

Joining the Navy

I actually was a veteran when I came to Penn State. I uh graduated from high school, Ken High in '54 and that was deep in economic recession. I think my dad was probably working about two or three days a week and in spite of the fact that I had an opportunity to go to college, the uh believe it or not \$900 a year that it was going to cost in addition to the scholarship just was not there. And uh I joined the Navy in June of 1954 about two weeks after graduation

First Racist Experience

I had my first injurious encounter actually with racism in uniform as a Navy um uh as a serviceman in the US Navy and that was in Baltimore, Maryland. The very first time that I came home from from basic training and met a bunch of other sailors at the Greyhound Bus station in Pittsburgh to being our journey back to Baltimore and then take the bus back to Bainbridge, Maryland. We went across the street from the bus station and in uh Baltimore to get lunch uh four or five of us for dinner whatever it was to get a meal. And uh I was refused service. That was sometime like in October or November of 1958. That was the very first time that that had ever happened to me. I knew about it. I mean you could read about it in the Pittsburgh Courier you could read about it in Ebony and Jet in whatever the publications were that specifically were targeted to African Americans and our plight and whatever. Uh but that was my first face-to-face encounter with it. And uh it was most unpleasant obviously.

Subtle Discrimination in State College

I don't think that there were instances you know like blatant racist incidents where we weren't served or where we were hounded or disinvited. And downtown businesses. Of course we had the typical thing that you hear about racist behavior where you are followed in stores and people behave like you came in to steal rather than to uh purchase. But again I never make too much of it. I was an older a little bit older student and so while I while obvious to me there's authenticity to the complaints and observations of my peers. Mostly I didn't individually experience them either in town or on campus. There were some instances where you have a sense of inequity. People professors who were underdeveloped themselves in the areas of interracial understanding and accommodation. Tried to save us from ourselves. Um weren't sure that we wanted to graduate from Penn state because opportunities would be foreclosed to us in the professions that we were training for and so uh instances like that of being treated differently.

Penn State Was Indifferent

When I came to Penn State in the late '50s Penn State really was indifferent. I don't think it was foreclosed. It wouldn't have been foreclosed per se to African American students but there really was no energy around recruiting uh African American or minority students.

Sticking Together

There were 125 or 125 or 30 African American students. We were pretty well divided across the several opportunities there were to join the Greek letter organization. And uh so we were a very tight interdependent reciprocal community. What happened to one of us happened to all of us. Things just were barred to us. Uh I mean we perused the alternative that was open to us open to us and that was fro us to have our own organizations and our own social uh political uh community. And so we did. We had several organizations as I said five Greek letter organizations as I recall were on campus at that time. And uh Entre Nous Dr. Williams Preston Williams who left to become um Harvard University uh divinity school faculty member uh provided support for us also early on. He was part of the faculty in Eisenhower Chapel and the spiritual life of the campus and so those were those were our bridges to Penn State.

Racism in Phoenix

I was never more offended at confronting racism in Phoenix, Arizona than uh than at any time. I was just like completely turned off by Phoenix. I had a good friend who was there and had graduated from Arizona State and kept saying this is the place. This is the place. You know it's moving. Whatever and so I applied and I was going to go to Arizona State to graduate school and teach. And I went for the interview and I was told I had to go meet one Mr. Green who was the principal of wherever the Blacks and Hispanics were taught in Phoenix. And when I finally got the picture I said do you mean to tell me that I can't teach just anywhere in Phoenix. I've got a university degree. I have certification in social studies. No you can teach at Mr. Green's district out in south Phoenix. And I just thought that was untenable. And so by the end of uh that summer had come back to um Pennsylvania. In fact I called back here to placement and they said well just go to 21st and parkway to the board of education in Philadelphia and you'll get a job teaching. You don't need to go through whatever. And so that's what I did. We came back and went to Philadelphia. I went to 21st and Parkway and I got hired uh to teach.

New Experiences for Students

When I was head of the department I insisted that all faculty should teach the undergraduate courses in our in our curriculum. Nobody should not teach undergraduates and I assigned myself to teach the undergraduate course in counseling and I walked into

one of those lecture halls in Chambers Building and the students who were in there who come from all majors in these liberal arts and education uh about 17 students got up and walked out of the room. I put my name on the board so it was clear to them that I was the one who was assigned to teach that course. And I passed out the syllabus and told them what the requirements were going to be for the course and 17 more left. And I just had the occasion for students to say. It was a weird experience for them and one that they weren't ready for. They had never had an African American instructor in their lives wherever they came from in Pennsylvania or the bordering states and they weren't about to have one now. And I've had other faculty colleagues say oh I've had that experience too where white students just got up and walked out of the room the first day. I presume that doesn't happen anymore. But who knows. I don't know.

Making Progress But Not There Yet

I don't think that Penn State is where it ultimately will be and owes the citizens of the Commonwealth and of the United States to be as an institution in these areas. But we have a real office of educational equity and uh we have a real uh solid uh uh base and structure uh. I am very pleased that I am a Penn Stater and that we're in the vanguard of leading in these efforts of providing genuine equity.

Record of Progress

To uh have the record of progress over time to be able to compare uh one era to another era and what has happened I think is critical for for us.