

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

DEMEKU: Hi my name is Nuhamin Demeku and I am at the mural room at Shabazz Center for Intellectual Inquiry at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire and I'm doing a zoom interview with Robert Bennett, who is in his house in Metro[politan Area] Atlanta, Georgia. Today is October 27, 2021, and this is an interview for the Dartmouth Black Lives Oral History Project. Hello, Mr. Bennett! Thank you so much for joining me today. First, let's learn a little bit about your childhood. Can you please state when and where you were born?

BENNETT: I was born in Columbus, Georgia in the United States in 1947. April 14th, 1947.

DEMEKU: Can you please tell me the name of your parents?

BENNETT: My parents?

DEMEKU: Yeah.

BENNETT: I've never known my father [pause]. My mother's name is Anne. And the surname is the same as mine, Bennett.

DEMEKU: What was it like growing up in Georgia?

BENNETT: Well, I left as a little boy, when I was 10 years old and for — [laughter] — for me and all my buddies, we just had a lot of fun playing all the time. Of course, in an originally segregated — racially segregated — community. Although white people did not live very far from us, meaning the white neighborhoods were not far from us at all, just maybe a half a block or so. So we knew some of the white children, boys our age. And there was some limited play with them as well. But extremely, extremely limited. So my world growing up was, except for that limited play time with them, was strictly amongst the Black people. And it was on — oh gosh — we went to segregated schools and walked a good distance to the Black school or the African American school. Which, I can't say really how many miles from my home, but I'm gonna guess—it was obviously several miles— and we walked right past a white elementary school on our way to the Black school.

We had to walk through the white neighborhood, which was very close or joined adjacent to the Black neighborhood. So we knew our place in American society at that early age, a menial place that

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
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white people had forcibly reserved for us. And as young children we didn't question it, and we just accommodated ourselves, just as our parents and grandparents did.

DEMEKU: At a young age, what was your concept of race growing up? In terms of segregation; what was your interpretation of everything that was going on?

BENNETT: Well, at that age my concept of it, the segregation, it was that It was the way of life for white people and Black people. White people were on top in every way, and we were on the bottom in every way. It was a way of life, but our people and my people—family—did not accept it, meaning that we did not embrace it. But it was something that we were forced to live with, so to speak, and at that time when I was just a young child like that and that era, there wasn't a very public display of resistance to that. But there was a resistance that I knew very well; my mother, my grandparents, with whom I live, and others in my family, and neighbors etc. They hated the way—they hated the fact that we were an oppressed people and they clearly had, what I say to be honest about it, they had a very harsh view of white people.

When I say a very harsh view, meaning that they knew obviously far better than I did, the cruelty of the oppression and suffering of Black people at the hands of white people in the system which they had created and so that was expressed and so as a young child, I knew that.

But, also, being a young child that age, we did a lot of playing. Sports, my buddies and I, sports of all kinds, you didn't have any store-purchased or store-bought toys, we made our own toys.

So the baseball bat was a stick of some kind or another. And a ball was— you name it— we use all kinds of things, we used to make the balls. Rags, balled-up rags, etc. that type of thing but anyway, we played and had a very good time.

DEMEKU: When you look back on your childhood, do you, is it mostly negative or positive? Like what do you think — when you think back on your childhood — in regards to the time period you were growing up in, how do you look back on it?

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

BENNETT: It was very positive [pause]. We were an oppressed people and without question, but at the same time we didn't live that way [pause].

The school that I attended, Claflin Elementary School, was founded several years after the civil war in the United States. The original Claflin, I think was built in 1868; the United States civil war ended in 1865, so it was started almost immediately after the civil war. And it was one of the first official public schools for Black people in the United States. So the school, by the time I got there, it had a long history and a storied history and the Black people in Columbus, Georgia, where the school is located, where we all live were very proud of the school. So the school was — that elementary school — was a very positive place for me. The teachers were all Black, of course, and they had a very strong commitment to the Black students. So we did not grow up, I did not grow up with a negative self-image at all, it was just the opposite, very positive. And the teachers were very demanding, meaning that they had very high standards, *that* was positive.

And on Sundays, we all went to church; so the church was a real focal point of community activity until to a very large extent this school was too because we did not have many institutions — and we're not allowed very many institutions — in which we could socialize with each other and that type of thing, etc. But generally, it was not a self-contained community, but because we had to have a self-focus community in a way; we didn't reach out to white people, because it was too dangerous to do so.

DEMEKU: Can you elaborate on that?

BENNETT: It was too dangerous?

DEMEKU: Yeah.

BENNETT: Well, the white people. [Pause]. The history of the oppression of Black people in the United States, of course, is known worldwide, and it was very brutal treatment of Black people, *very cruel treatment of Black people*, here in United States, of course, a slave and then the post slavery period.

And white people control the police. All the policemen were white; all the authorities were white; public authority, civil authorities were

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

white; and they were determined that we were kept in our place. An opposition, and so we knew that. And so there weren't any friendly reactions to white people; they were the employer, Black people were employees, etc., and so it's always important never to cross them—meaning that they necessarily try to be friends with them, but we know we have to accommodate ourselves to them. Because, I mean, they were a time, it was a very arbitrary rule on their part. So the slightest mistake, in some instances, could result in their violence against us. Using their police force or the police force and the vigilante groups [like the Ku Klux Klan] that were forever present in the south.

DEMEKU: Can you spell out the elementary school you went to?

BENNETT: Can I what now?

DEMEKU: Spell out your elementary school that you were referring to earlier.

BENNETT: Spell out you mean?

DEMEKU: Yeah

BENNETT: What do you mean spell out?

DEMEKU: Like spell your..

BENNETT: The name?

DEMEKU: Yeah.

BENNETT: Oh! Spell the name of the school. Claflin. C as in Charles. L. A. F as in Frank. I. N, as in Nancy. Claflin School. It was an elementary school—I think it may have been more than an elementary school when I was there. Claflin, the school was named after a well off White philanthropist from somewhere in New England, I think it was.

There is a college in the state of South Carolina, I believe, that's named after him as well, called Claflin College or Claflin University, something like that.

DEMEKU: Going back on how you were talking about your interactions with white people growing up, did you ever have any negative

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

experiences with white people, whether it's other students or authority?

BENNETT: Well, of course, the oppression itself was a very negative experience, I mean. So I had that direct experience, but in terms of personal confrontation with whites [pause]. In my lifetime I never really had that. No, not as a child growing up. And actually, when I was in middle school or junior high school, I lived in Cincinnati and I went to an integrated junior high school. And it was a working class school, meaning white working class, as well as Black working class, and we generally got along very well.

Both whites and Blacks have a lot of fond memories from that. Man when I was in high school in Chicago and there was a segregated high school there, an all-Black high school. So I wasn't in school on a day to day basis with white people—white students— as I was in junior high school. In all my years living I don't recall ever having any really aggressive confrontations to really kind with whites, no.

DEMEKU: Do you have the time periods of where you lived in each of those states and cities?

BENNETT: I didn't understand that.

DEMEKU: The time periods in which you lived in...

BENNETT: Oh, the time period?

DEMEKU: Yeah.

BENNETT: I was born in 1947. I left Georgia— the place where I was born— Columbus, Georgia, when I was 10 years old, so that was 1957 when I left Georgia. My mother left to move to Cincinnati with her then husband, my stepfather. So I lived in Cincinnati for five years, it was in 1957 to 1962, I think it was. Then I was in high school for three years in Chicago 1962 to 1965 and from there, '65, I went to Dartmouth. Graduating in 1969 of course.

DEMEKU: Growing up, what was your family dynamic like?

BENNETT: Well, I lived in my grandmother and my grandfather's household. And like probably most Americans at that time, certainly most Black Americans, they were married forever. Had lots of children, my

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

grandmother and grandfather had 13 children. My great grandmother had about oh gosh, I think, maybe 18 or so. So there was never a divorce anything of that sort. And the women were very strong. And in many ways, not not a matriarchy in a caricature sense that we often see on American TV today, but they had a strong presence in the families and I remember that very well. And so we never thought of women as retiring or meaning that they were just homemakers or anything like that, they worked and so did the men. They didn't make much money, of course, because the whites simply did not pay them much money, but just the same. They all work so. And it was a cohesive family.

Anyway, so when people move, family members have moved away, to the north, as we all call it, someplace in New York City [NY] or Chicago [IL] or Detroit, Michigan. Everybody always visited the family home at some point during the summertime, then oftentimes at Christmas or something like that. So that was a given that our family members who were scattered in a northern city, the younger generation who had moved north, would always go back south to see their grandmother and grandfather. And then, in my case, when I was young, the grandchildren were always sent back too. So I went to, when I lived in Cincinnati, I went south every year to see my grandmother and grandfather *every* summer.

DEMEKU: Do you remember any stories that your grandparents told you about the time period they grew up in?

BENNETT: I remember, yeah I remember. My grandfather [pause] complaining about white people and the treatment of Black people, I remember that very well. My grandmother worked in the home—meaning she was a homemaker but at that time, like so many African American women, she did the laundry for white people, meaning she washed the clothes and ironed their clothes for certain white wives — white women. White women would bring their clothes, their dirty laundry, to our home and my grandmother would wash their clothes and iron them. I mean it was all perfectly done; I mean just meticulously done.

But as far as stories go. It was my grandfather who was the most talkative one. So he would talk about experiences of Black people in Columbus Georgia, and I remember some of those stories, yeah, not all of them pleasant [Laughter].

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

DEMEKU: And what did your mother do growing up, what was her career?

BENNETT: Oh, my mother. I remember the first job she had, it was a, she worked at [laughter] Tasty Sandwich Shop — white-owned. I think delicatessen would be a word that we use today to try to explain it a little bit or describe it, but it was not anywhere at that level of delicatessen, but anyway. This white-owned business made sandwiches and my mother worked there. I remember that, and then later she went to nursing school and became a licensed practical nurse.

