She prepared more food for you than she does for anybody.

Vanderscoff: It was wonderful.

Blake: And she does that with guests. That's a part of the problem of having guests. She can't have a guest in the house and not do what she did. But she can't do what she did and do her work. So it becomes a conflict. But she cares for people and that care is articulated in that way. So she brings the perspective, if you will, of what I will use—the concept of the hurt child. I'm not saying that's what she says. I'm saying she is an individual who throughout her life has had to deal with the concept of pain and illness as she saw in her mother. And that's what I mean by the hurt child.

But that's a sensitivity that simply—that's indescribable. That's why she's such a popular administrator around here. She has become the mentor of people completely across this campus. Not by desire, but by them seeking her out as the word gets around. It's incredible. People are writing to her saying, "Emily, my dear friend." So she brings a quality of intuitive and sensitive understanding of the human experience that I think informs our work.

Secondly, she's an excellent teacher. Thirdly, she has a different approach in the classroom than I do. She is much more traditional, formal, than I am. And I think it helps give a structure that sometimes I need, don't want, won't have. But perhaps the most important thing was when I was doing a course on black women and she happened to come to one of my lectures where I was reading some of the text of, I think, some of my interviews, I'm not sure. She said, "That doesn't sound right coming out of your mouth. It just doesn't sound right." I

didn't understand that. "I'm an academic. I'm an intellectual. I can present this." She said, "It doesn't sound right." So she voluntarily started teaching with me, even though she got no credit for it. It's an overload and all of that. But it began to have a positive impact on my understanding and on my teaching. And that one thing led to another in terms of continued work and involvement with ideas and sorting out of ideas. It's very important.

Vanderscoff: And so, what sort of pieces have you worked on together? What sort of issues have you found common ground on?

Blake: Oh, we've got a lot going on. We've got a lot going on. We're working on a piece right now that I worked on this weekend, and I'll work on again tonight, on inherent philanthropy in the work of black faculty. It's for a volume on philanthropy as a voluntary action for the public good, a notion developed by the wonderful scholar, Robert Payton, who founded the institute for the study of philanthropy at Indiana University. But we're working on that piece. It's pretty much finished. We got to do some footnotes and stuff.

We've done things on student engagement and retention. We're working on a piece on diversity as value, in which we go beyond the rhetoric and the formalization of the concept of diversity and look at it as an issue of values. I take a much different approach to values than others do. It's an approach I learned from anthropologists and sociologists—Robin Williams' wonderful piece on American values that still resonates even though it must be fifty years old—looking at them as underlying statements of the criteria upon which one makes decisions. It's hard to articulate, but it's very, very important for the broader and, I think, deeper understandings—the liberal education, if you will. So we're

working on a piece in which we look at the idea of diversity as an idea, but actually tied to a whole set of value frames of reference. I'm still not sure what it's going to lead to, but we're working on it.

Storytelling as a Way of Teaching and Connecting

Vanderscoff: At this point I'd like to quote Don Rothman. Don pointed out in conversation with you last spring in the Humanities Lecture Hall at UCSC that, "Your way of teaching is so deeply embedded in storytelling."⁸⁰ Using that as a starting point, I'd like to ask you, what do you think the relationship of storytelling is to academic work and to academic writing?

Blake: Well, academic work and academic writing covers a wide range of disciplines and topics. But I think the narrative is an important underlying frame of reference that provides justification for a lot of things.

When I first came to the Medical University, I started going to grand rounds. I remember early on one of those grand rounds I went to, I heard Bruce Usher, who's been here for a long time, a cardiologist, a very distinguished faculty member. Since then I've had some email communication with him. He really doesn't know me. But recently I was on the elevator with him over at the new hospital going up. I started talking with him. And it suddenly struck him that I knew his work, but he didn't even know who I was. (laughs) That was a nice feeling.

⁸⁰ In reference to "Rediscover: J. Herman Blake and Donald Rothman," a keynote event at the 2012 alumni weekend. The talk was video recorded and is a wonderful companion to this oral history.

But he gave a paper on artificial heart valves. It was a presentation on "Artificial Heart Valves: A Thirty-Four Year Perspective." When I read the title I figured, "Well, a thirty-four year perspective. That's history. That's humanities. Let me go see what he's got to say." And what he did was he traced the way in which they developed these artificial heart valves based on bovine tissues and tissues from other kinds of animals and so forth and so on, to contemporary times. A beautiful thing. Well, he shaped it in terms of narratives. He kept telling stories about how this led to this one saved and that one saved and so forth. I find, so often the physicians or other health educators, in trying to drive home the points they're trying to make in terms of student learning, they use the narrative to make that point. Kimberly Ephgrave, who is now dead, from Santa Cruz—I'll have to give you that piece she wrote, in which she said, basically, "Storytelling is a way of thinking. And physicians *think* through narratives they tell."

So storytelling, for me, is a way of undergirding the point. If you will, it's the elongated data set. Rather than give you fifty whatever, units, to support my point—you've fifty people, fifty this, or a hundred people, a hundred this—I'll give you three stories, which I hope are more powerful and more persuasive, but fit that larger data set. I find storytelling to be an important way of connecting, really connecting. Don Rothman taught me that in so many ways. When I was out there last spring, he started telling me about Lawrence Weschler's writing. You know about him?

Vanderscoff: I've heard the name, and I don't know why.

Blake: He's a UCSC graduate and became I guess a Pulitzer Prize or major writer for *The New Yorker*. He wrote for *The New Yorker* and still is writing. But he'd written this piece called "Vermeer in Bosnia." The Dutch painter. And Don told me about it in terms of what Lawrence Weschler learned from judges trying these people, leaders, politicians, who engaged essentially in ethnic cleansing. Killed people. Not only that, did some of the most unspeakable torturing you'd ever seen, where one man was required to emasculate another man. Made him do it with his teeth. Yeah. And so he said to the judge, Weschler said to the judge, "How do you maintain your sanity? How do you maintain your sanity when you're dealing with people like this?" The judge took him across the street from the courthouse to a museum where they had these paintings by Vermeer. The judge found peace in those paintings. When you study Vermeer's life, you realize he dealt with a lot of pain, agony, and tragedy in his life, and out of that came these incredible peaceful paintings.

So recently, just a few weeks ago—it was after Thanksgiving, some time in the month of December—I was in a workshop with about ten or twelve doctors. And they were talking, some of our top educators. Part of the challenge of being a medical educator and being in a setting like this—in a hospital, you deal with pain and dying. It's hard to do that. You become emotionally engaged, even though you're trying not to be. You have to build up defenses because you've got so many of these cases. And when you're a pediatrician, as some of the people I'm working with, you've got to deal with this for children. Which is super painful. So I'm sitting there listening to them talk. They were having this very wonderful conversation, sincere conversation. And I went and got the essay and

shared it with some of them: "Vermeer in Bosnia." So here's Don Rothman informing my work. That's a story. And I do it all the time. I don't know, it's not something I'm conscious of. It's not something I think about. But if you think about it in terms of religion and all this other stuff, it came with the parable. It's there all the time. It's there all the time.

I think we all do it. I think we're all storytellers in one way or another, whether we do opera—I'll never forget being in Vienna the first time. And this is in the seventies. They were going to do a Beethoven piece in the Vienna Opera House. They hadn't done any for a long time because of the hostile sentiments of WWII and Germany and Hitler, because right there in front of the opera house in Vienna, Hitler used to come and address rallies. I'll never forget Alfred Spring, who was a guy who sat and talked with me and the others about this, sitting in the Sacher Hotel in Sacher Square. He talked about how he used to go as a child, a young adolescent, and hear Hitler's speeches. I'm trying to fit that together.

They were going to do a performance with Beethoven's opera, *Fidelio*, for the first time. It was going to be the opera and the orchestra, and I went. People come elegantly dressed. I was not elegantly dressed, because I was there for other reasons and didn't bring a tuxedo or any of that sort of business. Didn't matter. But it was just a perfectly beautiful night. Beautiful setting. And here comes this incredible opera performance of *Fidelio* by Beethoven. And what is *Fidelio* about? It's about freedom. I came away from there and went back to Santa Cruz to my teaching, and I thought I did a better job of teaching because of that connection. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know how to answer your

question about storytelling, because the answer is apparent in the experience. So you have the experience.

But I know a lot of people criticize it. I used to get criticism by students who said they didn't want a story. They just wanted the facts. Well, the facts are human dynamics in the human context. I'm sorry, go ahead.

Vanderscoff: Mm. Actually at this point—

(Recorder switched off for brief conference about remaining questions; record resumes within the minute)

Vanderscoff: So you just mentioned that some students asked for, instead of a story, the facts. I'd like to reappropriate another question that Don asked you about this narrative style of teaching that I think speaks directly to how you just closed out your last answer. Don asked you to reflect on the pros and cons of this style. I would now like to ask you, do you think there are limits to the storytelling mode of teaching? Have you found them?

Blake: Well, I think there are limits to everything, even though I think everything is limitless. No, I think there are limits to the storytelling mode. There may be data or information or material that's not appropriate to that setting. I don't know. That's not where I live in terms of academia. But I suspect there are, certainly. I think that's a part of it. People wonder, "What's the point? What's the point?" Well, you know, one of the parts of the point is the process. It's not just the end. It's the journey. I enjoy the journey as well as the end. So I don't know.

Vanderscoff: Is there anything else you would like to say on what we've been discussing before we turn the record off for the moment?

Blake: No. I think I'm all right.

The Oakes Legacy: Nationally, Locally, and Personally

Vanderscoff: Today remains Friday, February 15th, 2013. Cameron Vanderscoff here for the Regional History Project with Dr. J. Herman Blake for part ten of his oral history project. I'd like to go into a retrospective and a prospective section. And as we start moving towards a conclusion, I'd like to return to Oakes. Do you think Oakes has had an influence in the UC system as a whole, or more broadly in academia?

Blake: I would like to think so. I think more broadly in academia, definitely so. Oakes, as a college on a campus of the University of California, which in the general sense is well regarded as a high-level research university, a high-status university, gave me, if you will, a platform to speak to issues and ideas that were far beyond the college. And I became involved in national efforts where what we did in Oakes informed that discussion. One of those is the report we did for the Department of Education, about 1983, called "Involvement in Learning," which then got distributed around the country. Over 200,000 copies on college campuses. Many campuses said they used the report as a basis for revising their undergraduate curriculum. I spoke on college campuses from as far north as South Dakota, to as far south as, I guess, Puerto Rico, as far east as Keene, New Hampshire, and as far west as Guam, talking about undergraduate education

and the experiences we had. Now this is not about Oakes, but Oakes became my springboard. And that was a national picture.

You still will find people who will say that has impressed them and it guided them. For example, the president of Georgetown University speaks eloquently about my work and what I did and how it impressed him, and how it guides his presidency. Last year I met his vice president. I just said, "I'm Herman Blake." And she went, "Herman Blake! You're Herman Blake?" And she went on. That's at the national level.

I was then asked to chair a task force for the mayor of Washington, D.C., looking at postsecondary education in the District of Columbia. And we wrote a similar kind of report called "The Urgent Challenge of Higher Education," which was distributed and utilized by postsecondary institutions throughout the Washington, D.C. area. So those national platforms became very important.

There were people who said our experience at Oakes was an inspiration to them and what they did. One of those major examples is Freeman Hrabowski, president of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, who was starting his program at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County when he was an assistant professor of math. He and I had long conversations set up by a common acquaintance, [Adam Yarmalinksy]. But I was able to help Freeman, who's African American, from Mobile, Alabama, with that Polish name—which came out of slavery—which he's proud of, and he holds on to. People say, "Why don't you name yourself—keep a Polish slave owner's name?" He says, "My first name is Freeman." And it is. But anyhow, he's a wonderful guy, wonderful guy. And they've got one of the best programs in the country. Here at MUSC we try to get

him to send all of his graduates here. (laughs) He doesn't. But they've given him an honorary degree. And Freeman will tell you in a minute, I mentored him. But I got to that role only because of that mutual link with Adam Yarmalinksy.

I've had that impact on I don't know how many others. I've seen people who've done doctoral dissertations based on my work or on the "Involvement in Learning" report. So, in that sense it has expanded. I think it's expanded in the University of California system, in that in many respects, many of the values and perspectives we helped to develop I think inform the work of George Blumenthal, who is the chancellor [at UCSC] now, but came as one of the original faculty at Oakes and helped to shape Oakes and taught in the core course program at Oakes. And led, in many respects, in Oakes. That began his pattern of the larger picture. Always, always sensitive—always sensitive to those students who came from these diverse backgrounds. Incredible man. And not only sensitive to that, visits Daufuskie Island. He'll tell you in a minute he learned some things that he still remembers. Nobody but those coming from Daufuskie or a real rural area would even know or understand. But anyhow, so I think it has impacted. I could go on and on and on and on with example after example. Victor Rocha leaving Oakes with gestalt and going on to Cal State San Marcos. Others, yeah.

Vanderscoff: How would you characterize the Oakes mission relative to the original UCSC mission? Was it an extension, or was it a divergence?

Blake: I think it was an extension; that is to say, first-rate undergraduate education, as Clark Kerr wanted to see—an institution that remained small while growing large. It definitely fit the mission. We never diverged from that mission of education, liberal education, undergraduate education. Where we began to

enrich—not diverge, *enrich*—was bring into the mix a population that had not been a part of it, had not been, in my opinion, considered. People were aware of that population, but had not considered it. And that was an important part of that mix.

Vanderscoff: In the '81 Oakes Commencement Address, you say that when you and your peers founded Oakes [in '72] you all had, quote, "dreams—but we had many more doubts than dreams." Now, forty years later, Oakes and its mission still endure and are still a presence. You visited Oakes last spring. What became of those doubts and those dreams? When you stand witness to Oakes now, what do you see, what do you feel?

