

Dr. John F. Simmons, Jr. '65
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Black Lives
October 26, 2023
Transcribed by Ahmir Braxton '25

BRAXTON: Okay.

SIMMONS: Got it.

BRAXTON: My name is Ahmir Braxton. I am currently in Hanover, New Hampshire, and I'm doing a Zoom interview with Dr. John F. Simmons, Junior class of 1965, who is in Oakland, California, right now, today is October 26, 2023, and this interview is for the Dartmouth Black Lives Oral History Project.

BRAXTON: Hello, Doctor Simmons, how are you doing today?

SIMMONS: Very good, very good. And I'm glad we got a chance to connect.

BRAXTON: Yes, sir. First, I would like to talk a little bit about your childhood. What was it like growing up in Oakland?

SIMMONS: Well, for the first half of my life, I lived in Southern California. I am a second-generation Black Californian. The critical or important aspects of my life are just skimming the surface. My mother, my paternal grandfather, my maternal grandmother, and my grandfather were Ohio State graduates. I used to think my grandfather was really something because he was allegedly the first Black man to graduate from Ohio State, or "the Ohio State," as some people call it. That was in 1912. It wasn't until I happened to be looking through one of his yearbooks that I found out that, in the same year, my grandmother, a Black woman, graduated from Ohio State. Now, it was hard for any woman to go through college, but she didn't talk too much about it. So, I come from my mother's side, people who were used to putting in the work and reaping the rewards.

BRAXTON: Yes, sir.

SIMMONS: On my father's side, both my grandfather and I died when I was 5. My grandmother didn't die until I was probably about 41 or 42. So, essentially, I don't want to say I was raised because that sounds like it's out of a storybook, but my mother worked as a teacher in Los Angeles. She graduated from UCLA, and among her classmates was Kenny

Washington. [Kenneth Stanley Washington, key figure in integration of NFL. Played for UCLA Bruins and the Rams]

I didn't see a smile.

You know who he is, right? No, sir, check him out. Well, then, Woody Strode. Woody Strode played an actor after football. The other person you know in her class grew up around the street from her in Pasadena: Jackie Robinson! So, I mean, they're college people. My father left New Haven when he grew up at 15, and a little while later, he left with the story he kept telling me. "I left with \$26, and when I got to Monrovia, which is east of Pasadena, I had \$13." So, he knew how to watch his money, and he was a very smart person.

I've always been told that he and Tom Bradley [first Black Mayor of Los Angeles, served 1973-1993] were among the first Black men to get into the LAPD, the Los Angeles Police Department. However, in hearing, there have been other Black people. But he was a "light-skinned Black man." As such, my old man was a narc; he worked undercover. I remember hearing stories about that when I was five, six, and seven. Then he went to Meharry in Nashville, Tennessee, for medical school. As an undergraduate in Southern Cal [University of Southern California], he was the butler and chauffeur for a man named Rufus Von KleinSmid who happened to be the President. That's interesting because he got his BA and also got a master's in bacteriology. So, I mean, it's like I was programmed. When you finish college, it'll be interesting to see what you want to do.

So, I tell everybody I went to medical school twice because I was seven years old when my grandfather, when my father graduated. I went to public school, and initially, a school that was probably about two miles from where I grew up. Then, for some reason — I think it was because my mother was working — I went to another public school, but it was much closer to my grandma. My paternal grandmother died before I was born, and my paternal grandfather I met once or twice, but I don't have vivid memories. Where I'm trying to go with this is that I got scholarship genes. That's what it's about.

When I finished high school at Dorsey, it's interesting. My junior high school, senior sweats, my junior high school, my high school, my college all had the same colors, green and white. I often thought that was interesting, like God telling me something.

In high school, I was a nerd. Yet, I realized, my high school had, I think, something like 6,000 people there. Each class had about a thousand, and we had half-year graduation. So, I finished in February of '61 from

high school. The next morning, we piled into the car and drove up from LA to Berkeley. I sort of went to what's now post-baccalaureate and all that stuff. But essentially, I did Dartmouth prep or Dartmouth finishing school in preparation for Dartmouth at Berkeley. Berkeley has long been held a sweet spot in my heart.

Personally, I have no siblings. It's kind of hard for an 80-year-old man to talk about being an only child, so I have no siblings and very few first cousins. My mother's younger sister had two. To continue with that kind of theme of being taught how to keep my eye on the prize, if you will, my mother's older sister had a Yale graduate who developed paranoid schizophrenia and was homeless in Boulder, Colorado. Can you believe that? The next one went to Brown. It was even more racist than it was when I applied. He wound up graduating from, I think, the University of Chicago, and he's a theologian now. After that, he went to Pomona and then went to Harvard Law. My mother's youngest sister had two boys, one of whom was at Harvard for a hot minute.

