

Dr. John Buckner '62
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Black Lives
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Transcribed by Katie Elders '23

ELDERS: Alright. Hi, my name is Katie Elders, and I am currently at home in Hanover, New Hampshire at Dartmouth College. I'm doing a zoom interview with Dr. John Buckner, who is currently in Ossining New York. Today is October 24th, 2023, and this is an interview for the Dartmouth Black Lives oral history project.

Hi, Dr. Buckner, thank you so much for joining me today. To begin, I was wondering if you could just tell me a little bit about your early life. Can you please state when and where you were born?

BUCKNER: I was born in New York City at the Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center. I was premature and early on I was placed in a foster home in Jamaica, New York.

ELDERS: Got it. And can you tell me a little bit more about your foster care experience?

BUCKNER: Well, it was a comfortable experience. I had a couple of, they divided into boys' rooms and girls' rooms. So usually there were four of us at a time. Although I was always there with my sister, the others varied.

ELDERS: And what was your sister's name?

BUCKNER: Barbara.

ELDERS: And where did she fall in line compared to you age-wise?

BUCKNER: She was about two and a half years older.

ELDERS: And was she your only sibling?

BUCKNER: Yes.

ELDERS: And what was she like personality wise?

BUCKNER: She was fun to be with. After we left the foster home, we lived in Harlem in a section where they sometimes didn't have heat, and so we slept in the same bed together on those occasions.

ELDERS: And when, you said you eventually moved on to live in Harlem, when did you leave the foster care system and how did that process work?

BUCKNER: Well, I had been frankly disobedient to my foster father, so he gave me a beating and my father got us out of there. And that's when we moved to Harlem on St. Nicholas Avenue. It was a long block between 130th and 133rd Street. And we were about where 132nd Street would have been.

ELDERS: And you were disobedient. Yes. Go ahead.

BUCKNER: I had been disobedient. We had been to Georgia a couple of times and this last time I was walking down a dirt street to a white boy, he ran over a baby, I threw a rock and hit him [laughter]. He fell off his bicycle. I went and told my foster father, and we were out of Georgia before long. And then when we got back home, he was upstairs and he told us not to go away, but I went to play in the park with my foster brother. And when we got home, he gave me a beating and my father got us out of there.

ELDERS: You say your father got you out of there? Not your foster father?

BUCKNER: Correct. Because he, the way things work with custody, somehow my mother got custody and she lived in Washington, D.C. So we only got to see her occasionally when we went down South to visit Albany, Georgia, where my foster mother was from.

ELDERS: And can you tell me the names of your birth parents?

BUCKNER: Rudolph Buckner and Freda Buckner.

ELDERS: And would you mind spelling those? Yeah, go ahead.

BUCKNER: Rudolph is R-U-D-O-L-P-H, and Freda is F-R-E-D-A. And she was Freda Sperry before she got married.

ELDERS: And what were they like, your parents?

BUCKNER: Well, I didn't really get to know my mother very well until years later after I'd been in the army. And she told me that what happened was that she'd been visiting a cousin on 131st — 136th Street — and she, the cousin came after her with a butcher's knife and she jumped out of the window with the baby — who was my sister — in her arms, and that's how I got to be born prematurely and spend maybe a month or so in an incubator at the medical center. That's also why my sister had epilepsy and eventually died at twenty-three of a cerebral aneurysm.

