Wallace L. Ford II ‘70
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Black Lives
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Transcribed by Zhory May ‘24

MAY: My name is Zhory May and I'm at Gile Hall on the campus of Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. I'm doing a Their Story interview with Professor Wallace Ford who is currently in Harlem, New York. Today is October 28th, 2022, and this is an interview for the Dartmouth Black Lives Oral History Project. Hi Professor Ford, thank you so much for joining me today.

FORD: It's a real pleasure. It's a real pleasure. It's been 52 years since I graduated from the college, and I can only hope that you'll have a similar experience. You say, “well, I hope people remember what the hell we were doing back there because we were doing some real things.”, so it's good to be remembered while we're still above ground. So that's great. I plan to stay above ground for quite a while.

MAY: Right, we sure hope so!

[brief pause]

MAY: I'd like to learn a little bit more about your childhood. So if you could please state when and where you were born?

FORD: [laughter]

FORD: Sure, only reason I'm laughing is because for people who play pool, it's kind of like a 3-cushion, 4-cushion shot how things happen. I live in Harlem,135th Street. I was born on 122nd Street. I was born in January of 1950, on January 13th, which happened to be a Friday. We won't talk about what that may or may not mean.

My first couple of years, my parents lived in Harlem.This is the son of Wallace Ford and Carmen Ford, and both of whom came from not fancy backgrounds to say the least. My paternal grandparents, one was a long shoreman, and my grandmother on my father's side

was a domestic maid in people's homes. My maternal grandfather was a pulling car porter, which is one of the jobs that brothers had in those days, riding all over the country and carrying people's bags and what have you. My maternal grandmother, who was from Puerto Rico as a matter of fact, she was a seamstress her whole life. So my father, when he came out of the military, he did go to college and got a degree in accounting. And my mother, who spent the last few years in high school, had a convent out on Staten Island because of some family issues, graduated I think like 17 years old. There were no opportunities to go to college for a young Black girl. There's no programs, there was nothing!

So she went to work. She started working at the age of 17 as a bookkeeper, which is basically what she did for the rest of her life. My father was an accountant, and my mother was a bookkeeper. And I'm living proof that math proficiency does not transfer genetically.

So as I said, I lived in Harlem as a little kid. And my father, after graduating as an accountant with a degree, looked to get a job with an accounting firm in New York City. No accounting firm in New York City would hire him as a Black man. So, my father had been in World War II in the military. Remember, this is like 1952, ‘53, and we're still in a post-war era.

Long story short, my father went to the Department of the Army as a civilian and they gave him a job. The job was to work as an accountant in Japan because the U.S. had like 350/400,000 troops still occupying Japan. So where you have that level of occupation, obviously, my father's not going there in a military context, but there's an audit function, right? There's all this money going around, so he went there. My father goes to Japan and had to leave his wife and little kid behind because they assigned him to a part of Japan where you can’t bring families, Hokkaido, which is the Alaska of Japan.

And it wasn't until 1950. Remember, there's no internet. There's no long-distance calls. There's none of that stuff. And how a young couple was able to maintain [relationships] in those days, is kind of a lesson for us all, in that, you think you have challenges, right? Or

I think I have challenges. And then there's challenges. And, again, after he kind of proved himself, they transferred him to major cities in the south where there were military bases and we were able to join him.

So, I took my first airplane trip at the age of four with my mother, and we flew to Seattle. And my mother tells me the story that-

Well, those were the days when you got on a airplane, you dressed up, you were in a suit and tie. So I had a little suit and tie, and I also had a medical bag because I wanted to be a doctor. So when I went on the plane, I said to the stewardess, my name is Dr. Ford and if anybody gets sick you Just call me.

ALL: [laughter]

FORD: I just have to laugh at myself. And then of course, I slept the whole way. Then we took a ship from Seattle to, I believe, Fukuoka in Japan, which is where I got to see my dad after close to a year. And I remember our meeting. Just four years old, I barely had an image of him, but as soon as I saw him, I knew who it was and ran and jumped in his arms and we were good.

So that's the first place I went to school, was in Japan. I'll have to send you some photos Zhory because I went to a Japanese kindergarten. Japanese kids wear those little uniforms, and there was me. You'll be able to find me in the picture.

I went to a Japanese kindergarten, but I was taught in English, which is where I learned to read. And was very fortunate, in that, we're all blessed with different skills. I never mastered the crossover, dribble or a dunk, but I learned to read immediately. Immediately. As soon as I knew my alphabet and as soon as I figured [out] see Jack run, literally see Jack run, see Mary run, it all just kind of fell into place. I never learned to read until people-

When I worked as a student teacher with the Dartmouth program, in Jersey City, years later as, obviously, [an] assistant teacher, and asked me to help a young man with his reading, I really couldn't help him because I didn't learn to read. So it's hard to teach

somebody how to learn to read. And it's just like you just do this, you know?

But back to it. I went to a Japanese kindergarten, and then I went to a English Catholic school. Europeans had quite a presence in Japan before the war and there's still Marist Brothers High School, it was called. And I went there in the first grade at the age of five.

I call this part, Zhory, the law of unintended consequences. Because what happened? Because my father faced all this discrimination and racism in the US, he had to go to Japan to find a job and of course, he had bring his wife and son. His son gets to go to school and be in the first grade at the age of five. Which if I was in the New York City public school system, just doesn't happen. I don't care how bright you are. And then it gets really interesting. I spent about a week in the first grade and they put me in the second grade.They put me in the second grade. “This is ridiculous, we just need to put you in the second grade. You're not benefiting from the first grade”.

And I remember going home and telling my parents I'm in the second grade. And "what we tell you about lying? look, I have new books!" And so, as a result, I got really skipped and jumped ahead in the educational process which would not have happened If I was in New York.

Just going forward, I was a freshman at 16 at Dartmouth. I was the youngest person in my class. I'll always be the youngest person in my class when we have reunions.

So I went to school in an English, Catholic school and that was fine. And then we moved, and I went to a U.S. school for the first time. I was now, I guess I was still in the second grade? Maybe going into third grade. I'll never forget, Zhory. I know we got to get to the Dartmouth part, but you asked. You ever transferred to another school in the middle of a semester?

MAY: Yep.

FORD: Okay. So you know when they bring you into class and say "class this is Zhory" and everybody's looking at you, right? Right. So, "class this is Wallace". And then they stand up and start singing the National Anthem. I belt out “God save the Queen”. What is wrong with this kid? I went to an English school.

We left Japan on my seventh birthday, January 13th, 1957. My father wound up with an assignment in Puerto Rico. So, I was a civilian in Puerto Rico, which is where I went to school for third grade and fourth grade.

By the way, I learned to speak fluent Japanese while I was in Japan. Because we lived in town. We didn't live in any military bases, we lived in town and I was the family Interpreter. Little five-year-old, but I was fluent. My mother, who sadly has passed away now, but she would tell me that until I was about eight or nine years old, I would speak in my sleep in Japanese. And of course, most men learn to stop speaking in their sleep period. We don't know if I was still speaking Japanese, but it was just that ingrained with me.

ALL: [laughter]

FORD: Sadly, I don't really remember much because I never learned to read. And that would have made a difference. Although, fast forward just for a moment. When I was like, oh gosh, I was 40, and I was a New York City Commissioner for business for ports and trade, I was asked to head a delegation of New York City officials to meet with our counterparts in the Tokyo Metropolitan government. So this is like 33 years later. I go back to Japan, I'm in Tokyo, which we never lived in Tokyo by the way, but of course we visited.

I've got a quick quiz for you Zhory, which is, of the five senses, which one triggers memory the most?

MAY: Hmm. That's a good question.

FORD: Well, thank you very much.

MAY: Oh, wow. I want to say sight but that seems too simple.

FORD: That's too wrong, yes. It's olfactory. Sense of smell.

When you travel, time zones and all that, you're all disoriented. So we got together, finally, for breakfast the next day and they served me a bowl of green tea. And I smell, and it was like bang! I was back in Japan. I felt culturally comfortable, and in all my-

I guess we'll talk about this point. On all my International work and international travels, I firmly believe that it's more important to be culturally comfortable than to know language. People will work with you on the language, but if you're culturally comfortable, as if you are a knucklehead, you know, you can convey that very clearly that you're a knucklehead, but if you can just go along with different cultures-

And so I was good for the week that I was there and even broke away from the folks at one point and just kind of traveled a little bit through Tokyo. And I went to a Japanese sushi bar. I don't really speak any Japanese but I could say tekka Maki. So that was pretty cool.