Blake: Well those dreams are more than fulfilled. Far beyond anything I ever expected—far beyond anything I ever expected. Dreams fulfilled. We used to say to the students, "When you get to the table think about who's not there." And they developed these kinds of interests for gay students, which I think was an important development; more attention given to women; more attention given to students with disabilities. Not 'disabled students,' but students with disabilities. A constantly inclusive environment, which I think spills over to the campus, by virtue of its continued enrollment of people from diverse backgrounds as a result of the changing demography. So I'd say those dreams have been fulfilled and more than fulfilled. That emphasis on undergraduate education and excellence, *excellence* in undergraduate education, is an important part of being able to sustain the Santa Cruz mission. We didn't ask people to drop your high expectations. We raised them, but we broadened them. So that's an important part.

The doubts have subsided considerably, but never left. They're still there. Never left. But when I went through Santa Cruz and had so many experiences there last spring, my only regret was I could not actively share it with Ralph Guzman or Ed Dirks or some of others who are no longer with us. Or Peter Nemes, who had a serious accident and brain injury. They were a part of making that. I'm sure there were many who thought it would never work and just walked away in disappointment. The rejoicing in the triumph is absolutely joyous. But the doubts are still there, because many of those doubts were more than doubts regarding a system or an institution. They were personal, profoundly personal.

Current Work in the Medical Humanities

Vanderscoff: I'd like to talk about some of the things that occupy you now and your time, some of your current focuses. You're now the inaugural Humanities Scholar-in-Residence at the Medical University of South Carolina. You recently co-wrote an article discussing the ethical and legal ramifications of the rise of 'telemedicine.'⁸¹ It was published in *Patient Perspectives in Pulmonary Surgery*. How did you come to enter the medical world?

Blake: Well, I don't know if I'm in the—well yes, I would say I'm in the medical world. I'm in the middle of it. I would say I'm on the periphery, but in fact I'm not. I'm the middle of it. I was invited. It seemed almost destined. While I was still at Oakes in the late seventies, the Medical University, which had a history of

⁸¹ The essay in question is J. Herman Blake, Mary Kay Schwemmer, Robert M. Sade, authors, "The Patient-Surgeon Relationship in the Cyber Era: Communication and Information." *Thorac Surg Clin.* Nov 2012; 22(4): 531-538.

segregation and racism—in 1969 there was a huge strike against the hospital here, the blacks particularly. Those sentiments still exist and some antagonisms. Santa Cruz students who were in the Extramural Program in Beaufort County from time to time came to Charleston and marched in the demonstrations. And they would stay at Septima Clark's home. So you got that kind of a circulation, in terms of completing the circle.

But in the late seventies—I think it was about '75, '76—the people here at the university had started a free clinic on Johns Island. While some people came to the clinic, by and large the black community ignored it. Didn't go, didn't go. So I guess somebody here at MUSC decided we needed to talk to the people on Johns Island and see what we can do to resolve this. So people said, "Okay, let's talk with them. Let's talk with them *on* Johns Island. Not just *about* Johns Island, talk with them on Johns Island." So they organized, apparently, a one-day conference to discuss the relationship between the Medical University and the Johns Island community, around people bypassing, ignoring, this clinic. Apparently the planning group involved people from Johns Island. And one of them, Bill Jenkins, the son of Esau Jenkins, suggested they invite this guy from California who had been doing research in the community. "That guy" being me.

So I was called and invited to come to South Carolina to speak at Johns Island High School—not the structure that's there now, but the older structure that's been dismantled—about issues related to this. Now, I didn't know anything about the medical field. I knew community. So I went through my material that I'd been gathering and I pulled out examples and quotes that people had given me about their views. We had a similar situation on Daufuskie

Island where people didn't want to go the doctor. They always say, "Doctor can't do me no good, doctor can't do me no good. I got problems that are beyond medical treatment." And they go into the more traditional ways of seeing, dealing with hostility, angry, using roots and root doctors. But they say, "Doctor can't do me no good." So I wrote a paper with that title and came here and delivered it at the beginning of this conference.

Now you got to understand, I came, delivered the paper, and left. I didn't stay around. I was not a part of the conference. I don't know who was there. I don't know what happened. I knew Bill Jenkins was a part of the planning committee. Bill Jenkins is still on the community committee linking the community and this campus—still on. And when I came and I started getting involved with that committee, I began to pick up from Bill Jenkins and others some of the more subtle ways they communicate that the doctors and others never picked up.

That paper's been anthologized about twelve times. When I first did it, I went on from here and I did it at a conference and people liked it, picked it up. And it's in twelve anthologies, approximately. One guy wanted to name his anthology after that title, "Doctor Can't Do Me No Good," but the publisher said, "You cannot have a title that is grammatically incorrect." Well, that's what they did, and they put my paper in there. The title of the book is *Black Folk Medicine*. But I don't think it's grammatically incorrect. I think it's Gullah correct and their grammatically correct English is just broke up Gullah. That's the way I look at it. So that was a part of my introduction.

Subsequently, I did a couple of presentations here, invited. They had a woman who's running a black center, you know, to help students feel comfortable. I was invited in a couple of times and met with the president at that time, James B. Edwards, and others and talked with and listened to them. I was never impressed because I felt they were operating out of a mode that kept blacks in a default kind of a situation. I didn't like it at all. And this woman had her needs, which were very different, and she was dealing with personal, and I guess professional dynamics, but not really with grassroots community folks.

And all the time I'm doing this I'm interacting with my family. As a matter of fact, when I spoke out at Johns Island High School and did this thing, two of my cousins were on the faculty. And bunches of my family were in the audience. So when I got the standing ovation, I'm not so sure it was for what I said as much as it was for just being there, one of the people. Br'er Fox threw Br'er Rabbit in the briar patch, so here we are in the briar patch.

So those kinds of things went along, and ultimately I was brought back as a consultant later, in the early 2000s—2002, 2003—and did a couple things for the campus here in the new regime. Some of the people heard me and after they learned I was at University of South Carolina, Beaufort, the provost invited me in and offered me this position, which had never existed before, and which was approved by the trustees. I've never talked with them about, "Why me?" But I think they felt I understood the institution. I had some familiarity with it. I certainly had familiarity and understanding in the community and some contacts there. And I was also in a scholarly realm, in terms of my work at the University

of California. Sort of brought together strands that in too many situations don't come together. So that's where I am.

Once I got here, I began to make my way, making contacts with different departments and programs. And like I said, I go to grand rounds. People couldn't understand, "Why is he here?" I'm at the OB/GYN grand rounds, or pediatrics grand rounds, or a lot of orthopedic surgery, or general surgery grand rounds. There'd be discussions going on. In one grand rounds there was a discussion about a VA patient—a general surgery grand rounds, which starts at seven in the morning. And here I am sitting there, and somebody says, "Well, you know this is cultural, and we've got this expert here." They asked me to comment. Well, most of the people there didn't even know who I was. I was just somebody who showed up.

I remember going to cardiology grand rounds. I called the day before, I said, "You know, I'd like to come." "Oh yeah, come on." I went over—this is over in the new hospital, small auditorium. I went to the cardiology grand rounds, sat and listened, and enjoyed myself thoroughly. As I was leaving, the department chair came running down the hall, calling me. He didn't know who I was, and after I left he apparently asked the secretary. And she said, "Oh, he called yesterday. That's Dr. Blake." He came back, caught me, and said, "Please come any time you want." One, I'm African American, moving through these arenas where there are very few. And I'm not playing in any way being African American. I'm just being an interested citizen of the campus.

Then I got a chance to do some presentations on humanities and my perspectives. And got reactions from physicians and others sent to the campus,

to the president, saying, "This is important. We ought to have more of this. We got to do more of this."

So I got into that, and in the process began to get into some of those people dealing with bioethics. And the opportunity, question, came to Dr. Sade, Robert Sade, "Can you do an article on these kinds of issues?" And he didn't have much time and didn't know much about it. He asked me, would I be interested? I did the literature review, and then we brought in an attorney and we collaborated. It was very exciting doing it.

I got to know Dr. Sade because of sitting in with him on things in bioethics. And he had written a paper which I found very useful very early on. And it was a title, "What We Don't Know About What We Know." He's a pediatric cardiologist. It's a very interesting article about the limits of understanding of knowledge of pediatric cardiologists and the importance of not allowing those limits to limit you. Because they have protocols, they have standards.

And in this case he talks about—it was a child that flatlined. He was called to this situation. He tried to revive the child; he tried and he tried and he tried. And so they reached the limit, I don't know, X amount of time and then you stop. But he kept trying. And people around him were saying, "Well, wait a minute, you're going beyond the—" And he just didn't. He kept going. And finally he said, "Well, at X amount of time I'm going to pronounce." So just as they reached that point and he decided to pronounce, life came back into that child. Twenty-two years later he got invited to the child's wedding. His whole point was, "Some things we don't know. We know what we know, but some things we don't know." And how do you know what you don't know? How do you deal

with that? That is a humanities, human, humane kind of dynamic. And it is to be respected, in my opinion, and honored in a setting where you know what you know, and you know *a lot* about what you know. But the human experience ultimately is unknowable. And that knowledge is profoundly important.

Vanderscoff: What sort of programs do you put on, or activities do you undertake in furtherance of advancing this humanistic perspective?

Blake: Well, it's been interesting because I came in with a whole set of ideas and a whole set of suggestions. And we ran into two kinds of challenges. First of all, shortly after I arrived they were hit by some major additional budget cuts which limited—I was given a budget, but I felt under the circumstances the last thing I wanted to do was try to begin to spend money and expand, or develop a new program.

And secondly, I didn't want—well, let me put it this way. I had seen where before I arrived some people had gotten a grant on humanities in medicine. And they'd done some things on humanities in medicine. And nobody knew anything about it, because very few people went. The people who did it were at the periphery of the institution. Working with Dean McHenry and all of the people I worked with in California, I knew that if you do something at the periphery, with people who are on soft money, when those things—it's tied to the person. I wanted to institutionalize something. An important part of that is the institution has to buy in and adopt. But you can't do that when you're cutting back. Particularly when the central administration takes the big hits. You don't put those in the departments or the educational programs. You take them in those administrative areas. So I decided I wasn't going to try and do that.

But I also saw where there were all of these grand rounds and these other ways of presenting things. And we have the clinical grand rounds, and we have the ethical grand rounds and things like this. So I decided to begin to bring in people who could fit into the grand rounds, so that there would be a vested interest in people going to hear them or participate in what they are doing. One of the early ones was a guy who'd written a book on physicians in Mississippi during the Freedom Summer, a book called *Those Good Doctors*. He came and did a series of presentations, had lunches with the medical students and all of this. They liked him. He's a historian. They liked him because he fit where they were. It's not like you're doing anything additional, or adding to their weight, because the medical school curriculum is very intense.

Brought in Troy Duster, a sociologist who had a joint appointment at Berkeley and New York University, an African American who had been involved in the Human Genome Project. He could talk about genomic approaches to medicine and all of these kinds of things, and talk knowledgeably. He did a grand rounds for the Center for Health Disparities. But he also did presentations in graduate school courses where people were working on pharmaceutical approaches to diversity. He introduced some critical perspectives. But you see what I'm talking about is new people who fit into the old regime. Sort of like what we did at Oakes.

One of the others was Evelyn Hu-Dehart, who is a professor at Brown University. But I knew Evelyn from Stanford. Evelyn is Chinese born, Chinese raised, came to this country when she was about eleven or twelve, speaking Chinese, and ran into all sorts of discrimination in California because she was not

a citizen. Won some major award in high school because of her academic achievement, and after she was given the award they discovered that it was only available to native-born Americans. And she was not a native-born American. They took it back. Evelyn went on doing what she was doing. Did a doctorate, ultimately, in anthropology. But she became a specialist on Asians in Latin America. She speaks about twelve languages. She's comfortable in China, in the Middle East with Arabic, with Spanish and all of these things.

The department of family medicine was interested in having someone who could address issues related to Latinos. So I invited Evelyn to come and do a grand rounds for the department of family medicine. She came, had some evening sessions with some of the doctors, who everybody thought were Latino, and to all intents and purposes they were. But they really aren't—and they talked about it. It was very interesting. But she helped to reaffirm. Then we have a couple of Latinos who are from South America, not Mexico. A lot of good, positive interaction. Very positive. When she came to do the grand rounds, she ended up talking with virtually everybody who walked in who was from another country, in their language. And she had just finished lecturing at the Sorbonne and she'd been somewhere in Egypt. So everybody found themselves in her. But then she talked about Latinos, and she's standing there and she's clearly Chinese. Well, you can't look at the images and listen to the ideas and operate in a traditional frame of reference. So those kinds of presentations have been important to impacting and promoting the humanities.

Then I've done several presentations to the faculty in workshops promoted by the Apple Tree Society, in which I've talked about the humanities

here. I'm developing still another one, which is broader than anything I've done yet. And it's—constantly thinking about it, constantly working on it.

Vanderscoff: And at this point for you, what other projects and endeavors fill your time and preoccupy you?

Blake: Well, it's dealing with bioethics. I'm doing a lot more teaching in bioethics. A certificate program in clinical ethics is developing out of the graduate school, a certificate program in clinical ethics, research ethics. I'm doing some presentations there that require me to develop my ideas in relationship to community and research and ethics. I'm doing a lot on end-of-life care and developing a series there. I've become involved in a statewide consortium on care for the seriously ill. By that, meaning people who are almost at the point of hospice and palliative care. I meet with them once a month to discuss issues and I bring perspectives that they don't often get. I also lecture on cultural competence, mainly to first and second-year medical students and to second-year dental students. Sometimes I'm invited to College of Pharmacy, to a special course where they do that. I've been doing that every year since I've been in here. I constantly develop my material so that it isn't stagnant. And then special workshops and other things.