So, it's a family of people who not only know the value of education but wanted to share that, make sure it was shared with their kids.

Okay, so then, now it comes time for, "Where are you gonna go to college?" Well, you know, we haven't had a dialogue. All I hear from you is, "Yes, sir, yes, sir, yes, sir." Alright, and I'm not your football coach. But I had a very controlling father. He's probably about 6'1, maybe about 210 [lbs], and was strong and unbelievably intelligent. Smart, creative. When he finished, what do you call it? When he finished medical school, he went to work in Watts, so I got a chance to experience the Watts revolution up close. I had worked hauling kids around, watching kids around in Watts who needed dental appointments because my mother's youngest sister was married to a dentist.

But having been in practice maybe, I don't know, between fifteen and twenty years, he [SIMMONS's father] just closed the office and took a psych residency. In psychiatry! I mean, that's — he retired our trophy, the undeclared a competition trophy that we had. He was just so big you can't get around him, so smart you can't outsmart him. You just go along with the program and act out at your peril.

BRAXTON: Yes, sir.

SIMMONS: Is that striking a resident note?

BRAXTON: Yes, sir, so

SIMMONS: He said, "Well, you know, you can go anywhere you want to college. But if you want me to pay for it, you're gonna have to go to an outstanding school." And in his mind, the HBCUs, which weren't called HBCUs at the time, were not outstanding. He knew that kind of up close and personal because Meharry is in Nashville and associated with Fisk. Right?

So, that meant he would only pay if I went to an Ivy League school or a top-tier school. He may have used a euphemism. I think I applied to Columbia, Yale, Harvard, Brown, Princeton, and Dartmouth. I think that was it. And those throwaways were Howard.

BRAXTON: You didn't apply to Penn?

SIMMONS: Now, that's why I said you made a very good decision with regards to Penn and Columbia. My rationale was typically cerebral and unsophisticated. My aunt — today is the 26th — ten days ago, my aunt turned 105, and for the last 60 years, she's lived in New York City, in Manhattan, in an apartment, if you want to call it, that's got, I think, 4 bedrooms overlooking the Hudson on Riverside Drive.

So you've been down to Manhattan because you had relatives in New York. Right?

BRAXTON: Yes, sir.

SIMMONS: So, you kind of know where I'm talking about. It's just two blocks off Broadway, two blocks going towards the Hudson from Columbia. I wanted to get away. I didn't need in loco parentis. With my aunt, although I liked her a lot, she and my uncle were really, really neat people, and the people at Brown when they came to interview me at the house, "Oh, gosh! You live here at this wonderful house." Unstated and implied was, "How can a Black person live at a house like this?" They didn't make the cut. So that took care of Brown. And Cornell was a state school, so that didn't really count as an Ivy League school to me. Then there was Yale. My old man grew up in New Haven, something School Street, just in the little ways. Every time we go to New York, he wanted to look at Yale. One of my great confrontations or refusals, only two or three was, "Yeah, I filled out the papers, I submitted, but you want me to go to Yale. I don't want to go to Yale." Yale was killed because I want to do what I want to do, and that is the thing that has been important to me and that I've continued throughout my life. So, Dartmouth, why Dartmouth? Because I didn't know anybody there. I didn't have any relatives living down the street, and if I got in, it was because of what I was, not because of riding somebody else's coat-tail. From your experience, I hope you've already learned it, that is, "If you can open the door, I will get through it and show that I belong there. I'm not asking you

to do it for me. I'm just asking you to open the door, you know." Have you ever had that experience?

BRAXTON: Yes, sir, coming to Dartmouth.

SIMMONS: Yeah, well, that's good. So, his name was Uncle Bob, and he was, I think, back in the class in the thirties or so, and I knew one of his relatives. There's a good friend of my family, but there was no Dartmouth permeating everything. And once I had applied, I found out there was another Black man, William Durousseau, I think class of like '55 or '58. He was, as I was, there when it was an all-male school. I think they were shorthanded on pigment. So, he was the Dartmouth Indian, if that comes up.

So, I went there because I was I — and the other thing — I was interviewed by this white guy who was amazing. He was a class of '38, Charles Robinson, I think his name was. And he was from Glendale, which is kind of a racist town, but he was supportive, caring, friendly, affable. It's like getting into psychology and all: He's the kind of person I wanted to be. I mean, I'm sure, at one level that was what it was about.

There was not a lot of Black awareness that I had when you know that my grandfather was an outstanding lawyer in the Black community when one of his colleagues was Lauren Miller. When Thurgood Marshall would come to the house. The two, my parents and grandparents, I mean. So, I'm cognizant. But it's one thing to know history. Know the news, and it's another to know what's going on inside of you.

