

Edmond F. Noel '68
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Black Lives Project
October 30, 2023
Transcribed by Dayaja George

GEORGE: Hi. My name is Dayaja George, I'm currently in Carson Hall in Hanover, New Hampshire. I'm speaking with Mr. Edmond Noel, who is in his law office in the Denver Metro area in Colorado. Today is October 30th, 2023, and I'm conducting this interview as part of the Dartmouth Black Lives Oral History Project. First, I just want to thank you, Mr. Noel, for volunteering for this interview. And feel free to treat this as a more casual conversation. I'm really just glad to have you here!

NOEL: Well, I'm glad to be here as well.

GEORGE: Yeah!

NOEL: I'm glad to be above ground.

GEORGE: First, I just want to position you in space and time. Could you tell me where and when you were born.

NOEL: I was born in 1946, November 15, 1946, in St. Louis, Missouri.

GEORGE: Excellent. I'd like to know a little bit more about your family background. Could you tell me the names of both of your parents?

NOEL: I'm named after my father. I am Edmond Forrest Noel, Jr. My mother is Rachel Bassette Noel.

GEORGE: Your-

NOEL: That's Bassette with an E.

GEORGE: Right, right. Your great-grandfather on your mother's side was A.W.E. Bassette. Could you tell me a little bit about who he was, what his legacy was?

NOEL: Well, he was a Virginian. He was emancipated from slavery at, I think, eight years old. He later founded a school to help educate freed men and women. He was an attorney. He didn't — in those days, not everyone sat for the bar exam. They sat for the bar by being recommended by a member of the bar and satisfactorily, I

think, answering questions in a session. I'm not sure about the procedure any more than that, but it wasn't a general bar exam as we're used to it now. And then when my mother was growing up, he was the patriarch as the grandfather of a family. She had three other siblings and there were cousins, et cetera, family.

GEORGE: Yeah. So, how did it feel knowing the identity of your great-grandfather and knowing that he was formerly enslaved, as you mentioned? Did having that information give your mother's family some sort of emotional burden?

NOEL: I don't think burden is the right word at all. [Laughter] I didn't ever get anything, any impression from my mother about burden. I got the impression about struggle. I got an impression about adversity. Those are words in which we stand together tall and struggle against something. And we know what we're struggling against, and we do it collectively. There's a collective strength rather than a collective burden. I don't express it that way. I don't remember my parents describing it that way either. A segregated society is not, to me, preferable, but one of the realities of a segregated society is the folks who are being segregated against know exactly who they are, and who their friends are, and who their allies are. And they are in an adverse struggle. I hesitate to call everything a war. This is a war against slavery. This is a war against ending slavery unfairly. All of these were situations in which Black people banded together and resisted, and I don't think burden was the right word.

GEORGE: Right. That's a really important distinction. I'm glad you made that. We talked about this a little bit over the phone earlier. Even though you know one of your ancestors who was enslaved, you don't know much about his experiences in slavery. You don't know his parents or really his prior lineage. All of those people in your family before A. W. E. Bassette were essentially stolen from you. How did your maternal family grieve that loss?

NOEL: Stolen from me may be accurate in the sense that I'm now seventy-seven years old and even if they told me I might have forgotten. So that's a — with an oral history of a seventy-seven-year-old, that's an immediate stumbling block. That doesn't necessarily mean it was stolen from the people at my mother's level or her level before that, that they didn't know. I'm not saying that they didn't know. I don't know what they didn't know or knew. What ended up being passed down to me is not the accurate portrayal of what my family collectively knew at various generational stages of our family history. So, that's why I want to correct the question to begin with. What is not known to my family, I

don't pretend to be able to say. What's not known to me is a combination of what I might not have been told and existed or what I have forgotten. What I do not know is beyond my mother's accounting of my great-grandfather. He was emancipated at age eight, so I don't recall her telling me anything about his parents. And that ends up being the answer I have to give you.

GEORGE: Right, so AWE Bassette founded the first Black school in Virginia, but as you mentioned, he was also a very prominent attorney. So, why do you think on top of his legal aspirations, he was so invested in getting Black folks the access to education? Because he had his hand in so many pots. Why do you think he prioritized academia?