DEMEKU: Do you have any siblings?

BENNETT: I have two brothers and a sister. We share the same mother but not the same father.

DEMEKU: Are you the oldest?

BENNETT: Yes, I am.

DEMEKU: What role did you play in the family?

BENNETT: I generally — I lived apart from my mother and my two brothers and my sister from about 14, when I was 14 years old. So I was not really, I was not — not not really — but not a part of that family structure. And I'm 10 years older and nine years older than my oldest brother. So I never really grew up, I did not grow up with them, no, but I always saw them. They lived in Chicago for a brief period, when I was there living there, then he moved back to Columbus, Georgia, at some point when I was still in high school. And that was the last I actually lived with them, so I lived with him for a very short period of time.

So, my family dynamic, so to speak, meaning am I living with them, it really wasn't as I just said, a situation in which I actually live with them directly, no.

DEMEKU: During that period [of time] where you weren't living with your mom, who were you living with?

BENNETT: During that period when I wasn't with my mom, what?

DEMEKU: Who were you living with?

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

BENNETT: In Chicago, when I was in high school, my mother was back living in Columbus, Georgia. I stayed with an uncle and then with some family friends, so I moved around a bit. But my high school years were that way, in terms of family.

DEMEKU: Were there any other reasons you were living with your uncle and other family friends instead of your mom?

BENNETT: Well, I did not want to. When my mother decided to go back to the south, back to Columbus, Georgia, I was in high school. Just starting high school, in the ninth grade, and I didn't want to go back South. I wanted to stay in the high school which I attended in Chicago [IL]. I wanted to live in Chicago, not the south. I knew enough about what was going on to not want to live in the south.

DEMEKU: What was going on during that time?

BENNETT: Well, as I described to you earlier, the Black people in the south, well throughout the United States, had a very limited—an extremely limited—ceiling. It was a little bit higher in the north. And so I did not want to live in that extremely limited ceiling that prevailed in the south. A little more, a little higher in Chicago and because I was a very good student in school, there were opportunities available to me in Chicago that would not that be — there were opportunities that were not available to me in the south. And I knew that even as a 14 year old. So I tried to stay in the state, stay in Chicago and my uncle lived there, so I stayed with my uncle.

DEMEKU: What were some of the opportunities you took advantage of in Chicago?

BENNETT: Well. [Pause]. Of course Chicago is a far bigger city than Columbus, Georgia, and although it was a heavily segregated city, it is a racially segregated city, nonetheless the Black people made more money than what Black people in the South made. The factories were in the northern cities like Chicago, etc. So our people were factory workers.

So our people have more money to spend and there was a much bigger Black middle class, if you will, in Chicago than in Columbus, Georgia, as well as the case in other northern cities. And so there were more cultural opportunities available in the north, in any Black



Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

communities in Chicago. There's a lot more going on! There were social clubs, there were entertainment venues that didn't exist in the south. There were libraries that we could attend, that were well-equipped, etc. And as a high school student, I used to go to the library quite a bit. And so that type of thing, etc.

DEMEKU: Can you repeat the time period that you were in high school?

BENNETT: Can you repeat that for me?

DEMEKU: Can you repeat the time period you went to high school? Like the years?

BENNETT: I just didn't understand what you said.

DEMEKU: Can you repeat the years you went to high school?

BENNETT: Oh, the years! Okay the years I was in high school in 1962 to 1965.

DEMEKU: Okay, so you went to high school during the peak of the civil rights movement, which occurred like during 1954 to 1968, what was that like for you?

BENNETT: Well, it was very interesting *obviously* and to say interesting is an understatement. [Pause]. It was a very exciting period because Black people were resisting this oppression, in a very public way all throughout the United States. I used to read the newspapers, even as a 13 year old, daily newspapers as well as watching TV, so these stories were always on TV and stories of civil rights demonstration are always on TV, of course, and in the newspapers. So I followed all of this, and it was just fascinating.

And also in Chicago fascinating and inspiring and in Chicago there was a strong Black nationalist movement. And I was aware of that, there was Malcolm X, for example, one of the most prominent Black nationalist leaders in American history. He was in Chicago, that was the headquarters for the group organization to which you belong, Nation of Islam, so I was aware of all about — and then my two uncles who live in Chicago, they were very strong Black nationalist, and so I was exposed to all of that too. So it was an exciting time. Very positive time for Black people, meaning fighting the oppression in an open, very public way.

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

DEMEKU: Did he ever participate in any of the protests or any of the movements? Were you active?

BENNETT: Not until I got to college, at Dartmouth. That's when I did that, but before that, no.

DEMEKU: Earlier you mentioned how you were—you had a lot of opportunities that you wanted to get, a lot of opportunities that's why you wanted to stay in Chicago. Can you talk about some of your ambitions that you had during high school?

BENNETT: Well, I, for example, there were many examples. There was an organization for high schools in Chicago. I don't remember the exact name, but it was an interschool student government, meaning a number of schools in a large district of the city of Chicago had a joint school student council. And there may have been maybe 10 high schools, for example, or more, maybe 20 high schools, for example. I don't remember what part of this interschool student council, that's the district, must have been like at least 10 high schools. There were two officers chosen each year for this interschool student council, president and a secretary of state. The officers were chosen by the student council, this joint student council, and the teachers and administrators who oversaw the running of the interschool student council that the officers were chosen on the basis of oratory. Those who wanted to be competing for these officer positions had to give a speech, competition speech written by the student and performed by the student in oration. And so that was something I looked forward to doing because it had a lot of prestige, and once you belong to this you got a chance to go to other high schools. So it was really exciting, and so I competed to be one of the two officers. I gave a speech and I was chosen as president, for example, there was one such opportunity.

DEMEKU: What other extracurricular activities did you participate in during high school?

BENNETT: I was on the football team. The editor of the school newspaper, and that was really instrumental for me, because it helped me to learn to write. Oh gosh! I was on a track team, as far as athletics go. There were several academic clubs which I was a member of, one of the clubs called the Key Club, exactly what that meant, what it was [laughter] I don't remember too well, [laughter] but anyway, it was a, oh gosh, honor society of this type, mostly academic group

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

centered. I was part of most of what high schools offered to the top students at that time.

DEMEKU: What was your favorite subject in high school?

BENNETT: What was what like in high school?

DEMEKU: Your favorite subject.

BENNETT: History.

DEMEKU: Why history?

BENNETT: It is still my favorite subject today; I really love history. Reading history and studying history. I like it because it's instructive. It's not only interesting but it's very instructive about why we are in the present. How we got to the present. And it's also instructive about how to get out of the present and to make something new, so I always wanted to learn history, for that reason, and to this very day, I study history.

DEMEKU: Going back to when you became the president of the Student Council, Do you remember what year that was?

BENNETT: That would have been 1964 to '65. So maybe like September '64 to June 1965 something like that or May 1965.

DEMEKU: Was that your senior year?

BENNETT: That was what?

DEMEKU: Your senior year?

BENNETT: Yes.

DEMEKU: What was your main motivation in high school?

BENNETT: I enjoy school/ I like school and my motivation was to be a top student, meaning to do well in school. It wasn't necessary to go to Dartmouth, or any of the ivy league schools or anything like that. But to be a top student at that for sure, to compete with the very best.

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

DEMEKU: Do you think you accomplished that goal?

BENNETT: Yes, I think I did, yeah.

DEMEKU: What makes you think that?

BENNETT: Well, I was able to go on to Dartmouth and I was admitted to all the schools to which I applied. I didn't apply to a lot of them. The University, that is, but they recruited me and the first year of the National Achievement Scholarship, I think it is called today, it was called that then too. The National Achievement Scholarship was given to African American students by the National Merit Foundation. The first year was 1965 and it was a very selective process and I was one of the chosen students for that scholarship nationwide.

DEMEKU: What were the other schools you applied to?

BENNETT: Colleges and universities?

DEMEKU: Yeah.

BENNETT: I don't remember all of them, but there were just a handful and they were midwestern schools. Let's see, I believe one of them was Macalaster College, I think, and I don't even remember where that was. In Michigan or Wisconsin, someplace? I applied to maybe just two schools or so, two colleges—two universities, including Dartmouth. Dartmouth recruited me heavily. And so that was my focus once I started applying. But other than maybe three midwestern schools or so, plus Dartmouth, that was it for me. And I was accepted at each of those schools. Dartmouth was the number one school of all the ones to which I applied, so I wanted to go there, because it was such a highly ranked school, one of the best ranked schools in the United States.

DEMEKU: Are there any other reasons you chose to attend Dartmouth college for undergrad?

BENNETT: That was the primary reason. And the National Achievement Scholarship paid for my tuition for four years. There were at least one, maybe two, African American cultural groups in Chicago that awarded scholarships also. So they gave me money also, scholarship money also, so I didn't have to—I had a full scholarship

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

attending Dartmouth. And I didn't have to work during my school year at Dartmouth to attend Dartmouth. But the fact that it was such an elite school, that was the primary reason for my going there.

DEMEKU: Did you work throughout high school?

BENNETT: Yes, I did.

DEMEKU: What did you do?

BENNETT: [Laughter]. At that time, you know, as I mentioned earlier, factories throughout the northern cities employed Black people. And in high school one could get a summer job fairly easily at these factories. So I worked at two, my junior year I worked at one factory, a menial job, but still it paid steady income. And then my junior year—my senior year of summer I worked at a different factory.

DEMEKU: How was your transition to Dartmouth college and how did you deal with leaving your family?

BENNETT: My transition to Dartmouth?

DEMEKU: Yeah.

