

DAVIDSON, Barbara. 3/18/76

Q: I'm interviewing Barbara Davidson, a member of the Board of Education for the City of Middletown. Hello, Barbara.

A: Hi.

Q: Let's start from the beginning. Can you tell me about your background? When did your family come to Middletown? Why? Where did they come from?

A: Both my parents came from Florida. Around 1922, my daddy, In 1925, I think, my mother. And what's the second part? Why did they settle here? Both of their parents, well, no, my mother's parents settled here for better job opportunities and my daddy came for the same purpose, to seek, you know, better employment than Florida.

Q: What type of employment opportunities were available to people, at that time, black people, that is?

A. Most factory jobs, but not factory like the machinery. There was a mill, a bone mill in Portland my father was employed at. I think that's where almost everyone started off, the newcomers to Middletown.

Q: So that's how most people earned their living?

A: Mmhm.

Q: What kinds of social activities did you participate in?

A: I?

Q: Your family.

A: My parents, being both religious, the social life was around their religious beliefs so, therefore, we come from a very strict religious family, Pentecostal Holiness so, therefore, that was the social life, church affairs.

Q: Were there any activities that were restricted to you because of your race?

A: My parents, no. Again, I say their activities were around the church. For me, no. There wasn't any restrictive activities.

Q: Now, your family settled in Middletown or Cromwell?

A: After my father and mother married they settled in Cromwell. They lived in Middletown, both of them, prior to this and they bought a home, oh, some forty-seven years ago, in Cromwell.

Q: So you attended school in Cromwell?

A: Cromwell.

Q: What was school like for a black child at that time? How many black students were in the school system?

A: In Cromwell at the time I was growing up would be, let's see, I started school about early '40's or '40, somewhere around there, early '40's. There were only three families in

Cromwell so I went through the entire system with maybe three [black] people in the school, excluding my own family.

Q: Were you treated differently or did you ever realize that you were being treated differently because you were black?

A: Not really. There were some racial incidents during my early school years, but, I really, it was because I was black, but it didn't make that great an impact on me at that time.

Q: When was the impact made?

A: After graduation and seeking employment.

Q: Seeking employment. Could you expound on that? What happened? Give us some examples.

A: Well, in high school I did take a business course and there were incidents like the blacks in business courses where they weren't given jobs like the whites were. They immediately went from high school right to employment and we had a small career opportunity office in the school, and I don't know of one black who ever got a job from that department. So that was a racial exclusionary means for black students. There was no blacks in Middletown--I graduated in 1955--in any clerical, secretarial positions. So, therefore, we had to go to Hartford if we wanted to seek employment in that area.

Q: So, did you go to Hartford?

A: Yes, I did.

Q: Did you find work there?

A: Yes, I did.

Q: It was impossible to find employment in Middletown?

A: Right.

Q: Where did you work? What company did you work for?

A: In Hartford? Travelers Insurance. That was, you chose the largest company for better job opportunities. The smaller companies did not--I did have a job after school one year around Christmas holidays as a salesperson. But there weren't any blacks working, like, locally in department stores, or anything like that, to my knowledge.

Q: After Travelers Insurance Company, you came to Wesleyan?

A: No, I had a job in Deep River at a factory in the Shipping Department as a secretary and then I came to Wesleyan.

Q: I'd like to talk about Wesleyan a little later but before that, can you tell me about the level of political activity while you were growing up?

A: I really don't know that much about it because I really didn't become involved until much later, you know, like only ten years ago.

Q: What happened to you? How did you become politically involved with Middletown affairs?

A: Well, I started off on a committee, Anti-poverty Committee. It's called CAGM now. And I was just on the Board of Directors and I saw a need for Middletown to grow, the black population in Middletown to grow, and I thought I could serve best in a capacity of doing service to the black community. That's how I started. I got interested by doing this type thing and then it just led from one thing to another.

Q: What other activities were you involved in within the political arena?

A: Other than the Board of Education?

Q: Yes.

A: No. Not political. Civic.

Q: Civic? Well, as far as civic associations?

A: Well, I said the CAGM, Long Lane's Auxiliary. You know, I took a child home, one of those girls, that all girls, that I would be like a big sister to one of the girls there, and I enjoyed working there because at that point there wasn't any blacks at Long Lane so there was a need for someone to go there and help the girls with their hair problems or any other problems because the whites were not trained in any of these areas and the black kids really suffered. And, let me see, the NAACP I was active in, both on the Wesleyan campus and in the City. Oh, I served on different interracial women's groups, you know, doing service to the community. In the religious aspect I was very much involved with the youth groups in the churches and much involved in summer bible school, and I sang in the church choir for many years.

Q: Well, how did you become involved with the Board of Education?

A: Well, when I first served in the civic group I became very depressed at the lack of involvement or commitment that the people, that is the white segment in Middletown, they weren't totally getting involved with different things and it was very frustrating. You'd sit at the table and discuss the problems that you know are in Middletown, such as housing or education or something like that. And I guess I just got frustrated and I quit everything for a period of about five years and then I was asked by David Cooper, who was very active in the Democratic party at that time, to serve out the term of a woman, who moved out of town, on the Board of Education. So I agreed to this and it was about April of one year, I think it was 1970, and I served out that term and it just happened that I agreed to run for the next election, and that's how I became involved on the Board.

