

Stuart Simms '72
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Black Lives Project
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Transcribed by James McCarthy '23

- MCCARTHY: Alright, my name is James McCarthy: and I am here at Gamma Delta Chi in Hanover, New Hampshire. I am doing a zoom interview with Mr. Stuart Simms who is in Baltimore [MD]. Today is Monday, October 31st, 2022 and this is an interview for the Dartmouth Black Lives Oral History Project. Mr. Simms, thank you so much for joining me today. First, I'd like to learn a little about your childhood-sorry to interrupt you there. Can you please state when and where you were born?
- SIMMS: Born in Baltimore, Maryland, July 17th, 1950.
- MCCARTHY: Awesome. And can you tell me the names of your parents? Excuse me.
- SIMMS: Son of Clarence and Louise Simms. I have one brother who is seven years younger. Grew up in West Baltimore and, aside from a bout of rheumatic fever, had a good childhood.
- MCCARTHY: Okay so West Baltimore with your one brother. And what was that like? Did you live in a neighborhood with a lot of kids? Were you guys outside playing a lot? I know you became quite the athlete and we'll get to that later on, but was that some sort of thing you would do to still spend time in your childhood?
- SIMMS: Yeah, I grew up in a, it wasn't economically depressed, but I guess you would call it the urban Baltimore of the 1950s and 60s, early 60s. We were fortunate in the mid-60s, about '64, we relocated to a residence close in Northeast Baltimore, which was close to Morgan State University and it was a great neighborhood. I met a lot of people who [inaudible] University, and they were very helpful to me from an academic standpoint.
- MCCARTHY: Go ahead. So they were helpful to you, just being around that community, sort of the environment of the university helped you grow academically.
- SIMMS: Yeah, that's correct.
- MCCARTHY: Gotcha. So when it came time to go to high school, I understand that you went to the Gilman School right there in Baltimore.

- SIMMS: I did, I started out being interested in another prep school, but settled on Gilman. And I was fortunate enough [inaudible].
- MCCARTHY: I'm sorry, Mr. Simms, I lost you for just a second. You were fortunate enough to do what?
- MCCARTHY: You graduated in 1968 from the Gilman School and I understand, please correct me if I'm wrong, that was part of the first graduating class that had Black students?
- SIMMS: That is correct there were, I had three Black classmates.
- MCCARTHY: Okay, three Black classmates so four of you and what was that like? I know it's hard to sort of dive into, as this was some years ago, but did you face a lot of challenges at that point?
- SIMMS: We would celebrate it. I guess, several years ago, the 50th anniversary of the graduation and at that time, I recounted that certainly [inaudible] It would be welcome, it was very difficult given the economic isolation, as well learning the whole environment of Independent Schools that's associated with them, and the whole aspect of turning in a math class [inaudible] is certainly a reality, so,
- MCCARTHY: Yes, that's certainly-
- SIMMS: So it [inaudible] expecting and you kept moving forward. And there were certain teachers who thought perhaps that your only purpose there was sort of a symbolic purpose I supposed [inaudible], wanting an education. But these were interesting and challenging times, certainly 19-, I entered in '65. So the time I was there, what was happening in the country from 1964 through 1968.
- MCCARTHY: Right and that does line up sort of with some of the historic events and even into your college years, which we will get into in a second and, but just going back to your time of Gilman, When you say that teachers felt like you were there to fill a need or serve a cause, how would you yourself and your other classmates who were Black, try to dispel that or disprove that? Did you feel a need to prove your worth, or your, or your deserving-ness of being at that school?
- SIMMS: [inaudible] So the important thing was to try to, take care of business as was necessary. So I don't know that there was a symbolic gesture that I gave to the instructors or classmates. I think it was just a situation in which you had to be determined to take care of business. [Pause].

SIMMS: Everything from Jackie Robinson, And Joe Louis to Muhammad Ali, so.

MCCARTHY: Right, and as you touched on briefly, those were sort of some of the events that shaped your time both at Gilman and I would assume at Dartmouth, which we will get to in one second. But, as you said, you enter in '65 and graduate in '68 so this was a period of turmoil and unrest, particularly as we moved toward the quote-unquote "end" of the Civil Rights Movement and Martin Luther King's assassination in 1968 and just, can you touch on maybe some of the major world events - outside of school - that you felt impacted you and your time there?

