

Civil Rights History Project
Interview completed by the Southern Oral History Program
under contract to the
Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History & Culture
and the Library of Congress, 2011

Interviewee: Dr. Esther M. Terry

Interview Date: July 6, 2011

Location: Her office on the campus of Bennett College, Greensboro, North Carolina, where she is Provost

Interviewer: Joseph Mosnier, Ph.D.

Videographer: John Bishop

Length: 1:16:28

Esther Terry: So, it's okay that I have this water here?

John Bishop: Yes, that's fine.

ET: And while we're talking, is it okay if I can have some?

JB: Sure. There's no reason –

ET: That I can't?

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: Okay, Joe.

Joe Mosnier: Today is Wednesday, July 6, 2011. My name is Joe Mosnier of the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I am in Greensboro, North Carolina, with videographer John Bishop. We are here to conduct an interview in the Civil, for the Civil Rights History Project, which is a joint undertaking of the National Museum of African American History and Culture inside the Smithsonian Institution

and the Library of Congress. We're on the campus of Bennett College with Provost, uh, Esther Terry. And, Dr. Terry, it's just a privilege to be with you.

ET: Thank you.

JM: Thank you for sitting down with us.

ET: Thank you for having me.

JM: And for clearing some time on I know your very busy schedule. It's really nice to be with you. Um, I thought we'd start today, if you would, with maybe just a description of your family and life as a child up in Warren County, to range across that a bit.

ET: Yes, it was a wonderful time. Um, I am the youngest of twelve, so I always, always, from the time I opened my eyes, had many hands around to pick me up when I fell, to punch me out sometimes, you know, when they wanted to show that they were all bigger and stronger and so much growner than I was. But it was a good life. We were farmers. My dad was Richard Alexander, and my mom was Mary Alexander.

My mom had gone through, had started to enter Normal School. Um, in those days, that was where one went – many, many, uh, [phone ringing in background] women went to prepare to come back to teach to the community. My mom had gotten to Normal School, but after her first year there, her mom died, and she was the oldest of her siblings, so she was brought home to take care of them. That was an unfortunate thing, because she always, always wanted to go finish and to teach.

But she didn't, and she married my father as a second husband. Her first husband died in the, in the flu epidemic of 1917. My mom was married and, to Arthur Hunt, and they had three children. She lived with Arthur and her three children in Richmond, Virginia. She had left – she

actually was born in Warren County as well, and she had left Warren County with her husband, and they had taken a residence in Richmond, Virginia. He died of the flu.

Meanwhile, my dad, who had grown up in Virginia, right across the line, if you know, uh, where my home is – it's right on the border of Virginia. My father had married a wife, and he had three children as well. He lost his wife in that epidemic and his three children. My mom lost her husband, but her three children survived. So, she moved home, as she was – one was wont to do. It was the thing to do. She moved home now. She was a woman with three children to raise and no husband, so she moved back to her home in Warren County. And she met my dad, and they were married.

They met and were married, and he then started to sharecrop, and she went to the farm with him. He raised all of those children, her three children, as his own. And to that union, as they say, there were nine more children born. So, I actually am the youngest of twelve children. My mother – all of us were my mother's children, but actually all of us were my dad's children, too, because he loved us all. And we grew up there as a family on big old farm that my dad worked for in the early years as a sharecropper but soon, uh, decided to work with the owner to try to buy, and did, succeeded in buying the land, and that land has remained in our family from the time there. My dad died in 1970, uh, and Mom died in 1985, and we have kept the land.

Now, I regret to say, all of my siblings are dead. I'm the last of them. And so, the farm means, means a great deal [5:00] to me, that farm in Wise, North Carolina. Actually, that's where I am, in Wise, North Carolina, the farm, and the children there are nieces and nephews. They are the children of my brothers and sisters. And so, as we did when one sibling was out of place when they were living, the other siblings looked after the children. So, I only have one

son, biologically speaking, but I have a lot of children when you consider all of the nieces and nephews and their children and their children's children. So, we are many.

JM: When was your father able to make that purchase?

ET: Ah, my dad –

JM: Not a small accomplishment.

ET: In 1945, I think, in 1945 Dad made that.

JM: Tell me a little bit about schooling and church when you were a child.

ET: Oh, very important, um, the church, particularly. Um, my mom was a serious, serious churchgoer, but she wasn't fanatic about that. And so, we had the teachings of the church more than the preachings, I think. Can I make those, those, that distinction? I think – my mom always said to us when she wanted us to be good children, she would say, "I'd rather see a sermon than to hear one." That was her philosophy. Mom wasn't interested so much in – I mean, we went to church daily, you know – regularly, not daily, but regularly. When it was time for us to go, every time, for us to go to church, we went to church.

But it was, it was, it wasn't oppressive church. She understood if we, uh, kind of sat with the girls our age and giggled a little bit. She understood if we were, uh, our age. She didn't make us, she didn't make us burdened by the church, but she always wanted us to be good. And so, she paid more attention to our going to Sunday School than to hear preaching so much. But Sunday School was important. We learned a lot. And she would ask us when we came home from Sunday School, "What did you learn?" And she always asked us to apply that to our lives.

My mom was always – uh, we used to call her "the how would you feel if" mom, you know, behind her back, of course. We never said anything like that in front of her face. But she would always say if we, you know, did something she didn't think was nice, she would say, to

someone else, “How would you feel if that happened to you?” And she would make us think about it: “How would you feel if someone took your lunch? How would you feel if someone walked away from you and kept you from playing?”

We learned early – and I don’t know where we learned it, but one of the things we did that I often think about, you know, I ask myself, “Is it innate?” you know – but we learned that separation was painful. For instance, if we were with our little girlfriends – and we weren’t allowed to fight; we never never did that – but we learned very early that if we said, “Don’t play with Sally,” or we’d all, you know, we’d get the group on my side against Sally and say we’re not going to play with her, that Sally would hurt so badly. I don’t know how we learned that isolation was such a, such a powerful tool to use against someone, but we did. And my mom would always say, “How would you feel if somebody did that to you? How would you feel if somebody did that to you?” So, we used to call her “old how would you feel if.” We didn’t ever tell her that.

JM: What was the – what was the school experience that you had as a child?

ET: Oh, we excelled in school. I liked school. I always did. Um, my sisters and brothers, I really – I don’t know that they liked school as much as I did, but we went, because my mom, you see, thought it was important for us to go to school. And because we worked on a farm, we weren’t always allowed to go every day. Sometimes the crops would just need to be taken in, you know. We just needed to save the crops.