- ELDERS: So, you obviously had a lot of heartbreak with your sister passing. How did that affect you and influence you sort of in your life trajectory?
- BUCKNER: Well, it was devastating for me at the time because she was only 23 years old. And it may have nudged me into going into medicine as I did.
- ELDERS: And did you ever think about, so that's when you kind of thought about shifting from engineering into medicine, you said?
- BUCKNER: Yeah, I had started out and done the necessary preliminaries for engineering. And then I realized that that's not what I wanted to do. So, I went in the army. And it was during that time that my sister died. And I think that nudged me into medicine. [pause] But also there was a doctor who did our regular care in the foster system, who was very kind to us.
- ELDERS: And what was their name, that doctor?
- BUCKNER: Dr. Goldson, and he was also from Jamaica, as my father was. [pause] He had a book in his office called *The Story of Tuberculosis*, which later, when I was in pediatrics medicine, the attending whose name was Bert Grebman, he had the same book. The problem with that was in that course, one day it was the GI's and the other day it was an upper respiratory section. So, I never did go into pediatrics.
- ELDERS: And kind of shifting back to your childhood and early life, I was wondering about the role of faith in your life. Was your foster family or your birth family religious or did that affect your upbringing at all?
- BUCKNER: Yeah, we started out going to Sunday school. I think I was probably four years old at the Macedonia Baptist Church, was about a block away. Later on, we just started going to the St. Paul's Methodist Church, which was a block away in the other direction.
- ELDERS: And besides your primary care doctor, was there anyone else who sort of inspired you as a kid or influenced you in a positive way?
- BUCKNER: Well, I was lucky in my kindergarten, I had a teacher whose name was Mrs. Callus and I used to dream about her. I always dreamt that the school was on fire and I was flying, I was Superman, I fly in and rescue her [laughter]. And then in first grade, she was a monitor on the floor below and I ran right by her and said, you are who I love the best [laughter]. Then she died the next year. She had diabetes, which I found out later.

ELDERS: And you said her name was Mrs. Callus?

BUCKNER: Yes.

ELDERS: Can you spell that for me, please?

BUCKNER: I think it's C-A-L-L-U-S.

ELDERS: Great. And staying on the education theme, moving on to your time at Dartmouth, to confirm, you matriculated in 1958 and you graduated in 1962?

BUCKNER: Well, I was a member of the class of '62 but I had dropped out and gone in the Army.

ELDERS: So did you know - Go ahead.

BUCKNER: So, I finished up, since I decided on it was very easy to take extra courses and did the medical school in '67 and in Columbia in '69.

ELDERS: And so when you dropped out and went to the army, were you able to finish up your undergrad when you went back for medical school? Am I understanding that correctly?

BUCKNER: Yes.

ELDERS: And getting back to your transition from your childhood, early life, onto Dartmouth, what put you on the path to go to Dartmouth? What made you choose Dartmouth over other schools?

BUCKNER: Well, I'd never heard of it, but there was an organization called the National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students, and there was a fellow named Julian Robinson who suggested I go to Dartmouth.

ELDERS: And what did your family think about you coming to Dartmouth?

BUCKNER: Well, at that time my father had already died, and my mother didn't really know anything about it. [pause] But she did send me a letter saying I shouldn't go out with any white girls [laughter].

ELDERS: Did you listen to her?

BUCKNER: Well, it was an all-male school and there was — I don't remember seeing any of the girls at that time. I know there was a barber shop where I went to get a haircut and they said they couldn't cut my hair there. So, I had to do it myself.

ELDERS: In Hanover?

BUCKNER: Yeah.

ELDERS: And was that because of your race? Is that what they said was the reason?

BUCKNER: Well, I'm not sure what their reason was. They said they couldn't do it.

ELDERS: So, you ended up cutting your hair yourself?

BUCKNER: Yeah.

ELDERS: Were you any good at it? [laughter]

BUCKNER: Yeah, I managed. And when I was down in New York, I get a cut there.

ELDERS: That's awesome. So, shifting back to your life in Hanover, where did you live on campus during your years here?

BUCKNER: Topliff Hall, which is across from the tennis courts.

ELDERS: And did you have a roommate? I know you mentioned a roommate your freshman year. Did that change throughout your years here or stay the same?

BUCKNER: No, I stayed there for a couple of years until I dropped out. In the second year — well, in the first year, they had a show of all the clubs and sports and I chose to go out for crew. I remember the first day, I had pain in parts of my body I didn't even know I had [laughter], but I eventually made it and got so cold that my hand froze onto an oar, and then we went down to Harvard and rowed there.

And then I came back and I had a couple of friends. One was named Doug Skopp ['63], he was from California. Bruce MacPhail ['66], who was from Massachusetts, and DeWitt Bell ['62], who was from Parkersburg, West Virginia. We decided to form our own fraternity. And we called it the Sigma Society. And we bought a car together. Doug Skopp bought a car. And Bruce MacPhail jump-started it, [laughter] and we went to White River Junction and got a toasted English muffin.