BENNETT: I didn't — it was not difficult for me, I didn't know. It was relatively easy for me. Well. [Laughter]. Academically it was not a problem, except for French. One course that was the most challenging was French — speaking French. I have never had — I had studied one year, more or less studied, because the high school didn't have a French program really, but there was one teacher who knew French, but that was not her subject of instruction, but she knew it. So she would try to teach us, some of us who were interested in learning French. But we didn't have a language lab. So I knew how to write French pretty well at that time, even in high school, but I couldn't speak it. When I got to Dartmouth, of course, they had the students speak French and there was a language lab. So it was an entirely new experience for me, being in a language lab so I struggled with that [laughter].

But other than that the courses were not difficult generally and I took courses—I took the required courses, obviously, but also, I took courses that I like, like history, and so anyway, I was a good student.

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

DEMEKU: What were some of your favorite classes that you've taken?

BENNETT: Some of the activities?

DEMEKU: Some of your favorite classes?

BENNETT: Again history — American history. And then there were at least a couple professors who were interested in African history, white professors — of course white professors at that time — and so I took those courses through and they were very interesting for me, but the courses I liked most were the history courses. And I would obtain honors and those parts of history courses or whatever.

DEMEKU: What was your major when you were at Dartmouth?

BENNETT: History

DEMEKU: History?

BENNETT: [Nods]

DEMEKU: Did you have any minors?

BENNETT: I don't know. I don't recall that at all, there may have been, I may have, but it was — I don't even know if Dartmouth had majors or minors at that time. But I do remember major being — to the extent that there was a concentration it was in history for me. And I receive honors in history.

DEMEKU: So was this your first time being a predominantly white institution? Because I know in the past you've been intermixed but I don't know what the percentages are.

BENNETT: You are asking if this is my first experience of being in a school with whites?

DEMEKU: *Predominantly white?*

BENNETT: Dartmouth, yeah. No, my junior high school years in Cincinnati, 1962 to 19—excuse me, 1959 or 57— 1957 to 1962, were at a white junior high school in Cincinnati, Ohio; so Dartmouth was a second experience. A very different experience, obviously, since it

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

was university level, and I was a resident at the university at Dartmouth College.

DEMEKU: Were they both like — in your middle school — was it like equal [racially] or was it like just a few Black students?

BENNETT: When I was at Dartmouth?

DEMEKU: In middle school? In your junior high.

BENNETT: It was primarily — I don't remember, but it was primarily white. What the percentages were, I don't know but, but I do know it was primarily white and it was a primarily white neighborhood but a working-class neighborhood as well. And the relationship was friendly between whites and Blacks.

DEMEKU: How are the relationships with white people at Dartmouth?

BENNETT: They were cordial and respectful. I didn't have any personal confrontation with whites at Dartmouth. I was very engaged with the student body at Dartmouth, whites and Blacks. So it was a very good experience for me, for many reasons, yeah.

DEMEKU: What was your most vivid memory you had during your freshman year?

BENNETT: Other than struggling in that French language lab. [Laughter].

DEMEKU: [Laughter].

BENNETT: My most vivid memories my freshman year — gosh — was playing on a freshman football team and the coaches, I remember the coaches and names and some of the things they said, that was a lot of fun, a lot of stress too because I didn't want to play football. I prefer to focus on the academic work because I thought Dartmouth would be really, really difficult for me. So I had to study all the time, but it wasn't overwhelming like I thought it would be, academically. So that's not to say it was easy, because it wasn't, it was very challenging but at the same time I was comfortable with handling it as long as I studied and disciplined myself.

So football, that was something I remembered a lot and then but also just being at the university at Dartmouth, and the environment.

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

It was very, very different from what I had experienced or had been around whites before. I've never been around the elites — white people — and these were elite students, meaning they were white elite, and so the culture of wealthy white people — that was new for me and very interesting and fascinating. So that was cool, I remember being in that environment for the first time and finding it a fascinating experience.

DEMEKU: Did you ever feel like you were out of place when you were at Dartmouth?

BENNETT: Did I ever feel that I was what?

DEMEKU: Out of place?

BENNETT: Oh no not at all! Not at all, I felt quite comfortable there, meaning that — how do I put it — I could be a student and was a student, just like the other students, white students. That's not to say we were treated equally by the professors or administration, because we were not, but at the same time, it was not overt in terms of any discrimination or anything like that.

There were just a lot of exciting things to do at Dartmouth, different courses, all kinds of courses. Like the kind of experiences that any freshmen students, such as yourself, would have and being on campus of a college or university and being away from home. Being so-called independent, so to speak. I had all that, shared all that, and it was a very exciting time.

BENNETT: As I said earlier, being there amongst a wide elite was a really eye-opening experience for me and an exciting experience for me to see — see the way they live and how they interacted. And I think I remember, and this is something maybe I shouldn't say this — I'm gonna, I'm not gonna say what I thought I was gonna say. But anyways, the white students used to call the local whites — working class whites, the janitors and workers at the school— emmits. I'm sure that's not done today right?

DEMEKU: [Nods] No, what does that mean?

BENNETT: [Laughter]. Okay, I—I don't— it was just a pejorative term for lower class— for working-class white people that they're well-off whites used.



Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

DEMEKU: How is it spelled?

BENNETT: I never saw it spelled though [laughter] I don't know so, but that was a term that I remember, and I one of these days, I'm gonna ask some of my fellow classmates if they remember the working-class whites who lived in Hanover, New Hampshire and clean your dormitories and were the groundskeepers — if they remember those people being called emmits. But anyway, I have to find out, so I guess it may have been something like E M M I T or something like that. But, again, I don't know.

DEMEKU: Do you think elitism was more of a problem than racism on campus?

BENNETT: If what was?

DEMEKU: Elitism?

BENNETT: Was more of a problem?

DEMEKU: Like classism?

BENNETT: I don't understand what you mean. If elitism was more of a problem than what?

DEMEKU: Racism. Like if they cared more about how much money you were making versus the race [of a person]?

BENNETT: Oh no, you couldn't really separate the two. No. They were so integrated. Racism simply was part of the culture. Even the emmits — the so-called emmits— no, they were racist too. So like I said, elitism and racism, they were two sides of the same coin, so to speak for the Dartmouth student — white students. They were often well-off and racist at the same time, meaning that it was simply a part of their culture. Some acted it out in more demonstrative ways than others, but that's the way they lived, that's the way they believe.

DEMEKU: How long were you on the football team for?

BENNETT: Three years.

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

DEMEKU: Three years?

BENNETT: [Nods] Yeah.

DEMEKU: Why didn't you do it your last year?

BENNETT: Why didn't I stay the fourth year? I had a lot of difficulty with a coach at the time and I thought the coach was a racist. And so I quit at the end of my third year there, which I regretted doing now that I had done it, but I was there three years.

DEMEKU: Why did you think your coach was racist?

BENNETT: Well, and it wasn't just me, but it turned out I was the only Black player on a traveling team and there had been — oh gosh — must have been five of us or so who started out playing and still were there when I was on the traveling team. Meaning that when the football team traveled to play other colleges or universities, Harvard [University] or whatever, I was the only Black player traveling. So basically, I thought the coach should have played me more and I thought he should have played the other Black players more, but he didn't.

The teams were very successful teams, but the coach clearly wanted a white team on the field, and we were new to Dartmouth, even though there were just a tiny number of us there, it still was a new experience for the coach. That's not an excuse, but anyways, I thought he was very racist.

DEMEKU: Had it been like that all four years or was it— ?

BENNETT: It was the same, it didn't change. The coaches were the same, yeah. For four years they were the same.

DEMEKU: But you mentioned your freshman year, the coaches were really nice and like they said a lot of nice things.

BENNETT: Well, everybody was very nice — the coaches, the professors, or whatever. They're very courteous, smiling. [Laughter]. There's a song — the song "smiling faces" — I don't remember the other part of the song but anyway behind the smiling faces were not always the best intentions, let's put it that way [laughter]. And the best

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

treatment and the most respected treatment, but it would generally be a smiling face.

DEMEKU: Did you have any personal experience that was negative towards any staff member?

BENNETT: No. At Dartmouth?

DEMEKU: [Nod]

BENNETT: No, no, I didn't. [Nods]

DEMEKU: So was the social life for Black students at Dartmouth? Did you often interact with students of other races or did you stick with other Black students?

BENNETT: There were so few of us there they were total—gosh, maybe 17, 18 or something — 30 at most across all four classes. And my class — class of 1969, I mean we started up in 1965 — I think my class of 1969, starting in September '65, we were the largest number of Black students that Dartmouth had ever accepted at one time. I think about 17 or so, maybe 18 or something like that, no more than that. So it was all male school at the time, our social life was each other — with each other. There weren't any women there and so it was an extremely limited social life. And without means to travel to the nearby, fairly nearby, women's colleges like Mount Holyoke [College in MA], Smith [College in MA], etc. We didn't have a means to go to those schools. I mean nobody had a car or could afford a car. And then there are so few Black women students and we didn't try to date any of the white girls [laughter], that was something we didn't do at the beginning, so anyway, but once we got more comfortable, then I became an open possibility.

So anyway, very limited social life until we, the Black students, began to change things for ourselves at Dartmouth. The Shabazz [Center for Intellectual Inquiry], for example, that was created by members of my generation at Dartmouth. We created a magazine— a cultural magazine called *Blackout*. B L A C K O U T, magazine of culture, dealing with cultural issues and political issues, etc.