So, when I got into Dartmouth, I said, "Okay, this is it." And just to give you an example, I walked from my house in LA over to Dorsey, my high school once or twice. It's probably the better part of 2 to 3 miles. There were 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, maybe 8 signals along that way. When I got to Dartmouth, there were 3 signals, the one right there by the Green, went down by Dartmouth Bank, and then at the bank coming down from the Green. Turn left. I don't know that street, School Street, or whatever it is, and there was one down there where the Co-op is, I think now. There were more people in my high school than there were in the college. It was interesting. I had done snow before. I'd seen snow before. It really, really wasn't a shock. It was like, "All right, man. This is what you said you wanted. Now let's get to it. Let's do it."

And, oh, the other important thing is to talk about my roommate. I received word that my roommate was Solomon. My brain isn't all that it used to be, and he was from Venezuela. Falachuk F-A-L-A-C-H-U-K. All right. I said, man, I gotta come from the other side of the country. I never seen this place before, but I know this is going to be it. But this guy is

coming from another country. Jeez, you know, you can't always believe the scouting report, right? You gotta see it to be real. His name was [inaudible]. Then me, Myron Falachuk ['65]. Mike [Myron] was a twin. His sister didn't go to Dartmouth because it was an all-male school, but she was one of the first ones that was kind of under the radar. He had an older brother, Kenneth Falachuk '62, and Kenny, when we got there, was a senior at Dartmouth.

Alright. I haven't told you the rest. He was living with his mother and his father. His father was a businessman in Brooklyn. So, who's teaching who about Dartmouth? To this day, we remain in touch. Whenever I go to Boston, I make a point of really working to go out to West Newton to see him or for him to come down. I mean, the man is beyond heavy. He finished at the end of his second year. At the time, Dartmouth had a two-year medical school, and then you do the other two years someplace else. But that's too long. The short version is, during his second year, he applied for and was granted admission to Dartmouth Medical School. Most of the other people did it at the end of three years. It was viewed as a five-year experience. Well, I mean, he was that heavy and gone on to teach at Harvard Medical School.

At the time I came in, there were only about four or five other Black men. I'll start off with, perhaps to me, the most notable was Richard Joseph Ritchie is from Bed-Stuy, alright. And he was a year younger than us. And long story short, he applied for, as a senior, and wasn't granted a Rhodes because he was too young. And so instead, he took a Fulbright. Nice, nice! Second prize. And then he got his Rhodes. He was the first Black Rhodes person I knew and is now, I mean, comparable in age, but is one of the nation's most outstanding scholars in Black history, in Afro-Am studies, however, you want to say it.

There was an Andy Newton ['65] who's from Massachusetts and is really kind of a gadfly, but somehow he's been able to do some fantastic things and is very well-heeled. Mike Lewis ['65], who was a participant in student government.

And the fourth fellow was also on the premiere track. And he's always a little on the strange side. He went to Columbia Medical School and took the place that probably I wish I could have had. And I happen to be thinking about him about eight months ago, ten months ago. And so, I did some digging. He got caught doing script. Pills.

BRAXTON: He was using them?

SIMMONS: I don't know if he was using them. He was convicted of writing and dispensing medications without a good faith exam. And I think he started

out as a radiologist. So, he just it's just a little strange. And not because of that, but throughout.

My other good friend that we continue is a Black man that you should know of, and I hope you could find out about. But he's not one of the people. I asked him if he'd be interested, and before my voice tensed up like a question mark, "No, no, I'm doing that." Stan was amazing. Stan Stanford Roman class of '64. Stan, like I, was in Tip. It was called Tip. It's the one next to Alpha Chi, and across from, is it Gamma Phi or something? Right as fraternity road takes turn right by the President's house. And Stan had a car and was a year ahead of me. I spent a lot of time road-tripping with him. And you get a chance. I mean, if you took a road trip back to Colorado every year with the same — like you and what's his name?

BRAXTON: Q

SIMMONS: Que. But his name is Key, isn't it?

BRAXTON: No, his real name is Alexisius Cornell Jones ['25]. But he goes by Q.

SIMMONS Well, he's not a Que, though, right?

BRAXTON: As in fraternity [Omega Psi Phi]? He is a Que.

SIMMONS: Well, I'm gonna let that go. Not touch that, because this is recorded. So, I don't want that to be publicized, all right? But it's as if you and Q had never known one another, and met at the school — at Dartmouth — and you wound up, going back, driving for whatever it is, a day and a half, two days, two days nice and slow, or go by way of Chicago, and then shoot, it's like you get to the point where you're friends and then you're kind of competitors. And then it all kind of boils over, and you realize that this is a brother. He had no siblings. And I had no siblings. His father's a doc, my father was a doc. I mean, we had a lot of similarities and we've kept our relationship despite turmoils for, you know fifty-plus, almost sixty years.