ELDERS: What was that process like, making your own fraternity?

BUCKNER: Well, we just decided to do it. It really wasn't a formal fraternity.

- ELDERS: And did you guys host meetings or events or anything of the sort?
- BUCKNER: Well, at that time, I got a job in Minichiello's Pizza Parlor, which is no longer there. At first I got to be a busboy and then I got to be a sandwich man and a salad man. I also got a job in a little diner mopping floors after midnight and gave a birthday party [laughter]. Had a big sign strewn across the ceiling saying all God's children got wheels.
- ELDERS: And back to the Sigma Society, were you, did membership go up at all or was it mostly just you and your close friends?
- BUCKNER: Just me and the friends I mentioned.
- ELDERS: And that was, that seems like a positive experience from your time at college. Is that a correct assumption?
- BUCKNER: Yes.
- ELDERS: Was there anything similar to the Sigma Society that kind of, you know, impacted your social life in the similar way?
- BUCKNER: Not really.
- ELDERS: And how was your experience being at an all-male college? I know we touched on a little bit about your mom's note and staying away from white women. And I've heard a lot about the College busing in women to schools, to Dartmouth. Do you recall that at all?
- BUCKNER: We did have one mixer. But I didn't really know how to dance [laughter], so I probably faked it a little bit. I forgot which college it was. It may have been Radcliffe.
- ELDERS: And you also mentioned in one of our conversations prior, woodworking and working on, you know, doing mechanic work on cars you own. How did that kind of play in during your college years or was that more of a post grad activity?
- BUCKNER: Well, that was after I returned and finished up the undergraduate. So I worked on the cars that I owned. And the woodwork I'd had a little bit — my foster father made a few things for us. And I had some woodworking in junior high school.
- ELDERS: Where did you like to eat on campus?
- BUCKNER: Say again?
- ELDERS: Where did you like to eat?

- BUCKNER: The dining hall. In fact, that was part of one of the conditions in my scholarship was that I worked there washing dishes, which was really nothing compared to the place I'd worked some before because it was a beautiful big machine that did all kinds of things. And one day in the dining hall, somebody put beer in the milk machine [laughter]. But it wasn't me.
- ELDERS: [laughter] And another thing that stood out to me in one of our previous conversations was the way you got to campus. So, that bike ride from Harlem up to Hanover. Can you tell me a little bit about those experiences, especially in the cold, how that was?
- BUCKNER: Well, cold was really that first winter. To get to the library, you had to walk through tunnels that were like 10 feet high. And one day I decided to go jogging and I got about 10 feet before my nose froze.
- ELDERS: Did that turn you off from jogging again, or at least for the winter maybe?
- BUCKNER: I always jogged until one day when I was skiing at Sun Valley, Idaho, a ski guy backed into me and broke my knee. But I did end up doing a row on my rowing machine, doing a full marathon.
- ELDERS: And I saw on your alumni note that you did a full marathon on a Concept 2 machine in your 70th year, so that's very impressive.
- BUCKNER: I still row a little bit. I still have a rowing, the same machine.
- ELDERS: So you were always pretty active, it seems like.
- BUCKNER: I like to be. I think it's important.
- ELDERS: Just returning once more to those bike trips up to campus.
- BUCKNER: No, it was a bike trip away from campus. I didn't ride back up.
- ELDERS: Oh, okay, so how did you get to campus otherwise?
- BUCKNER: Well, the first time my foster father drove me up, even though I wasn't living there at the time, but he was the one that had a car.
- ELDERS: And did you two have a good relationship or how would you characterize it?
- BUCKNER: Yeah. Well, he was a man of, even though I found out later, he probably didn't read. He thought that we got to go to church and I asked my foster mother, who was very kind, who I later took

care of after he died, until she died. He never knew, really knew how old she was because he said she was born the day Mr. Willie Watkins got thrown from his horse. So we estimated that she was about 80.