There was a dance band that our students — my class — the one gentleman, that student who organized it, called *Uncle Tom's*

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

*Cabinet*. Had about five or six members, the trumpet player, drums — I don't remember all the instruments— and then a couple lead singers, who sang all the top soul, rock and roll, or soul tunes — not rock and roll but soul tunes— at that time. Temptations and The Four Tops. They performed on the weekends at different fraternities. So of course it was an all-Black student little group, and they were outstanding! So when they performed every weekend, we the Black students, we'd go to the fraternity house where they were performing and we'd be a part of the gathering — social gathering — having lots of fun, dancing and that type of thing. That was in our junior year? Senior year? Junior year— sophomore year. Sophomore year! Sophomore year — junior, it didn't take us long to begin to change and make things happen for ourselves. So we created our own social life, including the Shabazz Center [for Intellectual Inquiry].

DEMEKU: How did you do that? What steps did you take to create all those changes?

BENNETT: How do we begin to do that?

DEMEKU: [Nods]

BENNETT: I don't think we started out, being at Dartmouth, to intentionally do what we did. It's just that necessity, so to speak, to be a mother of invention. We needed a social outlet and we didn't want to be like white people, so we just started creating our own. And we didn't discriminate against whites in any way. We brought them into our culture, so they enjoyed our presence, they enjoyed our activities that we created for ourselves. So Dartmouth became a very different place starting with the generation of the 1960s — the Black generation of 1960s. Black *student* generation of the 1960s. Am I making sense to you?

DEMEKU: Yeah [nods] yeah. So after all those changes, what were the responses from other white students?

BENNETT: Oh! They accepted, by and large, they accepted them and embraced us and the changes that we brought to the university. A lot, of course, some of the things that we did created a lot of havoc. But there was, of course, a very staunch opposition among not only just the student body, but the alumni etc. But over time, we were

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

accepted, generally, by the whites. Our presence was certainly embraced by them.

DEMEKU: You mentioned how the reaction wasn't always positive, can you elaborate on that?

BENNETT: The reaction was positive to what now?

DEMEKU: Wasn't always positive.

BENNETT: Oh no, no, not at all. Well, I think you have a little memorandum or a little essay I wrote about the protests against [governor] George Wallace.

DEMEKU: mm hmm.

BENNETT: Yeah, well that's an example, one example of an extremely, if you will, a racist reaction to our precedent there and our activities.

DEMEKU: So, I have a couple questions regarding the George Wallace protest. I'm going to ask them now. On May 3, 1967, former Alabama governor George Wallace was invited to speak at Webster Hall. He was extremely problematic—he was extremely problematic and known for shouting “segregation now, segregation tomorrow, and segregation forever” in his inauguration in 1963. How did you feel when it was announced that he was going to be speaking at Dartmouth College?

BENNETT: Well, we [chuckle], some of us Black students, of course we oppose him even being invited. Given who he was and what he represented, what he was trying to do in the United States at that time. So we were very vehemently opposed to that, and so we decided to fight it, to resist it and to do our best to block his speech. And we did.

DEMEKU: How did you do that?

BENNETT: Well, we, as you know, from the essays, we created a protest group — just a handful of us. We knew where he was going to speak, of course Webster Hall, and we decided to organize ourselves and the newly created African American Society, Afro American Society, we called it. There were two officers of the Afro-American society, a president and chairman of the political action committee. [Forrester]

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

“Woody” Lee ['68], he was a junior, he was the first President of the Afro-American Society and Robert Bennett — that’s me — was the chairman of the political action committee. And it was the political action committee that was responsible in charge of all the different demonstrations that we conducted, including the planning for the protest against George Wallace, so as a chairman of the political action committee, I was one of the leaders of that protest. And so, when Wallace came to speak, he was running for President at that time.

We knew that he would have, we as students, knew that he would have a big press following because it was national news wherever he went. So we decided to demonstrate against his presence, his speaking at Webster Hall, and the result was such chaos. During his speech he was forced to end his speech — well, he quit talking and he ran from the stage.

And so anyway, that created a tremendous uproar at Dartmouth, but a lot of positives came. Not only an uproar at the college, but also of course among our alumni and there was a real threat of our — being those of us who participated in the demonstration— of being expelled. I thought I was going to be expelled, but we were not expelled. We were allowed to continue at the university and we did. But it was good for the university in many, many ways, because the university community as a whole — the students, administrative people in the Community, and Dartmouth alumni — they can see that we Black people were not white — meaning that we were not trying and were not there to be white people or to become white people in any way whatsoever, and we were not subservient to them at all. And would not ever — would never be that. And over time, they appreciated that, meaning that they came to respect us for who we are. Or, more so than they ever did before that, I'll put it that way.

DEMEKU: What role did you play in the George Wallace protest?

BENNETT: As I just mentioned, I was the chairman of the political action committee of Afro-American society, of course, one of the founders of the African-American Society as a sophomore. So, I was one of the leaders on the basis of my position in the Afro-American Society and also just generally being an activist student, so to speak.

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

DEMEKU: So how did you get appointed to that position in the Afro-American Society?

BENNETT: The students voted for me. When we organized Afro-American Society, we voted for — we, the students who did organize it — voted for the two offices. So I was chosen for that. Woody Lee was chosen — voted to be the President. And I was voted to be the chairman of the political action committee.

DEMEKU: And prior to that did you have any experience in activism?

BENNETT: No, I did not, no. Prior to Dartmouth — prior to Dartmouth, I did not, but the George Wallace protest was not the first protest that I and the Black students at Dartmouth initiated and carried through. There were others. There were demonstrations against apartheid, apartheid in South Africa. Part of the demonstrations against the Portuguese, colonialism in Mozambique, Angola, and Guinea Bissau, meaning that there were speakers from the South African government. We spoke on behalf of the South African government and we did our best to give them hell. Prevented — this was before George Wallace — prevented him from speaking. It didn't make the national news or anything like that, not like George Wallace, but we did that.

And so this was a prelude to the George Wallace protest. And so it was like a training ground for us. I remember, there was a Portuguese representative speaking at Dartmouth, and I don't remember the auditorium but those of us who, Black students who protested, set ourselves in the audience and just made a lot of noise, created a lot of chaos. And the speaker was forced to leave the stage and he went to speak at a fraternity house immediately thereafter. And his supporters followed him to the fraternity house. And so did we, the protesters— Black protesters— we followed. We went there too and it became bedlam at the fraternity. It's amazing we didn't get in fights or anything but the speech did not forward so that that took place before the George Wallace protest.

DEMEKU: Do you remember the date of that?

BENNETT: The George Wallace protest took place in May of 1967, so that would have been maybe — I don't remember — January or February 1967. I don't recall any protest when we were freshmen. I

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

think our activism started when we were sophomores — early sophomores.

And freshman year we were still trying to figure out what was what at Dartmouth, so to speak.

DEMEKU: And what's the process of planning an event like that?

BENNETT: Was the process of what?

DEMEKU: Planning any protest. Like what kind of —

BENNETT: What was the process of planning? Oh, we did so through the Afro-American Society. We had our — I don't know how often we met— but we had our meetings and we met at the Afro Am — I think we'll call it an Afro Am or something. We met— I don't remember the name of the building— on a corner of Main Street and right at the main intersection there, right opposite of the name of the hotel—the main hotel there, I don't remember

DEMEKU: Hanover Inn?

BENNETT: Yeah, Hanover Inn. Yeah, It was the opposite, there was a way to that place. In fact, I stayed there as a senior, only seniors could have a residence there when I was there. I don't remember the name of the place, but it was an honor to be there, that was on one corner, Hanover Inn was on another. And of course, the one corner was the entry to the Green and then the other was the administrative building. This is where the Tucker Foundation was, while I was there, something like that. I don't know if that still exists either. But anyway, we used to meet there. Afro-American Society or Afro Am or the Am or whatever we became known as. So we met there and we did our planning and then also in each other's dormitory rooms.

DEMEKU: Okay, what do you remember from the George Wallace protest? Can you give me a timeline from the beginning?

BENNETT: A one-second one, second just a minute yeah [pause]. Remember? What do I remember about the George Wallace protest? The most memorable point?

DEMEKU: Or give me a timeline of everything that happened.



Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

BENNETT: A timeline [laughter]. Well, I don't want to go into too much detail but anyway. We did plan the event and we had a mission — stated purpose among ourselves, which was to make this demonstration national, in terms of the press coverage of the demonstration. Now, as I look back on it, of course, that was extremely ambitious but we didn't want to be on TV or be mentioned in a national press just for the sake of trying to gain some notoriety or something like that. But the purpose was to be part of the national resistance to racism and the fascism that George Wallace represented. We wanted to be part of that and we wanted to, believe it or not, to make it a national event, so to speak. And we were very successful at that, we really were. More so than we planned because the demonstration, once it began, took on a momentum of its own. Meaning that our protest couldn't have been more than 10 of us Black students. The auditorium was big enough, Webster Hall was big enough to accommodate hundreds of students and so it was packed. Most of the students wanted, almost all of them, to hear George Wallace's speech. He was a national figure, obviously.

And so there we were the 10 of us, just disrupting the speech. Every moment that Wallace tried to speak, a group of us in the center of the auditorium on the first floor, including me. I think there were five of us there, we just jumped up—and now all of this was planned—and just made a lot of noise. And then there were five of us or so scattered throughout the auditorium on the balcony and we had banners denouncing Wallace. All of this had been planned and we just thought naively that a number of — this was part of the planning — that a number of the white students would join us in protesting Wallace, but that didn't happen. They wanted — they protested that we get out at the auditorium and end the protest, so that they could hear Wallace speak. So that incensed us, so we came to be even more determined to just be disruptive. So that part of the planning of the whites not joining us, that was a surprise to us. So, at one point we did leave the auditorium, disgusted with the fact that we were not able to get a part of the auditorium to join us — the student body to join us — and participate in a demonstration against Wallace. So we left the auditorium and some of the guys — Black guys involved, Black students involved in the protest — they went back to their dorms or whatever and left the protest, but I and a few others, we stayed.