SIMMS: Well, I think one of the major things certainly, the introduction to a much broader sort of vista of education, [inaudible] much outside of the East Coast. I think the fact that we were participating in foreign language classes, the fact that we were discussing a number of things in both recent history, as well as current history [inaudible] Civil Rights Movement by the way, still continuing and never, it never stops. And so

MCCARTHY: I don't know if you could see but I "air-quoted", please go ahead.

SIMMS: [Inaudible] It was important. I wrote my - I wrote a senior speech, and delivered a research paper on South Africa, which at that time was heavily segregated and paralleled what was happening [inaudible] entitled "Whites Only" and so I brought with me, I think, a sense of purpose that we could, we could all have a better community and certainly [inaudible] everything, a very [inaudible] in terms of what America has in our community has yet to accomplish as well as attempting to make it a better community in Baltimore and greater Maryland.

MCCARTHY: That's great to hear. It's really refreshing. I guess you can say that the Gilman School was ahead of its time in that sense and really kind of preparing you guys for what would come as well as looking back [inaudible] focusing on the amount of a sort of the history we witness as we go through as students.

Absolutely, and just transition a little bit now, as you go on through Gilman and sort of learn to understand what it would take to succeed there academically as well --as I'm going to assume athletically. I'm sure you've had quite a bit of college suitors and you eventually ended up on Dartmouth. Can you talk about a little bit? Why you decided to come up this way?

SIMMS: [inaudible] I visited a number of schools, some in the Ivy League, a few in the South and I got ya, some schools [pause]

MCCARTHY: Go ahead.

SIMMS: I didn't I still have a great [inaudible]. So I looked at three schools which turned out to be Brown, Yale and Dartmouth. I was impressed by the collection of individuals that Dartmouth had and the fact that it was a totally distinct environment from the, it was not clubby [laughs] as clubby as the other environments and it just it offered for - it seems like for all students - just a much different independent option.

MCCARTHY: Absolutely. And that, like you said, you could create an opportunity for you to develop here and grow and do things and let's just stick on football for a second if you don't mind, because it's something I certainly don't mind talking about. I understand you were part of the two Ivy League championships here.

SIMMS: [inaudible] [1969,] '70 and '71.

MCCARTHY: Excuse me, three! I'm mistaken and I apologize for that.

SIMMS: Three championships. [Freshmen] could not play varsity at that time. We were, I think 25 and 2 [25 wins, 2 losses from 1969-1971].

MCCARTHY: So quite an era of success at that time, which is awesome to hear about. For the legendary Coach [Bob] Blackman and toward the end of his run. And now, can I ask you, coming in, was it difficult to get adjusted to Dartmouth? You mentioned that freshman could not play varsity at this time, but was it hard coming into this new place? This new world?

SIMMS: Well, I think, I came in with eyes open understanding [inaudible] that Coach Blackman had said freshmen, they don't serve as cannon fodder. However, that rule was voided on the second day of practice [laughs]. And so the reality of what he said, I'd be the number one tailback and I walked in and there were sixteen tailbacks in the freshman class, including [inaudible] So there was competition. I mean there was a tremendous amount. [inaudible] It was, it was a slow hard grind,

MCCARTHY: Right, a slow hard grind. And like you mentioned earlier, talking about the Gilman School, you knew that it was time to just get things done and get your work done and you were able to achieve quite a career, obviously playing on some successful teams in this time period. What were your relationships like with your teammates? You mentioned that there were sixteen tailbacks but I assume not everybody stuck through and was still there as a

senior, but I would have to imagine that you formed quite some bonds with your teammates during this time period.

SIMMS:

Yeah, because of that team's degree of success. In fact, there was a reunion on campus last year. [inaudible] teams that we gathered. And as a 1971 team, I felt we were somewhat responsible in the sense of being present for that gathering. So I attended the game with Yale and joined in the dinner to see my teammates afterward, [inaudible] Wayne Young ['72] who still has a connection to the school [Mr. Young serves as the radio broadcaster for Dartmouth football games on ESPN+] [inaudible] and enjoyed it, enjoyed the visit and enjoyed talking to some of the students and enjoyed meeting [inaudible] as well. It was my last opportunity, also to see [Former Dartmouth Professor and President Emeritus] Jim [Wright] who recently left us. So it was pleasant, it was good. I would have hoped and a lot of people in my class would have been able to stay on the team through those years. But we lost a couple of people in a sense of other people having other interests, other than football. And athletics. So, but all in all it was a wise investment of time.