Q: So, what is your current position within the Board?

A: Right now, I'm the Vice President of the Board of Education.

Q: You're the Vice President of the Board of Education. How many members?

A: Nine.

Q: Nine. And of those nine members, how many are black?

A: One. Myself.

Q: Yourself. And the rest are white?

A: Yes.

Q: Can you tell me about the National School Board Association?

A: O.K. Locally, we are members of the State School Board of Education which is the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education which I will call CABA, and CABA's parent group is the National Board of Education. I'm on both of the Board of Directors, State and National, and what it is it's a national organization which disseminates information to Washington in order to propose bills and other legislative things for public education.

Q: O.K. So there is a meeting annually of every member?

A: Yes.

Q: Now, can you explain to me, is there a member from every State, or how is this broken down?

A: O.K. Every State has two delegates chosen from their State Associations and any given State which has over 100,000 additional children, or pupils, you receive one more delegate. So there is some States that have as many as four delegates representing it to the National.

Q: And how many delegates has Connecticut?

A: Connecticut only has two.

Q: Only has two. Now at the National Association meetings, whenever they are held, how many black representatives are there?

A: At its maximum, nine.

Q: There are nine black representatives?

A: Yes, delegates.

Q: So what you're saying is, nine delegates represent all the black students?

A: You are absolutely right--in the public schools.

Q: How does this reflect as far as legislation concerning the problems that black students may have within the various school systems throughout the United States? What position, what types of positions, do you have? What is your power? What leverage can you use?

A: Our power base with National? Since it runs about 122 to 150 delegates on the floor at one time, and maximum nine on any given policy resolution, you can see that there is not that much impact from a black delegate. The only school system that has majority blacks as their delegates would be Washington, D.C., so if there is anything that is really pertinent to black children in the United States it very seldom would pass on the floor of the Delegate Assembly in that there is not that much backing seeing there's nine people

on the floor.

Q: Well, can you tell me if it is for that reason the National caucus of black school board members was established?

A: Yes. They needed--that was one of the reasons, the other reason is that there are so many problems that crop up from a Board of Education that you really, you can say it is a black problem and you couldn't find a solution with the National. The National, by the way, has a lot of publications and different materials helping school board members to better themselves, and the black population of the delegates felt that there was a need for dissemination of information to each other about particular problems, sort of a bank for hiring administrators and teachers and in this we could get a better feel locally on the Boards of Education if we want to recruit either an administrator or teacher. So they felt it very necessary and I agree, too, that there should be a place where a black School Board member could go to seek the same things that National offers.

Q: When was this black caucus established?

A: Prior to my time on the Board. I would say that it is maybe seven years old, but it's only been recognized as a body of National in the past two years.

Q: Could you explain to me what are some of the objectives of this black caucus?

A: Better understanding and better activities for the black child in public education. That's a very broad view of it.

Q: Well, what programs have you instituted as a black caucus? What proposals have you made?

A: We, what was instituted from the black caucus would be a branch of National which they call Human Relations that deals with particular problems with minorities in school systems. And the black caucus is not funded from the National, by the way. We pay dues and fund our ownself, but the Human Relations office is a part of the National.

Q: Have you encountered any animosity on the part of your counterparts?

A: Locally?

Q: Locally, nationally.

A: Locally, my counterparts are unaware of the black caucus. They don't get involved that much, either with state or national things. Statewide we have a very good relationship with the caucus on the CABA Board of Directors.

Q: As well as Nationally?

A: Nationally, there is resentment toward the black caucus because they felt that there was no need for a group to branch off from the National School Board Association. However, I think that's being resolved. It's still a ticklish subject.

Q: Do you think that nationally they fear the black caucus?

A: Fear in a very different sort of way. They don't like the bad publicity if the black caucus ever did anything "radical".

Q: Has there been any bad publicity?

A: At one point during one of the national conventions the black caucus did walk out on an issue being raised that was pertinent to the black cause across the country and that was they wanted to unseat one of the executive members, and they proposed a resolution that would do this. They did not succeed.

Q: They did not succeed. Could you tell me something? What is your position politically, educationally, as far as busing is concerned?

A: I guess I have to speak to it in two ways. Locally, I am for busing only because 79-80% of our children are bused. In the Middletown area if we didn't have busing you would not get a very good cross section of children in varying schools in that our black children are predominantly in the inner part of the city and our very new modern schools are on the outer perimeters of the city. You would have, if we chose to have neighborhood school settings we would have totally, not totally, very, very high percentage black schools. So I believe, personally, that a child should have a cross section of children, be it economic or ethnic, within the student body for them to get the broadest education possible, as I feel the same way about teachers, too. This is one of the ticklish spots with my Democratic Party about recruiting teachers in Middletown. Basically they feel the community endorsed us to serve them and we should reciprocate by hiring the community which elected us to office, and I agree with this in principle. However, I don't think you would get a broad cross section educationally in just hiring local teachers. I think that a child should be exposed to urban thinking, rural thinking, a teacher with extensive travel experience, oh, whatever. So, therefore, I'm off the busing subject but, anyhow, nationally I guess I'm not opposed to busing or a means for desegregation. However, it's really pathetic that a community cannot be totally black with totally good educational facilities for the child. So, I guess what I'm saying is, no, I am not--I mean, YES, I am for busing.