But Mom would work so very, very hard to do all of it to make up for our not being in the field. She would get up in the morning and go to the field with my dad and she would work, oh, she would work so hard. She picked cotton. What a terrible thing to do, to pick cotton. But she

would pick cotton, she would pick cotton, and she would pick cotton to make up for the fact that we weren't there.

And then we were told to come from school, directly from school, and change our clothes really, really quickly, and run, run, run to the field because Mom would be there working so hard. And then, when we got to the field to help pick the cotton, she would go to the house to make us something good to eat for supper. She always did good suppers for us. But I – [10:00] I had a good life. I didn't know I was a poor girl. I didn't think about that too much.

JM: How, how closely, um, connected was the black community in the area of Wise, because, of course, farm landscapes can be, depending on population density, fairly spread out?

ET: Well, they were. They were. But, you see, we had the church and we had the school, and they were centers for the activity of the community. Um, and we took advantage of those. My parents would come to school for Easter programs. They would come for programs that we had in the evenings, where their children, you know, performed and they saw their children. My parents were very much – as were other the parents of other members in the community – very much involved with the school, not like now. Not so much so is that the case now, as I think about it, as I go home to see. But when I grew up, parents were very much involved in the schoolhouse, very much.

JM: Uh, did your family own a car?

ET: Sometimes we did and sometimes we didn't. Uh, I think the times when we didn't was when my brothers were away and not – we didn't have a brother to drive. My dad didn't ever drive. He never ever drove, and I don't know why that was, but he just never drove a car. He never was licensed. But if – when my brothers were there, before they would go off to the Army or go somewhere, we would have a car. My folks would have a car.

JM: You just suggested something I was interested – I know there are eleven siblings ahead of you, but in broad – one very interesting part about your life history, of course, is you're the first in your family to go to a four-year college.

ET: Yes.

JM: And what were the life paths taken by some of your older siblings?

ET: Oh, we didn't have money to go to college. I like to talk about this part of and I'm not very much willing and, and forthcoming talking about my family very much, but I always want to say that I always thought, "How ironic." I thought always that I was not the smartest of my siblings. I was just the luckiest one in this regard. There was never money. There weren't many scholarships, you know, then, as there are now, for black kids to go off to school. So, my brothers and sisters would grow up and they went off.

We had a thriving, much more thriving than now manufacturing, uh, uh, country then. Manufacturing was big, and so they got jobs in factories. My – one of my brothers – two of my brothers worked at Ford Motors. One of them, you know, my brother – I had a brother who always swore he would never drive any car that wasn't a General Motors car. And he would always say to me, "Why don't you get a General Motors car?" They were loyal to the factories that they worked in.

And some of them worked in – I had a brother who worked in a shipyard, um, in Norfolk, Virginia, for a very long time, for a long time, and, um, made a good living. I had another brother who worked in the system, the school system, of New York. I think he might have been a janitor. They call them something else now, engineers of some kind or another. I think he was probably just a janitor, but he took pride in his job. And they all were proud that they weren't

ever fired from anything. And they all bought their homes and took care of their wives in that way.

JM: Um-hmm. How did it come to pass that your family was able to send you to Bennett?

ET: Well, farmers got Social Security. It's as simple as that. Um, my sense of these things sometimes, when I think about them, is that it's so connected and so, so unknown by people who sit in decision-making positions in the world. They don't quite know how one thing affects another. Um, I, I, my – when did the farmers get Social Security? In 1957. Farmers – until that time farmers did not get Social Security. They weren't – And so, when farmers got Social Security, the recipients of Social Security were able to get it retroactive to the time that they, you know, turned sixty-five.

And I remember going home and working so hard, helping my parents – not just my parents, but helping the people in the neighborhood, um – go and sign up, prove their ages. I learned so much about the Bible and where names were recorded. Most of the people in my community had been born at home with midwives. And so, the midwife would – here's another thing. [15:00] The midwife would have four babies, you know, delivered in a week, and she'd have to go all the way into town to register them. So, if there's a baby born on Monday, and she'd say, "Well, I'll wait to go in. I'll turn them all in when I get a lot." [Laughs] Or she would – so, there's all kinds of stories that I loved hearing about my folk, who – "that person was not really born on that day. That person was born on another day." Well, you know, that's how that goes. So, we had good times talking about how the midwife misnamed somebody or forgot, you know, spelled the name incorrectly.

There are those stories, but everybody knew everybody in my neighborhood and we got together and we, uh, I learned, my first, uh, chance to figure out how to convince somebody about your age – if you don't have it, you know, in the courthouse, if you don't have a birth certificate – was that you go to the family Bible, because most people entered the deaths and births. If you have to go looking for a history of a people, you know, find deaths and births. Find a Bible or some other religious place, and the Bible – in the black community, it was the Bible. And then, they could tell you what year a flood came or when a tornado came and killed three kids or – these catastrophic in nature, these catastrophic things in nature would be landmarks that would help prove their age. And so, I helped some people prove them, prove that they were at least sixty-five and establish when they turned sixty-five so that they could get, uh, their checks and begin to get Social Security.

And then, my mom said, when my dad got a check, my mom said, “This one will go to college. This one will go.” I actually had no choice to go to college, when I think about it. I think I might not have survived, you know. I would have so disappointed her, and that would have killed me, I think. She so much – And then, only then did I know that she had wanted every single one of those kids to go to school. And so, she engaged with us in the evenings when we did our, uh, we did our lessons. Lessons were very important for us to do. And she used to spell with us. Mom was a terrific speller. She would spell with us, spell our names out, spell anything – we used to have contests. We spent a lot of time together as a family, and that's –

JM: I'm interested to get a sense, as best you can recall this, and think about how other persons might have, might have given a description, but what were you like as a seventeen-year-old thinking about heading off to college? What were your – did you have a set of kind of well-formulated ambitions at that time, or did you know what you wanted to study? What was it –?

ET: No, I was going to teach, something as general as that. I don't, I don't, I really don't recall. I think you would have to ask someone else. Here's what I don't think I was. I don't think I was – I don't think I was as independent of my family as I might have been. I think I was always maybe too late, uh, thinking, you know, independent of what my mother needed, what my father needed, and how we would work together. You see, growing up, we all talked about how we're going to all work and we're going to own the land. And we're going to own the land. So, it was always the "we" that – when we talked about the things we were going to do, always at the center of it was we were going to get the land, and Dad's going to finish paying off the land, and then we're going to get a car, and then we're going to get a big house, and then we're going to get – and we, we, we. And "we" was the propellant there that propelled me in my thinking. And I think maybe, at seventeen, I, um, I didn't think so much about going off to do anything. I knew I was going to teach, I think. And where was I going to teach? In Wise, of course!