So, I've gone from how I've gone to Dartmouth to some of my personal experiences.

Now, I mentioned Richie R. Oh, that's what his name was. Richie. I'll think of his last name, the other physician in my class. There were I think, two African nationals in my class. But, you know, there just weren't too many Black people when I was there. There was Charles O'Hagan. and you should know about him because I think he was a lineman on the on the football team. He finished in 61. No, he was a lineman there for

both, 61, 62. I'm sorry, 60, 61, and then 61, 62. He went on to med school and went to practice in LA. So, he was there, and as you well know, you ain't got time for too much when you're playing football. especially if you get your bell run as a lineman all the time. I think in 62. I forget whether the undefeated team was 62 or 63, but if it was 62, he was on it with Don McKinnon, I think.

BRAXTON: Okay.

SIMMONS: There was a junior when I started. But it's like, I mean, out of 3,000 people there, you know, on the small side of thirty, maybe the small side of twenty. I was raised to not just believe but know that I was something special. I was playing around in high school, not really studying that much. But when I got to Dartmouth, I took a permutations and combinations class with Kemeny, in fact, John Kemeny, before he became President. I got a grade on an exam, I didn't even know that letter existed in the alphabet. It was so bad; I didn't know it existed in the alphabet! I said, 'No, we ain't gonna have this.' So, I got a tutor, and I wound up, I think, on the final maybe three or four.

I got there summer, 63. I was a three-year rising junior, and I was getting ready to go into my third year. I took Harvard Summer School, so I could really get a flavor for what it's like, and I have lifelong friends from that. Myself and another fellow set the curve, and I had a lot of fun because he made me aware of somebody cheating off my paper! And so, they were from Florida. I went to the Professor and told him, you know this is what I've been told, he said. 'Okay.' You know, if you get a D in summer school class — you may be aware that if you get a D or an F, you can just, like, I didn't take it. I didn't take it. But you get a C, it's on your record. You can't, you can't sweat that. And so that's what he did. He got him and got him good.

Now, I learned how to ski back there. My athletic activity was rowing, lightweight obviously, and I think I was on the team for four years. I rowed actively for three, and I was a manager for four because I wanted to go to the party at the Penn relays. I couldn't do that if I was rowing. It was a fun experience at the Penn relays, a real fun experience. In the three years I rowed, we had every winter break at Kresge Auditorium at MIT, and so I was rowing two days on the Charles, and I knew each and every curve. We tried not to breathe too much because people dumped all their poop right there. All that stuff. When I went back for my fiftieth, I made a point to talk to Dave Dawley, and Dawley is white, class of '63 and was a student, our student coach. Dawley was from Connecticut, and I think very well-heeled. He wound up in Chicago after getting a master's and stuff or MBA-type stuff. He befriended and was befriended by, I don't want to call them the young lords, one of the

Black gangs there. He helped them develop their entrepreneurial spirit and accomplishment, and showed that you know you can get power, which is what it's all about. You could get power through many legal modes and he wrote a book about it.

Among the notable things, I went around with a lady who became a lawyer, a Black woman from Smith, Myrtle Herret. She was probably a '66, maybe a '65 or '66. My friend Stan, that I talked about, Stan was going around with this lady who was a daughter of the President of Spelman. Alice befriended Myrtle when Alice was at Smith as a residential counselor. I would go down either on my own when once I got a car or with Stan, and he'd see Alice, and we'd kind of travel together. I think it was through Alice or Myrtle that I went down.

I went down to Smith, and it was at that time they were doing recruiting for — not the Weatherman — it was one of the Chicago 7. He was a fellow who was married to Jane Fonda [Tom Hayden, co-founder of Students for a Democratic Society]. In any event, I didn't go there to be interviewed. But as a Black person, you take everything in. You know, and it's getting a chance to see this group kind of partying together. Then, one after another, certain people get taken over the hill to talk privately. And I found that was all really very, very interesting to me, to see how that recruiting was going. This was before email, it's before cell phones, and the people were probably very aware of the fact that there were spies amongst them. Okay, so that was one civil rights experience.

Clearly, MLK came up, and everybody got mobilized. I think it may have been a religious organization, it used to be based on katty-corner from the inn, a non-denominational organization [Dartmouth Christian Union]. In any event, I think they were instrumental in bringing King in. Then it was very interesting. I graduated in '65.

BRAXTON: Yes, sir.

SIMMONS: In early February [January 1965], there was a five by seven announcement poster with Black borders announcing that Malcolm was coming. And that had been arranged by Richard Joseph. And that was him starting to flex and develop his Afro-American muscle. Clearly, there's no Afro-American Studies department at the time. Alright, and so I think he's still alive and, Doctor, what's your name, Professor Rabig.