But anyway, we were in Puerto Rico. I didn't learn to speak Spanish in Puerto Rico because most of the time we actually did live in civilian quarters on the military base.

And then we came to New York. I was about the age of nine, so I was in the fifth grade now. We lived in New Rochelle for a little while and then we moved to Teaneck, New Jersey in January of 1959. So I was eight in the fifth grade.

Fortunately, I was always tall for my age. I wasn't anybody's Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, but I was tall for my age. I was ultimately taller than most of my classmates. That's another story.

I was in public high school in Teaneck from fifth grade through high school. And we were very fortunate that Teaneck had one of the best public school systems in the country at the time. And so, while it wasn't fancy, we had very enriched programs and they had something in Teaneck called heterogeneous grouping, where you put the students, [to] put it bluntly, students who were most

advanced, [you] put them in some classes and then there's other kids in the rest of them. You probably experienced that yourself. I never asked for that but there I was with them.

My parents, remember this is like 1958, ‘59, [and] they're still hanging brothers and sisters and slapping people off stools and “segregation now, segregation forever!”. All of this is going on and my father and mother told me that It's not about being as good as anybody else. You want to be better. It ain't about good. Well, see as a Black person in America, that would get you in trouble because they call you arrogant. I always considered it a badge of honor. If nobody's ever called you arrogant, you're not doing your job, you know? Because I'm not worried about being as good as you. I'm not worried about that at all. I'm clearly better than you and you just have to live with it. Even if I'm not, I still think I'm better than you. That has kind of played me through my life. Not played me, but I'm very comfortable with it.

I have a son who's now 25 and I tell him the same thing. If you believe in white supremacy, then it's true. And I just was never taught to believe in it. Of course that would result in some rather difficult conversations in these schools, but particularly at Dartmouth, and we'll get to that in a moment.

My parents were not civil rights activists in terms of going out marching, but I always say I was my parents contribution to the struggle. I was always, fortunately, a very good student, math not included. But it came easily to me. I never really struggled except for physics in high school, I think. That was not the struggle. The struggle was, not to be good enough, but to be your best.

You hear about Asian parents that you come home with and get beaten. I didn't get beaten, but it's like why is this a big deal? I responded well to it. Not every child will, but I responded well to it because I was blessed with those tools. I looked to play sports, always got cut from the Little League teams, got cut from trying out for the basketball team. I wasn't one of those kids who didn't engage in sports, I just wasn't that good at it. I enjoyed it and had a good time.

I almost forgot I gotta tell you a story, Zhory. After we moved to Teaneck, this is like the first house of ours we lived in, It was a modest home, certainly, split level and what have you. Within a year, my father bought something that you probably have no idea what I'm talking about. He bought me the World Book Encyclopedia. All 18 volumes.

MAY: Oh wow

FORD: All 18 volumes, right? And you know what I did with the World Book Encyclopedia Zhory?

MAY: You read them?

FORD: I read it from A to Z. I would sit down and read A and then I would go to B. Nobody told me to do this. It was meant to be a reference for writing papers, but I never was really cut from the cloth of doing what everybody expected. I read the encyclopedia and when I finished, I read it again. You talk about being able to answer just damn near any question in class.

And when I graduated from here, we had junior high and high school. Coming out of Junior high, my nickname that was given to me was the walking encyclopedia. If you want to know stuff, you need to learn stuff, simple. It wasn't a chore. My parents never told me to do this.

Remember I told you that I'd called myself Dr. Ford as a little four year old? I decided I wanted to be pre-med.I wanted to be a doctor. I wanted to be a doctor primarily because I didn't know of the universe of professions that are out there. There's doctors, I never met any lawyers, I met doctors. So I took all the necessary courses and took four years of violin lessons to improve my manual dexterity, so then I would be a better surgeon. I was never really a great violin player but I took four years of Latin because they said you need Latin to go to medical school. I took the extra credit courses. I was at Rockefeller University in New York, taking special courses. I really really really wanted to be a doctor.

Now here's something that I would strongly suggest that you look into further, which is part of the reason why you're there but definitely the reason why I was there. By the time we're looking at colleges, it's like 1964,'65. And you ask people from the class of '64 and '65, it's like me, Bob, and Joe.

And you know Dartmouth, right? There's not a lot of that going on. And that's true of all the Ivy League schools and higher level schools. I did not know about Ivy League schools beyond the football scores. Princeton had a very good NCAA team and I knew about them. And by the 10th grade, I really wanted to go to UCLA because they had good basketball teams. Not that I was going to play, but I was young.

FORD: [brief pause]

FORD: I happen to see some documentary about class at UCLA. They had a classroom of like 500 people, and I'm like God, because at that same time in high school I had my first bump in the road academically. I took physics and I got a exam back. It was an E, F, I'd never seen that. My father told me, well, you need to go talk to the teacher and find out what you did wrong. By the end of the semester, I got an A. But I thought about it and I was like 13 years old and I had to figure this stuff out. If I was at UCLA, I'd die. If there's 500 other people in the class and I need help, what would I do? You know? And I was really trying to figure it out and along came something called the Scholarship Service for Negro Students.

You google that and you will find that for a really short period of time, this organization took steps that would literally transform, not just academia, but America. And why do I say that? Because the National Scholarship Service, funded in some foundation, about '64, '65, they started identifying Black students who had done well on the SAT scores, National Merit scores, National Achievement scores.

I couldn't dunk but I could take a test. So that's how I came up on their radar because I was already a National Merit Scholar whose scores and achievement scores were ultimately very good.

In my senior year and every day that I came home from school, there was an offer from some school. I must have got 50 to 100 offers from colleges. The National Scholarship Service for Negro Students came up with schools that I had never dreamed of applying to. I'd never heard of Johns Hopkins University, just never heard of it. Dartmouth was in there, Brown was in there, Princeton was in there as well. Those days you might only apply to four schools or so.

So I went to my racist ass guidance counselor. You remember National Achievement Scholars at your school? So my junior year, I'm like 15 years old, and by the time that comes around, and you remember high school right? Like you know some kids are going to get it. And they skip my name as they call people to come to the auditorium. I went to my guidance counselor and he comes back to me and said "your teacher said you're doing well academically, but you're too arrogant". And I'm like, "I'm only doing what the white kids are doing". I went home in tears, and my father, in particular, said "this is a lesson for you. Don't put your hopes and expectations with these people."

I was so upset I caught whooping cough. They hadn't had a case of whooping cough in Teaneck, New Jersey in 30 years. I was just devastated. But I came back. At that point, I didn't give a shit about National Achievement Scholars because I knew who I was and people could just-

Well we're being taped, so we'll just say it gave me a different kind of attitude because my father would tell me you'll always be held to a different standard, and that's been true for my entire professional life as well. You'll always be held to a different standard, and any time you don't think you are, you are gonna get your feelings hurt.

Ultimately, I applied to Johns Hopkins and Dartmouth, and Princeton, and Brown. And I was admitted at Johns Hopkins and Dartmouth and was not admitted at Princeton and Brown. I had a friend who was working with admissions offices, and once you get into that sphere, it's almost like roulette. It's not you, it's them and they've got all kinds of things. But interestingly enough, when I was 15, I really wanted to go to Johns Hopkins because they had a BA

MD program and you could be a doctor in six years. I'll be 22 and I'll be a MD.

My father drove me down to Baltimore in October for a meeting with the admissions officer and I had not applied yet, but he'd seen my file. We talk and we talk and when we finished it, "okay, you're in! Fill out the forms, but i'm telling you you're in!"

I always tell people, I was admitted to a BA MD program at the age of 15, which is true.That's where I was going. So the fact that I didn't get into Princeton, that's no problem. I didn't get into Brown, that's alright.

My very dear buddy, who sadly enough passed away about three years ago, we had gone through high school together. Dandre DeSandie, class of ‘70, we were both admitted to Dartmouth. Well, here's where technology, or the lack thereof, can change your life because we only had three phones. It was a split-level house, so it's not like you had your own phone. My father overheard me talking about going to Johns Hopkins and how they're all these girls at Morgan and we're going to go down to Howard. And then my father said "oh hell to the no. We didn't do all this work and this negro is going to just go and wind up going to jail!”