ELDERS: Then shifting a little bit back to your Dartmouth experience, the more academic side, did you feel academically supported during your time here, undergrad and at Geisel?

BUCKNER: Yes, the only thing I had that happened that I was uncomfortable with was one of the professors whose name was, I think it was M-O-H-L-E-R, did a anoscopy on me. I was the only African American student. And he also referred to the space of Retzius as the nigger in the wood pile.

ELDERS: Can you repeat that last part, please?

BUCKNER: He referred to the space of Retzius in the abdomen as the nigger in the woodpile.

ELDERS: And was that really your only instance of discomfort academically or were there more?

BUCKNER: That's the only one I can think of.

ELDERS: And were you moved to react in any way to that discomfort or how did you kind of move forward from that?

BUCKNER: Well, I just kept on going. In fact, it probably prepared me because years later I had a patient come into the hospital who had total body psoriasis and I had to put him in buck's traction, and every morning I'd go in and he'd say, how's my nigger doctor?

ELDERS: Has that affected how you practice medicine at all or you know how you react to patients like that?

BUCKNER: No, not really. [pause] And he was the only one in fact my response to him was I'm grateful for you expressing who you are about me, but I have other patients who feel different, express themselves differently.

ELDERS: Yeah. And were there any professors that were particularly supportive in your time here that were able to maybe support you through, you know, uncomfortable and frustrating experiences like that?

BUCKNER: Harry Savage, who was an anatomy professor.

ELDERS: Would you mind just spelling his name?

BUCKNER: Harry is H-A-R-R-Y, Savage is S-A-V-A-G-E.

ELDERS: Got it. Thank you. What made him particularly supportive?

BUCKNER: I can't think of anything particular, except I know at the time I returned, I was in the, we were in the anatomy lab. And he left about three o'clock and then all the lights went out and we were living in a trailer at the time, but I had just, I had these things that I call knowings and I can't explain them.

The first one occurred when I was on my way to Germany. It was almost like somebody tapped me on the shoulder and I just knew that someone was going to die before I came back. Of course, that proved to be my sister at that time was devastating.

And then I was in a medical school, I got a tap on her shoulder that said, buy a flashlight. And I ignored it. So the next day, I bought the biggest flashlight. And all the lights went out and they sat out for three or four days.

ELDERS: And sort of just some more logistical question. Do you remember how many Black students were in your class or at Dartmouth while you were there?

BUCKNER: I know there was some. There was one fellow who was an African and was Ataturji Adelikan. And undergraduate, the only one I saw later was Chuck Hageman, who had been a football player, and Tunji [Likely a nickname for Ataturji]. I know there are two or three others, but I never did know them. And there was a fellow a year later, his name is Al Overton, who on Christmas vacation, he got us a job unloading ships on the dock. I also got a job at Macy's thanks to my foster father working as a busboy. And I also got a job at the Planetarium post office. And I remember working all three and taking a lot of no-doze and I got back to Dartmouth and I slept for 24 hours and I got up to pee and slept for 24 more hours [laughter].

ELDERS: That's great. Your work experience undergrad, you know, did, did that affect sort of what you wanted to do with your life at all? Or, or was it mostly, you know, figuring it out, getting into the army and going from there?

BUCKNER: Well, there was a Dr. Golson who was very kind and I think I was playing softball and tore my fingertip off and he would let me come by and sit in his office and read. And he even gave me a mechanical pencil back then, which was a big deal as far as I was concerned. [pause] But I went back to see him once and then he had died and I found out from a colleague of his that

he'd gone skiing and had a pulmonary embolism, which became one of the things I wrote a paper about.

ELDERS: And what was that paper titled?

BUCKNER: I forgot the name now. I know I wrote one on before laparoscopy, acute abdomen, and I think it was the use of aspirin as an anticoagulant compared with Coumadin, which is really rat poison.

ELDERS: And shifting a little bit to your impression of the national civil rights movement that was unfolding during your time at college. Just from my research, you would have entered college shortly after the Little Rock Nine and the federalization of the National Guard in 1957. Although these events were unfolding far from Dartmouth, did they leave an impression on you?