JM: Let's take just a little quick pause.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: We're rolling.

JM: We're back on after a short break. Dr. Terry, I – just one quick question before we turn towards, um, towards Greensboro and Bennett College: Did you happen to know – and I'm not thinking the answer would be yes – did you happen to know T.T. Clayton in Warrenton?

ET: Yes.

JM: Oh, you did, even coming up?

ET: Yes. I know I knew him – I met him, I think, when I was in college. I think he came to Warrenton as a lawyer, and, and immediately, he and his wife, Eva, became members of our community. I knew them. I know them.

JM: He would be, uh [phone rings] – let's pause for just a minute. [20:00] The phone's ringing.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: We're back.

JM: We're back on after a break for the telephone. Um, Dr. Terry, I know – I think I know that, um, your parents drove you to the college here and moved you in the fall of [19]57.

ET: Yes, they did.

JM: Um, what did you discover here, arriving at Bennett College?

ET: [Sighs] It was a big day for me, for the whole community. Um, I came *from* someplace. I just didn't show up. I came being supported by the whole community. They prayed for me at church. Um, they gave me, uh, a little – a few pennies here and there. As I said, we didn't have a lot of money. And, um, I had a little scholarship. I had, uh, taken the SATs, uh, there and, um, so I had done well enough to have been granted a little scholarship money, and I was going to work a little bit. But there was always that, "Let me give you a few pennies."

So, I came, being borne up by the good wishes of the community. And off we came to Bennett College. I'd never been to Bennett College before. I'd never been to Greensboro before. And I arrived here to have ourselves, you know, just sort of swallowed up, my parents and me, and all of us, by a lot of parents and a lot of students, all being deposited by parents. And it was a lonely feeling when they said good-bye and left.

JM: Um-hmm.

ET: It was very lonely.

JM: Tell me about some of the people who would, you know, in short order become persons who were important to you here on the campus, faculty, staff, fellow students.

ET: I met when I – as my parents were getting me, uh, situated in my room, there was a woman who was bringing her daughter – there was a girl, Roslyn Smith, being deposited from West Virginia. And her mom met my mom, and they talked. And Roslyn's mother told my mom – how they talked and just told each other so much in so little time, I'll never know – but here's what got established in that little while.

Ros's mother had other children in college at the same time, and so she immediately knew – she told Roslyn immediately she wouldn't be coming home, Ros, that is. Ros wouldn't be coming home. There wasn't going to be money to bring Roslyn home except at Christmastime and in the summertime. My mom told Mrs. Smith that we lived a couple of hours up the road, and they would be driving back to see me often and they'd be – I could come home quite often. I could come home for Thanksgiving. I could come home whenever, you know, and that Roslyn could come home with me anytime.

So, Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Alexander sort of bonded that day, and they exchanged children. My mom became surrogate Ros's mom, and Ros's mom became sort of my mom, although it would take a long time before I got to West Virginia to meet Ros's mother. Ros went home with me that very, very first break that we had, and she went home with me for all four years. My very best friend to this day is Roslyn Smith. She is actually living in Greensboro.

JM: Isn't that nice?

ET: And so, it's – uh, she retired here some ten years ago from New York, where she had been working in social work. So, she came back when she retired to Greensboro. I often laugh at her and say, "Why'd you come back to Greensboro? Did Bennett have anything to do with it?" But she came to Greensboro, and then, of course, when I took the job here, I was delighted that she's here. And so, we are where we met.

JM: She was, as I think I understand, she was on – really kind of in a different part of campus in the classroom, so to speak –

ET: Yes.

JM: Because she studied sociology and political science.

ET: She studied sociology and political science.

JM: And you were doing English and theater.

ET: I was doing English and theater, un-hmm.

JM: Yeah. Tell me about the world of being an English student and a theater student in those late [19]50s.

ET: Oh, my goodness, it was wonderful! It was wonderful. My English professor was Hobart Jarrett. Well, I had several, but Dr. Jarrett was the man who taught me literature. Dr. Jarrett, what a wonderful man! What a brilliant man! All of my, all of my faculty were. Um, Dr. Jarrett was hard. He was tough. He exacted absolute perfection, and we were arrogant enough to think we could give it to him, you know. He really had us just charmed into thinking that we could write anything, we could articulate any idea, we could debate anybody. He was just a wonderful teacher and, and he empowered us a great deal, but no nonsense. So, I was very much engaged with him.

He [25:00] would walk on campus and say, “Miss Alexander, I – I am going to pick up Baugh. What am I –?” That’s a book. And I’d say, “*Literary History of England?*” He’d say, “Yes!” You know, I mean, those little games, you know, he would – he was such a showoff about how erudite he was, and we reveled in it. He also was a very handsome man and he smoked a pipe. And he was so – he was so elegant. We all, we all just sort of drooled after Dr. Jarrett, but in a nice way, nice way. We were so, so proud to say we were his students. Now, that was Dr. Jarrett.

Then there was Dr. [John] Crawford, who taught us grammar. He was less, uh – how should I say this? He didn’t, he wasn’t – I don’t want to say he was less polished, but he was less polished. That’s a fact. He was less polished. But he was a terror. He didn’t like you to split verbs or anything of that sort. He would – so, he taught us grammar and he would have us at the sentence. He would make us parse verbs and he would make us diagram sentences. And, um, he was, he was tough. Um, I wasn’t – I don’t think I was one of his favorite students, but I was treated kindly by him because I could diagram a sentence, you know, and I got on out of his way. But there – he was, he was serious. You know, he was, he was just a serious man, and so he wasn’t quite like Dr. Hobart Jarrett.

Um, then we had, um, in the theater, we had Fred Allen Eady, who had come to us from Howard and was a terrific director. And we got him married. We, um, we thought he needed to be married. So, we, um, we selected the lady on the campus that we thought he ought to be married to, and so we bought her – we collected money and bought her flowers and sent her flowers and said they were from Mr. Eady. But we told him. We told him, we said, “Now, we took this lady these flowers. You should follow up, and we put your name on it.” He did. And you want to know something really funny? They got married. We always took credit for that.

Bennett was wonderful. What can I say? I lived in the honors dorm, which was Kent Hall. We were very proud to be Bennett girls, um, because we were taught every day that we were as good as anybody in the world and better than a lot of people in the world and had responsibility to help those who weren't as fortunate as we were, that there was something in life that required us to be as good as we could be and to give back to the communities from which we came. It was that sense that led us to be cognizant of what was happening in the community, helping people to get registered to vote, understanding the importance of registering to vote, and getting people to do that, taking ourselves into the community to be helpful, um, to help people in the ways that we could, to conduct food drives, to, um, the whole sense – and to talk about the community.