So my father was cool because he did not say don't go. He just said you might change your mind. So I winded up going to Dartmouth. And damn, if I didn't change my mind because I was definitely a biology major, pre-med to the core, but by fall of my sophomore year, I just wasn't feeling it anymore. I became a history major.

So my buddy and I, Dandre, went to Dartmouth and we meet what was the second largest cohort, the largest cohort of Black young Black men at Dartmouth ever because the largest one before that was the class of '69. I think about it, I was 16 as opposed to 18, right? And there's about 60 on campus all together by then, and you had what was called a critical mass. That goes back to what I was talking about,The National Scholarship Service for Negro Students. I think it's really important that you incorporate that somehow because this happened not only at Dartmouth, It

happened at Amherst, it happened at Harvard, happened at Colombia, happened at Yale.

When you're only one, two or three brothers, it's hard to demand anything except "could you leave me alone!", but as opposed to where now you have, it's not a large community, you're in Hanover. It's the only Black community in the state. You have enough of a critical mass. And I said, "we can change this place, not just get out of this place, we can change this place". And I've always believed every place I've ever gone to, school or work, I want that place to be different from before because I was there, in a good way.

We had this critical mass and it was, for me, it was just a wonderful experience, in that, in all that schooling I told you about from K to 12, there's never been more than two or three Black students in any class I was in. Never. Now here's these brothers and they're reading Frantz Fannon and James Baldwin, and we can talk about stuff and what have you. I mean, I hung out with my brothers and sisters who weren't in those advanced classes on the basketball court or parties, but you couldn't talk to them about James Baldwin, for example, and I should say, parenthetically-

I almost forgot this, and I certainly want you to know about this,1963 was the March on Washington. I was 13 years old at the time and going into the10th grade it would have been. And my parents, I was their contribution to the struggle.They had to go to work that day. But they got a bus ticket for me to go to the NAACP bus out of Englewood, New Jersey and it went down to the March on Washington.

I was at the March on Washington, and it was so many people Zhory that I never even saw the capital. I never saw the stage. I didn't hear Dr. King's Speech until, I think it was like a Wednesday. Yeah, I didn't hear it until Saturday. Yes, but it was okay because it's just that feeling. And it is hard to convey it if you weren't there during those times.

This had not happened before. All these Black people coming to Washington and white people too from all over the country. And when you came from all over the country in those days, that's like a

two, three-day flight and trip. It was no joke. I came home with this great feeling you know? Your mother puts you on a bus with a bag of chicken. Of course, you always have to have a bag of chicken on a long bus trip. It was just a great experience and I feel very blessed that I was able to actually be there. It's one thing to watch it on TV, it's another thing to actually be there. And I was there, obviously, for the whole damn day and it felt good to be there for sure.

But back to Dartmouth. We're meeting these brothers. We're just freshmen and these brothers, just because they're upperclassmen, they were really, what's the word? Embracing, I guess is the word. They're trying to introduce-

Because we all came from schools where "we're not talking about this, we're not talking about that" and notions of racism. I mean, I am not embarrassed to say it but I don't say it a lot, I came to Dartmouth supporting the war in Vietnam. I thought it was a great idea and then somebody said, "are you stupid?" They didn't say that, but were like "here, read this, understand what's going on over there." Once I read it it's like "yeah, I got that." And in Spring of our freshman year-

FORD: [laughter]

FORD: I have to laugh now because it's 1967 and New Hampshire then was a big deal because it was first place in the presidential primaries. George Wallace came to town, and most of us were in what's called the Dartmouth Afro-American society. Basically, a lot of it was meetings, kind of talking about it and what to do. And we're still trying to figure out what to do even looks like to change this place because we all recognize that we were here as agents of change. Although, our parents, by and large, did not share that view. "You're there to get an education and get the hell out of there, and don't get these white people mad." They may have to get mad.

So George Wallace is coming and you'd have to go in the wayback machine, Zhory, and understand how malevolent and evil a person this was because I mentioned I was in the March on Washington 1963; It was in August. And in September, these little girls got

blown up in a bombing in Birmingham, Alabama under his administration. I mean he was just the living, breathing, satanic version/face of what racial segregation look like. And now he's going to talk about running for president.

So, he's coming to Dartmouth, and it's like the First Amendment, forget that. We never really quite figured out what we were going to do. One of the things we did, It was in Webster Hall, somebody's got up with these signs, "go home Wallace"and we booed him. In fact, we made so much noise that he decided he had to leave, but that's when we went off script. Improvisation is the soul of jazz. It's also the soul of protest and change. We followed him out of Webster Hall, and he's getting in the car and we surround the car. Now with the security around presidential candidates today, they would have shot us. But he had a couple of Alabama state troopers with him and some others, but we surrounded the car and now he's like, "what are we going to do?" And then we started to rock the car and we're rocking the car and you can see the wheels coming off, the tires coming off the pavement. I was at the back of the car and I saw his face. And the look on his face was, "I can't believe I came all the way up to New Hampshire and these niggas gon kill me?" And finally we kind of backed off and he went away.

Well that wasn't the end of the story because CBS Sunday Night News carried it and it was just all over the place and they have it somewhere in the archives of Dartmouth, letters from the alumni. And have you seen those?

MAY: Nuh-uh

FORD: Ask for those. The alumni went nuts, okay? "first of all, we didn't even know you had niggers up there. Send them all back to the jungle!" I mean, really these are Ivy League educated white men and they were just "let me take off the mask and tell you who we really are."

Meanwhile, our parents were calling. That was probably one of the more visible things that we did, at least during my freshman year. We were just getting warmed up because '67,'68, we actually had, I

think it was called the Hinman Report, had come out. Are you familiar with that or have you heard about it?

MAY: Nuh-Uh

FORD: Okay, h-i-n-m-a-n. Hinman report which talked about dealing with-

It was generated by the college which was talking about trying to deal with this notion of inequities and what to do about it. Ultimately, that's started to transform our Afro-American society [from] a fraternal organization, into an organization with purpose. By then, I'm in my sophomore year, I think. I was the minister of information, kind of modeling the Panthers. That becomes important in just a few moments, but we started to actually coalesce around things and focus on admissions, on faculty, on curriculum, and community service, and all of these kinds of things. So if we're going to do admissions, then we need recruitment. It's not enough for the folks who were there in the admissions office, you need to have some of us go out to these schools and talk to these young brothers. We weren't talking to sisters yet, obviously. Now we're starting to see a little more of a-

Starting with the class of '68,'69, you saw an increase in admissions. But there's a thought process going on right now in terms of what we can do about the curriculum. The Black studies programs are still very few and far between. Now I had proposed-

And you can't go through life with regrets Zhory, but I wish that it had turned out differently because one of the things, as you know, at Dartmouth is that if you want to work on the Daily D, you just had to show up. If you want to be on WDCR, you show up and you go through. My thought to the guys was like, "we could take over this school. Within two years, we'd have people in the senior positions at the radio station, at the newspaper, and go through all of those organizations. We can run this place!"

I was never able to get that going. It's bits and pieces, but we could have done that. But I was on the radio station and the school paper. I interviewed Simon and Garfunkel when they came to town and later Sly and the Family Stone, which is an interesting interview by

any means that you consider because this guy, he was so high. This was after the show. He was so high, and so was the entire band and we're not going to talk about me. But it was like, "Sly, I hear that you're going to Africa, right? Yeah, I'm going to Africa." I said, "what about that?". "Well, I'm gonna play my music and [inaudible]. "Forget Africa!"

It was interesting because it was a great opportunity. I was on the radio station which helped me, amongst other things, just in terms of communicating, like we're communicating now. I've done hundreds of TV and radio interviews over the dates, and once you get used to that microphone, once we're used to ignoring the microphone and just doing what you have to do, that's when you're on your way to do these things.

Sadly, at the end of my sophomore year, which would have been April of '68. Martin Luther King was killed. I remember getting word from another one of our Dartmouth brothers, Charles Johnson, class of '71, he comes into the room and says-

Well, we were rehearsing. I was also acting there, and I'll tell you a little bit more about acting. Well anyway, I was in one of the plays, in "White America", I think it was called. And he comes breaking into rehearsals, "They just shot Dr. King!" Everybody's like "what are we gonna do? what are we gonna do?", and my thought was "okay, we want to write a statement on behalf of the Afro-Aam and we're going to put it on the radio right away."