They have a college of dentists. It's sort of like an academy of professional development of dentists. It's a national thing, but there's a Carolina chapter, North and South Carolina. When they had their annual meeting here in Charleston they asked me to give the evening address at the dinner. They come and they do their professional stuff. Then they go out and play golf. that's a big thing, playing golf. And they came back and they had all these announcements

about the golf and who won this, that and other, cheering and carrying on. Then they asked me to speak and I guess they kind of expected a little entertainment. Well, I went into Gullah Geechee culture and even the black dentists were not prepared. I got a standing ovation. And the dean of dentistry and the associate dean of dentistry came and talked about it later. They said, "Nobody gets a standing ovation from the dentists. Nobody does."

Had an interesting session once. This is what happened: they convened the entire College of Dentistry to hear me lecture on Gullah Geechee culture. And they had a lunch. I mean, they had pizza and all that stuff. Everybody came and they were sitting. But the part of the challenge is, you're in the middle of the culture. You've got people here who are a part of the culture: patients, staff, others. But they hadn't interacted with the people who are in the place. And about eight or nine blacks came. They were all technical assistants. You know, they were at the technical level or clerical level, but they weren't clinicians. And they were very dubious. They didn't know me. They were *very* dubious. They all sat in one corner together, almost like a little phalanx. Well, you know, you got to win your stripes every time. It doesn't matter how much you've done or how well you know. If people don't know you, you've got to start from scratch.

Well, I went and got into my thing, and I was talking. I was making a point about some of the ways in which you can understand things. And I began to quote from a song that is very traditional in the churches. I've only heard it in Gullah Geechee churches. When I reached the end of the first line, where there's a refrain, I stopped. And they said the refrain. So I went on to the next line, and they picked it up. Before you knew it you had this call and response going and

the faculty were absolutely stunned. Now I didn't plan that, and I didn't intend to do that. But I laid it out, and they could not, not respond. And they did. Well, afterwards I couldn't get them out of there. They wanted to talk to me. And now I go over there and they all, oh, "Dr. Blake!" And so, you know, all those kinds of things.

I make it my business to greet people, learn their names and greet them. I'd say half a dozen of the campus police are my biggest friends. One of them met me and we were talking. He said he had a son who's interested in law and wanted to see if he could get me—I put his son together with some people in the legal profession. Next time I saw him he said his son was shadowing a lawyer. Another guy often comes by, because they patrol up here, you know. They walk through these halls all the time. I'll be sitting in here. He comes and says his daughter is graduating from Claflin College. She was interested in anesthesiology and she wanted to shadow some people in the emergency department. She's been here several times and now she's applying for admission. She graduates in June.

So these guys see me as a resource, and a precious resource. So they take care of me in the sense of, you know— Emily and I were going somewhere. We came out of the parking lot and we were in a rush. Here comes a guy by in the patrol car. Next thing you know we're in the patrol car getting to go wherever we want, and driving up where we couldn't have driven before. We get out of the patrol car and go there.

So you bring it by example; you bring it by word; you bring it in any form that fits. There's one guy walks around here cleaning up. He's one of the grounds

people. He's always got a snarl on his face. Always got a snarl on his face. I greet him and I greet him and it's sort of like, you know, "Don't bother me, don't bother me." He's that way. So one time in the paper they did a thing about the grounds people and they had them all lined up, and there he was with this beautiful smile. The next time I saw him I said, "Negro, as pretty as you smile in the paper, how come you always got a scowl on?" I used to always greet him. He'll never look at you. He'll never look at you, but you know he's watching you. He's wondering if you're going to speak to him. So I always speak. Now I see him, he says, "You doing all right? You doing all right?" You break through. I don't know what his problem is. I *don't* know what his problem is. And I don't know what limits him in his personal interaction. I just decided I'm not going to let that limit me.

Vanderscoff: So to pull all of these threads together, in summation, what does it mean to you to have a humanistic perspective in medicine?

Blake: You listen eloquently and you see with the third eye.⁸² If you look at— Oh, turn that off a minute, I want to go get a publication. (recorder is switched off; Dr. Blake goes to his office, returns, and the record resumes)

I know I tend to talk in rhetoric, but when I say, "Look with the third eye, listen with the third ear, listen eloquently," it's important for these kinds of things. But what I mean is hard to put in words. This is a copy of *Daedalus*, the journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. I've belonged to this for a long time, this academy, and I subscribe to this journal. I was doing this before I

⁸² For more explorations of the idea of listening eloquently, which is drawn from Langston Hughes, see Dr. Blake's "Rediscover" talk with Don Rothman, previously cited in these footnotes.

came here. So when I started doing presentations on humanities I use this image—which I have in a slide—of this labyrinth, which is their logo. And it turns out that there are all sorts of labyrinths around and available. This one is from a cathedral in Rheims. That's a different labyrinth from that labyrinth.

But I talk about the labyrinth of learning, and I've talked about that in my presentations. Now how can you know and interpret a labyrinth if you're down on the ground? You can be going trying to figure out how to go to these places, but you can't know the labyrinth from down here, if you're down there. So in order to be able to understand and know the labyrinth of learning you've got to see it from above. But when you get to the top, or above, you see the general picture. But you don't see the detail. And to me, humanistic, humane learning is that learning which allows you to incorporate the labyrinth from the top and the bottom simultaneously. You've got to have a broader view than a two-dimensional view. You've got to be able to see the bigger picture and the detail. As Clark Kerr would talk about it, "The hedgehog and the fox." The fox knows a lot of little things. The hedgehog knows one big thing. Now is it the hedgehog or the fox? It's both. And if you see in my [office] window over there I've got a hedgehog and a fox.

Vanderscoff: That's right.

Blake: I've always had them, because that's Clark. And that's based on a philosophy.

I use images and ideas that come from all sorts of places. This is a journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. When I was working with Bob

Sade and Mary Kay Schwemmer on that article, I picked up this particular issue and it had protecting the Internet as public commons. So here in this article, which is going to go in a journal of thoracic surgery, I start by quoting *Daedalus*. So I'm bringing the humanities to that whole perspective, even in terms of the data on the Internet. What I'm trying to do is constantly be in touch with, alive to, alert about, ideas that push you higher and broader simultaneously, and in the process tear you up. It's not easy. Sometimes it's very painful. So, I don't know if that helps.

Current Community and Public Involvement

Vanderscoff: It does, thank you. Before we come to our final question, or final two questions, I'd like to ask, beyond the Medical University and this work that you're doing currently, what sort of other organizations are you involved on in your community, or more widely?

Blake: Oh, it's really at every level. I am a member of the Red Top Community Improvement Association. Red Top is a very grassroots, local community.⁸³ And when I became a member they wanted me to become an officer. You know, Dr. Blake and all that. No. I refused. They've always had grassroots leadership. If I come and I become a leader of the organization, I don't think that's leadership development at the grassroots level. I didn't think that was right.

So I volunteered to become assistant secretary. And they said, "Well, our secretary doesn't even use a computer." She writes out the minutes at each meeting. They read the minutes. They don't even distribute them. I said, "I'll be

⁸³ Red Top is a community on Johns Island, where Herman and I attended church service the previous Sunday.

the assistant secretary, so when the secretary isn't there I'll take the minutes and so forth, and then I send them over to her." That's important to me, to be the assistant secretary and support the grassroots leadership. But at other times when they're dealing with public officials, they want me there, want to make sure I'm there. I'm doing less and less of that, trying to make sure that I help strengthen them.

Then I'm on the board of the International African American Museum, which is being developed in Charleston. The board is chaired by the mayor. Or he just stepped down as chair, he's now chair of the fundraising project. And that's going to be a museum right there on the harbor, here in Charleston, where 40 percent of all those who were brought here as slaves entered this country, right at this harbor. That's an important experience, developing that and working with people on that.

I'm on the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission. This is a corridor of Gullah Geechee communities, right along the coast, from Wilmington, North Carolina to St. Augustine, Florida. About twelve thousand square miles, and we're developing a program of preservation and support for the Gullah Geechee communities in this corridor. This is done by federal legislation. I was appointed by the Secretary of the Interior. Involved in that.

I'm also on the Humanities Council of South Carolina. I'm on that board, which promotes the humanities in communities in the state. We develop and support and promote programs, primarily in communities of 25,000 or less. And it's very exciting to see the way in which that is being developed.

And in all of this, I continue my involvement with the Gullah Geechee communities, particularly the Daufuskie Island community. But now that's expanding. I'm getting more engaged with Wadmalaw Island. And I'm on the school improvement council of Johns Island High School.

But all of it's overwhelming. It's more than I should and can do and I'm thinking about revising my time frame.

**"Every Shut Eye Ain't Sleep, Every Goodbye Ain't Gone":
A Closing Reflection on Continuity and Core Values**

Vanderscoff: You've spoken of Alex Haley as making you understand the value of your own story, your own experience, in ways that you had not prior to meeting him. Now, as you reflect back and look forward, what do you think, or hope, the themes of your story have been?

Blake: (pause) I don't know. I think that if I think about that a lot more I'll have a better answer than I do serendipitously or right off the top. Because, you know, I never looked at your questions. So I didn't even know you're going to ask me something that would lead me to draw on *Daedalus* so I had to go get the journal and all of that.

When I think about Alex and what themes are in my story, I would argue hopefully there's one, at one level—it's not always true. I mean, all of my actions and words and everything haven't always been stellar or exemplary. But hopefully integrity with regard to the human experience. Sort of like the Hippocratic Oath: do no harm. But I don't put it in negative terms, "Do no harm," but "Do good all you can. Do as much as you can, lifting as you climb." And

that's an inclusive, constant theme of growing, changing, developing, but always in concert with others and strengthening others. That covers a lot of ground, and it will be a lot of things that I want to talk about and think about as I go on.

I know I'm not going to live much longer, which is all right. And I don't think about that, don't worry about it. Except that I would like to finish two or three books and really write up some projects that have been hanging fire for years. But that may not be my lot. But it's not sad, in the sense that, you know, wanting to get it all done. Instead, it's the contribution and strengthening of the community, empowering people who felt they didn't count, they weren't worthy. Doing that kind of a thing. That may be part of it.

Vanderscoff: You have a habit of making your talks and presentations interwoven with expressions of gratitude. As we draw towards the conclusion of this oral history project, what are you grateful for in your life now?

Blake: (pause) Life. Good health, and good intellect in the sense of, been able to last this long. Eighty years, when you get right down to it. Eighty years. I've been working constantly since I was nine. And I've been grateful for privileges and opportunities which allow me to continue to grow and allow me to continue to contribute.

I don't know if you know Emily and I have just established a fund here to support those people without insurance, or underinsured, who have to come to a free clinic that the College of Health Professions operates, where they get occupational therapy and physical therapy. This is run at night by faculty and students. But there are people who come who also have to pay a co-pay, and they don't have it or they have to use—they have to get money to get buses or

whatever to get here for the free clinic. So we just established a fund just last month to cover the co-pay for the people, because the ability to get physical therapy and occupational therapy often makes the difference between them being able to go back to work or remain in some degree of non-revenue producing. So constantly trying to make a contribution. We don't have any money or anything like this but we're thinking about leaving our house and other things to this fund.

Just constantly being able to make a contribution—I'm very grateful for that. Grateful for the wonderful string of people I've met in the course of this journey. But grateful for life, in a very meaningful and powerful way. Opportunity, continued opportunity. To think, I never applied for a job. Never. That's seventy-one years, and I've had all these wonderful things happen. Yeah. I could never stop expressing gratitude.

Vanderscoff: Before we close off this record, is there anything that you've think we've missed, or anything you would like to say about any of the topics we've been discussing: your work, Oakes, anything?

Blake: Well, you know I have thought about that. I don't think you prompted me but I was wondering what I was going to say when this thing is over? (pause) Gullah Geechee people have a statement which I've used in some of my talks with young people and others: "Every shut eye ain't sleep, and every goodbye ain't gone." Meaning, you know, you can't really trust folks, because the shut eye ain't sleep and the goodbye ain't gone. I turn it, though, into the positive rather than the negative, and talk about the people who are asleep, the people who are gone, or the people who are unborn. So, as I think about this in the context of

Gullah Geechee community, which is a very important set of guiding frameworks and values, I think of it in terms of those who preceded me and those who are going to follow me. And building that constant link.

And although I do express gratitude in my talks by dedicating them to different people and all of this, I've never dedicated a talk to my mother. Not once. Because I think she incorporates so much and expands so much she goes beyond all of that. I think that I am in many respects a reflection of all the values and the examples she gave me. So even though she died at a relatively young age, primarily as the result of a stroke, but also heart disease and diabetes and obesity—the metabolic syndrome that characterizes this area—I think she gave to her children, and I feel especially to me, a charge to not only keep on keeping on, but to continue to serve and benefit others. I see that in its ultimate form in bringing to Oakes College young people from Daufuskie Island.

The circle closes. You're continuing to grow and you're giving back. That young person from Daufuskie that I think about is Ervin Simmons. You can see what he wrote about me when he saw me in the fourth grade. You could see one, he couldn't write; two, he couldn't spell; three, he didn't know grammar. But he had perseverance. He had those assets we talk about among students as a result of his parents and his grandparents, and the emphasis on school. So he applied himself and he struggled. And when you see how he writes now, you see he's an eloquent writer. Don Rothman had a lot to do with that. But he also changed many of his perspectives. And Ed Dirks, and Jan Willis, and Diane Lewis, and Ron Saufley, and Bill Doyle had a lot to do with that.

And so you see, in terms of the gone: my mother—and then me, and then that young man. And if you had been there last Friday, you would see that he brought his mentee, a young lady who's younger than his children. She's becoming the next generation. So they're unborn, but they're coming. It's just going to be a constant string. I'm really grateful that I can...I can...I can exemplify my mother's life and my mother's sacrifice in a way that's going to go for a century or more, directly. You can't beat that.

Vanderscoff: At this point I'd like to express my gratitude for the way in which you have inhabited the space generated by this interview and for all the time and thought that you've given to this process.

Blake: Thank you.

Vanderscoff: Thank you.