MCCARTHY:

Absolutely. [inaudible] And now this was a time, like you said, you came in from the Gilman School where there are so few Black students in the school. Were there a lot of African-American guys on the [Dartmouth football] team at that time and did things always mesh well with the white players? Can you talk about that experience a little bit?

SIMMS:

[Pause] Yeah is the connection still there? [pause] I focused more on the offense, I didn't have much to do with the defense. The team got along generally well. I think we began to run into problems because, I think, coaches were sort of somewhat late in adapting to new trends such as long hair, afros, mustaches. I mean, we spend a lot of time on useless crap, from my standpoint. [inaudible] focus on, I think also some of the coaches [inaudible] I don't want to say, it was the understood or appreciated certain things that they did. We almost fell apart in 1971, because at one point, we looked like Alabama. In other words, nine of the folks were African American. I don't know what ripples that caused. But, for a couple of reasons, the coach did some things in terms of personnel [inaudible] folks that actually belittled a quality player [inaudible] and almost caused a riot. It took Wayne and I, Wayne Young ['72, a co-captain for the 1971 season along with Mr. Simms] and myself two meetings: one with the coach, and one with the African American players, I mean to heal the wounds. So that was a lot of time that was wasted and spent because, I think the coach didn't think about the repercussions of what he, what he was doing. But nothing major. No walkouts. There were other teams that were going through that period. [inaudible] Had much more difficulty because particularly in the Middle Atlantic and the South. And there were a few in the Northeast. I mean, I talked to

some of the folks at Cornell, I talked to some folks at Columbia. I mean they hit some of the same bumps that Dartmouth hit.

MCCARTHY: Yeah, it makes sense that there would sort of be this natural tension or issues as you - "ripple effect" that you mentioned. And from what I understand, I know in 1971, you guys did go on to win all but one game and win the Ivy League championship, so you must be able to come together with those meetings with yourself and Wayne Young, who you mentioned. So, glad that was able to work out and it shows a maturity for everybody involved to be able to, sort of cast those things aside, and move forward with the task at hand.

SIMMS: I think it was really the focus and the determination of the individuals and so forth who had come so far. And I think folks were prepared to do the right thing. I'm not going to tell you that all the wounds were healed even after 50 years, but when I see some of those folks, but [inaudible] are we going to be successful and so, folks focused on the main thing [inaudible] Successful.

MCCARTHY: Right. And that's, and that is the key, and just not to take away from your own experience here but in my time here, one thing that really has tied white and Black players on the football teams together is their experiences with Greek life. Was that something available or prominent in that era for the guys on the team? Is that something that was a unifying -

SIMMS: Experience with what now?

MCCARTHY: I was just mentioning that in my time here, so far, something that really has united the white and Black players has been their involvement with Greek life. That's been something that really has tied guys together. Would you say that was the case during your time as well? Or was it more of a dividing factor? In Greek life, in the fraternities.

SIMMS: Greek life was not something that everybody was sort of into at that time I think [inaudible] Significantly. My roommates were not involved. I think it's a great activity and it helps, however, the number of individuals that I was associated with, did not move into that group, did not move into Greek life.

MCCARTHY: Absolutely, that certainly makes sense. Go ahead. Sorry.

SIMMS: [inaudible], I would say not already on campus there was less than 100, so they were busy [inaudible]. And less interested in Greek life than they were in working and moving in some other direction. So, I think Greek life obviously began to broaden years later and I think, people took advantage of that. That certainly is a positive,

getting to know people in other circumstances. and I was a [inaudible]

MCCARTHY: So many other things, absolutely, which transitions us. So I understand you were involved in the Afro-American Society throughout your four years here and actually served as an executive your senior year. Can you talk about that a little bit and sort of what, what the goals were at that time or the outcomes that you guys were looking for and were you able to achieve them?