Q: Do you see busing as a political attempt to polarize that which was, or those who were, liberals?

A: No.

Q: So, you don't see a polarization at all? Well, do you think that busing has caused more damage than it's done good? Or do you think it's too early to say--we'll have to wait a few years? Do you think there is not a substantial amount of cooperation? What do you perceive the position of the parent? Will you elaborate on all this?

A: Well, the thing that sticks out most readily in my mind is Boston's busing situation. And I feel that if the parents would be more understanding and not display the bigotry that they have displayed these past years and just let the kids be educated, I don't think we would have the problems we have. But in most situations, and I could go back to Middletown, it's the parents who cause the most confusion in any situation and, I'm getting wrapped up in my own thoughts, I forgot the ending of your question. But, I believe that the parents, it should be that the onus should be placed back on the parents, because I think they're the ones who are out there stoning and throwing rocks and disrupting the entire system. I think if you left the children alone and, you know, Boston

has quite a large population of blacks, I think if it could be arranged so that there was equalization of the distribution of race, I think everything would work itself out, rather than the parents' trying to run the school systems.

Q: Do you have a time limit, or do you see a time limit?

A: No, I don't. I see it getting worse than better.

Q: You see it getting worse than better but you still feel that students should be bused?

A: Yes.

Q: But when will the worst begin to appear as if its...

A: I can't predict that but I just have a gut reaction that black days are over.

Q: By that, what do you mean?

A: Fair treatment to blacks.

Q: Fair treatment to blacks.

A: Or the liberal aspect of it, you know, going all out for being liberal towards the minorities. I see this as being over because--

Q: Over permanently, or for a short period of time? Do you see it as a cycle?

A: Until the economy factor rises, I can't see any change with people's feelings because the money situation would dominate anyone's ideas or ideals. That's a personal view.

Q: Earlier you mentioned teachers in the area, if I'm not mistaken, correct me if I am, there are approximately 387 teachers in secondary, middle, elementary.

A: Yes.

Q: School teachers in the system. Of those 387, I believe no more than thirty are black.

A: I think there's twenty-eight.

Q: Twenty-eight. What is being done to increase this number? Will this number increase? If so, what will be your impact, influence, on this problem?

A: What is being done. We do have a recruitment policy on the Board of Education where money is allotted to go to predominantly black colleges to seek teachers to teach in our system. Although that line item in the budget is decreasing, the program is still going on. But we are getting fewer and fewer teachers who want to come to Middletown. As long as I'm on the Board I will see to it that this is kept as it is or stepped up if we have, I know we have a money crunch, but I think it's still necessary to recruit minorities in Middletown. There is a great need for this. I will do everything I can to see it because I think that both white and black children, parents, and the administration would benefit from having a different view brought into the classroom at all levels.

Q: Well, aside from the teachers, I believe there are two administrators, one vice principal and one black principal.

A: Yes.

Q: Will that number increase?

A: There is not a great turnover now-a-days, again due to economic conditions. But if there is an interest shown, I believe that that will increase.

Q: How is your position received by the eight members on the Board?

A: It is difficult for me to evaluate my position in another person's view. Like any group where you are the one minority, your cohorts believe that you know every answer to any minority problem. I guess that it shows how they think, but I think they see me as another board member but with the view that I'm supposed to be some authority about any black problems, yes.

Q: All black problems. You have all the answers no matter what the situation may be?

A: Right.

Q: Now, the way it seems, you have one black vice principal; you have one black principal as a black member of the Board of Education. There may be one or two black teachers in every school. Do you see this as an attempt on the part of the school system to say we do have black teachers and just keep it at that, an attempt or to have this perceived as tokenism? Do you perceive this as tokenism? That's what my question is.

A: Well, there's a number of things that we must comply with and the one that's most important, as long as we are receiving State and Federal funds we must maintain the presence of minorities within the system. So I wouldn't call it a token. I would call it very necessary to have funding coming in. With myself on the Board, I believe I am the third elected official on the Board of Education in, let me see, in the past, say, ten years. And I'm the third also that was ever elected in Middletown--that may be redundant, but the third Board of Education member.

Q: The third black member, or just the third?

A: The third black member.

Q: The third member in sequence? So that there never has been more than one?

A: Right.

Q: Black member--

A: And it was only here that--

Q: --at one time.

A: Yes, right; the first one being Dr. Bridgeford. He moved out of town and Ernestine Brown replaced him and she moved out of town and I replaced her.

Q: You replaced Ernestine Brown? So that's what I'm trying to say. As long as they receive these funds they will comply.

A: Now the funds have nothing to do with the School Board members. But the funds have a lot to do with the teachers.

Q: But there is an image that one sets?

A: You would have to separate the Board from the school because the Board does not have to have ONE black person on it. We receive no funds. There is nothing forcing anybody to put a black on that School Board. But for the school, if any Joe Schmo community person wants to call the EEO and report that Middletown is receiving funds with a pupil population, minority pupil population, of over 15% and has not attempted to hire any teachers, then we would be investigated and our funds, possibly more than likely, would be withdrawn from the city.