NOEL: I don't know about the — how many pots. I know about those two. I do not know that the school he founded was the first Black school in Virginia. I don't know that, but I do know that it was a school and it was recognized and remembered, and his role in education was recognized and remembered by the Hampton, Virginia community by naming a current elementary school after him. That occurred when I was in law school in the early 70s, so there is a lasting recognition of whatever he did. What I do know is what my mother taught me, which was education was the key element. This is not new news. It's not an accident that during slavery, education was forbidden. So, that in and of itself, especially the importance of it, I'm sure, to slaves at the time, to their progeny and to us, that education, while not a panacea, is almost a necessary, maybe not completely satisfactory, solution. But it's certainly necessarily part of our struggle. That's how I was taught. I think it's true, but I mean that is how my mother and father addressed the subject. It wasn't that they tried to make their two children something that they weren't. I'm not saying everybody has to be a college graduate, but my parents made sure if we were possibly capable of being college graduates, we were going to get that opportunity and they would try to make it an equal opportunity to the extent that we could.

GEORGE: Right. Those are important principles. And, having the trauma of being formerly enslaved and finding your foothold in the world after emancipation seems like it must have been stressful beyond words. I know that A. W. E. Bassette was a presence in your mother's childhood. Do you know if they had a good relationship, or do you think the stress of his life kind of made him a more intense person?

NOEL: Again, I'm going to beg to differ with the word. I never heard my mother describe their struggle as stressful. It may have been that it was stuff that was not supposed to happen in the world. In the course of time and forever, yes, slavery was horrible and to the

extent that they couldn't change that major force in their life, that was bad and I'm sure not good emotionally. But what I understood from my mother was the contrary, that they – knowing it was bad, knowing how awful it was, made them work against it all the more. That their DNA had been forever reconstructed that they were in a battle from the day they probably hit that soil until the day that they died. And yes, I think that's stress, but that would be the same stress a combatant soldier would be under. That wouldn't keep — that would not keep them from battling ever more and even more every day that they could. So, I didn't — my [great] grandfather never got portrayed to me as a man of stress. He got portrayed to me as a man of vigor and stature rather than stress, that he was a stalwart member of the community leading the resistance. That was, I think, well-appreciated and certainly well-appreciated by me if he was able to do that. But rather than a victim of stress, I was taught he was a stalwart of resistance.

GEORGE: Right. So, he was empowered by his background is what you're saying?

NOEL: I'm not sure what is his — by background you mean.

GEORGE: Oh, background of enslavement.

NOEL: He was empowered by his presence of community and family to be a part of a resistance that we were born into, taught that we were part of, and struggled every day against all of our lives.

GEORGE: Ok.

NOEL: That is true today as it was true then. And yes, we should recognize that is a stressful condition, but not something that we are stressful about — we are resistant about.

GEORGE: Right. And I like the way you paint that emotional response. The Reconstruction period for Black families coming out of slavery was such a tumultuous time, and it was easy for families to fall apart and lose strength after enslavement. But your maternal family seems very grounded. So, I was wondering how you think A. W. E. Bassette was able to be a stabilizing force in their household?

NOEL: I'm only obviously guessing about Reconstruction. I'm only guessing from the way I was raised. The way I was raised, my parents made it sound like the families of slaves, the slave families, knew they were families and knew what they had lost if someone was sold to another plantation. These were not unknown things.

They knew who their family members were. And to the extent they could ever reunite, they knew that was probably an aim of theirs from day one. And if Reconstruction or post-slavery, post-emancipation allowed them to do that, I think they went to whatever extent they could to reunite their families. But those families that were already still together stayed together. I'm not sure that their economic strata would be different on that score for those who were more fortunate in their economic recovery or existence or establishment than others. I got the feeling that the family unit, the families — I would just say creation of family units post-slavery was as vigorous as it could be. I didn't get the sense that the stress of simply having been a slave prevented them from keeping their families together. They did everything they could to keep their families together was the impression that I had. And in our case, that's the way I was taught. They knew who they were. If we went to Mississippi, people I'd never heard of would be at events and family things because there were — it was spread so widely, horizontally in the sense of who you were related to. There would be more people than we might've chatted about around the kitchen table in Colorado. If we went to the kitchen table in Mississippi, it was a lot bigger.

GEORGE: That's good to know. And I know that A. W. E. Bassette passed the Virginia bar exam and became kind of the senior lawyer in town, helping folks in Hampton. How do you think his son, your maternal grandfather, got inspired to pursue a legal career after him?