BUCKNER: Absolutely, although I wasn't there. I did get to meet Malcolm X before they formed the, I think it was called the Shabazz House [now the Shabazz Center for Intellectual Inquiry]. And my own bias is I did get to meet Malcolm X and I thought his work was important, but I personally think that they need a King out there. Because the work that Martin Luther King Jr. did was, in my opinion, far more important. And a friend of my father's, whose name was Carl Holmes, had worked with Thurgood Marshall in the *Brown versus... What is it, Brown?* [*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954] I forgot the name of it. And in fact, my aunt led an organization called Jamaica Progressively that helped people from Jamaica get jobs in New York. And, oh, her friend's name was Audrey Clark. And it was her son that did that little demonstration with the dolls, which one's the good doll, which one's the bad doll, and which one's the white doll, and which one's the Black doll. And everybody tells the difference, but everybody, including the African-American girls, said that the Black doll was the bad doll. ["Doll test" conducted by Drs. Kenneth and Mamie Clark in the 1940s to illustrate destructive impact of racism on children.]

ELDERS: And sticking around in New York, what was your experience of schooling in New York City during a time when activists were pushing to desegregate schools that were segregated, in fact, if not by law?

BUCKNER: I had very good teachers in my junior high school years. In the first year, with some friends of mine — one was named Howie Wiggins — we used to go to the park and jump over the rocks. And one time I sprained my ankle bad enough so I put some heat ligament on it and it burned so I had to wash it off.

But I got down in the museum and I had been there in elementary school, and I looked into the dinosaurs and the planetarium and I memorized those things. And I was allowed to give lectures to my classmates on that.

The next year I had a teacher whose name was Edna Mae Harris and she got me to go down for an interview with the superintendent of schools in New York and it was called the Rebecca Ellsberg Award. Although I wasn't aware of it, it was for poverty. That was my handicap.

ELDERS: And shifting a little bit back to your time at Dartmouth and especially, you know, your transition into the army. How did the civil rights movement and, you know, what was going on in the Cold War affect you as a student and maybe as a prospective member of the military?

BUCKNER: Well, they used to have this course called Great Issues. And I used to sit out and listen to it even though I wasn't in that class. And they did have Roy Wilkins speak. And George Wallace came to speak. And the fellow on the African American side, he almost had a riot. But I felt he had a right to speak even though his views might be different from mine.

ELDERS: Do you remember roughly what years Roy and George came to speak?

BUCKNER: Probably mid-60s, 65 [1963] or so.

ELDERS: 65 or so you say?

BUCKNER: Yes.

ELDERS: And you talked about your classmate almost inciting a riot about George Wallace's visit. What was dissent like on campus at the time? And did you participate in any protesting?

BUCKNER: Not really. Once when I was in an office in Lynwood, there were some riots because a fellow got beat up in California. And I stood in front of my door with my pistol because I wasn't going to let him touch it. And I saw the National Guard guy there. That's the closest I came.

I used to do the interviews for the students that were being applied for acceptance at Dartmouth.

ELDERS: You said you did those interviews or you were a part of them in some way?

BUCKNER: Yeah, yes.

- ELDERS: And do you remember what that series was called or do you remember if it was preserved?
- BUCKNER: Well, the parts that got started were called the ABC or A Better Chance program, which gave students from African American communities extra skills in Math and English. A fella named Jim Simmons led that.
- ELDERS: What were reactions like to the ABC program at Dartmouth specifically?
- BUCKNER: I thought they were very favorable.
- ELDERS: Would you mind repeating that, please?
- BUCKNER: I think they were very favorable. I think the students did very well.
- ELDERS: Were any of your classmates a part of the ABC program or was that later than your time?
- BUCKNER: Well, actually, my friend DeWitt Bell ['62] worked in Chicago and got some gangsters in business [laughter].
- ELDERS: And shifting back to your own college experience, how did your political beliefs change during your time up at Dartmouth? Would you consider yourself more of a politically charged person, or were you more neutral?
- BUCKNER: Well, I voted for Obama, of course, and I voted for, let's see, and Kennedy, and let's see who else. In fact, I was in my foster parents' attic asleep when my foster mother called me down and I got to see the televised version of the Zapruder films.
- ELDERS: The televised version of, what was that?
- BUCKNER: Of the Zapruder, that was the fellow who happened to be filming when Kennedy was assassinated. And also, Lee Harvey Oswald gets shot. So, the official version couldn't be true because he was on the third floor. And I did drive through there. And since I would never miss a shot at 300 yards, I think I could have made that shot. The problem was he had reached for his throat so the bullet went from somewhere low in the car through his throat and out the back of his head.
- ELDERS: And back to your transition into the military, was there a specific moment that prompted you to drop out or what was that decision like?