Q: So by saying that there is no direct influence to the Board of Education as far as having a black member that your position if you were elected or you were asked to assume this position just because you are Barbara Davidson, someone who is--

A: No.

Q: --aware of the community and its problems, or is there a correlation with--

A: With the funding?

Q: Yes.

A: No. I don't know how Dr. Bridgeford got on the Board initially but--

Q: Excuse me, when did he assume his position?

A: I've been on five years, Ernestine had about two. I would say eight to ten years ago.

Q: So we could say that he assumed his position during the vanguard of black awareness and white liberalism?

A: Let us go back a little bit. As I was saying, I don't know how or who asked Dr. Bridgeford to be on the Board, but that's a purely political thing. The Democratic, well, I'll go Democrat since I am one, the Democratic Town Committee, sometime before August you were asked to be on a spot or slot within that slate, I think it's twenty-two openings. You say YES or NO and the Town Committee approves you and that's--you run for election and you're either elected or not, but it has nothing to do with, you know, the school system per se. It's the political wheels who choose you.

Q: But wouldn't you say that--

A: Let me follow that through. I don't know, I never talked to Dr. Bridgeford about how he got there or who asked him, but a door was opened for a minority on the slate and when he left town, another one slid in and when she left town, I slid in and we try to keep that door open.

Q: That door is always open for one person? Or is that door widening? Or is it getting narrow?

A: Well, since Bridgeford to me there is only one door.

Q: One door. So it's stationary, let's say?

A? It seems so. But now this last term I was informed that the door had closed.

Q: Oh, really?

A: And that I was in jeopardy of maintaining that slot and it was only through the five members on the Town Committee and my black contingency that I maintain my position. I have a fairly good backing locally so if on any given election year that my party wants to unseat me or put someone else in my place, my backing is pretty strong and pretty regular. Again, we go back to the problem of the Democrats' request that we hire local teachers before we go out of the area. I disagree with this entirely. As I said before, I think that the children would be cheated to just have local people teaching them. I think that they need all the experience and all the different experiences that teachers have had or administrators have had outside the community to broaden their horizons. So, therefore, I tend not to keep a policy that we are only to hire Middletown people. That has been a very sore spot. My philosophy has been a very sore spot with the Democrats and this is why it affects my position every time election rolls around. And it was very strong this year in that the entire nominating Committee questioned me for a period of two hours and fifteen minutes about my philosophies on education and my difference in my voting practices on a number of issues, and they were going to make the decision if I should be on the slot or not. And I understand that they had promised it to another person, and it was only the night before nominations for the slate that I found out that I would be running with the Democratic party. This has happened in the past two elections.

Q: Would you agree then that the Board of Education, I mean the political impact overshadows, let's say, the educational?

A: In many instances, well, it's clear to me at the local level, but I see it national too. We could go back to the delegate assembly at the national convention and you have a State such as Arizona or New Mexico that has a very high Chicano population, or whatever the different ethnic groupings are, and there are none representing them on the Board as a delegate from their State.

Q: So the political influence is great?

A: Yes.

Q: O.K. Aside from being a member of the Board of Education you are the secretary for the president of Wesleyan University? Is that correct?

A: One of his, yes.

Q: One of his secretaries. When did you assume that position?

A: Well, seven years ago.

Q: Seven years ago you became his secretary? How long have you been an employee of the University?

A: Fifteen years.

Q: Fifteen years. So what, how did you begin; what was your initial position?

A: I began with exposure to Wesleyan as a clerk helping a professor write a book. I did his clerical duties and while I was there--I could go back a little further than that and tell you an interesting story on that, too. It was after I left a factory in Deep River for personal reasons. I did resign, and I went to collect Unemployment Compensation and the requirement then was you had to visit two places a week to seek employment in order to get your employment check. O.K. I knew in Middletown with my experience that it was seven years' background as a secretary and they didn't have a black secretary nor a clerk nor a file clerk in Middletown, so I knew that my chances for being hired anywhere in my home town was very unlikely. So I played a little game which I'll confess to now after all these years. Working in the NAACP, the man that I did the research work with at Wesleyan was a history professor and he was about to write a book. So that's how I met him and that's how I got the job which started out to be a part-time job but after it developed into a full-time job. But I actually, knowing my community, could draw a compensation check, go to two places, sometimes three and four, a week, knowing I would not get a job. So, therefore, I was getting a double salary because I banked on my not being hired because I was black, and I made it for a whole year. So, anyhow, that is how I first got on campus and while I was there I met the dean of the college who was a very close friend to the professor and a girl was leaving his office, pregnancy reasons, and he asked me if I was interested and I said, "yes", and I went over and was interviewed. And that afternoon, by the time it took me to walk from North College to PAC, I had the job. And it was an interesting story that he told me afterwards because he told the office manager in the dean's office at that time that he was anticipating hiring me and she said that she had been there about thirty-five years at that point and she threw (he told me this), she threw the book across the desk and said that she would not work with a Niger or a Jew, and that was when he decided that he would hire me.