There's another departed Brother, class of '70, Herschel Johnson, who's the best writer I ever knew. And if you put his name down, please and just google him someplace along the line, Herschel class of '70, he inspired me to do all the writing that I've ever done. I had my poetry published in a random house collection of Black poets when I was 19 years old. I've two published novels now, and I told you about the column that I write, right? About the blog? The Point of View blog? Did I tell you about that?

MAY: Mhm.

FORD: So Herschel says we're going to the radio station and we're going to write up a statement. Everybody else in the radio station is white so-

"We're here to make a statement on behalf of the Afro-Aam." Herschel and I write this together and I don't have a copy. I think it's in the daily Dartmouth, somewhere in the archives, and it's April 4th, 1968. So it would have been April 5th,1968.

It was pretty much a diatribe I'd say. I guess we were mad. We're young, and we're mad, and pissed off. It's bad enough about Malcolm X and you're gonna shoot King? And so the last line of the piece was "Black blood will no longer run in the streets alone." So you kind of get the tone, right? And so then they had me read it over the radio. So Herschel wasn't there. I read it over the radio.

Then there's a Black power conference in town the next day. That was still the big deal going on. Well, somebody got a hold of the actual copy. Two things happened. One, they put it in the Daily Dartmouth. Again, if you look at the archives, it's in the Daily Dartmouth. They did a memorial service at Rollins Chapel, so if you hadn't read it, they were passing out copies as people went in.

They actually canceled classes on Monday because this statement of ours caused all of this turmoil. I don't regret it because there's such a thing as being too nice. And as a people, we are always nice and we're always doing the right thing and it's like, no, we're really pissed off. This is ridiculous. And I wasn't a big supporter of King or his policies, but that's okay. Although, when you read about King's policies later on, you realize that he was a pragmatist. I don't think he really believed in non-violence, he just believed that if we all went the violent route, we'd all get killed. That was kind of Gandhi's point as well, which was, not that he believed in non-violence necessarily, but the Brits had all the guns. Obviously, you have to find another way.

For the balance of the semester, I really couldn't show up at any public event without a fight breaking out. I mean, it was really kind of weird and sometimes some of the brothers were with me. We gave as good as we got, obviously, in terms of this and we weren't

hiding from anybody or anything like that. And so by the end of my junior year, I guess they made me president of the Afro-Aam going into the end of my sophomore year. In many ways, I went on being a lightning rod, if you will, for whatever was going on. But we stood the course and stayed the course. Rhetoric aside, we focused on these damn demands. There was like 16 demands. I tried to be strategic-

We tried to be strategic, and we did this together. Let's be very clear about that. One of the things I'd insisted upon, to the extent it was possible for this small band of Black students, we were looking for institutional change, and that's not just admissions. We wanted Black faculty, wanted Black people in the administration. So we got Black people in the administration of Dartmouth for the very first time by 1969, and not never been a Black person working. I think Sam Smith was in admissions and then you have all kinds of Black people in admissions today. There was zero. There was zero. Obviously, we want an increase in admissions but we wanted to have special initiatives with respect to programs like people going to Sierra Leone or Jersey City and Mississippi. The idea is that we wanted the college not to be so insular. We wanted to go forward.

I came back in my junior year because I spent the first part of my junior year in Jersey City. Dartmouth had this teaching program there. You may want to look up. When I came back, Dartmouth had, in their wisdom-

There was a very wealthy Dartmouth alumnus in Chicago, who was of the mind that the same skills that allowed somebody to become a general in the army, or president of the United States, United States senator, or corporate president, were the same skills that gang leaders had. You just needed to be guided differently. They sent about 18 of these brothers up to the school, virtually all of them brought their pistols with them. The way that they had learned to survive and prosper, was that you just challenged people right up front. You don't shout, you find out who's in charge. I was away in Jersey City, and they kept hearing about "Wally Ford". I come on campus and these brothers in my face, "Wally Ford right? " I said, "I know I can't run and I can't fight these guys." We later became-

Not later, gradually and very soon actually became good friends when they found out I didn't control anything that they wanted anyway. What was interesting is that the white students couldn't tell us apart. So they couldn't tell the Black former gang members from Suburban Blacks. We all look alike. Well this got them in trouble because early on, legend has it, that these white guys are drunk and they see these two brothers walking down fraternity row, "hey boy!" So the guy takes out a pistol and puts it in his mouth and says, "if you ever call me boy, again, I'ma blow your motherfucking brains out", and then walks away. And they said, "well which one was it?", "We're not sure, so we better just leave them all alone. He had an afro, an army jacket. Well that's pretty much all of them!"

FORD: [laughter]

FORD: There were very, very few confrontations after that. Of course they knew I wasn't. So I still got singled out from time to time. But I thought it was hilarious.

About half of those guys actually did complete their studies and graduate and get degrees from Dartmouth.They had to do remedial reading and all this kind of stuff just to get to do college work and I have all the respect in the world for the brothers that came through with that. So we, again, continue to pursue those demands and by the spring of '69, we actually had hammered out in negotiations with the administration.

I learned by doing. Negotiating skills have helped me to this day. Now, there's ten things I want, but I got to get these five. If I can get these other two or three, we're doing okay. So you give away something but you keep something over here.

And I was 19, really kind of figuring it out at the time. We ultimately put together said demands and had to take it in front of the faculty for the faculty approval. I look back now and I had this safari jacket and all the hair in the world and a cigar. I gave this presentation, and it passed. It was done. It was done.

By the Fall, we had our first full, Black Professor, Harold Hill, who later headed the drama department. We had a Black studies

program. Robert Maguire headed that up. The number of Black students that came in December, excuse me, September of '69, which would be Class of '73, was over a hundred brothers. Like I said before, we want to transform this institution. It's never gonna be the same after that. I'm comfortable in saying that, we, because it certainly wasn't just me, as a collective group, we're able to do this because-

Back to when we were doing those demands. It wasn't a done deal. If you go through the archives, it's around the time that the students at Cornell took over a building with rifles, and made front page of Time Magazine, we had our Afro-Aam meetings every week as always-

"We ought to take over a building!"

I said “listen, we are the largest Black community in New Hampshire. If we lock ourselves in a building, what do you think is gonna happen then? The last thing we want to do is lock ourselves in a building."

Because a couple weeks earlier, the white students for the Democratic Society and anti-war took over Parkhurst. I don't know if you're familiar with that one. They took over Parkhurst. Meeting with the Afro-Aam we said, "no, we're not taking over a building. That's not a good strategy up here in New Hampshire." Maybe at Colombia or someplace, but not up here in the woods because the state police are not playing. I did visit and go inside Parkhurst because I wanted to show solidarity, but I'm not staying there.

Overnight, they sent in the state police, knocked down the door of Parkhurst, and pepper sprayed them and tear gassed them and dragged them out. The sons of alumni, okay? They had a court set up at Hanover High School. By the afternoon, these guys were in prison all over the state. My roommate, who is white, was part of that and they shaved his head. His father was the founder of a shoe line, he's a wealthy kid, right? And it didn't matter. [They] took them all.

I remember saying to the president, "you see what they did? What do you think they would have done to us?"

It was a lesson to be learned. You have to apply the strategy to the terrain.

Ultimately, we were able to get the demands passed and that was a big deal. A lot of the changes we've seen, whether it is the increased number of females, generally, because that was the next big thing. Of course there's still a continuing struggle, but I must add though, as I'm telling this narrative, I was a disc jockey on the radio station and I'm trying to edit my comments here because of it but I don't really have to.

The way it works at WDCR, I think it still does to this day, is that you have to start off with the hard stuff, Which is doing the 6 a.m. morning show, and then you have to do best of broadway, and rock and roll, and finally you kind of have a little bit more freedom with the 11:00 to 1:00 show because that's when they turn off the transmitter. I'd done all of those shows along the way and I'll never [forget] as a freshman opening up the station at 6 a.m. and giving the weather report and it's 30 below zero. “We're gonna have a high of 15 below zero today”, and I was like, what did I just say? I can't believe it. It got to zero and people we're like "oh, we're gonna get this tanning spray,"

By the time of the last semester of my junior year, I'm one of the senior members at WDCR. So they came up with all the various slots, and I didn't choose any of them.

I said, "I'll tell you what I want to do. I want to go on at one a.m. Just go as long as I want and I'll play whatever I want."