NOEL: Well, hold on just a second. My great grandfather then was — I don't know about other lawyers in town, so I can't speak like he's the senior of other lawyers in town. I only know my own family's vertical lawyering here from father to son. And the son, my grandfather, I never got to meet him. He died when I was a small child, I don't know, three or four, and it's not somebody I ever got to meet. So, for me, everything is the storytelling passed along. But I would imagine that the idea that my grandfather had his father in town with a law practice was kind of like it would be today. Are you going to be a lawyer? Well, if not, then you made that decision, then go be whatever you want to be. I thought I wanted to be a doctor like my father until actually the summer before going to Dartmouth and would have been a doctor today. My father didn't raise me to be a doctor and follow in his footsteps, but I thought I wanted to.

GEORGE: And could I get the full name of your maternal grandfather, by the way?

NOEL: I think the A.W.E. is Andrew William Ernest Bassette. And then there would be the great grandfather was the first and then my grandfather was the second. My uncle was the third. And I have a cousin who's the fourth.

GEORGE: Oh, wow. That's very cool. So, it sounds like we can assume he wanted to follow in the footsteps of his father. That's good to know. Your maternal great-grandfather, A.W.E. Bassette, and your maternal grandfather, who was also named A.W.E. Bassette, were both attorneys. How do you think they inspired your mom to also pursue a career in public service? Because she wasn't an attorney, but she was, I think we could say, a public servant in her own way.

NOEL: She was a public-oriented educator. My mother may have later in life become a political activist, but she was always an educator. She got her master's in sociology from Fisk [University]. I'm trying to think of the name of the professor, I think I wrote it down here, that she got to work for. At Fisk, she was mentored by Dr. Charles S. Johnson, who was one of the early Black sociologists studying the Black community, or in those days, the Negro community across the country. And mom got to be part of that research.

When she came to Denver, she initially was a house person who took care of my sister and I until, I think, until I got into the sixth or seventh grade. And then she began to work for the city as part of the mayor's human relations commission. But soon thereafter, she ended up as a professor at a new school that's now Metro State University of Denver. It started out as Metro State College when it was first created in the early 60s. Mom was the co-founder of the Department of Black Studies and was a member of the faculty of the sociology department. And she taught for thirteen years before she had to retire with a back disability. But I think if you asked mom what she was, she was certainly going to include educator in the title, which goes back to the question you're asking. Yeah, I don't know if my mother had the opportunity to be a lawyer. If women at that stage in American history, and particularly history in the South, were given opportunities to be lawyers. Would my mother have been one? She could have been. I don't know if that opportunity was really available. But graduate school opportunity on a very limited basis for young Black women was available to some extent. And mom was fortunate to be able to do that.

GEORGE: Right. It sounds like she was able to make a lot of change for her community in her own way, just like her father did and his father did before him. So that's really good.

NOEL: I think so.

GEORGE: And kind of going back to her —

NOEL: I think that's how she felt about it. But, her sister, for example, was one of the hidden figures. I don't know if you saw the movie *Hidden Figures* [2016] or read the book. Her sister was one of those mathematicians. And she was an educator all of her life. So yes, this orientation to collective activity for the betterment of our people was an ingrained philosophy of our family.

GEORGE: Right. Could I get the full name of your mother's sister, by the way?

NOEL: Ida. They called her Ida B because her middle initial was B. Ida B Hadden was her married name.

GEORGE: That's good to know. And it seems like a lot of members in your family —

NOEL: Yes. The *Hidden Figures* book has an extensive index. It lists the names of all the people that are in that historical accounting. And so you can find her in that book.

GEORGE: Right. And it seems like a lot of people in your family have very strong roots in education. That's nice to hear.

NOEL: Yes, yes.

GEORGE: Going back to her early life. Your mom, for anyone who doesn't know, her name is Rachel Bassette, now Rachel Bassette Noel. She was born in January of 1918 in Hampton, Virginia. Could you tell me a little bit about the racial climate in Hampton at the time of her birth?

NOEL: She was actually born on January 15, which is the same day as Martin Luther King. She was very proud of that.

GEORGE: Wow.

NOEL: Or she was proud of that coincidence. January 15, 1918. Yes. I don't know what it was like growing up in Hampton, obviously. The way mom has described it is — and I think my father may have let me understand the same thing — it's not that slavery wasn't bad everywhere, it's just that like anything else in life, in some places it was less bad than others. And Virginia slavery was maybe, on the common, less bad than Alabama and Mississippi. I don't know what

the indices are for making that kind of gradation of bad, but that's how I generally understood it. I don't know how that translates into any description of any slave activity, et cetera. But, less bad versus more bad is best I could say.