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

We were locked out of the auditorium. Being angry, thinking our demonstration had failed, and at one point, I jumped up on a pedestal or the base of one of the columns at Webster Hall to rally the crowd, which I had gathered around us — the few of us who had been forced out of the auditorium — and so I rally them to go back in. And there were people around me, they were encouraging me to — encouraging us — to go back in. So I got caught up in the moment, like everybody else, to protest on the outside there and we decided to storm back into the auditorium. And the door was locked. So one of our guys — student, a big guy, was a football player, a good, very good, dear friend of mine to this very day — he forced open the door. And we [laughter] and by this time when we were outside the building, a number of white students did join us. And maybe some townspeople did too, but there are whites and Blacks now in the demonstration. This is something we hadn't planned — and my rallying the crowd and forcing our way back in — we hadn't planned any of that.

But anyway, there we were rushing the stage. This group of Black students and white, now rushing the stage and I remember very well, I wasn't sure, what the objective was — what *my* objective was to that point, other than they get to the stage. And I was conscious of what I was doing, but at the same time, it seemed really strange that I was doing this. So there I was, I rushed to the stage. The security Wallace, George Wallace's security, was on the stage with him, and the stage with raised from the floor level. And the podium, Wallace was behind a podium, and there I was in front of the podium about the climb onto the stage and I remember an Alabama state trooper putting his hand on his weapon, his gun.

DEMEKU: [gasp]

BENNETT: Yeah [nods], and at that point, Wallace started running off the stage. And I was wondering what am I doing [laughter] what am I doing [more laughter]? It was crazy in a way, meaning that it wasn't planned, but just the — I learned a lot from that in many, many ways. But anyway, Wallace was now gone from the stage. The audience started leaving too. The whole thing became just total chaos. Wallace ran from the stage with his bodyguards and the audience ran from the auditorium into the street. Wallace went to his car, which is parked alongside Webster Hall. And so I and the other protesters, we were no longer a cohesive group, obviously, but some of us, we went out too. And there was just an enormous

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

crowd surrounding Wallace's car, hundreds of students — whites — blocking the car from leaving, blocking Wallace from leaving the venue. And I did not participate in the rocking of the car, but I was right there when all of it was taking place and I thought, how dangerous it was and how foolish it was that we were in that situation, which could have easily gotten out of control. And people could have been shot, yes, that kind of a situation. New Hampshire police were there, Hanover police, the New Hampshire State police were there, I think, in addition to the Alabama state trooper there were also local police forces there, and they were protecting Wallace. And there was no way for the car to move and the students were rocking the car. The driver of the car kept trying to pull up and after a while he sped off! And nobody was injured by the car and there wasn't any fighting or anything, no shots were fired — but it was that kind of a situation where it could have easily gotten out of control and people could have been injured or wounded, or whatever or even killed.

It was that kind of a situation so after it was over, as you can imagine, there was this *enormous* outcry by the students — the white students at Dartmouth, administration at Dartmouth, alumni — to get these “monkeys off the campus, expel these monkeys” and that was us. And I remember being called to the football coach's office, and he showed me some of the telegrams that are coming from alumni. And we were actually called these kinds of names, that's why I use the word monkey and nappy headed this or that. He actually showed me this stack of telegrams he as the football coach had received. So there was a huge outcry, as I just said, for the expulsion of us. Of all kinds—I mean just terrible name-calling against us.

But anyway, the CBS national news, the next day, mentioned the demonstration. On the national news. And Eric Sevareid, the commentator for CBS news at the time, Walter Cronkite, was the main news presenter, he was an anchor of the program. And Eric Sevareid gave a commentary each evening, I think was each evening, on the major events of the news. And the commentary he presented on that day after the Wallace demonstration was about our protest. I was shocked. And I remember some of the things he said, he talked about the racial protests in the United States, including the Dartmouth protest, obviously, but because that was the focal point of his commentary. But he put that demonstration in the context of the civil rights movement that was sweeping the

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

country and he even said something to the effect of, if I recall, what America's future would look like, and he, as I recall, said something to the effect that at some point it wouldn't be so starkly Black and white, but over time, there would be a more integrated society. Something like that, as I recall, a racially integrated society.

It was quite an event for Dartmouth. And then also the protest was mentioned in the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, and some other, I was told, some other national newspapers as well. So, I don't know all that personally, because I didn't read it and didn't see it myself, but some of it I did see, so it did become a national story.

DEMEKU: What were the student's responses to the protest?

BENNETT: The Dartmouth students?

DEMEKU: Yeah.

BENNETT: Well, the white students, which was 99% of the student body, generally certainly opposed it. [Pause]. But over time, they embraced it, I think. They embraced it and more importantly, at that point, the administration did not expel us. We have those of us who protested, that we had to make an accounting to, it wasn't a formal court or anything like that, or a formal hearing. It was never that but we had to meet with people administrators, professors and explain ourselves, so to speak. And we refused to do that, but we did meet with them and we just simply told him why we did this, and that type of thing, but we didn't. We didn't express any regret about it, nothing like that at all. We were very proud of ourselves for having done that.

DEMEKU: During those moments did you believe you're going to be expelled or did you know that you are going to be okay?

BENNETT: We thought — I thought — we would be expelled, yeah I did.

DEMEKU: And how did you feel about that?

BENNETT: I hadn't thought about it before the demonstration. I didn't think the demonstration would end that way. That it did, I thought that, as I said earlier, our planning was to create enough disruption to prevent Wallace from speaking, but we also thought that enough

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

whites would join us and would block the speech, and that it would end in that way. And it we wouldn't have a group of Black students stand out as the instigator of this riot. This news—well, this riot, yes. This mob, the instigators of this mob. So we didn't expect that, I didn't think it would turn out that way, but they did. So after then I thought about the possibility of being expelled because that was a real possibility but beforehand, I hadn't thought about anything like that. But I wasn't. worried or anxious about it at all, not at all, just after the demonstration, because I thought that if any other guy did the right thing, so it didn't bother me and then later.

Once I graduated from Dartmouth, and I was like me, maybe we shouldn't have done that, because it was too risky but, at the time I didn't see it that way at all.

DEMEKU: So I was going through the Rauner [Special Collections Library] archives on the George Wallace incident and I noticed that for several months, after the event at Dartmouth, they were still getting lots of hate letters—like you were like talking about earlier, the telegrams—referring to Black students as “Black apes” and “ugly cockroaches” and comparing them to Nazis and many other hurtful things. Did the administration try to protect Black students from this negativity or did they continue to show you all of that?

BENNETT: I don't recall the administration trying to protect us in any way whatsoever, no [nods].

No, we just—I mean I went on about, after the demonstration, I went to class like I always did and classes were not canceled or anything. We all went about our normal activities, although there was just tremendous, not undercurrent, but there's tremendous *current* that we all could all see and feel that was taking place on a campus because of the demonstration. But it didn't change our routines, not at all. And like I said, the administration, as far as I know [laughter], there definitely wasn't any attempt on their part to try to shield us from anything. It may have been impossible for them to do anything like that, even if they had wanted to, and I don't know if they wanted to or not, but they did not expel us.

DEMEKU: During that time period, after the protests, did you feel safe?

BENNETT: Yeah! Oh very much so! Before the protest, I felt safe at Dartmouth. After the protests, I felt safe at Dartmouth, absolutely!

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

DEMEKU: So there was no confrontation with white students?

BENNETT: No, not at all. No [nods], I didn't and I don't know of any confrontation at any of the other Black students here because of the protest.

DEMEKU: So, overall, would you say Dartmouth was pretty supportive, or do you think they were just like neutral?

BENNETT: Overall, I think they were just neutral, or if they were — I don't understand what you're saying.

DEMEKU: About the protests and the activism, do you think they were supporting, and like, trying to make a difference or did they just leave it as is?

BENNETT: The white students?

DEMEKU: The administration and white students.

BENNETT: Oh gosh! A lot of things happened positive for Dartmouth after the protests — Wallace protest — and administration was part of that. Shabazz Hall. The name I don't know — I think first it was called — [referring to] the building — was called the Afro Am House, I think, or something like that, and then it was later named Shabazz Hall.

The recruitment of Black students began in earnest by our group, meaning the Afro Am Society, that generation of Black students who were there in the 1960s. These were positive steps that the administration began to take to really make Dartmouth *different* and to begin to embrace us!

One would have thought, “well today, it might be different in America”, but today, if something like that took place, that demonstration took place, clearly, I believe today would have been extremely violent and a lot of pushback from the whites. But at that time, in this particular location, this particular setting in Dartmouth, there was a real concerted effort on the part of the administration to try to work with the Afro American Society leadership and other Black students to bring change to Dartmouth, in terms of enrollment of Black students, Shabazz society, and bringing Black professors to Dartmouth, creation of the Afro-American Studies department.

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

All of these things came out of—these policies, these programs—came out of the protest movement of the 1960s. Now just student protests, not just a George Wallace demonstration because there were other demonstrations across the country and the George Wallace demonstration simply put Dartmouth on the map, so to speak, in terms of this protest movement. And, fortunately, the administration response was to try to embrace change, and so a lot of African American students at Dartmouth became agents of that change, not only in terms of forcing, if you will, it to happen, to take place, but also became instruments in bringing about the change.

African American students began to get funding from the University, as a result of the initiative, African American students at Dartmouth, to travel across the country and recruit Black students to attend Dartmouth. And then in time get the administration to bring Black faculty to Dartmouth. Then the start of the African American Studies department, which became the African American Studies or the African [and] African American Studies, or something like that. AAAS, Triple A S or whatever it is. That all began with the initiative there, the 1960s. That generation, not just a class of 1969—class of 68, class of 1970, class of 1971—that type of thing.