BRAXTON: Yes, sir.

SIMMONS: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, I know Richie. Yeah, I should see if he'd be interested in talking to him. If you have somebody who can't make it with whoever they're interviewing, he would be fantastic, potentially fantastic.

His world consists of three people, him, him, and him. But he's done a lot, and to be able to hear it. So that was very, very interesting. And I think it was in the winter here. Yeah, it was the winter, I said in February. It was around the first or second of February, and it was in the big auditorium there in the new Hopkins, and Richie introduced them, and he walked in with his briefcase. And I thought that man knows more about image and everything. Man comes here with his briefcase really sending, you know, speaking loudly, non-verbally. And he gave a good talk, and less than a week or ten days later he was murdered. I mean, that was like, wow! I think it was the only time I saw him. I saw Elijah down in LA! one of the boxing arenas. So, I told this story to Richie, but he said, 'Man, what are you talking about? He had his piece in there.' So that was that was another side.

BRAXTON: How was that like experience of Malcolm X coming out of that affect, like thing that were going on, on campus as far as with the other white students?

SIMMONS: Alright, my disclaimer is, you don't do doo-doo squat other than football. Alright? Obviously, I'm saying that as one person to another. I'm not speaking in a hierarchical fashion. Your focus this time is that, although a little bit wider lens is [inaudible] forty. By the way, forty I thought was absurd. How are your mother and father, alive?

BRAXTON: Yes, sir.

SIMMONS: And how old were your grandparents when they died?

BRAXTON: My grandparents still alive.

SIMMONS: And how old are they?

BRAXTON: I want to say, my grandma, my mom's mom is in her sixties. My mom's dad is in his sixties and my grandparents on my dad's side, I want to say my grandfather on my dad's side is, and probably like his seventy, mid-seventies.

SIMMONS: Yeah, go ahead.

BRAXTON: My mom's grandma just turned ninety-three or eighty-three, something like that.

SIMMONS: So, one of the ways we talk about lifespan is, say, well, what they made of? What's the number associated with their parents as long as their parents didn't have a traumatic injury and no major illnesses. Chronic illness: diabetes, hypertension, stuff like that. So, you know, it ain't

gonna be forty, man. I'm not gonna be here to collect the bet, but it's gonna be closer to sixty than it is going to be to forty.

BRAXTON: I don't plan on working sixty or forty years.

SIMMONS: I didn't say work, you said work.

BRAXTON: That's what they make it seem though [inaudible] sixty years of work. I plan on being retired by time I'm 35.

SIMMONS: Oh, okay, good. This is a response to what you said and it's also okay, because we're talking about stuff. We had a discussion with a group called Hidden Genius, Hidden Genius Project, and a group I belong to is supporting it. And the CEO said, 'You know, one of our kids. Now he's just about finished high school. We've had him for about 10 years, and he was selected to Posse [Posse Foundation], and Posse people said that they had a spot for him at Northwestern, full ride. Yeah. And the kid was not clear. He's finally came into the CEO and said, 'You know, I just wanna be with my people. I'm tired of doing all this stuff.' And the director said, 'First of all, whatever you want to do, I support. I'm not trying to dissuade you. But instead, Posse plus Northwestern, and that's 60,000 free ride. You're gonna have to work to get that kind of money going to an HBCU. He wanted to go to Howard. You're gonna have to work to get that kind of money. And it's gonna be hard work in addition to what you gotta do in college.' The guy went away and came back and thought about and said, 'I want to go to Howard,' and he said, 'Great!' And the punch line from the director was before the summer was over, before he started at Howard, he had 160% of that sixty thousand and he wasn't finished yet. It's about drive. It's about vision. It's about looking at the horizon. I mean, it sounds nice to say, 'Hey, man, keep your eye on the prize,' you know, to be on the ball. Blah, blah, blah! But you gotta have — you gotta know yourself. And even though you think you know yourself you can go further and faster. But so that's why I'm kinda trying to bring that thing back.