You know, I grew up – that's very important what I'm saying. Not to you so much – as I reflect on it, why I think it was important to me that they taught us these things is because, you see, I talk about having been happy when I was growing up as a youngster. What I mean is that I felt safe, that happiness was somehow connected with being safe. But I can remind you that in that time the whole Southern terrain was dotted with “White Only” signs, with, uh, signs that said, you know, “Coloreds,” uh, or “Negro,” signs sort of, that sort of – they were reminders that there were places that, that you couldn't go and there were places that you ought not to go if you wanted to be safe. So, safety was a part of being happy. And that's – and, and when you were cocooned in safety and you were just such a – and that's what this campus was. This campus was a place that we knew that we were taken care of. Now, we were asked to give all we could give in the classes, but we also knew that we were special. And that is why [30:00] it was inevitable that we entered into the sit-ins.

JM: Yeah.

ET: We knew they were wrong. You see, you can't have someone inside the gates being taught how they could be the best of everybody – in anybody, they could be everything – and then walk right out the gate and be told, “You can't sit here.” And I think it's very important to know that Woolworth's became an ideal – that you can't sit down for a Coke. Now, you know you could go into Woolworth's. Woolworth's was not, was not closed to black patronage at all. You could go into Woolworth's. You could buy anything you wanted that they sold in Woolworth's if you had money. You just couldn't sit down to get a sandwich at the lunch counter. So, it was the lunch counter. You couldn't sit down there to eat.

So, you see, that stood in *stark contrast* to all the things that we had going on here at Bennett, where we dressed for dinner in the evenings and sat with tablecloths and we learned, you know, which fork to use and how. And we went downtown wearing hats, and we wore gloves, and we were Bennett ladies. You can see how it wouldn't – [laughs] it was just such a jarring thing to be told, “Well, Bennett Lady, guess what? You can't sit down there and have a cherry Coke.” So, those – they were things that got us – it was dis-eased, as it were. There was a dis – it's uncomfortable. One cannot, uh, uh, square those two things.

JM: Yeah. Did you through these, through your first couple of years of college – I mean, you – being a college student is a very encompassing and engaging kind of experience when you're happy and thriving in your classes and all. What portion of your attention in some broad kind of sense did you give to these wider questions? I mean, Little Rock is happening, the first desegregation of the local Greensboro schools is happening.

ET: Yes.

JM: Um, uh, there are some early lawsuits moving through the courts, uh, filed by people like Dr. [George] Simpkins to try to –

ET: Yes.

JM: Break down barriers of segregation in the city.

ET: Yes.

JM: How much of that was a part of your, you know, what you gave your attention to, because there were lots of other things that were keeping you occupied?

ET: There sure were. But I told you a part of Bennett was always that the education at Bennett was to prepare you to make a contribution to the world and to be reconnected into your community. Um, we – my classmates, um, had experiences before we got here. We didn't [clears throat] – even I didn't come here, uh, you know, sort of from Mars where everything was great and we never had a sense that there was, there could be clashes between whites and blacks. We all, we all knew about those things. I, you know, I grew up hearing and knowing about such things. You know, my brothers were – my mother worried all the time about what would happen.

So, what I mean when I say we were safe is exactly that. A storm is going on around us, we are aware of the storm, but we can also feel safe in here. And that's what I meant when I said that safety was a very important part of how I, I think, became – was a healthy person. Because I look back over it and I think was healthy. I think – I mean a healthy ego, a healthy psyche, growing up in that. I don't think it *damaged* me in any way. Now, I might be wrong, but I don't think I grew up with – my mother was wise, and she would talk about these things to us precisely so that they wouldn't scare us so much or they would, we would know how to live with them.

My mother would tell us – she didn't want us to hate white people. My mother had this rule: She wouldn't let us say "they" when we talked about white people. She wouldn't let us say, "They did so-and-so." No, no. So, one day she took a piece of chalk and she wrote T-H-E-Y,

and then she erased the T on one end and she erased the Y. And she said, “Now it’s HE. You come and tell me what HE did. You name him and you name her, and we will deal with that. But you will not ever speak of *all* white people as bad or having treated you bad.” And, you see, we had – we understood that. So, we couldn’t afford to be shielded from what was happening in the world. I’m – I just am always grateful that my parents taught us, I think, the best way to negotiate it.

She told my son – as I said, I have one son [Jules Michael Terry]. [Clears throat] And he’s always so pleased to remind me that when he was home talking to his grandma, he told her something about some white people doing something. He said, “Grandma, why did you, why did you let them do that? Why do you [35:00] let them call you ‘Mary’?” She says, “Mike, you know, they’re as good as they know how to be.” What are you going to do with that? “They’re as good as they know *how* to be.” And so, there was a way that she – my mother allowed us to have an ego about who we were, and she wouldn’t let anybody damage that. So, we were just told. She said to Mike, “They’re as good as they know how to be.” But what are you going to do with that then? They’re as good as they know how to be!

But to come back to your question, so here, yes, we had Dr. [Edward] Edmunds [Bennett College professor]. We had, uh – Roslyn, my friend, was in sociology. Well, they didn’t talk about – we had a life out there. They talked about issues. We talked in our classes about what was happening in the world. Uh, we didn’t pretend, um, that the world wasn’t out there.

JM: Yeah. I think you missed Dr. King’s appearance on the campus in [19]58. Is that correct?

ET: Yes.

JM: Um, but [19]59, things – especially fall of [19]59, of course, the momentum is gathering and will, um, will soon lead to some direct action protest. What do you remember about the fall of [19]59, and, and some of the women here on the campus, of course, were talking very actively, as you've just been saying, and, um, really thinking very hard about this question?

ET: Well, it really started in the, in the – my classmates who were in the sociology classes. They took sociology, Roslyn Smith, Gwen Mackel, Shirley Dismuke, um, that group, um, Gloria Brown. They were the ones that were engaged, engaging in an intense way, um, but, you see, they would come back to the dorms and tell us what was happening. Um, and, as I say, Roslyn was my best friend. Um, we knew what was going on. We knew – and you start as a theoretical, “How do we conduct ourselves in the world if that is the case?” And then, someone says, “Why don't – what would happen if we boycotted? What would happen if that – how can these barriers be torn down?” Um, these were questions that were being asked.

You know, there had been sit-ins before. Greensboro was not the – that was not something that never happened before. There had protest before. There had been marches before. Bennett girls [clears throat] had been engaged with protesting the showing of the film, um, “Birth of a Nation,” um, which is a pretty ugly film, um, and its stories.