Q: What was your initial reaction? I mean, you'd been in Middletown for so many years, you knew that there were no black employees, secretarial or in clerical positions. When this man said that he was going to hire you, what was your reaction? You must have been shocked or--

A: No, I wasn't shocked at that point because Wesleyan, even though it is in Middletown, it was a different liberal animal than the rest, so my chances were better. Now I did have an application in Wesleyan for about a year prior to that and I was sort of feeling like, well, they're just like the rest of the organizations and institutions in Middletown, they wouldn't hire me; and I was right. They didn't. The person or Personnel did not hire me. The Dean hired me and it was six months after the Personnel Manager found out that I was hired, which annoyed him but, you know, he could not rescind the Dean's--

Q: The Dean's decision to hire you?

A: Right.

Q: What was it like? Tell me about it.

A: My first years at Wesleyan? It was a trip! Well, to make it short, I came to Wesleyan July, 1962, I guess, or well, '61, actually. I went into the Dean's office in '62 and I came in weighing 123 pounds and at the end of the year I weighed 96. That's how it was. It was--I worked with two women who had been there over, say, twenty years when I got there.

Q: You lost close to thirty pounds?

A: They were completely complaisant in their positions. The women around them, their friends, were very secure. They were all older people. I came there at 25 years old and I was the youngest one on campus. They didn't like to hire young women at that point because it was an all-boys' school. Being young and black, I guess I wasn't a threat, so that's one of the reasons I was hired but, anyhow, the women were very, very, VERY rude my first years. There was the silence; there was the heavy load they placed on me, the workload, and at that time the Dean could not supervise because he was off the entire summer. So I was under the same woman who refused to work with me and it was difficult because it's very hard to work a desk away from somebody and they tell you absolutely nothing. The jargon was altogether different for me. I was in the business world before and I didn't know a fraternity from a sorority. You know, the machines were all modern. The Latin terms and Greek terms for the fraternities was new to me. The whole bag was a very new thing, so it was extremely difficult and the workload had a lot of pressure to it and they used to dump a lot of work on me. It was good that I was fast and I received very good training from Travelers because Travelers had sent me to school. Well, I was completely frustrated. I used to go home at night and cry and cry on my family's shoulder and everything, so my brother finally told me if the work's that hard on you, Barbara, just give it up. And I made up my mind to give it up because the pressure was just too great. And I went in the following July to the Dean and I just told him that I just could not hack it and that I was giving it up, and he told me, "Well, Barbara, if you can't do it, then forget it", and I guess it was his words. When someone tells me I can't do anything that makes me work harder and I told him, "No, I'm not quitting". You're out of your mind, you know, and that's how I stayed there.

Q: But it was extremely tense for you?

A: Not after that point. My whole personality changed.

Q: In what way did it change?

A: Well, as you know me now, I appear to be outgoing. I don't bite my tongue. That whole year I bit my tongue and I was very quiet and I took everything that was given to me. After that point, I gave. I knew it was a blessing that I had the workload from the women that worked in the place with me because it forced me to learn the campus inside-out and it forced me to, you know, pay strict attention to what I was doing so that I wouldn't make mistakes. So, therefore, I learned, I guess I learned three years in the one. So I became very efficient in what I was doing and it didn't bother me, the pressure that was put on me, because I could run circles, because I was so used to doing it for that year. So, actually, the women who mistreated me helped me.

Q: What was the reaction to the new Barbara?

A: Oh, they adjusted. I felt that they gave me enough problems and, you know, they made me what I was, so what I turned out to be, so they adjusted and I never had, you know, any real problems since then because as they gave I didn't take, and things worked out very nice.

Q: Now, while you were, the early years, the middle '60's, at Wesleyan, you participated in the Wesleyan University Tuskegee Institute Exchange Program.

A: Yes.

Q: Now, it was your duty to chaperone the white male students of Wesleyan through the South?

A: Yes.

Q: This was in the 60's during the change, the vanguard of black awareness; during the time of civil rights, Martin Luther King, etc.?

A: Right.

Q: What was your position as a black woman going into the heart of southern racism?

A: My position, I don't know if it was my position; it wasn't a duty. I chose to do this for the experience because, well, again, being attacked so consistently in the office from the females or from the staff, because some of them were males also, it made me become very close to students, especially like the minority students at Wesleyan, not black, Jewish then.

Q: There was a Jewish minority program?

A: No.

Q: There wasn't a Jewish minority program?

A: No program. The Jews were in a minority.

Q: Was there a quota system for Jews?

A: There was an unwritten quota system.

Q: For Jewish students?

A: Yes. Very few Jewish students. As I became very close to them with their suffering, suffrage, in their years prior we formed sort of an attachment and so I did a lot of activities with the students that I chose to do. It wasn't a part of my job. When this Tuskegee-Wesleyan exchange started they needed a chaperone. The Deans would not let them go without an adult. So, therefore, it was just like a mutual agreement that, you know, the Dean relieved me of time to chaperone them and I was glad for the experience. The first trip down there was indeed an experience, as each one was. But the first one had the greatest impact because I can honestly tell you I did not know what I was doing and getting myself into. And like you just said, yes, it was one black woman with five white males and that was a shock for the South in those years; and I was unaware, but I

learned fast, of the position that it placed me in.