SIMMS: It's been so long. I don't recall that I was an officer in the organization. However, the one thing that I did contribute, I was always interested in connection with Black alumni. And so when I arrived on campus and went into like 1969-70, [inaudible] connecting with professional graduates of the school who were at, who are Black and so I took trips to New York and did a couple of things. And if you look at the website of the Dartmouth Black Alumni, you'll see my name as one of the Co-founders of the organization and so that had been a big connecting activity. And I think it helped the students there and became a good contact outlet, as well as a resource and today has blossomed into a great organization which is contributing to [inaudible]

MCCARTHY: Right. And just in terms of that [inaudible] and being able to reach out to alumni when you were student, is that something that you [inaudible] in your professional career now, on the other end? Where students from the college would reach out to you and sort of seek your advice or counsel what they should look for?

SIMMS: I [inaudible] into the 1990s and as I got older I sort of got a little bit more distant but I still have connections today to members of that organization, as well as some of the fellow graduates as well. And, it served as a [inaudible] connecting activity reunion this year. and, [inaudible] at least for at least two years. I was president of that organization.

MCCARTHY: Gotcha. Okay, and then just to quickly jump back to your time here. I know how busy things could be during the football season but during the winter and the spring, how would you pass the time, the extra time that you did have, were you going away on road trips to different places? Were there different activities on campus, what sorts of things were you spending your time doing?

SIMMS: It depended on the time, period I mean, there was one period in which I participated in a program [inaudible] Being graduates of the class of 1952. [inaudible] I had the opportunity [inaudible] Berkeley. [Inaudible] Alumni and then during my senior year participated in an off-campus, [inaudible] Work deadlines. Part of that. Really. Yeah, working in the dining hall, doing those things to try [inaudible].

MCCARTHY: Yeah. Wow, that's really cool. You had all those opportunities to spend time in different places in the world, you mentioned Berkeley and Atlanta, and sort of represent Dartmouth during this time. And let me ask you, as if you were in those places. And this continues, even today as you travel. What is the impression that people have of Dartmouth, specifically of being an African-American at Dartmouth? And how do you answer that question or process what it was like to be Black at this college?

SIMMS: [Pause] During that time, I think the impression is good. Now, I think it's an affirming presence, not only because we were one of the last classes that did not have women. So the college has taken on a sort of, a new sort of a new appearance and a new flavor. And so that has helped with this recruiting that has helped to broaden the scope and interest in the school and I think has been a positive.

MCCARTHY: Yeah, I would certainly agree. I actually- I'm I was meaning to ask about the-

SIMMS: It was just, it was a lot of time lost [inaudible]. What to do about first the admission of women and second, the Indian symbol. And to me at that time, they were no-brainers in terms of moving forward. But, again, a lot of time was lost in them. I'm pleased to say that - we've now sort of... matured [laughs]. I think is a better world and sort of matured quickly. [inaudible] I didn't get involved, I didn't need to get involved. But I was glad it was resolved as quickly as possible so that the school could continue its move forward.

MCCARTHY: Yeah, that's certainly something that I wanted to ask about: The vote to include women occurred in the fall of 1971 So during your senior year, right after you guys had won the Ivy League championship, so it was just a time of marked change. And you guys were sort of the era or the generation of change with, not only the decision to admit women and the removal of the former mascot but also on a national level. It was a time of major change and protests in our country. And can you just talk about that? And some of the ways that the world around you affected your time here, at Dartmouth?

SIMMS: Well it I don't know that it prevented people from working and I don't know that I was involved in many protests or efforts. I simply supported those changes and hoped that Dartmouth could quickly get through it and move to the other side. Pleased that they did. And did so fairly expeditiously. Unfortunately, there are still some of those debates going on across the country, surprisingly, but I think we got through it and I think, I think the college is better for it.

MCCARTHY: Yes, the college is certainly better for it. I would agree with you on that. And, your time here, as we mentioned, you graduated in 1972, and then moved on to Harvard Law School, which predates your sort of ascendance in the Maryland legal system. Can you just talk about your time at Harvard Law briefly, and that maybe how prepared you for that experience?