And eventually all of the protests led to the, and this is probably missed I think in some part, led to the admission of women students at Dartmouth. The admission of white women students at Dartmouth, including a handful of Blacks, that came out of this whole protest movement of the 1960s, initiated by the Black students. It forced a tremendous change at Dartmouth and not only eventually brought in white students or women students, sort of like the civil right—not sort of like, but like the civil rights movement—in the country itself as a whole.

From that civil rights struggle of Blacks — initiated, operated, run by Blacks, etc. staffed by Blacks and the Black participants on a mass basis. That brought about all kinds of other change in the United States. Change for gender equality, women's rights — that type of thing that followed the Black movement, resistance, etc. Just like the 1800s, it was the same thing; the fight against slavery led to the fight for women's rights in the United States as well, and the forming of the national women's organization in the United States for the first time well, the same thing happened to Dartmouth. The Black students protesting racism in a very aggressive, public way,

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

forcing the establishment, if you will, to make changes to accommodate Black people, also segue into white people resisted too and brought about change for whites, including the admission that happened over time, the admission of white women at Dartmouth and then Black women as well.

And that part of the story, maybe oftentimes missed in terms of white women students at Dartmouth, but I don't know. I don't have much to do at that, so I don't really know the official story. I know, to some extent, of white women getting admitted to Dartmouth. But my guess is they don't tell the story too much about the Black student being a key part of the 1960s, that generation, being a key part in enforcing the establishment at Dartmouth to eventually admit women.

DEMEKU: Did you play any other role, like in regards to activism for women?

BENNETT: No, I did not, no.

DEMEKU: Okay, so on April 11th, 1969, a 1949 graduate Samuel W. Smith was appointed an assistant director of admissions. And this was one of the eighteen demands issued by the Afro American society..

BENNETT: I don't, I was part of Afro American Society but I don't think I was part of that actual protest, so but I'm familiar.

DEMEKU: Yeah. Do you remember the eighteen demands that they wrote—the Afro-American Society — they wrote eighteen demands? I think they were ranging from adding the African American Studies, adding more —

BENNETT: [Nods] professors

DEMEKU: Black students—recruiting back students and

BENNETT: the Am House, the Afro Am House. Yeah, yeah, that was a part of that too, I believe.

DEMEKU: Can you tell me a little bit about what you remember about that?

BENNETT: I was not directly involved with that. There were other students who took the initiative to lead that, I was not one of them. And that by that time, that was what — April 1969 — I was leaving Dartmouth. I



Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

was still a part of the Afro American society, etc., but not one of the leaders at that point.

DEMEKU: [Nods]

BENNETT: But I'm familiar with that particular protest like I said earlier.

DEMEKU: Okay, so during all this time, like how did you, what was your motivation?

BENNETT: My motivation for what?

DEMEKU: Persevering for African American rights, like on campus?

BENNETT: What was my motivation for pushing for African American rights on campus?

DEMEKU: Yeah.

BENNETT: Well it's the same motivation throughout my life. Resisting the status quo, the status quo that oppresses Black people, or pushes Black people to the bottom of the society. And I mean we were not, my generation of Black students, were not the first qualified generation of Black students to attend Dartmouth, by no means. There had been plenty of qualified Black students to attend Dartmouth, years and decades before. But we were not there, so why? Well, we know why we were not there. So my efforts for activism at Dartmouth was consistent with the resistance to the status quo, the establishment imposed status quo, on the way things were in America, and Dartmouth was obviously an example of the way things were in America. So my protest was resistance to that. That was my motivation to resist that.

DEMEKU: From your four years at Dartmouth college what were some of your proudest moments or memories?

BENNETT: Proudest moments and memories?

DEMEKU: [Nods]

BENNETT: I would say the Wallace protest was one of them. That was definitely one of them. Another proud moment for me was winning the oratorical contest as a senior, the college's oratorical contest,

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

which was The Benjamin F. Barge Speech Contest. One student had to write a speech and present a speech at a college audience and be voted on, for the prize. So, I won that prize as a senior and my prize money was \$150 [laughter], which I used to buy — part of the money — to buy my \$200 round trip ticket between New York and London, for my first travel abroad. So that was a proud moment for me.

Another proud moment for me was the way the African American students, the Black students, really came together and brought the kind of change at Dartmouth that we did. Very, very significant. And then one other aspect of the change was also the students, certainly the Black students at Dartmouth. We're no longer just students from the Black elite in the United States. Our fathers, my father was not a doctor. I never knew my father, but my family members did not have doctors, medical doctors, or lawyers, or small business owners. We were not government civil servants, we were not part of the Black elite in the United States, the middle class, upper middle class, etc. That was new. These were now working-class Black students at Dartmouth.

And also, my guess is that, and this is something I don't know, but perhaps someone at some time in the future can look at this too, is the composition of the white students may have changed a bit as well. Dartmouth became *less* elite. I think it may have begun to admit working-class white students in some appreciable numbers, which it did not do before it began to make the changes for Black students. These changes were instigated by Blacks. Oftentimes, what happens in the United States, with the exact same at Dartmouth of that just described — the Black people, because of our condition here in the United States, have taken the initiative of resistance and bringing about change to this resistance to the establishment status quo.

And other groups in the society have piggybacked on that resistance movement, protest movement initiated and pushed or driven by Black people. And, as a result, the whole society changes. So, I think that happened at Dartmouth, as well as I mentioned with regard to the women students being admitted to Dartmouth, so it's now coed university. Without the Black student protests, that may not have happened, certainly may not have happened at that particular time. It probably would have happened over time, but at the same time, it *did* happen when it *did*, in large

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

part because of the Black student protest, etc. So the type of changes that the Black students brought about Dartmouth, that's a very proud moment for me as well, and I think the Black students should be given full credit for that.

DEMEKU: Did attending Dartmouth change your perspective on white people?

BENNETT: No, not really. Meaning that it was my experience there was my first experience with the white elite in the country, a day-to-day experience. But my perspective, about white people and the establishment, no, it did not undergo any fundamental change. Somehow, they were more liberal or more giving, whatever, than I had a thought in the past. They were not — are not today, etc. So I had that view going into Dartmouth, and I left with that as well.

DEMEKU: When was the last time you visited Dartmouth?

BENNETT: Since I graduated from Dartmouth. I think I've been there, maybe three times.

DEMEKU: Since you've graduated?

BENNETT: Yeah in 50 — how many years ago — 50 years, I think I've been at Dartmouth, maybe three times. And each time I was invited by the administration or maybe I've been twice? I was invited by the administration once; I was invited by the administration 2-3 times or something like that. And the last time I was there I was invited to speak at the Tuck School [of Business] about doing work in Africa. This would have been maybe 2012 or something like that, and after graduating from Dartmouth — and I did not bother to go to the graduation, by the way, my graduation. I skipped that. Must have been 20 years after I graduated before I went back, so maybe three times and 52 years.

DEMEKU: What made you decide to skip your graduation?

BENNETT: What made me decide [laughter]? For me, it was a statement of rejecting that culture. Basically I had achieved what I wanted to achieve from Dartmouth, which was getting a degree, and for me, I'm going to repeat myself, not attending the graduation was a statement of my rejection of that elitist culture.

DEMEKU: Did any other students follow your footsteps?

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

BENNETT: There were, I know of several other Black students who — at least one — who did not attend the graduation, but that just another one, yes, yes, that one.

DEMEKU: When you were back at Dartmouth, did you notice any similarities or differences from when you were a student here?

BENNETT: Not really, other than the number of Black students there. I was not really engaged with the student body very much when I was there. I was there a handful of times, two or three—and I was there at least twice, I was there a third time and I went there to see a friend not long after I graduated. I went to visit a friend who was still at Dartmouth so I've been at Dartmouth three times since I graduated 52 years ago. I guess I wasn't engaged with the students in any way whatsoever on occasions out there. I could just see that there are a number of Black students there, *obviously* far more. Like several hundred maybe [laughter] 400, 300, when I was there was 30 or something. So, I didn't really look for my change because I just wasn't involved with Dartmouth.

Even now I'm not involved with them, except that I am part of a zoom meeting group; one is a group of Dartmouth alumni we meet twice a month by zoom, sharing our stories about experiences at Dartmouth, and having those experiences recorded for archival purposes. We started this started during the pandemic, 2020. I think I may have started around April or so 2020. And then I was asked to join the group, invited by July or something, and I've been a regular participant since that time. So that's my involvement with Dartmouth along with being a member of Concerned Black Alumni of Dartmouth, CBAD. I think CBAD, Concerned Black Alumni of Dartmouth, spearheaded or prompted this archival interview. So, I'm a member of that as well and that small group of maybe about 15 of us, or something like that, at the most 10 or 15 of us, who meet every so often to discuss changes that should be brought into that at Dartmouth to again push for change for Black students, Black faculty at Dartmouth, etc., increased enrollment, increased Black faculty, now an effort to promote the building of a Black [Shabazz] Intellectual Life Center at Dartmouth, or something like that. So, I'm a part of that group. I was asked to join that group. And Woody Lee, the first President of Afro-American Society, he's one of the 12-15 members of the group, and so am I, but I'm not one of the leaders of that group. Woody Lee is, fortunately, but I'm not.

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

That group is led by Tyrone Byrd, class of 1973, and Maria Cole class of ['84].

DEMEKU: What role did you play, and in that?

BENNETT: I'm one of the members and I suggest strategies or whatever, meaning that I'm one of the participants that pretty much go along with what the leadership says. But I express my opinion as to how we should go about whatever the objectives are. And I'm glad that I am part of that and so these two activities, the CBAD—Concerned Black Alumni of Dartmouth—and this Black alumni group. The formal name is HHP, Hanover Partners or something like that, initiative of some kind or another. I'm not too sure beyond what I described as a formal name but I'm part of both those. And we do those meetings—handle the meeting by zoom.