BUCKNER: Well, I just realized that I didn't want to be an engineer. And so, I checked with the Dean, and I think his name was Mr. Hague, Bob Hague. And they said it was okay, as long as I didn't get in trouble. That was it. I actually drove that car that I had with DeWitt down for my examination and I had a ticket. It said no parking. And then I gave it back to DeWitt and he said it became—[uncertain] he drove a sawmill in Parkersburg.

ELDERS: And for the sake of the record, how many years did you serve, from when to when?

BUCKNER: I joined January '60 and so, including the reserve time, about a total of six years, three years active.

ELDERS: And what was your experience like as a Black man in the military?

BUCKNER: I don't remember any particular problems. I got a top-secret security clearance and my job was to copy Morse code, which I did. And I guess I was the only African American in those buildings that we had, which were secured.

ELDERS: And did you find your experience in the Army any different than your experience as a Black man at Dartmouth?

BUCKNER: No, I didn't feel any particular discomfort. In fact, a couple of friends remain friends to this day.

ELDERS: And I've been reading about a few programs at Dartmouth, like V12 or ROTC. Were you involved in any of those programs or did you join the Army on your own?

BUCKNER: I joined the Army on my own. I chose that because I think the Navy and Air Force were probably four years minimum, and the Army was three. If you got drafted, it was two, and that's why I chose the Army.

ELDERS: And how was your experience of service? You know, were you deployed? Can you tell me a little bit about that?

BUCKNER: Well, after Morse Code School, I was sent to Germany. I think the city was called Lübeck. No, it was Kassel. And there's actually a section outside of Kassel called Rothwesten, or Rothwesten as most of the GI's called it [The GI's pronounced 'Roth' in Rothwesten with an /ah/ versus the proper /o/ sound].

ELDERS: And can you spell that?

ELDERS: R-O-T-H-W-E-S-T-E-N.

- ELDERS: Got it. Thank you. And how do you feel your status as a veteran has affected your experience as a Dartmouth alum, if at all?
- BUCKNER: Well, I think that in part it paid for my time at Dartmouth and Columbia. I got the GI Bill.
- ELDERS: Can you talk a little bit more about the GI Bill's specific impact on your life?
- BUCKNER: Well, it simply paid for part of my education.
- ELDERS: And was that your Dartmouth education or Columbia or both?
- BUCKNER: The final part of the Dartmouth Medical School and Columbia.
- ELDERS: And staying on the thread of Columbia, what years exactly did you attend Columbia?
- BUCKNER: '67 to '69.
- ELDERS: And would you mind talking a little bit about the differences between the two, both education-wise and socially?
- BUCKNER: Well, Dartmouth was, when I first started, had 2,500 students and 2,500 townspeople. And I felt that if I walked too far, I'd walk off the edge of the earth [laughter]. But we had 10,000 students.
- ELDERS: Columbia was 10,000?
- BUCKNER: No, my high school.
- ELDERS: Oh, your high school was 10,000. Wow. And what was Columbia like in comparison to Dartmouth?
- BUCKNER: I didn't find it particularly difficult. I have a few friends from there still.
- ELDERS: Would you say it was easier to find friends at Dartmouth or Columbia or was it a sort of similar playing field?
- BUCKNER: I don't recall it being difficult anywhere.
- ELDERS: That's a testament to you! [laughter] And sort of switching back to as you were finishing up your term of service in the Army, what made you decide that you wanted to come back to Dartmouth? Was finishing your undergrad the main reason or were you looking at any other schools?
- BUCKNER: No, I just, I had planned to come back from the beginning.