I had an extensive record collection of all kinds of genres. The first night, my roommate, the guy who ultimately got arrested and went to prison for that Parkhurst business, we went out to a commune, some place in Vermont, and the details aren't important. The point is, about a quarter to one, he said, “aren't you supposed to be doing a show tonight?"

I'd already told the people at the station because all this happened that night. There's a record album called "Listen Here" by Eddie Harris, it's about an eight minute song. I said, "just start playing that. Before the song is over I'll be there."

So we're driving back and slipping on the ice and by the time we get into Hanover, they're already playing the theme song.So I'm running up the stairs to the studio and the announcer before me said “stay tuned folks because Wally Ford has got a brand new show, and the name of his show is”-

And that's when I walked in the door and said, "hey, what's happening?".

"The What's Happening Show!"

For the rest of the semester, I'd go till like 2, 3, in the morning. My classes were really in the morning at this point and people would drop by and it became a thing. People at the fire station would call. Truck drivers would call in. It was like a thing for a while. I was doing that. I was writing for the school paper, acting in plays, but let the record show that I did maintain my academic standards. I was always on the dean's list and ultimately became a senior fellow going into my senior year.

And I should also mention, yes, in my junior year while I was down in New York doing that Jersey City stuff, I joined a Black Theater Company in Harlem. I was acting there. It was my first professional acting stint.

FORD: [laughter].

FORD: I have to laugh because what was I thinking? I commuted between Dartmouth and Harlem every week of winter and spring semester. I'd go to school and leave Thursday afternoon and fly to New York, and perform Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, and then fly back on Sunday. I think I was taking extra courses that semester, I made dean's list.

Don't try this at home folks, right? But I had a great time! I really enjoyed acting, but when I was getting ready to graduate, it's now '69/'70, the roles for Black actors were things like "I shot my mama. I shot my mama part II." You know, Superfly. Superfly part 7. So that kind of squashed my acting career.

I was doing all of these things. I became a senior fellow and we had a string of folks getting Rhodes scholarships. Black guys. I did not apply for the Rhodes scholarship.

This is where mentorship is so important because there's nobody to say, "listen."

Why didn't I apply? Because Cecil Rhodes made his money off the backs of Black people in Africa, and I don't want that money.

"The money's been made brother. Take some of that money and go do something with it." There's nobody to tell me that at the time.

We had a string of brothers already doing it. Next year, brothers got it as well and so on. As I said, you can't live with regrets.

But I did become a senior fellow and did a senior fellow piece that was on Black, political history in America. I didn't have any classes obviously in my senior year and I was able to lecture Black history. I guess this was an African American history course or American history course and we focused on Black history. I was a guest lecturer at Dartmouth. It wasn't just here and running around. We did a little bit more than that. At the time, Zhory, I was going into my senior year. As I said, I stop wanting to be a doctor. By then, I said I think I want to be a college professor because I could study Black history better.

Going into my senior year, with my, quote, radical background, obviously not as radical as what's going on today, I'll never get tenure. And I didn't even really know what tenure was. Again, I never really got good guidance on this.

They said "you read well, you speak well, why don't you go to law school?"

I don't want to go to law school! You know, I'm thinking of Perry Mason and stuff.

He says, [there's] "a lot of things you can do with a law degree other than being a lawyer". And with that, I applied to Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Stanford and Berkeley Law schools. Just with that.

Wound up being admitted to Berkeley's law school, Columbia's law school, and Harvard's Law School. Same with college, I was put on Yale's waiting list and was rejected from Stanford. If you can figure out what the metrics were to do that, you're smarter than a lot of people.

This is kind of like the [inaudible] to this story, which is that I got admitted I guess in April/May. Trying to figure out where to go to school. I wanted to go to Colombia because I had an offer to be a disc jockey on the radio station here In New York.

FORD: [laughter]

FORD: I have to laugh. What was I thinking?

And I was also offered a real gig with the radio station in San Francisco where you've heard of Sly and the Family Stone, right?

MAY: No.

FORD: No, okay. You can google them. He was huge. He was a disc jockey before he became a performer. He was on the radio station. I thought I was going to go to Stanford and orb to Berkeley and be a disc jockey at night and be in school during the day. We wouldn't be having this interview today because I just probably would be living in a tent somewhere

FORD: [laughter]

But I was going to do the same thing in New York.

Columbia Law School said, "Well, we can't give you a dormitory because your mother was still living in Teaneck, New Jersey. Your mother lives within 60 miles, so you have to stay at home."

And I said, "why would you do that to my mother? I haven't been home in four years."

So Columbia was out. So I'm thinking I'm gonna go bolt out there and not go to Harvard because I didn't like Boston. I was working for a record company that summer and he had me talk to a lawyer who had actually gone to Harvard Law School, and he was a good guy because he didn't say "what the hell's wrong with you."

Yeah, he's a white guy and he said, "there's a lot of benefits of going to Harvard Law School. You really ought to think about that."

I thought about it, and said yes to Harvard Law School.

The upshot of that story though is that Teaneck is in a suburban community. There's suburban papers. My mother had moved [to] 28 East Maple Street, I'll never forget. She put a piece in the paper, but it said 26 East Maple Street. My mom said, "oh, they got it wrong!"

I said, "don't worry. When they go to fire bomb us, they're going to hit the white people next door."

In those days, it took about six weeks to change your magazine subscription. It's 1970. I had this thing that I had to have my Sports Illustrated subscription to be able to succeed in law school as a college [student]. Always had to have that.

Now it's like July and I still don't have a dorm assignment. I call Harvard Law School and ultimately get the assistant Dean, who later became the dean of Howard Law School, and then the president of Fisk University, and he says "Wallace, we have a letter here from you saying you're not coming."

"I'm saying okay..."

So he reads the whole letter to me, and it's like, not only am I not going to go to law school, take me off the list, I don't want to be on the waiting list, I'm joining the Marine reserves, I'm moving to St. Louis, where I'd never been and on and on. As I'm reading this, I'm like wow. My guardian angel said ask him to read the entire letter.

26 East Maple Street, not 28.

So I could prove that over the phone and they put me back, cause I was out of the class. I had to bump somebody on the waiting list to put me back in. I was out of the class and they sent me the letter, the signature. I have a signature as we all do, and it wasn't even an attempt at forgery. And the address in St. Louis was an empty lot.

I said "this is not a prank. it's not a prank."

By now, the Nixon Administration is in full-blown, you know? And you didn't have to be Huey Newton. I was obviously on somebody's radar list and tried one of those career damaging incidents, and it was all based on my activity at Dartmouth.

The reason I sent you that commencement speech, Zhory, is because it occurred to me that, "she needs to see this speech."

By May of our senior year, we went to the dean and said "our parents are coming and there's no Black speakers, and there should be a Black speaker."

So the dean was like "alright, I'll let you guys decide who it's going to be."

So we go huddle and it's like, "okay you Wallace, you get to do it."

"Great."

I had this job in New York and doing my senior fellowship and my presentation, and all that went well. I had to drive back in a day or two. June 14th was graduation. It was a Sunday. I guess I got back on Friday. And this is something I do not encourage you or anybody else to try to do but I don't do drafts. I write and that's it. it's a gift or

a curse, I don't know, but I don't do drafts. So I wrote this speech and I was trying to balance the fact that it's like 5,000 white people and our parents there,

"and it's time that we just tell you what you need to be told."

On the other hand, it's our parents there right? I don't want the brothers mad at me.

"You said what in front of my mother?!"

So you got to try to find this balance. Because it was going to be published in the D, I had to get it to the editor noon the next day or something like that. So I go to hand it to him and I'm thinking "I'm not changing a word. You can't make me."

And he finishes, he says, "Wally", and he's looking up at me.

I said, "yeah?"

"This is the most beautiful thing I've ever read."

So if you go into the Daily D archives, the speech is there. That's not the speech I gave. It's pretty much the speech I gave, I kind of punched it up a little bit, but the speech I gave you is the speech I gave.

I'll never forget that day. My parents were there, my friends, brother's parents were there, and everybody else is getting to sit together. I'm sitting up on the stage with this guy who's the valedictorian, who nobody had seen for four years.

"So you're the one with the 5.0."

I remember giving the speech though. It was one of those moments. I was only 20 years old, Zhory. You have to put that in that context, but I never felt 20. I just felt like this is where I'm supposed to be. The last lines of the speech are "to you mothers and fathers, your sons are now with you."