**An Interview with Herman Blake: Understanding Education for Justice
By Leslie López**

Introductory Essay

This brief oral history interview with Dr. John Herman Blake was conducted by Dr. Leslie López, on April 26, 2013 at the Dream Inn Hotel in Santa Cruz, California. Dr. López has been teaching the Oakes College Core Course for six years and in the winter of 2013 taught an Oakes course in which students conducted oral histories documenting the history of Oakes College. She received her PhD in socio-cultural anthropology. Her research focuses on alternative communication and education strategies in Latin America and the Southwest United States, with a particular interest in orality and literacy.

Dr. Blake was visiting Santa Cruz to attend a dinner at UC Santa Cruz on Saturday, April 27 to "honor him for his myriad contributions to UCSC and for his tremendous impact on the education and lives of generations of students."⁸⁴ He generously agreed to participate in this focused interview that focused on the educational philosophy which he brought to UC Santa Cruz, and is intended as a supplement to the longer oral history in this volume, conducted for the Regional History Project by Cameron Vanderscoff.

This interview not only helps illuminate the history of UC Santa Cruz as a politically engaged campus with a tradition of extended undergraduate field study, but also connects the campus, and particularly Oakes College, with a

⁸⁴ See <http://hermanblaktribute2013.wordpress.com/> for textual tributes to Dr. Blake, as well as photographs of the occasion.

larger history of grassroots education in transformational politics in the U.S. The brief overview of the Citizenship School Movement and the Highlander Folk School provided here is meant to provide context for Dr. Blake's references, and serve as a platform for further study. Younger readers may be surprised to learn about traditions of highly sophisticated, transformative adult education conducted outside the realm of academia, by community practitioners.

There are many reasons these traditions get marginalized or forgotten. First and foremost, these programs back in the forties and fifties pioneered forms of pedagogy that are still relevant today, and still thought to be cutting-edge; in fact, the element that continues to make these forms of teaching "edgy" (or marginal) is their democratic, socially transformative nature, which by definition contradicts the status quo in which they are located, whether in the classroom or in communities.

Second, the historical frame in which they unfolded is now fifty years old. These projects were radical because they were occurring as part of the meta-cultural shift within the global decolonization process, a history that is not typically studied in standard textbook versions.

Third, this grassroots education and decolonization movement was closely related with *literacy* education during the twentieth century especially in the Americas. For instance, one interview of Highlander's Myles Horton investigates the intersections between the Citizenship Schools (1954-1970), Cuba's Revolutionary Literacy Campaign (1961); and Freire's Grassroots Education Movement in Latin America (Graves and Horton). The underlying conviction of late-century radical critical pedagogy is that when adults, in

particular, learn to read and write through a process that is based on collective reflection, analysis, and articulation of their own truths, they are seizing tools they need to remake the world.

All of this is part of the legacy that university activists of that era worked to integrate into their campus work, including the development and philosophy of the UCSC Writing Program, particularly through the influence of lecturer Donald Rothman, who was hired by J. Herman Blake in 1973 to teach writing and coordinate the writing tutor program at Oakes College and taught writing at UCSC for thirty-four years. Rothman also founded the Central California Writing Project in 1977, a think-tank for K-university teachers on the promise of writing to enhance democracy. According to Oakes College's web site, Rothman was fond of saying, "We write to avoid the humiliation of silence in the face of cruelty and injustice."⁸⁵

The stories that Herman Blake tells in his interview point to the implicit intersections, actual lived relationships, and functioning channels between university and community-based arenas of struggle for educational justice in those years. The two most famous sites for grassroots political education in the US constituted an important part of Dr. Blake's network, and thus tie UC Santa Cruz and Oakes College to the Civil Rights Movement's notions of "literacy for freedom" and "radical pedagogy."

It is fair to say that Highlander Folk School and The Citizenship Schools galvanized each other; their intersection and collaboration between 1954 and 1961 were powerful, fruitful years, although Highlander was founded two

⁸⁵ <http://oakes.ucsc.edu/news-events/profiles/fellows-profile-donrothman.html>

decades earlier, and each went on separately. They were in many ways institutionally symbiotic during this time, but are best seen as independent parts of the same network of spaces where people could come together to figure out how to see themselves and the world with new eyes, and how to move forward to create a desegregated South, after *Brown vs. the Board of Education*.

The Citizenship Schools are a cornerstone in the development of United States traditions of "literacy for freedom" in grassroots education. In many ways, they parallel the Freirean literacy schools of northeastern Brazil. Both projects offered short-term literacy education to poor, rural adults who were politically disenfranchised because the voter registration laws in both places required them to pass a literacy test, while the social structures of both places denied them an education. Both projects were also based in deep commitments to make *substantive* literacy and citizenship available to people (rather than obligate them to get in line and reproduce versions obedient to the status quo in order to get benefits), and sought to do so by engaging learners in analytical dialogue about their conditions and aspirations.

The central curriculum was essentially the students' lives and environments; through pre-study by teachers—who were often members of the same communities—and ongoing, collective self-study—key topics and texts were chosen to provoke reflection and action. Both projects ultimately became more political than conservatives were prepared for. In other ways, they are not parallel: the Citizenship Schools of South Carolina pre-date the Brazilian project by almost ten years, and were from the beginning created and led by local, African American activists, with the backing of Highlander. They spread and

endured for thirteen years, helping to change the balance in the South, and creating a curricular model that has only recently begun to be excavated and duly recognized by academics. The Brazilian projects, on the other hand, were sponsored by the federal government and the Church, and only lasted two years before a coup shut them down and landed Freire in jail (after which he went on to expand his model into Chile and throughout the world).

The Citizenship Schools were launched in the Sea Islands of South Carolina, after St. Johns Island activist Esau Jenkins attended a United Nations workshop held at Highlander in 1954. Key activists like Jenkins, Septima Clark, and Bernice Robinson, had already been mobilizing for years in favor of their communities, but as the desegregation trial unfolded during 1953 and 1954, new resources and attention poured into the South, including more donations to Highlander to do the capacity-building that would make desegregation possible. When Jenkins identified the need for adult literacy schools for voter registration, and a lack of resources in South Carolina, Highlander agreed to support the organizing effort (Kates 482-487; see also HFS Audio Collection Index).

Though Jenkins organized and became Director of the Island Schools, the development of the liberatory literacy program and the extension of the model was led by Septima Clark, who went on to become Director of Education at Highlander. The program that Clark and her cousin Bernice Robinson developed artfully combined elements that addressed practical, personal, and political needs of those who sought literacy tools, and combined local leadership and flexibility with central purpose and method. Each school was responsive to learners' needs and requests to include particular material; at the same time, they

offered structured curriculum and created a space for dismantling internalized oppression—for instance, their workbook included African American heroes in history, and causes of adult illiteracy as socially produced problems (Charron 5; Kates 494-496). But materials were also explicitly focused on voter registration, and the expansion of the schools took on the power of a campaign. School participants analyzed how literate community members could transform their governments; biblical references called on spiritual strength; all comers were asked to recruit new learners, to become tutors themselves, and the atmosphere was one of motivation for a cause, persevering in the face of opposition (Kates 490-492).

In 1959, Clark began urging Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to take on sponsorship of the system, arguing, "that the Citizenship Schools had done more than the SCLC to increase voter registration" (Kates 492). In 1961, the SCLC agreed—probably, as Hughes and others point out, because Highlander had already been shut down by the state of Tennessee, and the SCLC feared the Schools would be lost (245). Clark then became Education Director for the SCLC (Brown-Nagin). After just one year, the Citizenship Schools had expanded throughout the South, with enough capacity to offer literacy training to over twenty thousand (Kates 480; 492; following Glen 169-70). Estimates of total people served by the Schools vary widely, but by 1970 had trained at least 10,000 teachers (Payne) and at least 100,000 students had attended (Hughes 245). In addition, during Clark's tenure with the SCLC, about 700,000 African Americans registered to vote (Brown-Nagin 16).

Although the materials and impetus of the Citizenship Schools emphasized service and responsibility to others, along with a profound sense of personal empowerment and social change, the immediate focus was always on gaining the skills necessary to vote. When the Voting Rights Act of 1965 removed the literacy barrier to voter registration, the schools suffered a drop in funding, and reorganized their focus around civic engagement. Then, when King was assassinated in 1968, the general upheaval and loss of leadership in the civil rights movement was reflected in the school system, which closed in 1970 (Kates 497-498). However, recent scholarly interest in the role of education in the Civil Rights Movement has brought renewed attention to the Schools' model and achievements, while contemporary organizers and campus service-learners have refocused on the potential of popular education methods for community empowerment and leadership development.

The Highlander Folk School, as it was known at the time, was and still is dedicated to collaborative capacity-building and leadership development for radical democracy, and is perhaps the best-known training school for social justice activists in US history. Founded in 1932 in the Appalachian community of Monteagle, Tennessee, from the start Highlander was dedicated to expanding the potential for democracy in the South, and "deepening the concept [of democracy] to include every relationship" (Glen 225).

As with "literacy for freedom," the definition of "radical democracy" and how people might be trained in it is not straightforward. Myles Horton, Highlander's founder and director until his death in 1990, refused to pin down reductionist definitions, precisely because he saw his role, and the role of

Highlander, as holding open a space in which diverse people could come together to continually discuss those meanings in light of changing circumstances. Horton drew on a unique blend of counter-hegemonic traditions in philosophy and method, and refused also to define a fixed ideological mission for Highlander; instead, he sought to provide a "climate" for growth and change (Horton/PDKI 493).

Highlander's approaches proved to be very effective for leadership development as well as institutional survival in a hostile environment; at the same time, its non-instrumental nature and institutional independence have also confounded its allies and enemies across the political spectrum. John Glen, in a monograph on Highlander's history, identifies this open-ended commitment to democracy as the institution's "greatest strength and weakness" (225). In a highly politicized, competitive, even partisan environment constituted of campaigns and projects that are funded with the hopes of yields on an economy of scale, Highlander was perplexing in its steadfast commitment to working with people who came through the door, and to methods and principles that were fundamentally respectful of them. Horton, who was a contemporary and colleague of Paulo Freire, and with him co-narrated, in recorded dialogue, *We Make the Road By Walking*, consistently emphasized that teachers and organizers should not control people by taking over their functions; he argued that people have to be trusted to "move in the direction that will give them more freedom, more justice, a more creative life" (Graves and Horton 4). As Dr. Blake put it in 1969, Horton's "goal was not *community* development in terms of organization and programs, but *people* development in terms of their ability to articulate their

problems and the development of self-confidence that they could resolve these problems" (Blake 46-47; in Ling 13).

Highlander's first two decades were mostly dedicated to labor issues, and the Folk School trained generations of labor activists in the South before shifting its focus to racial justice and civil rights in the mid-fifties; but from the beginning, its commitments to democracy included racial integration in activities and agendas, and a pedagogy of empowerment. Highlander's workshop leaders facilitated discussions, listened to proposals, and practiced skill-building among participants instead of handing out doctrine; the school also used a participatory cultural curriculum that included collaborative skit creation, and singing and song-writing (Sharp).

Although Highlander's primary focus was on "people," it attracted leaders, people who self-selected and mobilized to get to the School, and whose development in turn impacted their communities. Workshops expanded transformational discourse and practice, and actively contributed to what Putnam (1993; 2000) refers to as "social capital" among democratic activists: increased cohesion, strengthening of networks, and participation in organizations. The School gained nationwide notoriety during the Civil Rights Movement for its role helping to fund and facilitate the Citizenship Schools, and for its famous alumni. Rosa Parks attended workshops there in the months preceding the bus boycott; other African American leaders who taught or attended workshops include Martin Luther King, Jr., Fannie Lou Hamer, Andrew Young, and Stokely Carmichael (Kates 482; Levine 90). In 1954, Highlander began gathering college students from throughout the South at

annual workshops that articulated the concerns and strengths of their generation (Hughes 245). In 1960, four freshmen students in Greensboro, North Carolina changed history by sitting in at a Woolworth's lunch counter. In a 1966 interview, Horton explained the relationship between the school and those kinds of activist decisions:

[Our enemies] point out that not only was Rosa Parks a student at Highlander but that a majority of the leaders of the sit-ins had been at workshops at Highlander. All of this is factually true. What I was saying at the Spring Conference and what I would still say is that it didn't occur to us to tell Rosa Parks what to do or to work out the strategy. But we did say to these people, "You should have dignity and you should command respect and you're going to have to organize to get it. Now just how you go about it we don't know." (Horton/PDKI 491)

Highlander had been tracked closely by Hoover's FBI since 1936 (FBI Vault), but had endured the Red Scare despite its unrepentant affiliations with labor leaders and fellow travelers. By the late fifties, when Highlander had become a network hub of the Civil Rights Movement, local enemies and the state of Tennessee took matters into their own hands. In late 1959, Highlander's school charter came under attack, in a court case that finally hinged on weak charges—a rotating fund for evening beer (Maclean 488) but nonetheless in court outweighed an avalanche of evidence and witnesses (Horton PDKI). The court case, prosecuted by Tennessee Attorney General Albert Sloan, ended with the loss of the school's charter and the seizure of all its assets by the state. Soon after Highlander staff was evacuated, most buildings were burned to the ground (Davis).

Highlander's commitment to the region and its purpose did not waver. The day after losing their original Folk School and land, the Board immediately reconstituted itself, requested a new charter, and reopened in Knoxville, as the Highlander Research and Education Center. In 1972, it moved to its new location,

in New Market, Tennessee, where it remains in operation today. The Center's open-ended framework for expanding radical democracy, and its responsiveness to the changing needs and conditions of people in the region have meant its workshops and coalitions have continued to reflect the challenges people face, from strip mining and water pollution, to immigration, language justice, and youth issues; its regional focus has also become more clearly imbedded in national and international networks. Indeed, one of Horton's most famous quotes comes from the moment of most direct confrontation, when the state tried to shut it down: "You can padlock a building; you can't padlock an idea. Highlander is an idea. You can't kill it and you can't close it in... It will grow wherever people take it."