SIMMS: [Inaudible] But I was accustomed, I think, to spending time, a significant amount of time in scholarship and study and certainly law school i is involved in that [inaudible] I guess for a sense of some of the, every person that you've had in your academic life that you thought was sort of, I don't want to say cutthroat, but you thought was razor sharp. [inaudible] would be in your law school section and Harvard's classes were so large. The initial couple of months it was, it was difficult to develop relationships. But, after about four or five months, things began to settle in [inaudible] all law schools, not just Harvard, all law schools that first year I think are challenging but I was fortunate, I had some great professors, I got involved in a lot of things. It was my first time volunteering as a public defender and I did that, for several years and I was fortunate in that there were several Dartmouth graduates who already [inaudible] was there and I'm forgetting some but there were several Dartmouth folks who were there who also helped in the transition. And there were several who followed me in subsequent years, Ben Wilson ['73], [inaudible] a number of different people. So, the challenging environment remained challenging and [inaudible] Work with a law firm. Two and a half years. I was interested in corporate law which I focused on and did a lot of banking work. In fact, the first vestiges of electronic banking, Electronic Banking, was starting back in '76, '75-76 and so [inaudible] and MasterCard actually owned it for a while. And so, but it got a little tough. [inaudible] How much printing should be on the back of a credit card? And so when the opportunity came to work for a U.S. senator, who was on the Banking Committee, I jumped at the chance and went to Washington for about two years and enjoyed it, made a lot of connections. I enjoyed the work, I was able to participate in a number of positive, historical events. That was just a lot of different people. And so I viewed it as a great highlight and, typical of Washington is once you get there, you start looking around for your next job. [inaudible] came back to joining the Justice Department and the opportunity came to join the Justice Department and join its trial division. So I became a prosecutor in the US Attorney's office, which was a great place to work. Great people. [Inaudible] Try a number of different cases, considered that part of my life to be a great success. And one of my close friends, this [inaudible] district attorney, we call it state's attorney here and out of the US Attorney's office – to - basically become the chief Deputy in his administration and time went by very quickly, he turned around and after three and a half years, and ran for mayor [inaudible] It was a great time. And as State's Attorney, I served eight and a half years and our office had about

125 attorneys and about 100 support staff at that time. The political juices started to flow. So I had an opportunity to perhaps be part of [inaudible] cabinet position with him and left the prosecutor's office. And I took a position as head of Juvenile Justice, part of the government, did that for two years and then when the chief of the Public Safety and Corrections retired [inaudible] Five years working with rolling probation and the penal system. Maryland at that time had about [inaudible] low, medium, and maximum across the state a long before it became fashionable. I was interested with a number of people in deinstitutionalization particularly of old and sick inmates, as well as the astounding number of African Americans who were caught up in sort of the drug, the drug wars, and what we could do to basically lower those numbers. I had a great time and great interest in going around the country talking to people and networking with folks, and how we could address that issue. And once I finished that I had the opportunity to return to private practice with a law firm of Baltimore, one of the person's I met while I was practicing at the Justice Department, had started a firm. It was not the kind of large practice I'd been in in the beginning of my practice and I went there and did criminal litigation and some consulting and I enjoyed that I did that for close to 17 years and retired in 2020 and took a position with marital legal aid as Chief counsel where I remained until I [inaudible]

MCCARTHY: So you sort of were able to climb and move to new opportunities, but let me just take you back for one second to your time in our nation's capital in the late 70's and 80's, '78 to '82, you witnessed historical events, and many positive historical events. Can you just briefly expand on those and maybe what your involvement was during that time period?

SIMMS: Well, I think both on the committee, I think trying to invigorate some issues related to public housing, issues related to the appointments of African Americans to Federal Judicial positions. There are a lot of things. I was able to do behind the scenes as well. Is on behalf of Senator [Paul S.] Sarbanes [Maryland Senator, 1977-2007]. And I think [inaudible]. At least for me in terms of both my career and on behalf of the country. So, my time in the Justice Department straddled President Carter and President Reagan [inaudible] so it was an interesting period in America's history. At that time, it seems dull compared to, I guess, in the last 10 years, in terms of doing what, but at least at that point. Stimulating.

MCCARTHY: Yeah, absolutely. And that is something interesting to mark and to have experience and now you carry through that experience builds upon itself, right? And you take the next step and then some of these things that you mentioned being passionate about:

the decriminalization, the institutionalization - excuse me - some of the older inmates, maybe people who were sick or African Americans in disproportionate numbers being incarcerated. That you really were ahead of your time. Not to make you sound old because you're not, but these are issues that are continuing to be pressed today and something that you were in front of which is really an honor.