And so there's dead silence. You imagine the green, it's dead silent and then the brothers got up to give a little standing ovation, and then everybody got up.

I'm like, "wait a minute! Did you hear what I just said?!"

FORD: [laughter]

It was really quite a moment. And as a parent now, I am just so pleased and so blessed that my parents got to see that.

ALL: [pause]

Let me take a moment here.

FORD: Yeah, because they've both passed away now, of course, but I just think about it. Remember I told you a story when I was a little kid in Japan and..

ALL: [pause]

FORD: Just a moment.

And to see things turn out the way they did. And of course, there's still chapters to be written, but to think that they got to see that is probably one of the great blessings of life. I grew up an only child, so the brothers I went to school with were my brothers.

ALL: [pause]

FORD: Wow, that's surprising, I didn't think I would get emotional over this. So you're gonna cut that part right?

ALL: [laughter]

FORD: I'm kidding. If you're not human, then you never cry. I'm glad I ascribe to being human. It's like 20 years later. No, 25 years later. 25 years later, I go to my 25th reunion, up in Hanover, of course. And one of my classmates, white, says to me,

"I read your speech to my son."

And I'm like "woah, wow"

because there was a lot of animosity. My picture would be on a poster, and they set the poster on fire. I mean, guys tried to run me over one night after the radio on Mass Row.

FORD: They missed. [laughter]

When I tell this story to some folks, I say, sometimes even if somebody doesn't agree with you, if you just tell the truth in a way that they can understand it, you have to respect it. They may still not agree with you, but you have to respect that. The last lines actually come from a poem by a departed brother, Herschel Johnson.

And so we're still at it Zhory, after all of these years. And I don't know what's next on the agenda, but these days I'm a college professor after doing all these many other things in life, and I wound up back in higher education on a whim. I was happy to be at the Columbia School of International Affairs, talking to the former mayor that I'd worked for, and somebody I'd worked with in the New York State governor's office said,

"Hey Wally, would you like to teach a class this semester?"

And I always tell people, it is a very good thing that I was not born female because I find it very hard to say no. So I said yes. And I got to tell you the first time I stood in front of a class, after all the things I had done, I've been in government, have been an investment banker, been a lawyer, and government officials, international law, and all of this stuff.

This voice said, "this is what we want to do."

It's 10 years to get to be a full-time professor, because you had to climb the ladder from being an adjunct, but I was fortunate because I had a JE, that was counted as P for PhD purposes because I never would have done [that] otherwise. Then you had to climb the

ladder to get tenure, and I got tenure last year. I think I was the oldest person in the city University of New York to get tenure at 71, but usually, if you get tenure you're in your 30s or 40s, maybe you're in your 50s, but my trajectory is different. And as you heard me say, for years, I was the youngest person to do whatever it was. 20 years old graduating from Dartmouth, 16 getting out of high school, 23 getting out of law school and so on. And then you see "this" kind of happening where people who are your peers were born 20 years later than you.

FORD: [laughter]

Then it's like "okay, we don't need to talk about it anymore."

I'm blessed with good health. Because I had great parents, I do believe I've been a good dad, which is in many ways as important as anything else that I've ever done or ever will do.

I got into writing, I have two published novels, where Dartmouth actually is in the first novel. I've done that, done radio, done TV, never done any movies.

Oh, there's one other thing I have to tell you about. I spent the summer of my junior before my senior year started in Ghana. All right. But we have to go back before that, which Is that we had our first Black Arts Festival in my sophomore year. You familiar with the Festival?

MAY: Yes, sir.

FORD: I was a part of the organizing committee for that. Ebony came up and covered. That was a big deal. When your parents still have any magazine on the coffee table, all that kind of stuff. I was a part of the organization, so I was with some of the reporters.

This was in February, you know, Winter Carnival was in February. I came down in March for spring break and went to see him. I'm looking for a job, right? And so I'm sitting there, his name is Peter Bailey, who's very closely associated with Malcolm X if you read some of the autobiographical information about Malcolm X. And I'm

sitting there talking about trying to get a job for the summer and he starts to look at me like this.

ALL: [pause]

FORD: And he says, "my God, you have the same eyes, the same smile."

And he says, "You look just like, Malcolm X."

Now, I had heard it from time to time, but I don't know if anybody ever told you you look like anybody, but when you look at the mirror and brush your teeth, you see Zhory, right?

And I'm like "whoa."

because I don't know, I had a poster of Malcolm X, as everybody did. And it's like "well, thank you."

And he says, "You should play the part of Malcolm X in the movie."

because they were making, this is 1968, they were making a movie, 20th Century Fox is making a movie. James Baldwin was doing the screenplay and Betty Shabazz had asked Peter to oversee the screenplays, so that James Baldwin's personal preferences did not come out in a Malcolm X story.

And so he said, "you need to meet Betty Shabazz because she'll see that you play Young Malcolm in the movie."

And again, I'm 18 years old. So, because I was in New York over that fall semester, we ultimately arranged for Betty Shabazz and I to meet at a restaurant here in Harlem called the Red Rooster. I come over from Jersey City, I only have one suit, and only one dress shirt, and only one tie, it was blue with green polka dots, and had all the hair in the world, and I get there early, and I'm at the bar waiting and the only thing I drank was Boone's Farm wine. The good vintage variety. Last week's vintage, right? And that's obviously scotch on the rocks.

As I'm taking a sip, in walks Peter with Malcolm X's widow and Amir Baraka's wife. This is all the Blackness in the world, and I'm standing here with this damn drink in my hand.

So I sit down with them, and it may have been about one of my worst encounters ever with anybody that I cared to make a good impression on. I ordered pork. If you knew Betty Shabazz, she looks at me like "Let me die Lord."

ALL: [laughter]

FORD: And that was the high point. It just got so bad.

By the time we finish, it's no longer, “I could play the part in the movie.”

It's like, “can I stay in the Black race?”

We fast forward now. I'm out in Ghana. My father's working for the state department, and I could come out as his dependent. I was taking courses at the University and I wander across campus one day. I got course credit, by the way, for Dartmouth for it, and I walked across the campus and I see what is clearly two sisters, who are American. You can tell by the hair and dress. I was trying to be polite, I said, "hello, how are you?"

And one of them says, "hello, Wally!"

Have you ever had that happen, where you do not know who they are?

MAY: Mhm.

FORD: I'd like to think my skills are a little better now, but tell Peter Bailey you saw Betty Shabazz and didn't know who she was.

It actually got worse. I was literally destroyed, and my father is coming to the embassy, and he talked to Betty Shabazz. He said, "you know, my son's really upset."

She said, "tell him it's okay!"

She said, "the resemblance was just jarring."

Her husband wasn't dead more than two years, and in walks this ghost if you will. But tell him "we're fine."

We now fast forward about 12 years later. I'm working for inner-city broadcasting. It's a Black owned company, and Percy Sutton is a major figure here in New York, and on the board of directors is Betty Shabazz. He was Malcolm X's lawyer and the family lawyer.

Okay. As vice president of a small investment company, we'd invest in Black owned companies around the country, and we'd ask to have board members on them, so I was on the board of this company in LA, and he put Betty Shabazz on. We would fly across the country about 3-4 times a year and we were good then.

By then this is years later, she says, "actually, you're a little taller but he was a little bigger in the body."

We didn't spend a lot of time, we'd just talk about stuff. And so she would refer to me as the son she never had. And so now we fast forward a few years later and I run into her at some reception, and she says, "how's your wife?"

I had been married and it didn't work, so I said it didn't work out.

"Oh I've got five girls! Did you want a tall one, the short one.."

I cannot see myself dating Malcolm X's daughter. I got his poster up. I just can't do it. So she prevailed and we did have a blind date. Very beautiful woman, Illyasah. I'm sitting there and she sits down. She comes in the restaurant and sits down, and it's like, one Mississippi, two Mississippi...she says, "You do look like my father."

"Check, please! Let's go!"

ALL: [Laughter]

We've remained friends, but we've not dated or anything like that.

I can't wrap my head around that, but these are some of the stories that come out of this and being around Dartmouth. All kinds of stuff happens for sure. I met Judith Jamison, brought Alvin Ailey up to Dartmouth, sitting there in the hop having a cup of coffee, we're just chatting before she became "Judith Jamison." It was a great experience, I don't regret it. I appreciate more than anything, the fact that we've been able to maintain the brotherhood, not just of the guys who were there at the time, because, sadly, several of them passed away now, but we have this...You've heard about the Hanover Partners?