In the months before he passed away, Don Rothman expressed the importance of these movements and relationships on his own formation. He located his "origins as a teacher of writing" with the Cuban literacy campaign (personal correspondence 9/17/12), and said that his conversations with Horton, and the example of Highlander were very important to him "in thinking about what was possible at Oakes." He recalled an image of Highlander's meeting room, an arrangement of 24 rocking chairs in a circle, that continued to inspire him through the years; he continued his relationship with the School, even after Horton's death, in the 1990s. He also emphasized that Paulo Freire himself visited UCSC twice, and that the Oakes Core Course had used Horton's autobiography, *The Long Haul*, and Horton and Freire's *We Make the Road by Walking* (9/18/12).

Although, as Dr. Blake explains in this interview, he did not directly hire Don, he created the conditions that made his hiring possible—and also helped created the opening for the development of analytical writing instruction, not just at Oakes and at UCSC, but at the University of California. Nor did Rothman and Blake know each other during the years when the Black Panther Party was developing, although Rothman was at Merritt College, and Blake was involved with the Party, supervising Huey P. Newton's academic work and facilitating Septima Clark's visit to the Panthers during her time at UCSC. However, what we should be paying attention to is the wealth of meaning in Dr. Blake's opening statement: "I think that it's important to understand that the connections are far greater than we ever anticipated."

The interpretive and invitational potential of this statement attests to Dr. Blake's power as a teacher: simply put, it has no final boundaries. However, for starters, we might observe that Carl Tjerandsen, the same person who invited Dr. Blake to evaluate the Citizenship Schools in the Daufuskie Islands in 1967, also, in his capacity as the Dean of UCSC Extension, approached Rothman and asked whether he would be interested in starting a community-based Writing Project (Rothman 1987). This kind of detail—rarely visible or commented on in social movement studies or even the work on educational activism—is actually at the heart of all of these networks, the connections among visionaries and like-minded activists like Dr. Blake who, day after day and throughout lifetimes, *work to create the conditions that will make others' development possible.*

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López: So this is Friday, April 26, 2013 at 3:30 in the afternoon. My name is Leslie López. And could you say your name, please?

Blake: My name is John Herman Blake, but I prefer to be known as J. Herman Blake.

López: And should I refer to you as Dr. Blake in this interview?

Blake: No, you may refer to me as Herman, the way the people at Oakes do.

López: Okay. So as we discussed a minute ago, this is a rather short oral history interview. We're talking about some of the historical background that has gone into the creation of Oakes College and the legacy of social justice that continues today in Oakes College. And I'd like you to start, if you would, by talking about your history with the Citizenship Schools. I don't know very much about your background with that. So could you please explain what your relationship was with that movement and with the schools themselves.

The Emil Schwarzhaupt Foundation and Extended Education, 1967

Blake: I think that it's important to understand that the connections are far greater than we ever anticipated. There was a guy at Santa Cruz, UC Santa Cruz, who was in charge of what I would call Extended Education. His name was Carl Tjerandsen. He was the most mild, pleasant, middle-class, Midwest white man that you'd ever want to meet, just as mild as they come. I met Carl Tjerandsen in

a variety of ways, but didn't know anything about him. He didn't know anything about me.

But one day after I had been here a year at Santa Cruz, I was sitting in my office in Cowell College and Carl Tjerandsen walked into my office and said that he was the executive secretary for the Emil Schwarzhaupt Foundation. This was a foundation started by a Polish immigrant in Chicago years ago. He'd come to Chicago as a poor person, became very successful and left his money to a foundation to help immigrants make the transition to American society, like he did. Carl Tjerandsen was the executive secretary, here at Santa Cruz, a foundation in Chicago.

Well, what had happened was, over time, as the immigrant population declined and the Schwarzhaupt Foundation still had money, they started putting their money into projects to help other groups who were on the periphery of American society come to the center. And in that capacity they had funded Saul Alinsky's work in Chicago. I forget what the exact name of his operation was.⁸⁶ In addition to funding Saul Alinsky, they had funded Myles Horton and the Highlander Folk School to work with people in the Sea Islands of South Carolina, specifically Johns Island, to develop strategies for helping them to become part of the larger society.

So this white [cake-bread man] in Santa Cruz was, through a foundation in Chicago, funding operations in Chicago; Lackawanna, New York; Buffalo, New

⁸⁶ Alinsky's organization was called the Industrial Areas Foundation. See <http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/scrc/findingaids/view.php?eadid=ICU.SPCL.SCHWARZHAUPT> for a Guide to the Emil Schwarzhaupt Foundation Papers, 1945-1987, which are located at the University of Chicago Library—Editor.

York; and Johns Island, South Carolina to bring people into the mainstream of American society. And he said to me they were looking for someone to go and do an evaluation of the work of Saul Alinsky and his work in Chicago, and of Myles Horton and Septima Clark's work on Johns Island, South Carolina. He wondered if I might be interested, whereupon I pointed out to him that I had family in South Carolina, specifically on Johns Island. My family history on Johns Island went back into the days of slavery. He could not believe it. I happened to have two wedding invitations from two cousins on Johns Island sitting on my desk with a Johns Island postmark, and I showed them to him. He couldn't believe that he'd walked into my office and all of these connections.

Long story short, they commissioned me to go and spend a summer in Chicago with Saul Alinsky and his organization, at Highlander Folk School with Myles Horton, and from Highlander to Johns Island, South Carolina, where I would work with Septima Clark and Esau Jenkins, to get an understanding of the long-term consequences of their work. That's how I got started and that's how I made the link. That's how I met Myles Horton. That's how I met Septima Clark. And since I came representing the foundation that had funded them, that's how it all got started.

I got a profound education from Myles Horton. Myles Horton had this belief that people from the grassroots had the knowledge to resolve the challenges and issues facing them, but they did not have the level of confidence, did not have confidence *in* their knowledge, and very often did not have the skills to deal with the larger society. And sitting there with him at Highlander Folk School, at the time in Monteagle, Tennessee, on the porch of his house, feeding sunflower seeds

to the cardinals—he loved to feed sunflower seeds to cardinals and they came, beautiful birds—talking, and we talked about these things.

From there I made my way to Johns Island, where I stayed with my family, stayed at my aunt's house, because she was just down the road, and I made contact with Septima Clark, Bernice Robinson, and Esau Jenkins and through them into a wide range of grassroots people. So I was home, as a person who was linked to the community, but I was also from the outside, as a scholar who brought a different perspective.

López: Sorry, do you remember what year that was?

Blake: Yes, I do. It was 1967. It was the spring of 1967 that Carl Tjerandsen came into my office and I spent the summer of 1967 doing these things. Now, in addition to that, at the late summer of 1967, August probably, or maybe early September, a bunch of radical groups had a political convention in Chicago called Convention for a New Politics.⁸⁷ I think it met at the Blackstone Hotel, or something like that. And since I was in Chicago, looking now at Saul Alinsky's operation, having spent the previous time in South Carolina, I attended and participated in the sessions at the convention, "The New Politics," and that was when I saw H. Rap Brown, Stokely Carmichael, and others like that who were spreading their word, and I sat in on a lot of these sessions. [James] Foreman gave his famous speech, "Profiles in Treachery: from Atlantic City to Black

⁸⁷ The Convention of the National Conference for New Politics took place at the Palmer House in Chicago from August 31 to September 1st of 1967. 3,000 delegates from several hundred left, community, and civil rights groups convened to discuss an electoral strategy for 1968 and to try to create a unified leftist agenda. Some wanted a third-party slate with Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., running for president and peace activist Dr. Benjamin Spock for vice-president.

Power," in which he castigated the Democratic Party and the political process. I have a copy of that speech that was mimeographed and distributed.⁸⁸ I was always on the periphery. I was not in the center. But I was very much there.

Septima Clark, Teaching Everywhere She Went

López: Let's talk about Septima Clark.

Blake: Yes.

López: And your friendship with her and her eventual visit to Oakes College—what was that like?

Blake: I made this trip and I developed a profound respect, indeed love, for Septima Clark. And she for me. And we began to work together in a variety of ways. First of all, as I listened to her talk about her successes, I asked a question which was at the center of my thinking. Sometimes you can learn more about success through failure. And that came through my studies of the poverty programs in California, where I'd dealt with a number of Latino-based programs that were headed by people who talked about the Cursillo Movement that they'd been involved in and the two key leaders in that were people who had been utter failures in their original program, but they grew from their failures. So I said to Septima, "Have you ever failed?" And she said, "Yes. Daufuskie Island." So I had to go see Daufuskie Island. And that's how I got to Daufuskie Island. That's a long story but that's how I made that connection.

⁸⁸ See: http://www.crmvet.org/info/6709_forman_ncnp.pdf

But Septima Clark was also on the board of Penn Center on Saint Helena Island. Penn Center was started in 1862 as a school for the contrabands, or the slaves, who were fleeing the Confederates in other parts of the states, to this area, Port Royal, where, in 1861, the former slaves, who were still legally slaves began to develop and to take over because they were in such large numbers. They celebrated their freedom there in November 1861 and people began to come. Well, the Union Army and Navy were so overwhelmed by these blacks they sought help from the Quakers in Pennsylvania and they brought some buildings down on barges and established Penn Center on Saint Helena Island. Penn was named after, of course, William Penn.

Septima was on the board and they invited me to join the board. And I did. Even though I was still in California, I'm on the board. So you see, I'm working with Septima in a variety of ways. And I've got, ultimately, students coming to South Carolina.

Well, in the course of this time Carl Tjerandsen made it plain to me that the Schwarzhaupt Foundation was going out of business. They were going to spend down their reserves or cash or whatever, and they were going to close. But in that process they wanted to make certain resources available to Septima Clark. But for some reason they couldn't give her a direct contribution to run her life. Instead, they made a very substantial gift to UC Santa Cruz. And with that gift, we invited to Septima Clark to come and spend two different periods of time of one month each as a visitor in residence. That's how she came. And we paid her very generously.

Now, the assumption was that she would come and visit classes and talk with students and faculty and others. And she did. But Septima's vision and her approach were so broad that she not only visited, she started talking. And she wrote papers about some of her experiences in the Civil Rights Movement and the schools she was developing. She'd write these things out handwritten. She gave them to me and I have them somewhere. My point is, she began to teach. And she would say to the students, "Well, where are you on the Equal Rights Amendment? And where is your state? And what are you *doing* about the Equal Rights Amendment?" The students—some of them weren't doing anything, hadn't even thought about it. The other thing they would say, as they listened to her they would say, "She's been at this for fifty years. Fifty years. We spend a semester or a year trying to do something. And if it doesn't change we give up and we go on to something else. She's been at it for fifty years."

Myles Horton: Why UCSC Students Were Never Placed at Highlander

And in the course of all of this we also had Myles Horton make several visits to the campus. So—

López: And what did he do when he came?

Blake: Same thing. Just kind of hang out and visit classes. He had a broader audience, though, and he spent time in San Francisco and in Los Angeles doing fundraising for Highlander. Because he had a number of artists and others who were interested and committed to what he was doing. So it wasn't focused on Santa Cruz. But he taught me a lesson because I thought we could work to have

Santa Cruz students go and work for him at Highlander Folk School, which became Highlander Research and Education Center. And he said, "No."

López: Why was that?

Blake: He did not accept any volunteers who didn't volunteer for at least five years, which nobody could do. He argued that what it takes to be engaged at the grassroots level is so intense and so time-consuming that you have to have people there for a long time. Somebody once asked him, "How long does it take to become a community organizer?" He said, "At least two years. One year to learn you're being used by the wrong people and the second year to learn what to do."

López: (laughs)

Blake: So he never took Santa Cruz students.

**Herman Blake at UC Santa Cruz:
Providing Educational Resources to Excluded Communities**

López: And did you see Oakes at that time as part of the same movement as what Septima Clark and Highlander were doing?

Blake: There was no connection.

López: There was no connection.

Blake: No. Oakes wasn't even alive.

López: Oh, that's right. That was Cowell [College].

Blake: It wasn't in anybody's mind. Oakes really didn't begin to take shape as Oakes College—I mean, it was in one of the plans, if you look at the early planning of the campus, the faculty and others, they were developing unlimited enrollment for twenty-five years. This was going to be a campus of 25-30,000 students with 20-25 colleges. And they began to develop these colleges. Dean McHenry was looking at things out until 2010. And this was in 1967, 1965.

López: But I thought that you said that there was a picture of Septima Clark on the lawn at Oakes College with the students.

Blake: Yes, there is. Not on the lawn but on the campus. In the book, *Freedom's Teacher*. But when she came, this was after we had gotten started. But when we were doing this original stuff with her and me down in the Sea Islands, Martin [Luther King] hadn't been killed yet.

López: Mmm.

Blake: Martin was assassinated in '68. That's when everybody began to think about what are we going to do. Dean McHenry did not appoint the planning committee to plan College Seven until 1969. So this other stuff had already happened. I had been involved with the Black Panther Party. When Septima came I took her to meetings or to sessions, locations where she could see what the Black Panther Party was doing politically. I took her to Vacaville, where she lectured and taught, spoke to inmates. All of this. But most of this happened before Martin was killed. So there was no direct link in my mind with these events and Oakes College.

To a great degree that link *was* made by Don Rothman, as he came to understand some of those dynamics and brought it in a variety of ways, including Paulo Freire. But that was not a part of my thinking.

López: What *was* your thinking about what you were doing at UCSC and your connection with these folks?