ELDERS: Yeah. And then what made you choose Columbia as you looked for another graduate degree.

BUCKNER: Well, it was because that was where my family was from.

ELDERS: And how far was your family from where you were on Columbia's campus?

BUCKNER: Well, I actually lived at 552 Riverside Drive and that was probably about maybe a half a mile from where I lived when I lived with my father and my aunt.

ELDERS: And did you say you lived with your father during your Columbia degree or were you on campus?

BUCKNER: No, he died by that time.

ELDERS: Right, right, right. Centering the conversation more on, you know, the political climate and student reactions from that. How would you say the shift in student activism nationally occurred between your undergraduate and graduate years, both at Dartmouth and Columbia?

BUCKNER: I think it was very, it was dramatic. But I was married and was focusing on finishing my own education.

ELDERS: And you say it was a dramatic shift. What specifically did you pick up on that had changed during those years?

BUCKNER: Well, at Dartmouth, there was the African American Society, in which we had some discussions. I think they wanted to have a, I think it was a visiting professor and we talked about it. So, we demanded a Black studies curriculum so we could get a Black studies professor at that time.

ELDERS: And when you say we demanded that, were you a part of the Afro-Am society at all? I know it kind of came to fruition towards the end of your time at Dartmouth.

BUCKNER: Yes, well, I think I was an official member when I started.

ELDERS: Right. And would you consider yourself pretty like-minded to others in the Afro-Am Society or was there more of an array of opinions?

BUCKNER: Well, except for the one who almost had a riot when George Wallace came to town, which I thought was a little — I think he had a right to express his views. That's about the only difference I had.

- ELDERS: And just generally, your collegiate experience was definitely wrought with a lot more political strife and fluctuation than the average person. How did that affect you mentally, if at all? You know, distracting from your studies or more emotionally?
- BUCKNER: Didn't really.
- ELDERS: And how were you able to stay on track? Was it more just getting through or was there anything that was helpful to you?
- BUCKNER: Nothing more than we've already discussed.
- ELDERS: Sorry, what was that?
- BUCKNER: Nothing different from what we've already discussed.
- ELDERS: And kind of moving on to your reflections, you know, upon graduation, how did you think about the difference between who you were when you graduated versus who you were when you arrived?
- BUCKNER: Well, I learned a lot in the meantime. And traveled parts of the world I never would have.
- ELDERS: Was there a most interesting lesson or piece of advice that you would point out?
- BUCKNER: Not particularly.
- ELDERS: Staying on the post-grad thread, I know you're a class representative. You were up [in Hanover] just a little bit ago for a meeting. How has it been staying involved with the college, you know, throughout your time upon graduation?
- BUCKNER: I really enjoyed it. One of the things I remember is when I came back to the 25th reunion, they had a reunion row. And as we were huffing and puffing down the river, one of the heavyweight guys was in front of me and kept sliding off his seat onto my feet and a group of young ladies passed us by like we were standing still [laughter]. And we were saying, well, it must be the pollution.
- ELDERS: [Laughter] And that's one other thing that I was curious about. How was your time freshman year on the crew team different from, you know, your experiences as a student, not a student athlete?
- BUCKNER: Nothing, I mean, probably ate well when I was at Dartmouth, because I used to have to weigh, the weigh-in was 165 pounds, and I used to have to go to the gym and work off two pounds to make the weigh-in.