Was there anything else about civil rights stuff? Oh, it was! It was so funny. You know, sometimes you don't know how you're perceived. You really don't. And there's some boots that we used to wear called student leaders. They're suede-like boots, and you can paint them. You can impregnate them with liquid silicon, and then — you can't swim in 'em — but I mean, you can go through a lot of puddles up at Hanover. And there's some Air Force-looking coats. They look more functional than stylish, which for years, I mean, Dartmouth's men were known is not being raggedy ass, but rather they're smart, and they drink, but they don't always look good. I mean, don't always dress well. So I remember going to a couple of, I think it was with Mable, we went to some of the

buses going on the freedom lines. And you say, 'Whoa! Were you going? From early on, my goal was to get myself prepared and qualified to go to medical school. In the fall of my freshman year that's when I started rowing and learned how to row. But when it came time to choose between a science lab, chemistry lab, and rowing, that was a no-brainer. It's gotta be the lab. That's what I'm there for. And I think I did well. It's funny. I think it was probably like the twenty-fifth reunion that I went back, and we put a boat together. My timing was still very, very good — and that was not me saying that — that was some other people saying. So be it, and I wound up, stroking the boat. our second boat. That was what I did, and then, when the captain quit, since he rode port, I was moved into port in the JV. I was very happy with that athletic experience.

When do you got to go to class or to work?

BRAXTON: I don't have class today.

SIMMONS: Oh, you mean I can keep talking until my tongue drops, alright. That's about Dartmouth. Oh, I have something. Yeah, I would like you to look at, and that is the street in which the alumni gymnasium is. If you go down that street away from the water and pretty soon you're past a parking lot on the left. Street starts to go up the hill, there's the street there, I'm going to do my best to remember the street name. There's a house up there and if you look under the house [consulting phone] Damn! I don't have it. I think the street, as you're going up the hill, it's on the left, it t-bones into that street. One of the first, I'll say first 5 to 7 houses on the right. If you look underneath the eaves, you'll see what looks like a yin and yang symbol. Then, I was told was a sign on the Underground Railroad that it's a safe house.

BRAXTON: That's interesting.

SIMMONS: Let me see if I have the Natos. I finally remembered their names. And I mean that to say. I think it was Rip Road. The name was Rip Road and as you're going north, it'll be on the right, and you can see it best when you're coming back south. So, it's on the north side of the house. And I thought, Wow, 'cause I had heard all these stories about, you know, Connecticut is one of the main freeways on the Underground Railroad.

So post-Dartmouth, I went to SC Medical School, which is over in the barrio, over in the brown ghetto. You have any friends who used to watch *General Hospital*? Soap opera?. That hospital is a real hospital. That's where I trained, and it was interesting because that's where my father trained. And I remember as a kid getting in the back of the car. This would have been in '50 because he finished in '50, and we'd drive all the way out, probably fifteen miles out east from Central LA, not

South Central, but Central LA all the way out to East LA to school and to take him. When I came there in '65, they were just getting ready to tear down the interns' residence dorm, where he would go to nights he was on call. I went to medical school for four years. I then came up here to a satellite of Stanford, Valley Medical Center in San Jose, California, and then went back and did training. And I'm well-trained. I have a year of pathology, three years of internal medicine, three years of hematology and oncology, and then something like probably about thirty-three, thirty-four years of practice.

BRAXTON: What made you want to go into the sickle cell and things of that nature?

SIMMONS: Well, I had three professional fathers: One, my own father who was, as I said, a physician; and my second professional father was a fellow by the name of Samuel I. Rappaport, and he was one of the world's most outstanding clotting experts. I started to work in his lab and took a summer fellowship with him. And that's how I got involved with hematology. And I really, it was like neat because, yes, you did see patients, but you also were doing research. One of the people on his team, was a family friend. I knew of him, and I knew my parents knew his parents. He was the head of sickle cell under in the department of hematology. And so I said, 'Well, you know, it's all real nice, but I want to go into private practice, and all of that is, I want to be like my dad. You know, from the vantage point of 80, I can say that. It was hard to say and harder to even think it before. And so early on oncology, medical oncology was just a subset of hematology. primarily because of all the liquid tumors. And I said to myself, hematology feeds my brain, and medical oncology feeds my stomach. Gives me the things that I want, like the things you want to get, by 35 and work. You know, I put in the work. I'm putting in the work. I am thin, wiry, but have spirit and drive, all things that were nurtured at Dartmouth.

When I had to, when I had to think about it, Dartmouth was really harder than medical school, the classroom part. I mean, I was just overjoyed taking care of patients, cause I'm an affable person and a person of color. You know, the world was gonna be my oyster, and to a certain extent it has been! And what I would share with you, whenever I talk to younger people, I share with you that no more than 49.3% of your waking hours can be spent at work, with work, thinking of work, involved with work because that will leave, quote, the majority of your time for your family. I've been married three times and I had kids with my second wife. I was not a good parent because I was focused on medicine, making it in medicine. Hopefully, you and [inaudible] from families that have moved beyond 'Wait, you've got a roof over your head, you got food in your belly, and you want to be loved, too? What's with you? You're crazy!' You know that's not how you develop and nurture people.

It's even worse if you're nurturing and developing people you think are gonna be leaders, because then they're all messed up. And they're messed up more or less totally, but how can you expect somebody like that to nurture and develop a subsequent generation?