JM: You'd done voter registration work.

ET: We had done voter registration. I don't – so I cannot tell you exactly and precisely what moment, you know, there was this great epiphany and we did things. But what I end up knowing was that students were planning and talking about a boycott, going downtown and picketing, what would happen if they picketed, what would happen, and then it went from picketing to, “Well, what would happen if we sat in, sat down at the lunch counters?” And so, these were conversations that were being talked about.

Students were – talked about training in nonviolence. That’s exactly what, um – that’s a route that people don’t often remember is that these students were – Dr. Edmunds and our faculty talked about, “What does it mean to be nonviolent?” You remember [Dr. Martin Luther] King was talking about nonviolence. “What does it mean to be nonviolent? If somebody hits you and you hit them back, you know, what’s to be associated with that? How do you conduct yourselves? Is it dangerous, you know, what happens?” So, um, it was in the air. And we were here on the campus and, yes, we talked about those things.

JM: Do you think that these – you described and named a group of women who were very much active in these kinds of conversations on the campus and friends of yours. Do you think that among those women there is a sense that, that they were –? Well, let me ask this way: To what extent would they think they ought to be, um, placed in the, in the, um – how much should they be credited for the full realization of that impulse here in the community among students, and now we’re reaching across over to [North Carolina] A&T, that opened the door to direct action protest? Are they credited sufficiently I guess is the right way to –?

ET: They would say not.

JM: They would say they are not.

ET: They would say not.

JM: Talk a little bit about that, if you would.

ET: Back in, um – two years ago, I [40:00], for the fiftieth anniversary of the sit-ins, I was here as a new provost and I remembered those days, so I called a group of them to come back to talk about that. And so, we had a retrospective. Gwen Mackel came, Shirley Dismuke came, um, Delores Finger came, Roslyn Smith came, um, Linda Brown was here. Um, we had,

um – we were in the chapel and we talked about that, and they would say, uh, “No.” Uh, here’s how they talk about it.

They say that they, indeed, did not argue with the fact that the four young men at A&T were the first to sit down. But they say that it was not spontaneous, that it had come – that action had been born of a plan that had been carefully, *carefully* considered and deliberated, beginning here on Bennett’s campus with the girls, and that they had, in fact, been happily considering it. And Dr. [Hobart] Jarrett had said to them, “Well, you girls shouldn’t get engaged in doing that alone,” because, you know, this is the “girls must be protected,” right? So, they were encouraged to invite the A&T boys to sit with them and to plan this sit-in and what it would be, because, you see, we’re talking about something that could be very dangerous.

Nobody asked their parents. [Laughs] Our parents did not send us down here to go do that, you hear me? And they would not have been happy – maybe – some of them might have, because our – my classmates have wonderful stories about their lives. Uh, um, Gwen Mackel’s parents had been run out of Mississippi because of her dad’s political actions. These young women weren’t babes in the woods. I had – my own father had had his, you know – problems. Uh, we had – Shirley Dismuke [laughs] said she just couldn’t figure out nobody had ever asked her to sit in the back of a bus or anything, you know.

So, we all came with a real deep feeling that that’s wrong. That’s wrong, and we knew that, so they wanted to correct it. And to be educated and not do anything about it was not – your education wasn’t going to mean very much. So, these girls would tell you that they worked very hard, they discussed everything, and they can tell you that they, that Dr. [Willa] Player, our president, was involved as well. And Dr. Player was told, and Dr. Player said she couldn’t tell us

not to, “her girls” – and we were always called “her girls” – she couldn’t tell her girls not to engage in that.

But she did point out that it would be sort of folly to start the sit-ins, to start the action before the Christmas vacation, because if you started it at Thanksgiving, say, for instance, and then everybody’d say, “Sorry, I’ve been politically active, but I’ve got to go home now, and I’ll come back. I’ll see you after the vacation.” So, she said – she cautioned them to wait. And they did and they told all of us when they came back, uh, that they were all ready to start. And they came back. And on February first, was it, um, the young men sat down.

Now, here’s an important thing. I asked Gwen Mackel, “Gwen, where were you on that day when they sat down?” She said, “I was in Woolworth’s.” “What did you – why were you there?” She said, “Because we were there –” first you had to go buy something. See, we knew how to do it. You had – you couldn’t – because we had been trained that if you didn’t buy something, you could be tossed out of the store, you know, for trespassing. So, you buy – you go in the store, you buy something, and she said, “I was standing, waiting,” because it was a plan and it did not – it was plan that had been created here on the campus. And so, the girls would think that they did not get enough credit. That’s what they would think.

JM: Um-hmm. Of course, very quickly, many other students take places at the lunch counter, and there are –

ET: Yes.

JM: There are carpools and careful assignment of rotating shifts of students and all.

ET: Um-hmm.

JM: And you sat down there, too. Can you –?

ET: Yes, I did.

JM: Can you just –?

ET: Beside Linda Brown.

JM: Beside Linda Brown, that's right. [45:00] Can you take us back and kind of describe the experience you had and the feelings that that generated and what you saw around you?

ET: I think we might have been young because, honestly, I felt proud. I don't think my mother ever felt – maybe she felt proud, but I think that was not the – her main feeling. I think she was terrified. I know that now because I have a child and I – I mean, I have a son. He's not a child anymore. He's certainly a big grown man. But, even so, I think, as a mother, I would be afraid. But I'm going to tell you, we were proud. I was proud to sit there. I was very, very proud. I will tell you something else. I never, ever understood the hatred that came. It was absolutely surprising, because I did not understand why people would glare at us with such hatred, um, for that. So, that, that was a little unnerving. But I was basically very proud to have done that.

JM: Did your, uh – on learning about it, did your parents have any, uh, words of guidance for you or comment?

ET: No.

JM: No?

ET: Interestingly enough, my parents – my mother never talked to me about that very much. She was always – she was very quiet. My mom was never very quiet, but my mom didn't talk about that very much. I think I understand why. I think my mom didn't want to say, "I wish you hadn't done it." I think my mom regretted the world as it was, that it had to be done, but I don't think my mom, um, [laughs] was elated I that went. I think my mom would have forgiven

me if I had called in sick. [Laughs] I think she might have. I don't think she would have been too upset if I had called in sick. But she never ever let me know from her own words what she felt. She was just quiet.

JM: Um-hmm. Dr. Player – um, it would be interesting if you would maybe just say a few words about her, because, um, as you've already said, she made clear in certain unmistakable ways that – oops, excuse me.

JB: Stop for a sec.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: Okay, we're ready again.