Q: This period that you traveled south was, let's say, the end, or was near the end, of the black codes that still existed; Jim Crow laws. We can still call them that?

A: Right.

Q: Did you encounter trouble?

A: I could not eat or go to the bathroom or use any of those facilities on the entire trip down. I got plenty of stares but the students, I have to admit, they were wiser than me and, I guess, we protected each other. I protected them at Tuskegee; they protected me on the road to Tuskegee. Yes, I saw the "White Only" signs and, mind you, being born and raised in Connecticut I was AWARE of Jim Crow activities but I had never EXPERIENCED any. And this was my first experience, and it would be a lasting one because I experienced it with five white people and my stupidity or unawareness of going down there in that position.

Q: So you went to a black college in the South? What was the reaction of a black woman with five white students from a northern elitist university?

A: The reaction from the Tuskegee students?

Q: Yes, or the whites in Tuskegee, Alabama.

A: Okay. Now, my trip going all the way down, we usually packed a lunch or something like that so I wouldn't be subjected to not eating, or if we didn't, the joke that I always made was that if you don't eat you don't have to use the rest rooms so, therefore, I didn't have a problem. I felt, by the time I got to, like, Delaware, I could feel what my father had said to me prior to my leaving and that was, "Do you know what you're doing?". And as bullheaded as I am I said, "Yes, of course", you know, but I felt the hostility from the whites on the way down. The only rejection I felt was the not eating and my first refusal was on one of those trips which I can't even put it into words how it is to feel when you're refused food which is a sustenance for life. But, anyhow, I felt this superficial inner feeling that it will be O.K. when I got to Tuskegee. That I'll be with my people and to tell you the truth, I almost felt more hostility upon arriving on that campus than I did on the trip down! They resented my being down there, not necessarily with the white students, but I was a Northerner, a black Northerner coming down there and that was deep resentment on their part. We stayed down there probably a week-and-a-half to two weeks at a time and it was, like, into almost the last of the week that people would warm up and chat and talk and there was a friendly atmosphere.

Q: Where did you stay? Did you stay at a local motel or hotel? Did you stay on campus?

A: On campus. At an inn. There was an inn right there.

Q: On campus. What about the white reaction?

A: There were very few whites on campus down there.

Q: But within the city itself, were there whites? Was there publicity?

A: Yes. This is where the students came in. It was really cute. The majority of times it was unannounced that they had a black chaperone and I clearly recall one incident meeting the mayor of Tuskegee. He was white at that time and the students saved the surprise to last, the surprise being me. And so they sat all around this large oval table and left one chair open right by the mayor and as I walked through the door, you know, he had extended his hand to all the students and saying how glad he was to meet each one and when he got to me he didn't want to withdraw his hand, but he didn't want to shake mine either. He was very uneasy throughout the whole interview that the students had with him and the students knew exactly what they were doing. They did it purposely as when we were walking out they saw fit every time they were in the company of a white Southerner to call me, you know, at that point I was Mrs. Brogan, by my name and title. You know, just treat me with this overwhelming politeness to just make a point to them that, you know, that there was this harmony between me and the student body. I can remember the kids right in the middle of the City Hall holding the water faucet for me to take a drink and just every mouth in the workers there, you know, who were watching the students, and they just looked at me like I was absolutely nuts because there wasn't a sign there saying "Whites Only", but you knew doggone well that no blacks were drinking out of that fountain! So that was one of the humorous things that happened. Another one was one of the students that went down with us, he was from West Virginia, I believe, and his father owned a HUGE resort there on the mountains and he, too, did not tell his father that I was black and so when we arrived there the father was indeed glad to have his son from Wesleyan's group, you know, staying at his home, but he was surprised to death to see me. He had planned this party for our arrival. It was all white, and they just stared at me all night. It was very uncomfortable for me but, again, the students were very good and they made me feel comfortable, but he segregated us in sleeping arrangements where he gave me a room that was off from everybody else. But I had the best room because it was beautiful and it was huge, with a sliding whole wall that looked out onto the mountains. I had a gorgeous view, but it was because he wanted to separate me that I got it.

Q: You did this program for three years?

A: Yes.

Q:participated in this program. Well, let's move up into history. When did black students begin to come to Wesleyan in larger numbers?

A: The Class of '69, I believe, was the largest.

Q: The largest black class? Now, when was there an incident at Wesleyan on the part of black students? Was that perpetrated by the Class of '69? What I'm referring to is the black takeover of this hall.

A: Was that the first incident?

Q: Was that the first?

A: I believe so.

Q: Now, prior to this Class of '69, how many black students were there?

A: When I first arrived there in the early '60's there would be ten black students, but that would include your Africans. So, oh, say, maybe four or five in any given year, black Americans.

Q: But the Class of '69 that came--

A: That was, you mean, how many was in the Class of '69?

Q: Now, the Class of '69 came in 1965?

A: Yes.

Q: The Class of '69 came in 1965; and how many black students were in that class?

A: You know, I forgot off-hand. I think it was in the teens.

Q: In the teens; but gradually the number did increase?

A: Yes.

Q: Now, when did the incident, this takeover, when did that occur?

A: I don't know the exact date.

Q: The year?