MAY: I don't think so.

FORD: You heard about BADA, of course.

MAY: Yes.

FORD: Hanover Partners is a more informal group of just brothers from my day, on and on to now. We meet every two weeks just to kind of...camaraderie, brotherhood, never worried about Robert's rules of order and all that kind of stuff. But just, you know, kind of maintaining contact, and we should have you as a guest just to kind of talk about what you're doing. There's a zoom every two weeks. I think it would be next week as a matter of fact. You have zoom as well, right?

MAY: Mhm.

FORD: Because I don't know what this platform is. I think it's really important for two reasons, one is every generation grows up thinking they just discovered shit, right?

ALL: [laughter]

FORD: "There's the sky, no one's every saw the sky before, right?"

And there's certain, common strains with respect to the struggle. Whether it's 1915 or 2015 or today, there's common strains

because you always have people who are looking to try to accommodate, people are looking to change in a more drastic way, and then as people are looking to find some middle ground, I think that It's important to have-

I mean, I wish I knew what the brothers in 1925 were thinking, for example. You actually have an opportunity to talk to people from 50 years ago, who are still alive and relatively well.

ALL: [laughter]

FORD: I think it's a benefit because it gives you perspective. Strategies that worked before, still work now. But as I hope you've heard me say, more than anything, the struggle continues. I think there's no time to think about spiking the ball or breaking the tape, I'm strongly concerned about the fact that we're actually looking at a regression. In 2024, if the republicans control the Supreme Court, the Senate, the House, and the Presidency, it's not going to be a very good time for Black people. The 13th amendment is on the table. It won't allow slavery again, but if you read the 13th amendment, the 13th amendment says that people cannot be enslaved, except if they're convicted of a crime. So why do we even need that anymore? Nobody's doing slavery anymore. Well you start peeling away protections that you thought were for granted. It can be very difficult. It's why I became a history major, in large part, it's just to learn, because those who do not know history are condemned to repeat it. There's just things that you and your colleagues and contemporaries want to know, not just what's in the book, But the experiences that people had. I'm not big on "We did this and we did that.", but that there's common experiences. So, how do we get past it? And I hope I've been able to share some of those with you. We didn't get past it, but we were able to get success because we did not accept no for an answer.

It's really interesting when you say "we're not accepting no for an answer. We'll stay here all day. We'll come back tomorrow."

It is really important that people keep that in mind as well. So, here we are.

So as I say, "aside from that Mrs. Lincoln, how did you like the play?"

ALL: [laughter]

FORD: Anyway, is there anything you want to ask me Zhory? Because, literally, I've been doing all the talking. So, is there anything you want to ask me?

MAY: Yeah, I would like to know your current impressions of Dartmouth today as you've come back to visit, and from afar, what is your perspective as an alum now that you've graduated, and if there's anything you would change?

FORD: I'm tryna think. The last time I was up at the college, it was probably about 4-5 years ago, but I would say I keep track with what's going on. I've attended Board of Trustees meetings by zoom and all of this stuff, and I think there's there's a danger in thinking that we have won. Because you do see more Black people there, Black people identify differently than when I was there.

When I was there, you're Black. You're African, you're Caribbean, mixed race; which is something I just, frankly, just don't even understand because no police officer in America believes in it, that's for sure. And I hate for people to find that out the hard way that mixed race does not play. This country doesn't acknowledge mixed race in any legitimate fashion.

I did a lot of work in South Africa where mixed race, called colored, was indeed codified and that produced a tremendous split, what was then the Black community and the non-white community. We dodged a bullet here in the U.S. because white people adopted the one drop rule. I don't care if you're light, bright, kind of white, or you can't see you in the dark, everybody's in that same position. But if we had the colored or mixed race rule in place, then let's think about it. Frederick Douglass wasn't Black, W.E.B. Dubois wasn't Black, Duke Ellington wasn't Black, shall I go on? I mean the list goes on. Walter White wasn't Black and so on. Barack Obama certainly wasn't Black, right? I don't think we need that at this point. I think people who identify that way, typically gonna get their

feelings hurt, someplace along the line, and perhaps in a very difficult way.

But I think that the emphasis on white women's rights supplanted a lot of the concerns about the rights of Black people, men and women, because I don't know that Black women are necessarily being kept in mind. Now it's 52/53 percent female. And obviously, you get counted in that number but I don't know if that translates into board positions, or faculty positions. What do you think Zhory?

FORD: When do you get brought into, other Black females get brought into the conversation? So, I'm concerned that there's ways that you can divide up a grouping that is confronted in a very comprehensive fashion, you know? And then I-

As I brought up before, and not even joking, you can say you're mixed race all you want, you get stopped by a cop on the highway on your way to Boston, and they're not looking at mixed race. I just think that people identify by their fraternity and their sorority and all kinds of other ways. I think that's great, but there's got to be some basic reasons for collective, for a collective relationship among people who are Black, if only for self-preservation but also for self advancement, you know?

The people who do not want to see progressive change take place at Dartmouth is for the Black community to vulcanize because then you don't have a unified front.

I sound like the old man in the sea, but back in my day, we just didn't have those fractures. The African brothers were with us, light-skinned brothers with us because we recognize that a collective action would benefit all of us. If you start splitting it up, I'm a Que, I'm a Alpha, Gamma, Delta, It's like great. That's all well and good, but can we come together under some basic umbrella in terms of the concerns?

I guess that's a long answer to your question, but the other part is it's no time to spike the ball. I mean, there's hardly any Black faculty, but full-time faculty, tenured faculty. Why in part? Because nobody wants to move up to Dartmouth with their family and live

there for the next 10 years in those kinds of circumstances. Unless there's a notion that there's a community that is welcoming and prepared to embrace their presence.

Dartmouth is not the only place that's not in an urban center. In the activities I'm doing with the Black alumni, we could do a lot better with respect to faculty for sure, different kinds of programs, like I said we had the Black Arts Festival.

We did that in part to say "We are here. We are here."

ALL: [pause]

MAY: Do you have any advice for Black students currently attending Dartmouth right now because I feel that as a 24, partly because of the pandemic, and partly because of other factors, Black students at Dartmouth are at a point where it's divided, as you hinted to with being like "I'm an alpha, I'm a que, I'm a Delta, I'm a AKA", do you have any advice for how to create cohesion in a collective?

FORD: Well, this is not new by the way, this situation. Once the Greeks got on campus, you start to see their fragmentation.

I was on the board of advisors for the Rockefeller Center for several years. They'd bring me up about three, four times a year, and I'd ask "Where was the administration? I'd like to meet with Black students while I'm here.", and I'm staying an extra day rather than going back to New York, so I could meet with folks and maybe two people show up.

I said, "What's going on?"

They said, "well, there's a que, psi, phi, thing going on down the street, there's a track meet going on over here."

and it's like, "okay, I understand that, but it's not like "do you know who I am kind of thing?", but we would have loved to have somebody from another era.

There's a certain insularity that takes place here, but I think what it comes down to is, what would be a common cause? Admissions is still an issue. The day Black students tell alumni to take our foot off the pedal with respect to admissions, is the day that you'll see admissions go down. Getting somebody to move to Hanover, you know, a Black person who would move to Hanover with their family seems like a big push, so what are some creative alternatives?

Okay, well for one thing, the last two years has taught us that you can actually teach a class by a zoom. Dealing with the administration, you can say, "we have faculty that needs to be on campus, let's say three days a week and they can be home four days a week.", something like that. And we can do zoom for meetings.

You have to accommodate that situation because imagine if you're a 30 to 35 year old scholar, and you have a wife, a little kid, and everybody's Black, and you go up to Hanover. It's like, where's a sister supposed to get her hair done? Do I want my kid to be the only Black kid in every class there? I mean, I was, but I wouldn't recommend that for everybody.

I think the burden is on Black students, to put the burden on the college to say, "these are the facts.", but we're in the 21st century for God's sakes. How can we adjust the circumstances that we can attract faculty and not have them totally disrupt their lives?

Maybe over time, people will feel comfortable moving there, but there needs to be a critical mass. Who wants to be the first one, or the second one, or the third one?, whatever it is.