Blake: First of all—that's a good question—first of all, my basic principle was to provide service and resources to grassroots communities. I had become a major evaluator for the Office of Economic Opportunity for poverty programs. And I evaluated, first of all, one of the first ones was the poverty program in Chico, California, the Upward Bound program in Chico, California, connected to Chico State. And that's where I met the young lady named Lovey Barnes, whom I sent a bus ticket to come to Santa Cruz and she came to visit and ultimately enrolled. She's now the actor, Adilah Barnes, who is a major—

That had nothing to do with all of this. I was evaluating the Upward Bound program. And that was one of the first in the country. I evaluated the poverty program in Sacramento, Sacramento County, in Fresno County, and in Stanislaus County. But in doing this I was engaging myself with a lot of Latino communities, not black communities, and making links that were profoundly moving. One of my most important memories is of a worker, agricultural worker in Ceres, California. I was in his home talking with him. He had an old upright piano in his home. And he was very bitter about the Kennedy Administration. He said, "Kennedy, nothin' happening, nothin' happening—Kennedy, nothin' changed!" He didn't speak good English but he knew Kennedy didn't do

anything. "Roosevelt—when Roosevelt came, Roosevelt changed things." And he had this big picture of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 8x10, sitting on that piano.

What was happening to my mind is that I was making connections with people who had hopes and dreams, but who were being exploited. I did not want to see that exploitation continue. I wanted to provide resources to the people in these communities. But the only resource I had was education. So it was important for me to try and open avenues of educational opportunity and when people came *into* the academy, to develop strategies that they might succeed. That was at Oakes College. That was serving the community. That's always been my motivation. That's always been my goal.

López: Okay. Thank you. And when you think back about the institution-building that you've done, whether that's at UCSC in general, or at Oakes, or other places, what do you think is the element of strategy that you can say, "Oh, I learned that by working with activists, whether that was the civil rights folks, the Citizenship School folks, or the Alinsky folks, the community empowerment folks.

Blake: You know, I'd have to think about that. I can't give you an easy answer because I don't think it is an easy answer. I wasn't thinking about institutions. I was thinking more about strategies. For example, early on a guy named Ron Saufley, who was working in the development office at Santa Cruz, came to me about some of the things I was doing in North Richmond. Working with him, we made it possible for us to move the program in North Richmond, with junior high school kids, we met every summer for six weeks. We were able to raise the

money with support of the Junior League of Oakland, raise the money to have a two-week program on the campus.

Ron Saufley worked with whoever it was at the university. We got the residence halls in Stevenson College. We had about one staff person for every four to five students, so that was a good ratio. And we would have academic programs in the morning and recreational programs in the afternoon, and then academic focus in the evenings. For two weeks, with about fifty kids. That's what we were doing. We took them up to the Lick Observatory, where they could look through a telescope. Scared the life out of them because when they got into the Lick Observatory, they realized there was a body in the facility. And they were more terrified of the fact that, "Here lies James C. Lick." "There's a body in there!" Looking through the telescope became secondary. But turning them on to other kinds of things—I can't tell you how much there was.

The strategy was: educate those young people. One of them ended up ultimately graduating from Oakes College. But she was a junior high school student and they were learning reading, math, and writing skills. I particularly focused on reading and writing. And reading for substance, not just calling words. So, that's what I knew. That's what I knew how to do.

What happened was when Martin [Luther King] was killed and there began a movement to try and build some academic support for his vision—this was all across the country now. It's not just Santa Cruz. And then you get the movement in Santa Cruz arguing for a black college. I felt there was a possibility to move some of those strategies more fully to the campus, okay? But institution building

wasn't so much in my mind in the way that most people might think about it. What was in my mind was broadening and expanding the strategy. And with Myles Horton it was listening to the voices of the people.

Lessons from Saul Alinsky

With Saul Alinsky, it was community-organizing strategies that allowed you to empower vulnerable communities. The most important thing I learned from Saul Alinsky is you don't have to have everybody involved to get something going. Saul used to say if he could mobilize 2 percent of a community, he could run it. I said to him, "Saul, you're out of your mind. Out of your mind." Saul came and taught in my Peace Corps classes. I started teaching Peace Corps at Davis in 1963. And while I was teaching Peace Corps, they arranged for Saul Alinsky to come in. That's another long story. That's where I met Saul. Saul was so irascible that if you said the sky was blue he'd look at you like you were crazy. Everybody with good sense and clear eyes could see it was green. What was your problem? So he went on like that. But Saul said all he wanted was 2 percent. That was one thing. I went and evaluated his programs and he was right.

The second thing Saul understood so well was that very often in grassroots communities, the people who get involved early on and become empowered have selfish motives. And in his programs, by the third or fourth year he'd gotten rid of all of the people who came early on and began to get the people who were more willing to share.

Well, that became important as I heard Myles Horton saying you gotta spend a year learning you're being used by the wrong people. And I saw in Daufuskie

Island and in poor communities in South Carolina that as the world was changing and opportunities were opening, the people who were grabbing them were people who thought it was time for them to be in charge and be empowered and not to let those other people get up here like they think they know. It is incredible.

So, those are the kinds of things I began to learn. And I began to think in terms of how you could expand that strategy in an institutional setting. But I didn't have all the tools, all the knowledge.

How It Worked:

Understanding the Importance of Chancellor Dean McHenry and Bob Bosler

Now, let me say one other part about this that I think is very critical. Dean McHenry, the chancellor, was absolutely superb and priceless in this process. He didn't know what I was doing. He didn't understand it. He made it plain he didn't understand it. And he did *not* agree with it. But what he also made plain was he would never stand in the way. He felt every program, every college, every provost, must have maximum opportunity to succeed or fail. So he gave incredible support and encouragement. But he didn't try to manage and control. But one thing he did was he sent to work for me, in those early days of Oakes, one of his staff, a fellow by the name of Robert Bosler. Bob Bosler was good at putting things together. He had completed a master's degree in aeronautical engineering from MIT at the age of twenty-one. And he was working on Dean McHenry's staff and he liked working with young people and doing things. He

was a kid himself. But he became the person who would take an idea that I had and begin to put the parts together. You see what I mean?

López: Yeah.

Recruiting Minority Faculty at UCSC: Eugene Cota-Robles' Role

Blake: All I had to do was come up with ideas and we began to recruit faculty. Then there were other circumstances working toward us. Dean McHenry didn't think we could find faculty who would be competent and qualified to work on a University of California campus, who were women and minorities. But we happened to catch the crest of maximum participation in graduate programs in the early sixties. They began to crest and as those people were finishing up in '63, '64, '65, we were able to pick them up, a substantial number. They had to come from a certain limited number of institutions. We got our share, more than our share. And then we had Gene Cota-Robles in place. Gene was also another one of those strategists who were making my dreams come true while I'm out here raising money. So it wasn't a simple one-person or two-person operation.

López: What did Gene Cota-Robles do?

Blake: Gene Cota-Robles very often did the negotiating with boards of studies and academic programs to allow me to attract and hire minority faculty they probably would not have wanted. I had the money, we had the money for extra things so that if we wanted somebody— Like a Frank Talamantes; we wanted Frank Talamantes. Well, the board of studies wanted another biologist. We wanted Frank Talamantes. Well, there was going to be one position. But two

years later there was going to be a second position. So because we had the extra money, Gene Cota-Robles negotiated the situation where we could bring in Frank Talamantes early and pay his salary for two years and then he'd become the candidate for the regular position further down.

López: Ah. And why was he good at that?

Blake: Gene? Because he was the vice chancellor! That was his job. He was vice chancellor and he controlled all of those things. And he knew what was happening.

López: I see.

Blake: So we ended up in biology—not just Oakes—but the campus had four Latinos with PhD's. Four! And a Latina with a PhD in biology who was on the research staff faculty. We had one black with a PhD in biology and one American Indian, Cliff Poodry, a Mohawk Indian with a PhD in biology. With a biology program like that, how could minority students fail? I want you to hear me. But it wasn't just me. It was all of the others. What I kept pushing was *we must continue to lift* as we climb. We must continue to reach into the hearts of those communities and raise levels of hope. Four or five of the first Latinos that we graduated in biology entered unable to do long division. Oh, yeah.

One of the classes had Martín Martín. I don't know if you know that name. You don't know Martín Martín! His sister worked on the campus. Martín came to us from Newark, California. He couldn't do long division. And he never took any remediation. He was bright, capable. And between Gene Cota-Robles, all the

biologists, and us in the college—we nurtured Martín. Ron Saufley, Bob Bosler, we nurtured him. And Martín then became a model for other Latinos, as well as blacks. And when he was near finishing his bachelor's degree, he had been accepted to medical schools in California and at Harvard. And I remember, we sat down and talked. And I pulled out a *National Geographic* story about a black MD in a rural area of the South, who was doing a heck of a job as a physician and as a political social leader. And nobody questioned his qualifications because he had an MD from Harvard. I said to Martín, "When you get your MD, wherever you get it, you're going to become a social leader and people are going to question you. You go to a place where they can't question you. He went to Harvard. He was in the upper 10 percent of his class the first year. And he wrote back and said, "I studied harder at Oakes and Santa Cruz than I did at Harvard." He took a year off and did a master's degree in public health or public administration at the Kennedy School and went on and did his MD. He's now a full professor at UCLA and his specialty is pediatric gastroenterology. And he has done his research on Latinos in the Oaxaca area of Mexico, but in doing that he's making connections with African roots and everything else. The man is amazing!

López: Oh, that's wonderful.

Blake: Amazing. You can look him up.⁸⁹

López: Yeah. I will.

⁸⁹ See <http://www.uclahealth.org/body.cfm?id=479&action=detail&ref=13171>

Writing and Literacy

Okay, let's talk about literacy. You mentioned that you worked on reading and that was important to you. And the Citizenship Schools, of course, were about reading and writing.

Blake: Yes.

López: And Don Rothman told me in, I think it was this October or November [2012] we were talking about the Cuban literacy campaign and he said that was formative for him. So I wanted to talk about what your vision was initially and how that might have developed while you were at Santa Cruz. So when you began to work with Don Rothman and others at Oakes, what was your initial vision of the role of writing for Oakes students?

Blake: I did a lot of personal writing. People used to call it journaling. I never did. I just used to write through to clarity. That's how I put it. I was dealing with my own personal issues and I found writing was very important. But more than that, I found that in my work with community people, particularly junior high school students, not adults, not adults—I was never successful there—I found writing was empowering. They could write and then read aloud. And you would encourage and somehow or other I think it was transformative.

I never thought about literacy in the way that you may have thought about it. All I knew was writing was important and I never taught a class in which students didn't have to do a *lot* of writing. It wasn't the one-minute essay that I ultimately adopted after learning from Don. It was more like every course had a major term

paper. I was fully aware of the tendencies toward plagiarism that students have. So in every course I taught, students not only had to do a major term paper, they had to begin their work early and about halfway through the semester they had to submit to me a detailed outline for their paper along with a detailed bibliography, preliminary. Which means you had to spend time at this. And we would critique this. And then about three quarters the way through the semester they would have to submit a draft, a full draft. And I kicked ass. They had to do it. I have students who are now college professors saying to me, "I don't write drafts when I write." But you can always improve it. If they had to write a draft and submit it, you can critique it. And it's more likely to be something they have done themselves. So they had to do drafts. Then they get that back. Two weeks later, they have to submit the final paper.

What I found was, when people did this it transformed them. It did me as an undergraduate. I did two term papers in demography that got me in the library and I began to get the excitement of learning and the excitement of articulating new ideas. A professor looked at one of the papers and gave it an A-plus and said it was of graduate school quality. Hey, I wanted more of that. So that's what I was trying to do.

What Rothman did, and you've got to understand, I had nothing to do with hiring Don Rothman. We knew we wanted to teach writing. We taught writing all the time. I was a TA in a course at Berkeley that the English Department underwrote. They gave the professor, a sociology professor, money to hire additional TA's who would read if the professors would assign writing. As a part of that, the TA's, one of whom was me, had to take a course in writing under

a writing professor. Then we used those skills in the sociology course. Well, I took that course. But the writing I was doing at that time was my master's thesis. So when we had to write something and read it to the class, I'd write something about my master's thesis. I was constantly growing in this way. So that was the way I approached things. But we had to write. We wanted to teach—I forget the name of the course—they used to call it Bonehead English, which is unfortunate. But it was a special course—it was remedial writing. Well, they did not allow you to use Regents' money for remedial purposes. So the students had to pay extra to take this course. This was at Berkeley, all of them—you had to take this remedial course but you had to pay extra to take it. I didn't want that. And I wanted somebody who could teach it without putting a burden on the students.

So I was able, through the leadership of Dean McHenry and Gurden Mooser, who was a development officer, we met with a philanthropist in San Francisco named Daniel Koshland, who eventually came with the Oakes naming gift, but initially I sat with him in the Wells Fargo building over Shrimp Louie and he gave me \$75,000. That became the money to hire Don Rothman. This guy Bob Bosler now is doing the administrative stuff. I'm off at Daufuskie doing research in the summer. Bob calls me and tells me we got this great guy from Berkeley and I think we should offer this job to him. I said, "All right." I didn't meet Don Rothman until he'd signed the contract. So I can't say I hired him. But I created the financial structure that allowed him to be hired. And once Don Rothman came on board, he made everything happen.

Why and How Writing is Empowering

López: And so what did you learn during your years at Oakes about writing at the undergraduate level?

Blake: Writing is empowering and uplifting.

López: Why?

Blake: Because when you write you are looking into your own community, your own environment, and ultimately if you are reflective in your writing, you're looking into your own soul. And when you get there, you're at the grassroots of who you are. I found, and I did this in other places; I did this when I became the president of Tougaloo College. I would—oh, and the other part of it—Karl Lamb, I don't know if that name is familiar? One of the original faculty at Santa Cruz. He went on to become the first civilian dean of the United States Naval Academy. And they fired him because he was turning out scholars rather than engineers. (laughs) But Karl was political science and Karl always wanted to be a novelist. He taught a course called *Daily Writing*. Every day a small group of students and he would sit down and write. He'd write and they would write. That became an important model for me.