DEMEKU: Are you planning on visiting Dartmouth anytime soon?

BENNETT: No, I'm not [nods no]. One of the professors in the African American Studies department, has indicated that they would like for me to come up to Dartmouth and speak, share some of my experiences with the student body there, which I'd like to do, but at the moment with no formal invitation. Then, I think maybe I'd have to wait until the pandemic is a bit over, but I'd love to come.

My experiences in my lifetime have been quite a bit different from probably most graduates of Dartmouth [laughter].

DEMEKU: Yeah [laughter]. So tell me a little—Oh, do you have anything else you want to add about your experience at Dartmouth?

BENNETT: Anything I want to add?

DEMEKU: [Nods] To your experience at Dartmouth?

BENNETT: Anything I want to add about my experiences at Dartmouth? What I experienced at Dartmouth?

DEMEKU: mm hmm [Nods]

BENNETT: Not really. I don't think so. Except to say that I'm really happy that I went to Dartmouth. It was a great experience for me. It really was, in many ways. And in the course of this interview, I hope I

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

described some of those ways in which it was a great experience for me, but it was. It really, *really* was.

DEMEKU: Did you ever have any periods where you regretted your choice to choose Dartmouth or have you always been happy with your choice?

BENNETT: Okay, say that one more time what?

DEMEKU: Have you ever regretted your choice of attending Dartmouth?

BENNETT: Have I ever regretted it? If I had the choice of going to Dartmouth again, I think I would. No, I've never ever regretted it, not at all. It was a great experience, no question about it. I'm very, *very* happy with my decision to attend Dartmouth, no regrets whatsoever, no.

DEMEKU: So tell me a little about life after Dartmouth.

BENNETT: Oh well, I'm looking at the time here. As you know, from my biographic material that you've seen. I became an attorney; I went to Yale Law School with a very interesting experience. Now that was a situation where it was like a fish out of water there [laughter] because I just didn't fit there at all, it was even more elitist than Dartmouth [more laughter]. And I don't regret going there, not at all. Again, one of the reasons I don't regret it is that it's important to — certainly at this stage in America, when I was there, certainly the case now as well — it's certainly important to be able to function in a society at the highest level that one can. And having those necessary credentials to do that, is important and Dartmouth afforded me that, and so did a Yale Law School degree as well. It assists me and that's its purpose.

Even with working on this campaign for this candidate for President of Somalia, the fact that I went to Yale Law School, this its credentials, it's an asset to the candidate and he uses it wherever he can. He says "this man who graduated from Yale Law School, graduated from Dartmouth College, is helping to lead his campaign". So it's important to have those kinds of credentials, and so my experience of Yale Law School, though I was a fish out of water, net of elitism, nonetheless I'm glad I was there.

Then after Yale, and even while at Yale, my experiences in Africa began. Actually before too, because I traveled to Africa for the first

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

time, immediately after graduating from Dartmouth. I traveled to Europe, hitchhiked through 15 countries in Europe and 3 in North Africa, the summer of 1969. That was a truly transformative experience for me. One of the most exciting transformative experiences of my life and it changed my life and while I had been interested in Africa, long before the travel, once I began to travel to Africa, it fundamentally altered my life and the path that I took. And so, I became very much engaged in doing activism in Africa, working with the African National Liberation Movement in South Africa — which is primarily the African National Congress, Mr. Mandela's group — working in various other African countries on many different kinds of activities, many, many different kinds of activities, and traveling to 25 African countries over the course of the year and continuing to do work in Africa today.

That's the kind of activities and a broad scope, so to speak, that I've been engaged in and since I graduated. I also practiced law for many years, and I did fairly well at that in Chicago but I combined that with consulting practice in Africa. And consulting practice is what I still do in Africa. And I really enjoy that and I've tried to make a difference. And some of the ventures in which I've been engaged, I think I have made a significant difference in some ways.

DEMEKU: Can you elaborate on some of the ways you've made a difference?

BENNETT: In South Africa, of course the ANC came to power, and my activities — although small scale — we began in 1970 when I met the African National Congress Exile Leadership in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. I interacted with them for about a month during my visit to East Africa 1970 and I worked with them for years. Being a part of protests here in the United States, of anti-apartheid protests here in the United States, acting as a lawyer for several demonstrations, to get people out of jail, who have participated in those demonstrations, participate in demonstrations myself, when I was never arrested, one reason, I think, *maybe* because I knew I had to try to get the others out who had been arrested.

I remember demonstrating against South African apartheid government outside the US consulate in Chicago. We used to demonstrate on a weekly basis or something like that, and I was there. Then, later I worked with them during transition after Mr. Mandela was released from prison and had just the tremendous blessing, blessing if you will, to be at the negotiating table in 1992.

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

May 15-16, 1992, when the new constitution was being discussed, on the type of changes that should be made—type of revisions that should go into the new constitution. An *amazing* experience. So I think in some way, some small way, my being a part of that and being a part of that through people I knew personal contact that I had made, with personal relationships with people who were longtime members of African National Congress, so that's how I got the act that kind of access and so to some extent, I made a difference there and then also in West Africa.

Participating in the development of some major infrastructure projects, such as the West Africa Gas Pipeline which I work to develop as a consultant for the Chevron International Petroleum Corporation. And the pipeline it goes from Nigeria to Ghana, and I hope I was instrumental in making that happen. And there are some other kinds of activities as well, so I think so.

DEMEKU: How did you get involved in working with Nelson Mandela? Where did you meet your connections?

BENNETT: Where did I what?

DEMEKU: How do you meet your connections?

BENNETT: I mentioned Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Before that point, as I mentioned earlier, participated in at least one demonstration, anti-apartheid demonstration at Dartmouth, and then in Chicago, my home, while I was at Dartmouth, and Yale, had a very active anti-apartheid movement. And I was part of that movement in Chicago. I first met the Exile African National Congress Leadership, as I mentioned in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in 1970. I hitchhiked through five countries, East African countries, in 1970, landing in Nairobi [Kenya], taking a train to Mombasa, Kenya and then the train from Mombasa to Gambosi [Tanzania], Gambosi to Moshi, Tanzania and then Dar es Salaam. And I spent about a month in Dar es Salaam and that's where I met the ANC, and then hitchhiked across Tanzania to Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, and then back to Nairobi.

But anyways, I met the Exile Leadership in Dar es Salaam in 1970. I did not meet Mr. Mandela until, *obviously*, until after he was released from prison in 1991. And I think it was in 1991 that I first met him; there was a conference at West Vaal University in



Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

Durban, South Africa, of the ANC leadership that had been in exile since the 1960s when Mr. Mandela was sentenced to prison. They met, I think, in 1991 and I attended that conference. And these delegates were seeing each other for the first time, since they have been in South Africa, for the first time since the 1960s. 1961, 1962 etc. They were also seeing Mr. Mandela for the first time in all those years. That's where I met Nelson Mandela, for the first time.

DEMEKU: What was your experience with working with him like?

BENNETT: Well, I was around him more than I was directly engaged with him, except I was directly engaged with him when he visited Chicago in 1993. I was one of his hosts for the visit in Chicago, and there I was directly engaged with him, in terms of raising money for the election campaign. So, I was one of his hosts, had hosted a reception for him, raised money among African American lawyers and other lawyers, white lawyers as well, but primarily African American lawyers, and then I and my family, we visited him in his hotel room. And I had my mother, my wife at the time, my children and my mother, we all went to his hotel room, we sat there and talked with him, I met him, and it was a very nice family discussion type meeting gathering. And then I met him at home, in home settings in South Africa, several times, so a number of times. One of my best friends in South Africa was a member of his cabinet, the first cabinet in 1994 and he and his wife were close to Mr. Mandela. And so Mandela attended their wedding. This gentleman was one of my best friends — my best South African friend at the time — and so I was staying at his home. And so Mandela was there for the wedding, along with his wife Graça Machel.

I have known Graça Machel since before Mandela was released, I think, in 1987. She was a former wife of the President of Mozambique, Somora Machel, who was killed in an airplane crash. Graça was an activist herself, and since I was involved in Southern African liberation movement activism, I hosted a reception for her in my home in Chicago. This was long, long before Mandela was released from prison, and long before he married her. So I remember being in a friend's home and Mandela was there and Graça was there and Graça and I knew each other, Mandela wanted to know, he was standing there, and he wanted to know how Graça knew me [laughter]. We both explain [more laughter] why she was in Chicago in my home.

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

DEMEKU: Oh, so you mentioned how you were married and had kids. What was the timeline? When did you have the time to get married and have kids and all of that?

BENNETT: Oh well, [laughter] I have three children. So two sons and a daughter. I mean, I went to work every day. And so yeah I had plenty of time, even now I have plenty of time, just requires discipline. Discipline, so to speak, organized.

DEMEKU: When were they all born? When were you born?

BENNETT: Oh, all their birthdays are coming up, I keep reminding myself *don't forget*. Okay my daughter's birthday is on November 2nd, next Tuesday, 1977. My oldest son's birthday—now let me make sure because I kept forgetting their birthday—November 19 is the birthday of my youngest son. He was born in 1982. And December 3rd is the birthday of my oldest son, he was born on December 3, 1979. So I have to remember those birthdays, so I can reach them a happy birthday.

DEMEKU: When did you get married?

BENNETT: I got married in 1974. So yeah, 1974. I would have been, how old was I? 27.

DEMEKU: So, how did you meet your wife?

BENNETT: Mount Holyoke [College]. She graduated from Mount Holyoke. I met her when she was there.

DEMEKU: So earlier you mentioned how you and a couple of friends would go to the nearby colleges and was that when you met her?