SIMMS: Well, I was pleased to be involved. It wasn't my purpose, my purpose really was to try to make it better and to try to improve also sort of, made a reputation about trying to at least organizationally retune organizations in order to move in a particular direction. And so [inaudible]

MCCARTHY: Mr. Simms, I've lost you for a second.

MCCARTHY: [inaudible] I can hear you just fine. Can you hear me?

SIMMS: Yes.

MCCARTHY: Okay so please go ahead. You were just beginning to talk about your involvement and the issues that I mentioned and what that meant to you.

SIMMS: Yeah. One of the things that I have always been involved in particularly insofar as criminal justice was improving aspects of the criminal justice system in terms of outcomes and reducing recidivism rates. And so, I took an approach to some extent that was different than some others did. When I tried to [inaudible] that was important to and increase our reliance on and respect for that criminal justice. Very difficult task, one which is risky but one which I enjoyed. The other aspect was really trying to make organizations effective and programming effective. So I enjoyed working with governmental entities and giving advice to people about governmental entities in order to make them effective as well. So, all of that was sort of part of [inaudible].

MCCARTHY: Yeah, absolutely. And important things to commit yourself to and just in researching a little bit for this interview, some of the honors that you have been given throughout your fantastic career - that could be the interview in and of itself - But it's hard to ask people about the awards they have been given but it is certainly nice, I would assume to be recognized. I would think, as the best lawyers general practice criminal defense and commercial litigation Best Lawyers list. Super lawyer by Super Lawyers magazine. Some of the awards that have been granted your way. Is it nice to be recognized for some of your work?

SIMMS: Yeah, I think that aspect of private practice turned out well. I was really thrilled about [inaudible] at private practice, the lawyers I

was working with the firm. I was working for the projects that I worked on. Many were [inaudible] and I still got two pro bono matters and I'm still sort of working on at the current time so I enjoyed that. I was privileged to have a great run, I think, in terms of the legal projects I was involved in and then in the people that I was involved with.

MCCARTHY: Absolutely. And that's remarkable that you're still at it. I didn't realize that was the case, still taking on cases, pro bono. And just as we sort to wrap up here because I've taken up enough of your time today, we touched on this briefly before, but can you just talk about your current impressions of the college and how you see Dartmouth, and how that fits into your life? Currently, how connected are you still and what are your thoughts or impressions of the college?

SIMMS: Oh, the impressions are there and the impressions are positive. I see Dartmouth reaching out and continuing to reach out in great many ways and particularly over the last five years in terms of their [inaudible] electronically and through the clubs and keeping people engaged. I think it's certainly one of the positives that, reads a level of interest. It may feel to some degree less remote than people say and I'm [inaudible] by their presence in the life of so many individuals across the entire United States. I've not been, I was engaged certainly I had a term where I was on the Alumni Council and I served for a period on Alumni Council and enjoyed it. And I've been on and off with [inaudible] The Baltimore area. And to some extent, the Washington Club of Dartmouth and so benefited from being engaged with those organizations that need to sort of do what I can to try to take advantage of their programming and their involvement. I've also worked with their efforts to reach out to current and former athletes. I have two individuals who visited me in Baltimore and we spent days together talking about the law or talking about what they're going to do in terms of their graduate career and so I've enjoyed those relationships as well.

MCCARTHY: Yeah, I'm sure those relationships are very rewarding and your connection to the college overall as an alum. I would have to use the word rewarding. Thank you so much for taking the time. Is there anything else, before I let you go, that you would like to say just about the oral history project and Dartmouth Black Lives overall and sort of, as we build this thing, what your thoughts are?

SIMMS: No, not really, but [inaudible] at least have a copy so I can tell my, my kids or somebody

MCCARTHY: Absolutely, yeah. We'll make that happen, I can send this over to you for sure.

Thank you so much, Mr. Simms for taking the time, I really can't say enough how much I appreciate it despite the title difficulties. Thank you for joining me and I'll be sure to get this over to you.

SIMMS:

Sure, and good luck to you. There's always just the next game so next week.

MCCARTHY:

That's right. It's our week to bounce back. Thanks again.