JM: Let me, um – we're back on after a short break. Um, I want to ask a little bit, um, for your thoughts and perspective on, say, Dr. Player in her role here at Bennett College, and then the leadership at A&T because, of course, the institutions have separate histories, many similar general proud aspects of their history, but also, you know, a different relation to the State of North Carolina, etcetera.

ET: Of course.

JM: And to talk a little bit about black leadership, educational leadership, in that era and the forces active upon that leadership.

ET: Um-hmm. What you want me to say about that?

JM: Well –

ET: Dr. Player was – let me first tell you a little bit about Dr. Player. She was a big, big, big, big woman, and I don't mean in stature, I mean in – physical stature – I mean in the shadow she cast over the campus when she walked it. She was quiet. She was a very, very quiet, very dignified woman. But I believed – but we *all* believed, not I – we all believed that she was

profoundly committed to making Bennett women, the girls who came to Bennett, into women who could stand in the world, strong women with a commitment to social justice. Now, that – I don't mean just to being good English teachers, being good, you know, math teachers, being good physicists; I mean undergirding all of that with a profound sense of social justice.

And that was her – I mean, and she talked about that, but quietly, in her philosophy. She talked about the fact that education was no good if you didn't use it to correct wrongs in society. She just believed that. And so, she didn't make fiery speeches about that. She wasn't a fiery speech person. But she was very quietly committed, and you knew when you were in her presence that it was not just nonsense that she was talking. She really believed and lived what she talked about. So, Dr. Player was a really, really [50:00] brave woman. And if she cared about anybody, she cared about the legacy that she would pass on to us at Bennett College. She was an incredible woman. So, that was Dr. Player.

I don't know very much about the leadership at A&T, but I do know that whatever is said and written about the Movement here as it played itself out in Greensboro, Bennett College women were involved in it from the top down, and we were supported and we were encouraged, and so, the college was there. It was what we learned as a college. It was what we were brought together to do as a college. Now, I don't know what – and Dr. Player, we knew she was looking over us. We knew she was monitoring us. We knew, for instance, [laughs] we knew she said that we could go down and march and sit down and sit at the lunch counter but that we would have to turn in our grades. There was no – no faculty member was to give us excuses, you know.

When I was in Amherst, the kids used to ask [laughs] when they went off to march at a protest or something, they'd come and ask the professors to, you know, overlook the fact that they were there, you know, to forgive their, you know, bad grades. We said, "No, you don't do

that. That's not a political stance. That's – you're not, you're not giving up anything. If you're not willing to risk your grades or to walk out and take a D to go do something, you don't mean it very much." So, here, we knew that this was something real, it was profound, and it was sort of like – it was like Dr. Player was here with us all the way, and we knew what that meant. And anybody who saw us knew that we came from there. They could trace us all the way back to where Bennett started. And that was what I could say about Dr. Player.

Now, I don't know very much about the, who was – I don't even know who, the name of the president at A&T was. And I can suspect that he didn't spend a lot of time, that the young people down there from A&T were spending a lot of time, you know, being supported and encouraged by the president. I don't know, but I – now, I said that, but I can believe to my heart that he probably wanted the sit-ins to be successful. So, I can believe in my heart that he wanted those sit-ins to be very successful, and whether or not he was able to say, I don't know. But, as you say, there are different relationships that people had with the state and with being funded by the state.

But Dr. Player, you see, we were private. We were private. And if you ask, every one of us would tell you, I think, if we hadn't been private, I do believe Dr. Player would have done exactly what she did. I cannot prove that but I believe that, because it was so much a part of her. It was so much a part of her. You know, later, you must know this story, that when the girls were arrested – during the second wave they were put in jail – she got in her car and drove downtown. Now, she didn't get a driver to take her downtown. She got in her car alone and drove downtown to go and to say, "These are my girls. I brought them their homework. I want to see after them. I want to see what they were doing."

I believe that she would have taken risks, risks that others did not and would not have taken, and I don't think that she would have judged them for that. I believe Dr. Player would not have become the enemy of anybody at any one of these institutions because they did what they did. I think she would simply say, "You must understand I do what I have to do, and I – and that's the difference between us." I think that's the difference in how I would see Dr. Player.

JM: Yeah. And she, just – I don't think you actually said the word – she went to the *jail* to –

ET: Yeah.

JM: To see the Bennett women who had been arrested.

ET: Yeah, she went to jail. But, you know, that's a very dangerous – that was a – you know, here, this is a black woman in a car. Uh, a lot could have happened to her. A lot of people in Greensboro did not like what was happening, and to see this woman – you know, there had been a cross burned. She did have a cross burned at the college president's house, you know. Dr. Player was a committed and sincere soldier. She really was.

JM: Um, let me turn your attention to, uh, to graduation and beyond because, of course, that spring, then, um, the spring of [19]61, you graduate.

ET: Yeah.

JM: And go on to, um, [55:00] to Chapel Hill.

ET: To Chapel Hill.

JM: And as a Danforth fellow, I think.

ET: Yes.

JM: Yeah. Um, I'm very interested to have you describe your ambition and your experience in Chapel Hill and, um, many things I'd like to ask about that, but let me just invite you to begin that story.

ET: Well, at that time, I knew – I didn't know so much when I came to Bennett, uh, as a freshman about what I wanted to do. It was sort of vague: "I want to teach, and I'll go back home and teach in Wise." But by the time I had studied with Dr. Jarrett and Dr. Crawford, I was, I wanted to do – really, really I wanted to work in literature. I wanted to be an English teacher. I wanted to study English, and I knew that I needed to go to graduate school. At least, I had been encouraged by Dr. Jarrett to go to graduate school, and Dr. Crawford, and Dr. Elizabeth Sewell, who came, uh, later, um, and she thought I wrote well, and that always pleased me.

And she said, uh, "Go to –" she was an English woman, uh, later left Bennett, I think, and worked at UNC-G [University of North Carolina-Greensboro]. She, uh, I, uh, until that time, and I never could figure out how this worked, but *if* one wanted to go to graduate school prior to that, prior to my times coming – and this was just changing when I entered UNC, just beginning to change – if one were black, you could apply to the state after you had been accepted at a Northern university, and the state, of course, would pay your way. Now, of course –

JM: So as to avoid the obligation of desegregating on their own.

ET: So as to avoid the obligation to desegregate and to have you, uh, in the classes there. So, um, we know that history. You know James Meredith at Ole Miss and all of that. My father and mother said to me, "If you want to go to grad school, I'm a taxpayer," my dad said. "Go to Chapel Hill." So, and this was – my mom really pushed this idea: "Go to Chapel Hill." Now, this is after the sit-ins, you see, and all of that. So, now it's "Go to Chapel Hill." I think my mom thought, "All right. [Laughs] She can do it. She's okay." So, Mom was a little less tense.