- ELDERS: Did you say 155 or 65? I missed that.
- BUCKNER: 65.
- ELDERS: Got it. And did crew help socialization or anything like that, or was it mostly just to stay fit?
- BUCKNER: Well, some of the people who were on the crew, Doug Skopp, I think, was the manager. I think to DeWitt rowed.
- ELDERS: You said Doug Skopp [‘63] was the manager?
- BUCKNER: Doug Skopp, S-K-O-P-P.
- ELDERS: Got it. Is there anything else you would add about, you know, being a Black student athlete at the time? Were there many others? I know you mentioned a football player.
- BUCKNER: No, I don't think so. But when I was, just before I started my internship, I met a fellow in New York whose name was Norman Jackman. And he had been to junior high school around the same time I was doing city college when I was at Dartmouth. And he went to Germany and learned German in summer school and then graduated with honors. And he taught me Shotokan karate and later Goju-Ryu.
- ELDERS: Shifting back to your post grad experience. How would you criticize or commend the administration for its behavior in reaction to such a volatile campus climate during your time there.
- BUCKNER: Well, I really didn't pay much time to it because I was married, lived off campus, and was focusing on my studies.
- ELDERS: Well after you graduated, during the summer of 2020 and some of those Black Lives Matter protests, how did you feel the administration handled, you know, responding to those and ensuring a safe campus climate for its current Black students.
- BUCKNER: I think they did a very good job. The only thing I missed when I got back was the Dartmouth Christian Union which used to have an office and we used to do things like shop firewood for farmers or collect clothing for people who needed it.
- ELDERS: That must have been a rewarding group to be a part of.
- BUCKNER: Yes.

- ELDERS: And did you stay involved? I'm not sure how that works with alumni with the Dartmouth Christian Union after graduation or did that kind of end with your graduation?
- BUCKNER: That sort of ended with graduation.
- ELDERS: And are there any other ways that you stay involved with campus besides your position as a class representative?
- BUCKNER: No, I did go to the Yale Club with a friend of mine who had his own airplane and as we were walking out to take a flight out to Montauk, my oldest son said, what happens if the wing falls off? I said, you die [laughter]. [pause] There was a fellow in my class named Phil Berger and they did have a Dartmouth flying club and he took me flying in it. I eventually got maybe 2200 hours of flight, single engine, multi-engine, land, single engine, sea, instrument airplane.
- ELDERS: Wow. And looking back at your time at Dartmouth, would you have done anything differently or are you pretty satisfied with how your years in Hanover went?
- BUCKNER: Pretty satisfied.
- ELDERS: Would you call out any highlights?
- BUCKNER: Sorry?
- ELDERS: Would you call out any highlights to your time as worth noting?
- BUCKNER: Well in the beginning, they used to have these bonfires. But they don't do that anymore. In the middle of the Green.
- ELDERS: For homecoming?
- BUCKNER: Yeah.
- ELDERS: We actually just had our homecoming bonfire this past weekend. It's not nearly as big as it used to be, I've heard.
- BUCKNER: I was up for that meeting, but I didn't have the room number. I talked to a few people, but I couldn't find it.
- ELDERS: Couldn't find the room for, sorry?
- BUCKNER: For the meeting that we were supposed to have.
- ELDERS: Oh, no [laughter]. Were there any other traditions like the homecoming bonfire that helped with that feeling of community on campus.

- BUCKNER: Nope, they used to have a recruiting office there.
- ELDERS: A recruiting office, would you mind expanding a little bit on that?
- BUCKNER: It was right across from the Hanover Inn. I think it was Navy.
- ELDERS: Got it. And that was put up during your time there?
- BUCKNER: Well, it was there when I was there, but when I'd come back.
- ELDERS: And did a lot of your classmates serve? Did you overlap with any in the Army?
- BUCKNER: Not that I know of. I'm sure some did.
- ELDERS: And shifting back to some of your more current impressions of the college. I guess this kind of goes along to how you think the administration's doing. If you were in charge, would you change anything or do anything to make anything different?
- BUCKNER: Nope. I guess I'd be sure that there's a [inaudible] cane house and a Christian Union.
- ELDERS: And is there anything else that you would say was kind of consequential, you know, spanning from your early life to your time at Dartmouth and Columbia and beyond.
- BUCKNER: Nothing I can think of.
- ELDERS: Well, it was so amazing to hear a little bit more about your experience at Dartmouth, you know, how that's changed and a little bit about the historical context there. And I've really enjoyed learning more about you, Dr. Buckner.
- BUCKNER: Well, thank you.
- ELDERS: Thank you so much.