A: That's what I meant. I don't know the exact year. Oh, gee, maybe '68, '69 or '70, somewhere around there. I'm not sure of the year.

Q: Could you recall what precipitated this takeover?

A: I think that the blacks on campus wanted to form a group together, you know, to have more identity with the other students, their own fellow students. Even though Wesleyan changed and enrolled a lot of black students their classes still were very middle class, white. The atmosphere was very white, middle class, and the students wanted to establish their identity and a role on campus other than the gracious role that was extended by Wesleyan in, you know, enrolling them in the first place. And out of that came, there was a big list of demands, but out of that you started your black study classes, Fisk Hall. That all came from this demonstration.

Q: Now, as a black employee, as a black person, were you ever consulted by the black students? What was your position on their takeover? I guess this leads me to ask you, "What is your position on the problems that black students encounter here at Wesleyan?"

A: I felt very close to their feelings because I knew from my own experiences on campus that you can be isolated to a great extent where it hampers just your being and I felt there was a need to direct some of the curriculum and the social activities to the total student body. Consulted me on anything? No. I was kept abreast of everything that was happening and, I guess, they felt I was a part of the group; and I felt a part of the group. But I didn't participate in any of their activities and that's very well understood because I am an employee and I did not have any contract saying that they couldn't fire me for such. So I was never, like, forced or threatened by the black students to do anything to participate in it but, you know, I helped them where I could.

Q: Were you ever tapped for information on the part of the Administration?

A: Of course.

Q: You were tapped?

A: Sure.

Q: They tried to get information out of you pertaining to the black students on the campus?

A: Yeah.

Q: Their intentions?

A: Well, it wasn't that secretive but they tried to, you know, talk to me to see if they could find out, you know, next steps, or something like that, but it wasn't that clear in the tapping. It usually came out of conversation, or something like that. I remember one incident where one of the flare-ups when I was called at home and they wanted to know which one associated with whom, or something like that, so they could find out the different roles of the students. You know, divide and conquer, this type thing. But it was never like a straightforward thing. It was just in basic conversations that they tried to gain information from me, but that's natural.

Q: Were you the only black employee?

A: I was the only black employee up to 1967.

Q: 1967?

A: Other than Beckham, Mr. Beckham.

Q: When did Beckham come?

A: Mr. Beckham came the mid year my year I was working for the history professor so, therefore, he came in '61.

Q: '61. So, after '67 there were more black employees?

A: On the secretarial level the first one came in, in '61, and I don't believe another administrator or professor came in until about that time also. There's not many of us.

Q: How many are there?

A: Black employees? Now? I don't think from the grounds crew to the administration, I don't believe there's over twenty-five.

Q: Is there any type of board or committee of black faculty members? Administrators? Clerical?

A: No.

Q: Do you think there should be or--

A: It's so small that we could converse with each other at any given point. At one time when there was a large black employee population we did have meetings every so often

to just talk about things that concerned us, but I don't think there's a need to now.

Q: You don't think there's a need to?

A: No.

Q: What do you perceive to be the trend or the tenor of black employees? I hope this isn't putting you on a spot.

Q: Whereas faculty members, clerical workers should convene at some given time?

A: I don't know if there's a need to now. The need would be for the quote, "established" blacks at Wesleyan to seek an avenue with some of the "powers that be" to, I think, to start a recruitment plan because for Wesleyan, who is supposed to be the liberal institution, the most innovative and all this that Wesleyan is known for, I think that they should look at their lack in this aspect of innovation that they do not have definite or a good minority grouping within the University. There's very few of us there and I don't think any effort is made to recruit any more.

Q: Do you find that those black persons that are here now want to work towards an increase in the number of Black faculty? Do you find that they are those individuals that come here with, uhm. Let's say on a simulated point of view, I mean, in some way they come here with white values and through the years they have lost that which we can consider black.

A: No, I really don't because there is a philosophy there but I think that sometimes a lot of us have lost--or I should ask the question, "What is Black values?" They're going to have to change their patterns if they're to continue employment at Wesleyan because of the lack of a majority of different thinkers at Wesleyan. Most of the power, and I use Administration, is very white, upper middle class in ideals and, you know, in their thinking and everything else. So, therefore, to get along you're going to have to do some adjusting to your own thinking; but I don't think that they have lost the basic values of black people, no.

Q: Well, tell me something. You've been here. You've seen the establishment of the African-Americans. This is the AAI. You've seen budget cuts time and time again. You've seen it evolve into the Center for Afro-American Studies. Do you feel that the University is committed to the minority peoples of this campus? Do you see them trying to curtail the involvement, the recruitment of those minorities?

A: What I see Wesleyan presently doing is they are trying to maintain financial stability. Now, naturally, the AAI and all your ethnic housing, the subdivisions, if there are going to be cuts in order to maintain Wesleyan's financial stability, the last thing that they did would be the first things wiped out. So, therefore, the last things would be your Latin House, your Black House, your French House, your centers, the different centers, and stuff like that. So as they cut back, yes, you will be cut. That's how I see it. The only thing is the old saying, "The last hired, the first fired".

Q: As a member of the Board of Education, someone involved with education, what do you feel, how do you feel when you see the machine, the Wesleyan community, the machine of Wesleyan, the Administration attempting to prevent or, and/or

curtail the commitment to black students?