While she never talked to me about Bennett and the sit-ins, she did say she wanted me to go to Chapel Hill, and she said, “Because you’ll be nearer home.” And I didn’t believe that. I thought she was kind of proud that I would go to Chapel Hill. So, I did. I went to Chapel Hill.

There’s a funny story about Chapel Hill. I left here and I went to Hartford, Connecticut, where I lived with my sister and brother-in-law. And I worked as a waitress there, but my sister took all of my money. She took all of my money. Every week she’d take my money. And then, when I came back, got ready to come back to Chapel Hill, she cashed – she gave me my money. That was enforced savings, and she took me shopping. My sisters and brothers were always very kind to me.

Well, I came home and then – before I got home, I had called to Chapel Hill to ask, to apply for graduate housing, and I was going to stay in the dorm. And “yes,” and they asked did I fill out the form? They mailed it to me, to Hartford. I mailed it back, saying, “Yes, I would like a roommate.” And so, they sent me my room assignment and said I should appear at a certain place on a certain day to pick up the key. And I sent forward my deposit, etcetera.

So, on that day, my dad took me and my mom and my brother, we drove down, and my sister. [Laughs] We drove down, and I went to the place and I got out. I said, “I’m Esther Alexander. I’m here to get my key.” And there was a look of absolute consternation on the woman’s face, and she finally said, “You *can’t* be Esther Alexander!” Well, now, that kind of confused me and my dad, because, you know, “Yes, I am Esther Alexander.” [Laughs]

As it turns out, you know what she had done. She had not known that I was black and she had paired me with a white roommate. And there was a ruling at Chapel Hill at that time that that was not to be. So, she didn’t quite know what to do with me. Now, I thought, “Oh, boy. This is not the best way to enter school.” [1:00:00] But I learned something that day, and my

mom and I talked about it a lot. They kept me aside and eventually they came and said, “Now, you have your room. Your room is ready.” And I said to my mom as we went down the hill, I said, “Well, I’m going to be the only person in that room.” And she said, “Yes, I expect so.” But, and I would have – I was prepared to just be furious. I think I was.

But on the way there, there were white girls sitting on suitcases, because they didn’t have very much space, housing space, for graduate students and they would have to go in the city someplace. Those girls were from I don’t know where, but they were saying to me, “Do you have a room? Do you have a room? Do you have a roommate? Do you want me? Do you want me? May I – would you like a roommate? Would you like a roommate? I’d be happy to room with you.” And the lesson I learned, and my mom and I talked about it when we got in our room. She says, “It’s not the girls, and you have to remember that.” This is my mother saying, “They’re as good as they know how to be.” My mother said, “It’s not the girls. It’s the law. It’s the ruling. It’s the ruling that you hate. Don’t hate the girls.”

She was right. I met some good friends there. They were never like Roslyn Smith, because they could come to a certain point in friendship, and there were doorways they couldn’t cross or wouldn’t let themselves cross. And I probably wouldn’t let mine cross either. But they didn’t, they didn’t do me harm, and they didn’t wish me harm. And I managed to get a master’s degree at Chapel Hill without much fanfare.

JM: Yeah. Um, the faculty and the academic experience – what was your – how would you evaluate and measure that?

ET: Oh, I took a class with C. Hugh Holman. Remember C. Hugh Holman? Holman’s *Handbook to English Literature* [note: actual title is *A Handbook to Literature*], you know. I was fortunate to have a class with him. He was a brilliant man, a charming man, and a

gentleman. My faculty members there were gentlemen, and I didn't have a woman. Isn't that interesting? I just thought about that. I didn't have – there was not one course that I took there – I was only there to get the master's. I'm just going to tell you. I didn't want to stay. I had to go to work after the master's. I'd been in school too long. I needed to take off. I couldn't stay and go straight through. I needed to have a break, so I did. And then I went to St. Augustine's College [in Raleigh, North Carolina] and taught for a couple of years and knew, I really did, if I was going to do this work, I really did need to get the doctorate. And so I went off to and ended up getting a doctorate at UMass in Amherst.

JM: Let's take just a little break here.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: Okay.

JM: Okay, Dr. Terry, we're back on after a short break, and kind of for our last segment here I want to ask about, um, some of your experiences, um, up in Amherst, specifically around – and there's so much. We have limited time, so I'll skip past other things that would readily merit a whole separate interview, and forgive me for that. But I want to, um, I want to ask about in '69 the creation of the African American Studies program, um, at UMass-Amherst, and you would, of course, direct that program for a couple of decades.

ET: Yeah, but not at the beginning.

JM: Not the beginning, right. You got your Ph.D. in [19]74, I think, yeah.

ET: Um-hmm.

JM: So, later you would step into that role.

ET: Um-hmm.

JM: Um, but that was, I think, one of two programs at the time it was created?

ET: Yeah.

JM: In fact, as kind of a capstone to your tenure as program or department chair, you'd, uh, be one of the very first two, I think, in the first two in the nation to offer a Ph.D. in African American Studies.

ET: Yes.

JM: So, broad theme, but I'm interested in kind of both the creation and the foundation period and how you thought about the pedagogical challenge, the frameworks, the narratives, the – you know.

ET: Broad theme. Well, where do you want me to start? Um, Massachusetts was – it was easy in Massachusetts. I think what happened in Massachusetts could not have happened at other places, and I'll tell you why. We had a very, very, very sympathetic administration on the campus. There were some things that had happened at and in the college community of faculty and friends. It was an incredible assembly of people there. [1:05:00]

First of all, in 1959, the – Massachusetts had – the UMass Press had come forward with, uh, the *Massachusetts Review*. That's the college literary magazine. Read the pages of that magazine, and it's almost – it's eerie. Because when that magazine was launched, it was dedicated to the four young men who – it referenced the four young men who had sat down at North Carolina's A&T University – this was in 1959 when it was launched [note: she intended to say that the *Review* discussed the February 1, 1960, sit-in after that date]. It committed itself to being a magazine, the pages of which would be readily available to black writers, to young black writers in the country as they expressed themselves and their traditions. It was an amazing thing.