BENNETT: Oh, when I met her, when what? The first part.

DEMEKU: You said earlier that during your time at Dartmouth, because it's an all-male school, you and a couple of friends would travel to nearby colleges. Is that when you met your wife?

BENNETT: Right. When Black male students were admitted to the east coast schools, Ivy league schools, over time, a short period of time, after the first of us to arrive at schools such as Dartmouth, Black female students were admitted to the various schools as well, that is, the

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

women's schools, so I met her in the course of a dance or something like that at Dartmouth.

DEMEKU: She attended Dartmouth or?

BENNETT: Mount Holyoke.

DEMEKU: Oh okay. And where's that located?

BENNETT: In Massachusetts, all women's college. They still exist, these all women — I don't know if they are women now, some men may attend — but when I was at Dartmouth there were all women's colleges and all men's colleges.

DEMEKU: Looking back at your life, what would you consider to be your greatest accomplishment?

BENNETT: I just mentioned one. For me the greatest accomplishment, besides my children is — and I've said this before — is a liberated mind. Liberated mind, best by far, my greatest accomplishment.

DEMEKU: Can you elaborate on what that means for you?

BENNETT: Just briefly. [Daughter calls Mr. Bennett] My daughter, hold on, [speaking to his daughter] let me call you back [hangs up]. Okay. I always have to answer her calls.

What I mean by that is, it's difficult for African Americans — but not just African Americans, for Black people in the world, African Americans included — to see ourselves as people. Just like white people, so to speak. [Received another call, but did not answer.] Meaning people with the same capacity in every way, intellectually etc., as white people, as Chinese people, etc. And we have that capacity to change the world, to shape the world, the same as any other people do. It's very easy for Black people to think that white people are the superior force in the world, superior capacity in every way and that's not true. We Black people can shape the world, just as any other people can do. And I learned that. And one day, as we continue to move forward, we will continue to reshape the world. We will. [Nods] We will do that.

We don't have to look to white people to define ourselves, we don't have to look to white people to define the world, to shape the world

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

to come. We can do that too, and we will do it. That's what I mean by a liberated mind.

DEMEKU: Was there ever a time period where you looked at white people to define you?

BENNETT: White people what?

DEMEKU: Where you didn't have a liberated mind, and you valued white people['s opinion of you]?

BENNETT: Yeah, yeah. Sure, sure. I mean just growing up in the south, growing up in America. I mean white people are the dominant force, the dominant power in every way here in the United States. And if one doesn't know the outside world, how would you know that there's another world? A world in which the white people have met their match, so to speak. China, for example. Yeah, I grew up on the dome too, under this umbrella, like everybody else here. And it took me a while to get out from under that umbrella and see the other world and travels abroad helped me to do that. Including the travels to Europe. Those were my first travels to Europe, 15 countries in Europe, and then the 3 in North Africa I talked about. It helped me to see the world from a very different perspective, and what I was taught here in the United States and so that was an extremely liberating experience for me.

DEMEKU: And what motivated you to take that trip and travel all along, Africa and Europe?

BENNETT: Well, I saw that I could do that, afford that. I always thought that that was out of my reach. But at Dartmouth, I saw, and that was a significant experience for me at Dartmouth, as well. There was a poster I saw on one of the bulletin boards at Dartmouth and it advertised a roundtrip ticket to Europe for about I think was \$202—\$224 or something like that. [Receives a call] This is a candidate I work for [pause]. So, I saw that poster and I thought, I can afford that. I can make the money to do that and I won that speech contest for \$150. So that was almost my entire round-trip ticket and then I worked, had a little barbershop at Dartmouth and cut the Black guys' hair and made just a handful of dollars, but then I also had savings from my summer jobs.

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

And then there was this book, for the first time, published by an author named Arthur Frommer, F R O M M E R. *Europe on \$5 a Day*. I bought that book and I was able to travel to Europe with my girlfriend, who became my wife, and her high-school-age sister. Her father — my girlfriend's father — would not let her travel hitchhiking through Europe and Africa, unless the sister went to high school went also. So there I was with myself, my girlfriend, from Mount Holyoke, who became my wife, and her 11th-grade high school sister. We hitchhiked through 18 countries.

DEMEKU: What was your wife's name?

BENNETT: Her name was. Maisha or Bobby Hamilton and then later Maisha.

DEMEKU: Can you spell that out for me?

BENNETT: M A I S H A. Swahili name, Maisha. M A I S H A.

DEMEKU: Sorry, I forgot the questions but ask [pause]. Where did you sleep? and how did you afford to travel once you got to those countries, once you got to Europe?

BENNETT: Well *Europe on \$5 a Day* was a compilation of travel information in each of the countries of Western Europe. Eastern Europe was a Communist area at the time, coming through the country at the time, and so the book did not cover Eastern Europe, but it did cover Western Europe. Hotels, places to stay at, I mean really cheap hotels, \$5 a day hotel, places to eat, hotel or student hostels, etc. All on \$5 a day, bus fares, ferry fares, train fare — the cheapest etc. So that was my travel guide. And my girlfriend and her sister had much more money than I did, I had the bare minimum. But their father made sure that they had enough money. But, for me, I had the bare minimum so they followed everything I did so that's how we made it, and so it was on that basis that that book was what I use daily to figure out where we're going to stay. How we were going to get to where we were going, etc., so I was like a tour guide for the two of them. Does that answer your question?

DEMEKU: Yeah. I think you've mentioned before that you slept on the side of the highway, if you couldn't afford it, you slept on the side of the highway.

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

BENNETT: Oh yes, I did. We did, not just I, but the three of us, the two ladies as well. In Italy was where we — well, in Austria as well. In 1969, we were hitchhiking through the Alps the day that Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin landed on the moon. We were staying overnight sleeping on the floor of a gas station, had a television and we watched the moon landing. This was Austria. In Italy, we slept alongside the highway twice. This is Southern Italy. We were hitchhiking from Rome to Palermo, Sicily [in Italy] to take a boat to Tunis [Tunisia], shipped us to Tunis. At that time, it was a very poor area — surprise for me — but traveling hitchhiking through southern Italy, very, very poor people, Italians. And so there are very few cars, so one night we were just hitchhiking and there were no cars. So we just slept on the side of the road.

When we hitchhiked from Austria to Venice, Italy. This would be before the highway trip that I just described, but we had hitchhiked to Venice and we got out there at night, late at night, and we uh — hate to say it— we slept on— I'll say it — a boxcar, train, cargo. A boxcar, so we just slept there, they left their door open, so we just slept there until daylight, then we got a hotel. Then in North Africa, very little traffic between Tunis and Eastern Algeria, very, very little traffic, so we just slept on the side of the road, until the next day when the traffic was more whatever. So I think that happened. Then in Prague [Czech Republic], we were in Czechoslovakia, we were at the train station and it was too late to find a hotel, so we just slept on the ground of the train station.

BENNETT: I wouldn't do those types of things today, I would not. And with the two ladies with me, I definitely would not do anything like that today. Europe is very different today than it was back then.

DEMEKU: Before I ask my next questions, can you give me a time period of all those travels?

BENNETT: What about other travels?

DEMEKU: The time period?

BENNETT: Oh, oh gosh! I've traveled so many times. I've traveled to Africa well more than 100 times so. Whenever I have traveled to Africa, I always go through Europe, going and coming. Then many times I

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

would simply spend a day somewhere in London [England] or Paris [France] or Frankfurt [Germany] or wherever.

So you can imagine how many times I've been to Europe, just many *many* times, but this has been over the course of—since 1969—that's over the course of 52 years. One year I traveled to Africa eight times from the United States, eight times. But then, sometimes in Africa, depending on the kind of business, I had to travel from say Accra, Ghana to London to take care of business and then back to Accra, Ghana. Lots and lots of travel.

DEMEKU: Does your job fund all of these trips or?

BENNETT: Yes, right. My clients funded the trips. I don't think I haven't paid for myself to travel to Europe, since 1970, I think.

DEMEKU: Was that when you hitchhiked?

BENNETT: Yes, that was the second time I hitchhiked, yes.

DEMEKU: When was the first time, like the year?

BENNETT: 1969, as soon as I graduated from Dartmouth. Second year was 1970, I hitchhiked again, this time it was through East Africa, as I described earlier, and also Turkey, spent 10 days in Turkey.

DEMEKU: And, did you say they were each three months long or was how long were you there for like how long did you hitchhike for?

BENNETT: How long was what now?

DEMEKU: Your trips. Your first two trips?

BENNETT: Entire summer. In '69, I left in June, right after the Dartmouth graduation whenever that was. Although I did not attend the graduation nonetheless, I left around the time of the graduation until I started Yale Law School in September of 1969. So that travel was about three months, about more than three months—July August yeah more about three months and maybe a week or so something like that.

DEMEKU: I think that's all the questions I have for you right now

Robert Bennett '69  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
October 27, 2021  
Transcribed by Nuhamin Demeku '25

BENNETT: Right now [laughter]?

DEMEKU: [Laughter] Is there anything else you'd like to add?

BENNETT: No, I just thank you very much for the opportunity to tell my story, and I hope you found it interesting.

DEMEKU: I definitely did! One last question actually, do you have any advice for any current students — Dartmouth students of color?

BENNETT: Yeah. Yes, I would say take the initiative to obtain this liberated mind that I spoke about. That is not taught to you. I'm certain that is not being taught to you and it is not likely to be taught to you— taught T A U G H T— It's something you will have to attain on your own. And that's important. So I would advise you to do that. Definitely so.

DEMEKU: Thank you so much for spending the past couple of hours with me, I really appreciate everything you've said, and I really enjoyed talking to you.

BENNETT: Thank you very much Okay, I appreciate that. Okay take care, and you know how to reach me if you need me for anything.