A: How do I feel? I feel a sense of sadness but I see it almost like in a parent role. You, as a parent, if you have some kind of financial problems you set priorities and the first, the LEAST one of your priorities would be the first one that would go. Now, you do not have a minority or liberal. Oh, I shouldn't say that. But you don't have someone with your views in power so, therefore, your views would be 'way down on their priority list. So, therefore, you would suffer when things go and the Board of Education will be faced with the same thing as Wesleyan do in cutting off the things that came last, And I would assume, with our budget cut, a big budget cut, coming up this year on this Board of Education, that the question of recruiting of teachers, recruitment of teachers, will be discussed thoroughly and they will try to get that money back.

Q: Well, have you, as an official member of the Board of Education, have you ever consulted Colin Campbell as two members of committees concerned with education, you as Barbara Davidson on the Board of Education and Colin Campbell as president of Wesleyan University as opposed to an employer speaking with an employee?

A: I, personally, being in that position I'm in, try to keep the Board of Education out of the office. I know the deep resentment in the community to Wesleyan University and I know Wesleyan's feeling towards the public schools. So, therefore, I try not to discuss those topics.

Q: Do these topics come up?

A: Oh, yes, they come up.

Q: Since many of the administrators have children who attend Middletown schools?

A: Yes, they come up often. I do talk about it but, like I said, I do try to avoid it. There is a great number of Wesleyan faculty children in the school system and this is part of the resentment that builds up because, and I'm generalizing now, Wesleyan tends to feel that they are the elite in educational programs and curriculum and they like to tell the Middletown people how to go about educating the children of Middletown. On the other hand, Middletown feels that Wesleyan is infringing upon them and, you know, you got all those students up there and they do this and they do that, you don't pay taxes, and all these things that happen in a town-gown relationship or a university within a small town relationship as throughout the country. So, therefore, they resent Wesleyan coming off the hill. Wesleyan sort of comes off the hill and dictates rather than trying to work out things together because they have the attitude that they know what is best and Middletown feels like THEY know what is best.

Q: So, in your opinion then, the tenor of relationships, the tenor of relations of Wesleyan and the City of Middletown are very bad?

A: They could be improved. I won't say very bad. I just wanted to bring out the two opinions on either side. Now, there are people who get along very well on both sides with each other but, in general, there is resentment both ways. I have, well, to put it on a personal point of view, I have been approached by many Wesleyan administrators and telling me how to solve one of the Board problems, or what to do in a given situation,

and it was then that I knew how deep the resentment is because they did not SUGGEST to me how to implement something or, you know, how to go about doing something. They TOLD me what would be best and I resented this personally because I am on the Board of Education and, yes, I am open to many ideas and many varying ideas, but you talk WITH me not TO me. So then, being on the two hills at the same time, I thoroughly understand the attitude of the Middletown citizens and I sympathize with them because they do have, when they want to give information to a citizen, they don't SHARE it, they GIVE it.

Q: Are there any attempts made to improve the relationships? Are there committees?

A: Yes.

Q: What has Wesleyan done for the community? What is the community doing for Wesleyan?

A: Yes. There are. Wesleyan has a portion of their budget thrown into a till that's called "Cause" and, I have forgotten the exact name of it, but it's to improve relationships with all the schools in this vicinity and what is done is, it's composed of administrators from Wesleyan, from the Middletown school system, from the parochial school systems and they get together and decide what to do with the budgeted money for varying programs within each, you know, one of the schools that they represent. That's one form of it and we have a Community Affairs Director at Wesleyan that really becomes involved with organizations, fund raising, you know, giving facilities to different agencies and groups in the community, suggesting various ways that Wesleyan faculty and staff might be used, you know, all this sort of thing--a broad spectrum there. And a lot of the administrators live on, I mean are a part of different committees, United Fund, Chamber of Commerce, you know, all those committees. So there's interaction in that way. Another thing Wesleyan does is give the graduate, we have a graduate summer school for teachers and there's stipends given for local teachers to go to school and make use out of the graduate summer school in the colleges that are close around such as Central Connecticut and Southern Connecticut. They are much cheaper than Wesleyan. So the stipend is given to enable the teachers to come during the summer, or during the year, and have a graduate program for them. That's one of the big plusses that Wesleyan does for the Board. I think that's very effective and I think many teachers become involved with this program. They also offer, like, the hockey rink is open to the kids. So there's a lot of things that is done. But I think many people in the community feel it as the "Big Brother" sort of thing or the "Great White Father" sort of thing. They used to give things like Halloween parties for the kids, which was very good, and now I think just one fraternity is keeping it up. But there's effort made from Wesleyan and from the University sort of to bridge these gaps. I know a big effort is made through the mayor's office and Wesleyan. They had a, for many years, a liaison committee composed of members of the administration and members of the mayor's office meeting and discussing different things, you know, this sort of thing. And then usually there are about three people from Wesleyan staff that's on different commissions or committees. So, therefore, the bridge is gapped in many ways.

Q: Well, Barbara, I want to thank you very much for your time. This has been a well enlightening interview and I'm sure it will be helpful to people in the future. Thank you very much.