I did not know that. I had no way of knowing that. But the group of people who had started the *Massachusetts Review* would become my family almost when I got to UMass. Um,

when I got to UMass, there were very few black people on that campus. But by – that didn't bother me by now. Um, I was there to study to get the doctorate. I was an older woman now. I'm all of twenty-two. [Laughs] I'm all of twenty-two! I'm seasoned! I'm a grown woman now, right? So, I could – I was – actually, I was – really I was twenty-five or so when I got there [note: she would in fact have been about twenty-seven]. But I was able now, I think – I'm certainly grown – I'm able to handle this now. So, I got there and I – at the same time I got there, Mike Thelwell came. Uh, and then Bernard Bell was there. My husband-to-be, Eugene Terry, was there. And we became, we – black people, now, let me tell you, we were, we were half of – we were fifty percent of all the black people on the campus at that time.

How did we get there? We got there because Sterling Brown, out of Howard University, had been, uh, sending his graduate students. We were writing to him, saying we want to go study at Howard University. And he said, “No, no, no, no. You don't want to study with me. You need to study – if you really want to study literature, you really want to put ‘American Literature,’ and you need to go study with Sidney Kaplan, who knows more about black American literature and how it fits in American literature than anybody I know.” These – so, he had sent us all there. Sterling had sent us all there. We used to say we were Sterling's little gang of folk there.

And Sidney Kaplan, of course, was a graduate in the graduate program there. And as soon as he got to be the head of the graduate program in the English Department – as the graduate program director, he's the one who's going to select students and get students – he had written to Sterling saying, “Send me students.” And this is – Sidney had been a part of creating the *Massachusetts Review*. Now, he's the graduate program director in the English Department, so he says, “Send me some students,” and we all got there to be students. And the first thing we

started to be involved in, of course, was a program, not a department, a program under the aegis of the English Department.

We started the – you know, we started and we would go visit the homes in the evenings of the professors and the staff people who ran the *Massachusetts Review*. It was a wonderful, *wonderful* place to be at that time, because politics was everything. We talked about the world. We talked about making it better. We talked about the obligation to make it better. Mike Thelwell had come from the Movement. He had been, uh, involved in the, getting the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party down in Atlanta with Julian Bond. It was just the most amazing, amazing assemblage of people.

And then, we talked about what would a program look like that would infuse – and here is what we always talked about. We never talked about erasing American literature. We talked about embellishing it with the story of the African American and that contribution. And so, ours was an American story. And we wanted – we thought ours would have to fulfill what was the perfect – the narrative, that the narrative of the black person would be a narrative that belonged in the consideration of narrative [1:10:00] for the, for *American* literature, what was uniquely American. We always talked about that. And then we had a program. And then, the next thing we knew, we were talking about a department.

And so, we went – Amherst is the flagship, but the president's office was in Boston. So, when we went to talk about – when my colleagues went to talk about the establishment of such a thing to the president and to the board of trustees, we were never alone. We had people who were there – we never were – not one thing happened at UMass of protest! Even when the kids were out protesting or whatever, there was never one such action that had all black kids and only

black kids or only black faculty involved. So, we had a wonderful assemblage of people who were there, uh, to, to work with us and to stand by us and to help us with that, and so it was easy.

So, I love to tell people that if you know what was happening at Cornell, what was happening all over the place where fights were breaking out and there were all these – the day that [laughs] we, uh, were granted the right to establish our independent department in Afro-American Studies, people kind of yawned and voted it and went on, and nobody – nothing was blown up. It was a real quiet thing. And I felt kind of – you know, I thought, “Where’s –” [laughs] let down! We wanted there to be some protest – well, if not protest, let there be some celebratory noise of some kind! But it was like, “It’s okay. It’s all right.”

I think, I think UMass was a very special place for me. I spent a long time there in my career. I grew a lot there and, and got to learn so much more than I ever learned. Because where there were thresholds that I thought I couldn’t – and other people thought I couldn’t – pass at, say, a Chapel Hill [University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill], I was pulled across those in many ways at UMass. And so, it was a really – if I look back at what I, what I had done in terms of how – it just worked right to be there. It just worked absolutely right.

And I was able to join with people, black and white, to make sure that we had a program that’s a good program, that’s a program that talks about making what was existent in the Ivory Tower better, because it would be, it would be – it would not now have to close off closets. We opened doors and we knew that we had students who could do that. We knew that we had a country that needed to understand that and who could swallow that and grow from it. Um, that’s what we thought. That’s what we did. And we have a great program at UMass, [speaking with emotion] and I was very, very sad to leave it. But I needed to.

JM: Umm. Just a final question: There is a nice kind of closing of the circle when you come back as provost here in 2009.

ET: And I've come back as provost here.

JM: And I'm just interested in maybe a final thought or reflection on Bennett today and how it stands in the lives of the young women who are here now and in the community.

ET: It's a small – everything is changed. Because it's – when I was here, the signs were up: “blacks this way; whites this way; don't come in.” You know, to knock down the signs sometimes leaves us not knowing what we have to do and, if we're not very careful, we can begin to think we are free and there are no more things to be done, there are no movements to have. But there are now. There are economic considerations.

And I say to the young women who come to me, who want to know, “Dr. Terry, uh, uh, what'd you do when we sat down? Did you sit down?” I say, “Well, you know, you only can run the relay that you're in. You run the lap you're in, and then you pass it on. But when you pass it, that person doesn't get to run the lap that you ran. That lap's been run. You have to run another lap. You have to run your lap.” So, I say to the students here that the world now is different. It's not the same as it was, but it also is not perfect yet and it's a far way – Greensboro, even – far way from being perfect. It doesn't have some of the problems that it had, but it has other ones, and they've got to find them.

Here's what I say to students: that you still have the obligation and the responsibility to make social justice and equality a part, a partner with you, as you [1:15:00] develop whatever skills you want to develop and you pursue whatever course of study you want to pursue. You have got to be the best. You have got to give your all. And you've got to have a part of it committed to giving back to the community. I think that.

I think that, so I think – and now, I think I go through here, and the young people have got Twitter and technology. I can't stand Twitter. You know [laughs], it's so limiting, all the – I don't do Twitter, you know, and I try very hard to stay away from blogging and all of that. But, you know, the students have to do that, and I have to know enough about it to get through. Their world has got all of these novelties. It's also unjust in many ways and unequal in many ways. And if they're not careful, they won't see it. So, they've got to work really hard to do that.

And I think Bennett is a good place to be. I think Bennett can become a haven, um, for at least nine hundred little girls, to make them into big women. That's what I work to do. And I don't plan to be here forever, to have another career, but it's certainly a good thing to do on the days that I am here.

JM: It's a real honor and a real privilege. Thank you so much for this opportunity. It's just been lovely to be with you. Thank you.

ET: Thank you. Okay, now you can strike –

[Recording ends at 1:16:28]

END OF INTERVIEW

Sally Council

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