So, what else has Dartmouth given me?

I'm in medical school, right? And one of my lab partners — we had 4 in our section: myself, a young lady who wasn't supposed to drink until she graduated because she was so young when she started from San Diego and went on to become an outstanding hematologist and a clotting person, and a couple who married when they were together in medical school. After, I think, two or three kids, they ultimately separated and divorced. But Martha [Regan-Smith] had some rheumatological issues and decided to become a rheumatologist. She taught rheumatology at Dartmouth Medical School and was the de facto dean of women there. So, whenever I go back to Dartmouth after medical school, I'd stay with her and her new husband. They lived right across the street from Alumni Gymnasium, and so it's only been about maybe three years, four years that she's retired. But I turned her onto my friend Stan. I didn't finish telling about Stan. Stan ultimately went to work as an administrator at the medical school [Deputy Dean of Dartmouth Medical School] and was on the board of trustees for a while. I think of that as such an honor, and boy, I had mentioned BADA to him (Black Alumni of Dartmouth Associate). 'No, man, I'm not talking about that.' And he's had a challenging life. But the essence is that my medical school connection sort of came back and interacted with Dartmouth because my roommate, Mike, the person who was his in loco parentis, served as his counselor, supporter, was a surgeon, Art Nato [Naitove, Professor of Surgery] at the Medical School. And Art was the one who was championing getting Mike in at the end of his second year. And can you imagine graduating after four years at Dartmouth and your first-year roommate has completed their masters, their MBA?

BRAXTON: All in 4 years?

SIMMONS: I think an MBA is 3 years, but I don't think many people go in at the end of their second year. There may be some that go in at the end of the third year. But Mike and I started at the same time, and he lapped me twice, and we finished about the same time. But he had lapped me because of going to Dartmouth Medical School. We came back from a meeting, a dinner with the Natos. I tagged along with Mike, and he said, 'Listen, man, everything you heard, don't tell anybody about that.' So Art Nato, I had known as an undergraduate — Professor Nato and his

family. And indeed when I graduated, my parents took back a lemon tree for them to put in their solarium inside. I just thinking about it. [Pause]

I took my daughter when she was nine from Berkeley back to Dartmouth because I wanted to say goodbye to Mrs. Nato. She had developed a brain cancer, a brain [inaudible] from lung cancer. And she also had kidney cancer, two separate primaries. I remember Gillian, my daughter and I were downstairs because we stayed at their place on Rip Road, 20 Rip Road. We stayed in a little room downstairs, and she came downstairs and she saw me crying. She said, 'Daddy, why are you crying?' And I said, 'Baby, Connie's dying, and I'm just so sad.' She said 'What?' I said, 'well, you know everybody's dying, I'm dying, your mother's dying.' She said 'What? Mommy's dying?' And I said, 'Oh, shit, you really stepped in it then!'

But I remember getting up to school, and it was like six or seven o'clock in the evening. It had been snowing, and the first thing she did is she went out and did a snow angel. A snow angel on the green. [Pause] That kind of shows how I valued the Natos as parents, how I regarded, not valued, at least regarded them. So, to have my medical school classmate go back there and come under their wing and protection, it was really something.

I guess this is under the heading of 'The community is really important.' The community is important for Dartmouth students, and one of the advantages of being ethnocentric — I mean, I know I'm Black, but not quote wearing that on my sleeve. Realizing that when you're the only black peppercorn in the whole sea of salt, it's different than going down to the barbershop on 125th, or now it's MLK, with everybody. It's different. So, I mean, for a while, I wasn't dating, but I would see this young woman who lived over in Norwich, Vermont, just across the river. But I didn't feel I was catching any hell for that. I didn't hear about it. So, you know, didn't bother me. I think that it's important if you don't do it already and Dartmouth can be a lab to develop this, that you have an aura and not the testosterone malignant, 'don't fuck with me.' But rather, no, I'm not about that and don't bring that stuff here. I am a Black American. I value them both. And if you bring that nonsense here, I can respond, but that's not what life's about. Life is about figuring out how to get along. With integrity. What I'm saying is — I don't know if you remember an ad, it was an ad for toothpaste — knock on an invisible shield. You have the camaraderie of a football team. You had the camaraderie — didn't say notoriety — I said camaraderie, and you will be able to have entree to a whole bunch of places. But you don't have to take doo-doo squat from anybody. You don't have to carry that on your sleeve. It's like — what is that? Was that Iron Man? He could push a button, all of a sudden his clothes became impenetrable, and all that

stuff. So, I have a few little analogies that are this century, not last century.