I think it will be faculty and administration because that's the heart of the college. Admissions is great, but unless you have the administration and the faculty really kind of driving the engine, you wind up with students coming in and feeling disaffected and not really engaged and involved in all of those kinds of things. So, yeah. That would be my

MAY: As a final question, do you have any advice or wisdom to impart on people attending Dartmouth College?

FORD: Say it again?

MAY: Do you have any imparting wisdom or advice for-

FORD: Imparting? I'm not going anywhere. I'll be around! Oh, you mean right now? Yes.

ALL: [laughter]

FORD: That's a useful question. Number one would be to remember why you're there, which is to get an education, okay? But education is not contained solely in those books. You get educated by broadening your experience, whether it's going to speaker programs, taking courses that you don't know anything about, study abroad programs or working in Jersey City or whatever it is. I tell students, my students, all the time, college is not a job training program, college is a life training program, and you don't train for your life just by going through 25 different syllabi, or however many courses. That's kind of a foundational aspect of it, but people need to remember why they're there, they're there to become a more complete person. You will not graduate as a complete person and none of us are ever really complete, but you want to be more complete than that smart ass high school senior that got out of there in the first place, right?

And the other is that it's not just about getting a job. I'm repeating myself, but if all you did is went to college because you want to get a good job and make good money and be able to live in a nice house, then every sacrifice that your parents made, and people that you never will know made, and all those things are really being played cheap, because the idea is, when we leave Dartmouth, you have some vision on how you can make this world better. I don't think that that's too grandiose. None of us will make the world better by ourselves, but at the end of your story, you made a difference. And you're not making a difference just by making money, that's not enough. Giving to charity is not enough. Giving of yourself is everything.

My advice would be to, right now, learn as much as you can about everything that you can, so that you'll be prepared to, it sounds kind of grandiose, but to make this place a better place. People made too many sacrifices just so that somebody can live in a big damn house. God bless them if they are, but if that's all you did, that's really that. That'd be dismaying to say the least.

That's what I would say, people need to focus on, and again, there's no magic trick to it. For myself, a lot of it was just instinctive because once you get to college, you get taken out of this-

But, again, I kind of instinctively, I took courses in Islamic history, for example, because it's different. I mean, I was very good at spanish at the college, and I was doing 20 Page papers in spanish by the end of my freshman year. And I was going to spend a semester somewhere in Spain, and I didn't because I was committed to being more involved with the Afro-Aam program. I look back on it and say, "well, maybe you should have gone to Spain."

On the other hand, I've been to Spain. It's not like I never got to Spain. I've been to a lot of other places in the world, and it seemed like the right thing to do at the time. I would say to maximize every opportunity for learning that exists at the college because once you get out of college, the opportunities for learning start to narrow. We will always learn through our entire lives, but the opportunities to take a course in Islamic art or something like that, maybe not something that is easily able to do. But I think the reason I didn't [go to Spain was] because I thought I could help make the college better for Black people and in turn, make it better for Black people in a lot of other places as well. Probably a little grandiose for a 79 year old rethinking that way, but that's what I was thinking. I can't knock that but it's got to be more than just self. I think everybody's capable of doing that, and it's very rewarding,

You may not get a medal, they may not name a dorm after you. That's okay, but if you know that you made it, I guess, more than anything else, I'd like to say that wherever I've been, I've made a difference. In terms of work activity and so on, you want to make a difference and it should be positive. I don't think that's too much to

ask as certainly, our great-grandparents, who I never knew, but I know history and I know what they had to be dealing with, that's for sure.

And as I said before I got all choked up about it, which is that, maybe that's the best thing I could say Zhory, which is that, if you could see yourself through the eyes of somebody in your family who lived in 1900, what would they think? Would they be glad that you got a nice house and a nice car? Because that's when people were being hung from trees, every day. Just looking cross-eyed at somebody would get you killed. And there's so many don'ts for being Black in this country and not just in the South.

And I'd say well, did you make a difference beyond your own self?, because believe me, in 1900, we were all in the same pot. People didn't care who you were. On a given day, they'd burn a whole town down. Rosewood, Tulsa, just a couple of examples, burnt the whole town down. It was really a era of terrorism. And so what are we doing to make sure that doesn't happen again? And if we don't think it couldn't happen again, it couldn't possibly happen again. Then we are fools, you know? And we have always had to be vigilant in that regard. Not that I called anybody a fool. I didn't mean to.

ALL: [laughter]

FORD: I said we are fools!

What else you got there Zhory?

MAY: I'd really love to ask you more-

FORD: Go ahead, i'm good for about another 15-20 minutes.

MAY: We have about 10 minutes left before the recording maxes out.

FORD: Okay, I can speak faster. I'll speak faster.

MAY: I'm really curious how how did you fare? I don't know if this is getting too personal, but how did you fare back in your time at Dartmouth with no woman being on campus?

FORD: Well, it was very interesting. I think all male schools have truly skewed America, because the leadership of America over 200 years has been, basically, in large part, graduates of the Ivy League schools, which are all male.That's not good. It's reason why you have sexual harassment, you've got sexual discrimination, and it was normalized over the years.

The only time then you saw women was as a date and vice versa, which is why same-gender schools are not a good idea any more than same race schools are a good idea. Now the HBCU communities are gonna run after me, but that's okay.

Socially, men could be very creative. We found every woman school within a 250-mile radius of the college, but that doesn't answer your question. I think that it really skewed and scarred. You can't normalize the relationship between people just from Friday to Sunday or something like that.

And again, many women go to these schools looking for a husband, literally looking for a husband as opposed to just a date. And that may be another thing, men looking for a date, women looking for a husband, and some place in between shall meet.

I wished that I had gone to school in a co-ed setting, in terms of socialization skills. I'll be very honest. Fortunately, my mother didn't take any shit from my father. I grew up with a strong Black woman as my mother and a role model. If you talked to any women, for whom I was responsible for any supervisory position, executive positions, I think I'd get pretty good grades. Quite seriously, being able to work with women as equals, and promoting women.

But socially, I think it stunts you. You don't get to use your left hand until you get out of college. Well, your left hand is not going to be as good as your right that's for sure. I understand how it came to be in the first place because it came from the notion of sexes and women. It was an antiquated notion even when I showed up in

1966 for goodness sake. The reason you see more women, whether they're judges or executives is because there's now a whole generation of people who always grew up with women in co-equal positions, you know? But the old guys, fortunately, are aging out at this point.

Again, socially, it's not good. It's not good. It was not good. If there was some way to do it differently, I wish I could have done it, but there really wasn't at the time. If you wanted to go to one of the Ivy League schools, they're all male. There's a female school around the corner, or down the street, down the road in Dartmouth's case, but the reality is, you need to be in the same classroom. You need to be able to have robust debates between men and women that are between two people, not because females over there, male over here, and all that kind of stuff.

Socially, if the only time you see a woman is to have a date, that's not good. I think generations have been scarred by that, quite frankly.

FORD: [pause]

MAY: I want to thank you for taking the time joining me today and being vulnerable and having this conversation with me.

FORD: Who said anything about being vulnerable? I wasn't crying.

ALL: [laughter]

MAY: I wasn't either.

FORD: I wasn't quite sure what to expect Zhory, quite frankly. I thought it would be interesting to give it a try, and if you have other questions, we can reconvene. I'm going to talk to the people who run the Hanover Partners, and if we can get you for next Sunday, which would be, whatever that hell that is, November something, It'll be in November for sure, but I think this project that you're working on is very great and exciting not just because as you know old men getting to tell battle stories, but I'm hoping that there's some lessons in there. I mean, I wish I had access to this kind of

information, when I was where you are now, from 30-40 years ago, what it was like. I hope that you've heard, and as you put this together, that there's so many similarities between the times, it's not that different. It's a different kind of light, but it is not that different is it? But they're strategies that are consistently useful over the ages, and the most important one of those is consistency, I believe. To keep showing up.

That's how we finally got these people to say yes. There was not a lot of support when we first started talking about it. And now it's considered the norm, right? Not as much of a norm is it should be, when we get a Black president, then we'll be talking. Although, be careful what you ask for because it could be Tim Scott, in which case we would definitely say, "Let's try this again."

Alright, well listen, if you have any other questions, you give me a buzz. I'm going to send you that photo as soon as I find it, which was taken the day of my graduation, which will be a different photo then what you see today.

All right.

[call ends]