Well, I would in my work at Tougaloo and other places require the students to write a one-hundred word essay every day. Monday through Friday, before you leave campus, you got to turn this one-hundred word essay in. What I learned—this was already at Oakes—when you're writing every day, your environment becomes your data. You become more observant. You become more educated by

your environment. And in the process you begin to develop these inner feelings, because not only do you write, ultimately you can begin to write about what you think about what you're seeing in your environment. So it's empowering. It's insightful. I did it myself. As I was going through certain things, I wrote long essays as a way of figuring things out. Essays about things which I've talked about. Essays I've shared with only one person in my life, and that's Bill Doyle, who was working with me. My wife—none of them have yet to see it. But Bill saw it. He saw what my thinking was as I was trying to develop stuff. So he was working over here—and I don't know if you know Bill Doyle, but he's a priceless person, priceless.⁹⁰ He grew up in the Pajaro Valley, poor. But he looks like, you know, Jack Armstrong, tall, Anglo, and all of this. And a first-rate biologist. And they were relating to him as a white, middle-class male. But he's looking from the perspective of a low wealth, peripheral person. He's more like us in spirit than he is like them even though he's more like them in appearance than he is like us. Bill Doyle was priceless, priceless, because he could be in places and he could run things in terms of getting people in place. And they couldn't figure him out. Oakes faculty couldn't figure him out. Roberto Crespi looked at him and said, "He's the enemy. He's the spy they put in here." He saw everybody as a spy, that didn't look like him, until he began to realize he was making stereotypical judgments.

⁹⁰ See William Doyle's book about the history of UC Santa Cruz, UC Santa Cruz: 1960-1991. <http://news.ucsc.edu/2011/05/doyle-book.html>

Working With Struggling Writers in College and Adult Literacy Campaigns: Similarities and Differences

López: How do you explain the needs of young students who struggle with writing at the college level or university level with the needs of adults in the communities like the Citizenship Schools? I think there is some confusion sometimes in the scholarship about transformative education. So could you talk about the needs of people who have been underserved in the past in their education and come into schools and are working at basic levels of reading and writing, versus the campaign strategy of going out into the community. What are the needs of those people?

Blake: I would urge you to read the essay I wrote with Ervin Simmons. You may have. "A Daufuskie Island Lad in an Academic Community." You need to read that.⁹¹

López: Where is that?

Blake: I can send it to you if you remind me.

López: Okay.

Blake: But also, in the tribute that they have for me, go through that tribute and read the tribute that Ervin Simmons wrote. It's in there.⁹²

Once again, I argue that writing is empowering. We create this myth, if you will, about writing. It's that writers sit down and it comes out. And when it comes out,

⁹¹ Available in full text at <http://www.scup.org/asset/55434/DaufuskieIsland.pdf>

⁹² See <http://hermanblaktribute2013.wordpress.com/2013/01/25/477/>

it comes out perfect. The idea of working to create, writing as a creation, if you will—you continue to act and work on it—is a part of this general mythical thing. We—I felt, and Don Rothman took it to a higher level; he was already there, not that he got it from me. It was critical for people to write. When I was running my junior high school program, I made those students write. I didn't understand what I was doing, understand that? But I felt that I was empowering them with that writing. They come with anxieties and fears, beliefs that they don't have anything to say.

Now, you got to understand that in all of this I'm interacting with and working with Alex Haley. And Alex says he wrote for seven or eight years before he ever sold a piece. The first piece he ever submitted for possible publication was a piece he wrote about a badger. And it was rejected. Over the years, by trial and error, he came to understand that the subject he knew best was himself. When he wrote about himself or his family or others, his stuff started selling. Now, if you read Alex's material, and I know Alex well, extremely well, and he underwrote a lot of my research—he is the loneliest man I have ever met. Every piece that Alex ultimately wrote was him writing about somebody he met: somebody he met in a grocery store, somebody he met someplace else. And he wrote about them. Alex is dealing with his loneliness through his connections he makes with people he writes about.

Do you hear me? What I'm trying to say is you just don't come out and say this, but you try to get people to understand ultimately that they are the most important subject of their writing. Now, writing instructors may disagree with me. That's all right. That's all I know. So I've tried to get people to write as a way

of developing insights and understanding. I don't say, "You're going to get insights through writing," I just say write about it. Writing about the horses you had to feed this morning, or the stalls you had to clean. Well, as they write about the horse and the stall, they begin to fall into, "what I think about this and what I'm going to do about it." And that's where you want them to go.

López: So in that sense, the needs of community members and the needs of young students are the same.

Blake: Yes.

López: How about the differences between their needs as writers?

Blake: Well, I don't call them writers.

López: Okay.

Blake: I can't say that. I'm talking about people who use writing as a way of developing insight and understanding. The differences are for me—and this is the first time I've ever been asked this question—you know the answer better than I do, and that's what Myles Horton would say to you. But that's all right—I understand that. The people on the outside, the so-called adults, have never had an opportunity to write and think about their writing.

We used to do orientations, okay [at Oakes College]. And when we'd do new student orientations, we'd always invite the families. When we sent the letter out, one page would be in English, the other side would be in Spanish. I'd sign them. And we had parents who would come. Don Rothman always, when he started

talking about what he did, he would give them a piece of paper and ask them to write a paragraph. They would panic. They had to write a paragraph. What Don wanted them to understand was the kind of emotions their students were going through, and that they needed to understand we need those students to stay here to work on those skills.

I remember a woman—he never picked up the papers—but I remembered one Latina just talking about this orientation, saying, "And you know, you put me to write! You put me to write!" She was so glad she could take her writing with her. But she understood this doesn't come easy. And that's what her child has to deal with. We have so disempowered and destroyed the inner strength and the egos of our people, not necessarily in a deliberate way, but by the advertisements we see—I mean, if you don't look like some skinny model, somehow you're ugly, or all these other kinds of things. And people from, if you will, low wealth communities, come to thinking, I ain't worth anything. I don't know how to—I know how to reach them but it's a process that's ongoing and long term and long range.

López: Yes.

Blake: All right? I used to lecture in prisons, Soledad particularly. And one thing about lecturing in prisons is you got the most voracious group of listeners you'd ever want to have, because they don't have anything else. And sometimes I would go and I'd lecture and guys would come up to me and say, "Dr. Blake, now you said..." and they had made notes, and they'd show me their notes and I could hardly read them because they couldn't spell. But they'd have them and

I'd be talking about demography and they'd be hearing democracy. That's a lesson to me, because that's what's in their head.

Anyhow, the young people who come have not reached that total, if you will, loss of confidence, dignity, and power. And they begin to work it. Now, what did Don Rothman do? Don taught me that you don't take somebody's writing and show them every mistake. I gave up using a red pen. I'd use a green pen or a blue pen. Because the red pen was what they got in high school and other places where they were always being told it's no good. Okay? Now others may have. I use always green or blue. I've got a lot of cynicism in other places. They'd say, "Oh, you're trying to hold their hand." I'm not trying to hold their hand. I'm trying to motivate them to higher levels.

The second thing he taught me—and he didn't necessarily say, "You don't use a red pen." I don't think he ever did to me. But I'm trying to listen to the kinds of things that stimulate negative feelings. The second thing was, "Before you start telling them what's wrong, you try and tell them what's right." So I'd say, "You got a great idea here. But that idea is constrained by the grammar." But if they knew they had a good idea, there's reason to go and learn grammar.

Recently, my wife and I did a review of a program in a college in a Southern state. And we tore them up. Because those teachers loved to write [about] what's wrong. They'd underline something with red and put "S/V"—you know, subject-verb. Well, what does that tell a student? All I know is I got a subject-verb problem. But how do I deal with it? Instead of saying I got a great idea about leading people into new perspectives through marches in Vallejo or in the San

Joaquin Valley somewhere, and I need to work on how I improve, how I articulate that idea. I'll figure out the subject-verb. If you read Ervin Simmons' writings and see the stuff he wrote when he was in the fourth grade, because he met me when he was in the third or fourth grade and he wrote about it and his mother saved it for him. And he showed it to me--I couldn't believe it. He couldn't spell. He didn't have *anything*. Now my problem is that I have over four hundred pages of texts that he's written, over four hundred pages. I'd just tell him, write, and send it to me. And then he's writes and I just set it aside. And it is so good. But he doesn't think so.

López: What is he writing about?

Blake: Whatever. His sister died recently. Before that his father and so forth. He's writing about his own thing. You read that piece because when he came to Santa Cruz, as he says, "I didn't know you didn't eat rice every day." He talks about what he didn't know before—

Diversity as a Concept: Blake's Ongoing Research and Struggle

López: So let's change the subject a little bit and talk about the concept of diversity, especially as it concerns undergraduate studies. As I've looked through the Oakes College history, I've been really impressed and inspired by the way that you and other founding Oakes members have formulated the concept of diversity and stood by it at that time. I think that it's a concept that we need to keep revisiting because sometimes people talk past each other. They think that they know what they're talking about and sometimes they don't. So I wonder if you could start by talking in the present today because it's also a

concept that changes. Please say what you understand today when we say, "the study of diversity."

Blake: Well, I don't like the term—

López: Okay.

Blake: —anymore. I once did. I don't like the term anymore because it has become a shibboleth. People say, "We value diversity and let's celebrate diversity." To give an example of what I mean, early on in my career as a provost, I was invited by the University of Massachusetts, Amherst to give a keynote address of the year, and I think it was a year they were going to celebrate diversity or something like this, the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. And I spent time preparing. I remember I went out here to Watsonville and found a nice little place and me and my wife, we stayed about four days and I worked on this paper. And I went to Amherst and delivered it. It was well received. I laid out ideas—I don't remember them now—about the need for diversity and building and transcending barriers and so forth. Well, the academic year ended. And somewhere along the line, the next fall, the Boston Red Sox lost the World Series. And it ended up with African Americans despising and putting down the Boston Red Sox and Anglo students being upset. So you had this huge outburst on the campus of people tearing each other up around the very thing we're trying to build.

What that said to me was, these issues are deeply rooted in our history, our national character. Becoming a diverse nation is a work in progress that's going to take a long time to take shape. In 1969-1970, we were saying to the faculty at

Santa Cruz, "Look who's in the elementary schools in Los Angeles and San Francisco. That's your future." And they would say to us, "Oh, we'll be able to get our percentage." But we have this notion that we can, if you will—when I say "we" and I'm here talking about an Anglo-focused or Anglocentric superstructure, conceptually as well as politically, will always be in charge.

And going around—but I'm going to get to where you want—for example, we used to have all-university faculty retreats. I went to numerous ones of those. Every year they would have a set of faculty from each campus, fifteen or twenty, all meet together and talk about things. I thought it was a wonderful experience. Well, one year they invited the chair of the Ways and Means Committee of the legislature, a black guy named Willie Brown. Yeah. And Willie came. And I know Willie. I've known Willie since he was in law school. We've done some things together, he and I and Merv Dymally. In the community they were very powerful. So they invited Willie. He's head of the Ways and Means Committee, and you want him to sign your check, university, without any restrictions. He said, "Well, I'd like to know more about your research. What do you do?" And they said to him, "You can't understand our research. Sign the check." They didn't put it in those words but, "Sign the check. We can only share our research with our peers." Basically, "you're not our peer."

I remember David Saxon—I worked with him very closely—afterwards, saying, "You know, we have to learn how to communicate." And I reminded David Saxon of Willie Brown's career. Willie Brown came to California from Texas when he was about ten, eleven, twelve. And he went on to high school, and when he graduated high school he wanted to go to Berkeley. And they said, "Oh,

no. You're not good enough to go to Berkeley," so he went to San Francisco State. Then when he went to San Francisco State and graduated he wanted to go to Boalt Hall to study law. They said, "Oh, no. You're not good enough." So he went on to that other place in San Francisco [Hastings] and he got a law degree. I knew Willie during this period. Then he went and became a politician. And the basic principle was, "When I wanted to go to your college you said I wasn't good enough. When I wanted to go to your law school, you said I wasn't good enough. Now I'm the political power and you're going to tell me I'm not good enough? I'm writing your checks. You better change your tune."

But they cannot change the concept. I may be in the minority numerically but that doesn't mean I don't run and define. So then let me come back to this concept of diversity. And even though you wanted contemporaneously, let me just tell you briefly how I got there.

López: Sure.

Blake: I'm a demographer and I study demography. And in the process of learning, I spent a lot of time on immigration, particularly European immigration to the United States. Well, during that European era, there was a significant Chinese immigration on the West Coast. Now, when I compare what was happening on the East Coast with the Europeans and the West Coast with the Chinese particularly and later the Japanese, I see two very different experiences. But the reasons for immigrating, very often, the hopes and dreams and aspirations very often are the same. How is it that one group has one experience—because one group can disappear. So they call it the melting pot but

it isn't. And there is no metaphor that adequately describes what we have. I remember, about 1970 or so, when they were trying to expand and destroy the old system of who could come and how many of what and so forth, Ted Kennedy standing up in the Senate and saying, "The rules that we're changing aren't going to change America." I said to myself, "He doesn't know what he's talking about." Because those rules opened the doors to Latinos, Asians, and Africans. And before you know it, you've got a different world. In that different world, we're still trying to hold on to the old things.

So when I taught, first of all, immigration—and I gave a seminar on that. I had a guy in one of those seminars named José Orozco. And he would take on those students. He would talk about "the *gringas!*" [makes dramatic angry noises] But they came to respect each other. Because José Orozco was supposedly, supposedly, a Chicano. But as they came to know and respect each other, José Orozco would come and they'd say, "Well, what are you today?" And they'd say, "Oh, today I'm *Mexicano,*" or today, "I'm José." He'd be all over the place as with the *gringas* and the others. You can't define them every day in a particular way. They are constantly developing and changing. So when I taught a course, when I began to develop what became the Oakes Core Course, at that time, I called it Social Change and something or other in a Diverse Society. Listen to me carefully now. I would deal with Europeans because I felt that was an important part, and you could see the comparison. Asians, Latinos, African Americans, and Native Americans. And the more you studied it the more you realized how complex that is. What's a Latino? What's a Chicano? Some of my students' parents or grandparents said, "Don't call me Chicano. That was like the N-word in the old

days." And race. What the heck is race? I'm trying to teach this. In another place I had a student. She was from Hawaii. She was not Pacific Islander, or East—whatever. She was Hawaiian race. I'm trying to say—race? She wrote an essay talking about power, she wrote an essay saying, "I am of the Hawaiian race." And she underlined *race* four times. "My father taught me that as long as I have a flower in my hair and *aloha* in my heart, I am of the Hawaiian *race* (*one, two, three, four*)."