I think it was a meldedness because I knew I had been tempered, and most people on the West Coast don't have a lot of Ivy League experience, at least at the time, and it was all men, pre-feminist movement type stuff. So, they're still in awe. I can meet and exceed whatever levels they have, so it's a perfect thing. I only know you for the nefarious 'yes, sir, yes, sir.' Man, your face lit up when you were talking about some other things. But what it's about is — there's no need — I don't have to push you down the rung on the ladder to feel better.

I'm a teacher. I want people to do better. I know from my history that I can succeed at the highest level. I know it because it's there. Stuff has been forgotten, but still, it's there. If people are going to give me something to make my job easier, that's fine [inaudible] great. I'm not gonna tell them what they've done, 'cause I can save the energy for later.

But, let me tell you some other things. It's to let it all hang out. Not all! Ain't gonna let it all hang out! I have a son, and my son, in fact, is named Lauren. Lauren is in memory of my grandfather's fellow lawyer in LA, outstanding lawyer, Lauren Miller. Lauren wound up at the Ohio State. He had a choice of law schools, and somehow he decided to go to the Ohio State. Well, part of that was because when he identified himself as Clarence Jones's great-grandson, and they wanted to put [inaudible] you know? So here was the great-grandson of their first Black graduate. He was perfectly situated to go through. But I suspect he didn't really want to go to law school. He did walk on the stage. We saw him walk on the stage. The 105 — now 105-year-old — aunt, she was there when he graduated in '12. He graduated exactly a hundred years after his great-grandpa. I mean, it could have been a magical time for him. But you know you gotta do things cause you want to. You can't do it because this is what you should do, or I'll help you do this (parentheses for me).

While we're waiting for him to get staged, I mean as part of the three days or so we were back there, his mother came. My right-hand person and love of my life, my current wife, came with me. I went to visit Lauren at his apartment, and I saw where it was inside in Columbus [OH]. Then I called a relative who grew up in Columbus, went to the Ohio State, and I told him where Lauren lived. He said, 'no real, really?' It's where they used to party. It was literally two blocks from the house that this relative grew up in, that I had visited when my father was in medical school, that my grandmother had come to live in before she was married. Amazing!

But what the whole sidetrack about Lauren was while we were waiting I called this relative back in LA and asked him if he knew the name of the cemetery where everybody was. It was Green Lawn. We went to the place, got the directions, and we started driving, couldn't find it, and finally we found it. Four, five, six generations of free Black people, one of whom, early on, had come up from Robert E. Lee's plantation. Pleasant Jones. It is alleged that his father was either Light-Horse Harry Lee [Henry Lee III, Governor of Virginia and Congressman] or Light-Horse Harry Lee's son, Robert E. Lee [Commander of Confederate States Army]. And it's a trip. I'm just free associating. I'm not rapping. I'm just talking as it comes up. There was a time, nobody talked about that. Yes, it's true, but you know?

BRAXTON: Yeah.

SIMMONS: And I don't know if it was that way with the early Black history in your family. was it?

BRAXTON: I don't really talk about it much.

SIMMONS: Well, we talked about it. But you didn't talk about it outside the family. Not even in the family, huh?

BRAXTON: They don't really talk about much as far as early history.

SIMMONS: Well, Pleasant was trained as a blacksmith. and he ultimately came to Columbus. and because of that training in the need for plows and stuff like that, somebody fronted him the five hundred bucks that had to be put up before a Black person could stay. It was Pleasant, his wife, and some kids. Ultimately he bought and brought his mother up from Virginia,. His offspring owned like a 3-story hotel. I mean zillions, at that time zillions of dollars. So, I mean, coming from people like that of course, you're gonna leave, and of course, you're gonna be dysfunctional, too. Because there's the thought of colorism and every now and again that stuff raises its head, but it couldn't raise its head amongst any of the Black men at Dartmouth because, hey? They're here so it can't be too much different, you know.

BRAXTON: Sorry, we got about like 3 min left on here.

SIMMONS: Alright. So, my next question is, when do we speak again?

- BRAXTON: Anytime? I can give you a follow up. I can give you a follow up on next week. Once I finish the transcript and get it uploaded and stuff. I can give you a follow up on how that went. And then we can talk.
- SIMMONS: Okay, so you'll text me.
- BRAXTON: Yes, sir.
- SIMMONS: Alright. You did a real good job by recognizing I love to talk.
- BRAXTON: I like to listen. Yeah, I gave you the agenda, and you accomplished it, in my opinion. So, I appreciate it very much for helping.
- SIMMONS: The agenda next time is first and foremost, at least a ten-minute monologue from you about who you are and where you want to go. Four for forty and then retire by the time you're 35. And then you tell me what I'm supposed to talk about.
- BRAXTON: Yes, sir.
- SIMMONS: Alright love you. Thank you. That's good. Alright.