López: (laughs)

Blake: My point is made. It's what you bring that creates. And as it creates division, it also can create other things. It's important to study it and learn and analyze, to see how we have been so destructive but we have also the potential to be creative.

So I want to tell two more stories and then I'll go on to the contemporary. In one case, I would give an exam at the end of the semester. I'd say, "Describe your group and then use that as a basis for your perceptions of another group." One lady sat in that Oakes 105 the whole [quarter] and she ended up writing and saying I didn't know what I was talking about. And she told her story, told her story all right. I called her and apologized to her. I said, "I'd like to use your story, without a name, but I'd like to use it." She gave me her permission.

All through the [quarter] I had looked at her. She always had a furrow in her brow. Because I try to look at my students. And she said to me, she wrote, she came to Oakes College because she thought she would be accepted. And she found she didn't *fit*. You know, that hurt me. Her grandmother was born and

raised in the People's Republic of China. And somewhere in this experience her grandmother married a so-called white man. Out of that union, her mother was born. Her mother, as an adult, married a "white man." And to that union, she was born. She came into my class, blond, blue-eyed, and I considered her white. And I taught her like she was white. But she grew up raised by her grandmother, speaking Chinese, and cooking Chinese cuisine. So she comes to Santa Cruz. Where do you go? She doesn't belong in Crown College. So she comes to Oakes and she finds out the Chinese don't want to deal with her because she looks white. But when she's amongst the whites, she feels Chinese. What do I mean when I say analyze your own group and write about another one? So I apologized to her.

I told this story and we began to decide we weren't going to use these traditional concepts because they don't apply. So we literally tried—instead of saying "I'm Chicana, or Latino, or black, or Asian," we'd say, "What are you? You tell me." Because I'd be giving speeches and people would say, "Well, Dr. Blake, as an African American—" And I'd say, "I'm not African American." "Are you crazy?" Like, you know, what's his problem? One lady said to me, "Well, as a non-white—" I said, "Don't define me that way. I don't like those negative definitions." She said, "Well, it's nothing...he's white; I'm white. You—(he taps his forearm)—are non-white, right?" For the rest of the evening, every time there was a discussion going on and that woman raised her hand, I said, "the non-male over here."

López: (laughs)

Blake: "The non-male over here." By the end of the evening, people were either angry at me or they were with me. Who wants to be defined by what they don't have? I was seeking the more positive.

My last story—I ended up teaching a course in Oakes College with Dilip Basu, the guy who brought us Don Rothman. Dilip is from India. He's a lover and proponent of Gandhi. Here I come, out of my Black Panther Party background, my extensive interaction with El Hajj Malik El Shabazz.⁹³ So Dilip and I taught a course together called *The Role of Violence and Nonviolence in Social Change*. And there are people who said it was the best course they ever took. Well, during the course—I don't like negative definitions—and in one of these debates or discussion, I said, "I don't like the term *nonviolence*. I'm trying to find a positive way of saying what that thing is. Dilip set me on my ear or turned me on my head by pointing out that from the way in which you explain and interpret things in his native tongue, nonviolence was not a negative term. It penetrated through a lot of other kinds of things and gave it a new character. He so eloquently laid this out there that I realized that what I was being was hung up on a word and an idea, without examining and articulating and understanding what could be its unlimited—unlimited--practice. So I had to stop that and say, what is this? I still don't know.

So now when I come to diversity, and what is diversity in contemporary terms, I don't like it because too many people use it as a bean-counting thing—you got so many of this, so many of that, so many of the other. Well, does that make you a different or transcendent society? My wife and I are trying to work on the

⁹³ Formerly known as Malcolm X—Editor.

concept of diversity as a value, a way of saying the world in which you make decisions around this. I use as an example, the president, Tom Ehrlich, who is now over in Palo Alto, when he was president of Indiana University, as president, Indiana University had eight campuses headed by a chancellor. When Tom Ehrlich came in as president, and members of the board liked to point out he was the first Jewish president. He hated that; he hated them. He used to sit with staff and say, "What do those bozos want?" I'd say, "He's calling the board bozos?"

López: (laughs)

Blake: So the black faculty and staff petitioned him to create a position: vice president for diversity or minority affairs, or something like that. He said no. He wouldn't do it. They were mad. Because they thought he wasn't committed to this. But his whole point was, you can create this position and it ain't going to change a thing. Tom Ehrlich got eight chancellors, eight campuses, after he'd been president about five years, of those eight chancellors three were women and two were black. And one of the women was black. So all of a sudden he got this range. And these chancellors were saying to the faculty, "Don't bring me candidates from an all-Anglo pool." The faculty were saying, "What is this?"

Tom Ehrlich, I literally, in a meeting called him out. I'm sitting next to him. I was his sort-of like advisor. There was this all-black group going somewhere on some kind of a thing. Somebody was asking, was he going to support it? He said, "Yes, I've been persuaded that for a limited amount of time it's all right to have these single-race exclusive groups." There were about forty people sitting around the

table. And when he finished, I said, "We're not going to do it." He looked at me like how could I—I'm sitting as close to the president as I am to you. I said, "We're not going to do it." They said, "The president said—" I said, "The president is wrong and we're not going to do it." That was it. They knew the next day I was gone. Tom Ehrlich never said a word to me. And we didn't do it. Because he was wrong.

Now, what do I mean? I'm still trying to figure it out. I mean that you have a value. And you value a society where you're not bean-counting or any of this sort of business. You just know when you've reached equality. If you look at some of the early, early stuff, you will see that there's a petition from Jewish students. They wanted a Jewish student component of the Oakes student body. I looked at it the other day. I'd forgotten about it.

Or, I remember the one that the black students proposed. They wanted to have a college where 20 percent of the students were black, 20 percent were white, 20 percent were Asian, 20 percent were Native American, and 20 percent were Latino. And they presented that proposal, and I said no. I said, "Because if you have that and you have a situation where you might have 22 percent Latino, are you going to say they're over the budget or take it from somebody else? Or you come in with 12 percent Anglo. That's not the way." "Well, what is the way?" I kept arguing, "When you sit down at the table, ask yourself, 'Who's not here?' I'm glad to be here. But who's not here. And you think about the ones who are not here."

Long after I left Oakes, they were thinking about disabled students; they were thinking about lesbian and gay students, and other categories, if you will. But it's not the category. It's creating the other thing. I'm working on another paper on homophobia and the social costs. Basically, my whole point is there is no way in which we can figure out how biology limits our intellectual or mental capacity. Therefore the challenge is to continue to expand that. But as we open up new opportunities and bring in new so-called categories, hopefully we will do it in such a way that we can transcend those categories. And in transcending those categories, we find ourselves focused on what is within the heart and soul.

López: Last year when you were here and talking with Don Rothman in the conversation that was videotaped, you said that you appreciated getting to know some of the students at Santa Cruz but you commented that some of them were overly focused on the study of their own group.⁹⁴

Blake: That's right.

López: Could you elaborate on that?

Blake: Sure. What we keep arguing is we need a critical mass so people can feel like they belong, are comfortable. But so often we get to that so-called critical mass and then what we want to do is deal with the people like us. I think that's where our transcendental, transformative conceptualization breaks down; it really breaks down. We had a young lady who wanted to build a Filipino organization. She wanted it and oh, I kept arguing, "You know, well, why not Asian?" She kept arguing, "No, we got to have the Filipinos. Not Asians. We're

⁹⁴ See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bsDW_M-NdtY

not Asians. We're Filipino!" And then she wanted a Filipino group where if you were part Filipino you couldn't belong. You've got one parent who is so-called non-Filipino. "No, we just want pure Filipinos" What the heck is a pure Filipino? She ended up marrying a white guy. Her love was not constrained in that way. That whole idea went. It just went out the window.

I happen to have a certain affinity for African Americans. None of my children have. None of my children. I remember walking across the first gathering with my daughter, my oldest daughter, one day. It's not that they don't have affinity [but] they all ended up marrying Anglos. I was saying to my daughter, she asked me a question, and I said, "Well, you know, like they say in the ghetto." She said, "No, I don't know what they say in the ghetto." I said, "You don't?" She said, "I've never lived in the ghetto." I lived in a ghetto. She didn't. I lived in a ghetto and worked my ass off so she wouldn't. Now she's got another world. You ought to see my grandson. His great-grandfather used to say he was being mixed up by being brought up in the way he was. But he came home one day saying he was Korean. His great-granddaddy said, "What are they teaching your kids about now?" "Well, he's dealing with Koreans and others. He's Korean."

López: So what is it about our young people's education, what factors are going into these folks' education [so that] they come to the university and they are committed to studying only their group's history?

Blake: It is the responsibility of the administration and the faculty to open their minds. I'll leave it there. You read Ervin Simmons and you'll see it.

López: What kind of leadership or what kind of curriculum do you think can do that?

Blake: It's the people. I don't care what kind of curriculum you have. It's what they see in the teaching and learning. I would never teach—I teach classes on blacks; I teach courses on African Americans. But I would never *only* teach classes on African Americans. People said, "Every group has their week to cry; the Jews have their week, and..." But it was not to cry, but to understand the common features and the differences. And now with all this genetic work and the DNA work, we ought to be working very hard to deal with that. There's a recent issue of *American Scholar* which deals with this. The lead piece is about the limits and is written by a man who is a third or fourth generation interracial child of a Mississippi family.⁹⁵

López: What's the name of that?

Blake: It's about the politics of race. You send me a note and I'll send you the reference. But my point is, for generations in certain towns in Mississippi blacks and whites have married and lived together. And my wife was one of them.

I have to go.

López: Oh. Can we do one more question?

Blake: Quickly.

⁹⁵ See W. Ralph Eubanks, "Color Lines: How DNA Ancestry Testing can Turn our Notions of Race and Ethnicity Upside Down," Spring 2013. Available in full text at <http://theamericanscholar.org/color-lines/#.UYgDTZWAbdc>

Social Justice Work

López: When we were doing the course on Oakes College this winter, one of the most debated questions was whether the original Oakes dream for personal and social transformation had died because of economic pressures and cutbacks—not enough staff, not enough teachers, not enough time. Everybody feels like they're being put through the meat grinder. I wonder if you could compare the challenges that founders faced in the first ten years, with the kind of challenges that people are facing today when they try to do social justice work at the university.

Blake: You do social justice work regardless of economic circumstances. I don't think you can talk about the budget and put it in those, in my opinion, transformative, transcendental terms. You look at a John Lewis and what's happened to him in his life, you can't do that. Or, Arturo Torres. When Art Torres came to UC Santa Cruz, he was the only Latino. There were no other Latino faculty members. Not one. It didn't stop him. If you start getting into the budget—and you have the budget cuts, you have the changes. The principles don't change. So the challenges we have are very different because they were related to resources.

I once talked to Pat Brown, Governor Brown's daddy. He said, "You know, when we were planning back in the fifties for the future, we didn't know anything about the Pill. The Pill came in 1961. All of the sudden, the demography changed and that constant growth didn't happen. So you have to make adjustments but you don't compromise your principles.

Dean McHenry was the one who sent me the resources to get started. Now, if I looked at Dean McHenry and tried to define him, I would have said, "No." And the rumors about his racism and his conservatism would make you think he'd never back this. He never tried to stop it. So what are we talking about? Or, in the civil rights movements, one of the leading photographers of the civil rights movement and Martin Luther King—we recently learned he was an FBI informant the *whole time*. I don't make judgments. Because I can't. I don't know. I don't question the soul of Bill Doyle. I don't know. Because their dreams are very different.

If you look at the leadership of the Black Panther Party, Bobby Seale and others when they got started, and look where their children and grandchildren are, you'd be amazed. I was sitting in a meeting one time and this was a conference of Panthers, former Panthers. This young lady was organizing the children, taking daycare. I said to her, I said, really nice, "What are you going to study when you go to college?" She looked at me. She said, "Dr. Blake, I have an MBA and I'm a financial analyst with a major bank in London." Her grandmama was a former Panther. An MBA? Financial analyst in London. How did you get there? We opened up doors. We turned things around. Now, if you let that kind of attitude think you can't accomplish, you're not going to get to where we need to get to: women presidents, Latinos on the Supreme Court. You name it. And it's not because they're Latinos or women. It's because they have vision and understanding. I'm sorry. I'm out of time.

López: Okay. Thank you.

About the Interviewer and Editor:

Cameron Vanderscoff is a freelance oral historian and writer based in New York City. His work with the Regional History Project includes a series of published oral histories, such as *Hayden White: Frontiers of Consciousness at UCSC, 1978-1994* and *James Clifford: Tradition and Transformation at UCSC*. In addition to his ongoing collaboration with the Project, he has a range of public and family clients in California and New York, including a new partnership with Columbia University on the Phoenix House Oral History Project.

Cameron is working towards an MA in oral history at Columbia, focusing on applied ethics in the field. He graduated magna cum laude from UC Santa Cruz with BAs in history and literature (focus in creative writing). For him, all of these threads come together in oral history, where individuals become authors through life storytelling, and historical experience becomes literary narrative. The opportunity to elicit and revisit these stories is an ongoing education and a privilege. He likes to do other things too, like writing fiction, playing the blues, and traveling with a notebook.

About the Interviewer:

Dr. Leslie López has been teaching the Oakes College Core Course for six years and in the winter of 2013 taught an Oakes course in which students conducted oral histories documenting the history of Oakes College. She received her PhD in socio-cultural anthropology. Her research focuses on alternative communication and education strategies in Latin America and the Southwest United States, with a particular interest in orality and literacy.