And then so post-slavery in Virginia, or particularly Hampton, all I understood was that the institute — Hampton Institute as a higher education institution, not funded by the state of Virginia, but funded privately, had a private land perimeter inside of which a different world existed. A kind of integrated education, not fully diverse and as we would say today, but integrated to some extent in those days and more resources than the state of Virginia or Hampton would otherwise be able to provide. So, mom described the library, for example, at Hampton Institute was the best library in Virginia. And the scholars came to that library because it was funded and resourced at a different level because of its founders. Now, I don't know how that translates to the rest of the city. I'm sure it doesn't translate to the rest of the rural areas. But the South is riddled with and was riddled with ironies and hypocrisies and hidden distinctions and all the ways in which the absolute rule of segregation based on prejudice and hatred. Some of the things that happened would belie that for no good reason, perhaps or maybe reasons that they understood, and we may not understand the full context. And I think Virginia, and Hampton, was riddled with some of those otherwise inconsistent occurrences.

GEORGE: Right. And speaking of the Hampton Institute, your mom attended Hampton Lab Schools. Is that correct?

NOEL: She went to the Lab School, all of her K to 12, or 1 to 12. And then she went to the college, Hampton Institute, as a college student.

GEORGE: Right. So, what was that K through 12 experience like for your mom? Was it privileged compared to other Black students in the area or was it the norm?

NOEL: Well, I think that's what I was just saying that inside of that perimeter, the educational opportunity at a lab school was going to be different and better or wider resourced and maybe deeper in terms of faculty experience and competence. Well, I know the idea would be yes, it would be different. It would have been a better opportunity, educational opportunity. Sadly, that would be the case, but probably was the case.

GEORGE: I think that paints a very clear picture. Thank you. And since they have very similar legacies in educational activism, or not very

similar but there are parallels in their legacies, how do you think A.W.E. Bassette instilled in your mom the value of education?

NOEL: I got the feeling that part of the definition of patriarch was that they did the telling and you did the doing. So, I think however my great grandfather would have communicated with my mother and her siblings, it probably would have been pretty direct and they probably wouldn't have mistakenly understood anything differently than he intended. That's the idea I got from her, that he was — he was the patriarch.

GEORGE: That's good to know. So, he was rigid, but in a compassionate way?

NOEL: Rigid is a value word. I would say he was direct.

GEORGE: Ok. So it sounds like your maternal side of the family was extremely successful in a workforce that was still hostile to Black folks, like A.W.E. Bassette, the first —

NOEL: When you say that, you make it sound like “a” workforce. There was no “a” workforce. There were two workforces. There was a White workforce and a Black workforce. In a segregated society, the Black people are working in primarily jobs that mirror jobs that White people have for less and with less resources. So, you're a Black teacher. That doesn't mean you're alongside White teachers and you get less. No, you're in a segregated school and you get less. You were never going to get more. You were never going to get the same. But there are going to be X number of Black teachers to educate X number of separate Black students. And that's how a segregated society works. It works in some ways almost — that's not correct to say — it works also to achieve full employment by having a separate system that for all the functions has to find Black people to do it.

GEORGE: Right. I'm glad you clarified that. So, it sounds like a lot of your family was successful in the Black workforce —

NOEL: Yes.

GEORGE: Yes, and a lot of Black folks during the Reconstruction Era weren't doing as well as them. So what do you think their career success could be attributed to?

NOEL: I don't know. I don't know. I wouldn't sit here and say they were smarter or anything. I don't know. I don't know how my great grandfather came out of slavery as a child and ends up sitting for

the bar — again, not an exam — becoming a lawyer. Somebody must have assisted him. There must have been some kind of mentor. I don't know, again, about the family generation ahead of him. I don't know what that does to make opportunities available to him. I don't know those stepping stones.

GEORGE: Right. That's a valid answer. And I think there's a lot of pieces in history that are going to be forever missing.

NOEL: Or for historians like yourself to find out.

GEORGE: Right

NOEL: Maybe that information is findable. It didn't pass down in the colloquial family history giving and receiving that I was a part of.

GEORGE: Right. And with the turn of generations, I think you can expect some information to not be passed down. That's totally reasonable. So, your mom got her bachelor's degree from Hampton and her master's degree in sociology from Fisk University, which are both historically Black schools, HBCUs. So, I was wondering if she ever encouraged you to attend an HBCU?

NOEL: Well, it was discussed as one of the possibilities. Since going to college was discussed as not — it was heavily encouraged, let's put it that way. And I was already ready to be going to college to find out about life and what I might do in it anyway. So, it wasn't a push to make me want to go to college. What was described to me more was based on what you do and how well you do it, you're going to have a range of opportunities for colleges. And I'm in a school that I may have described to you earlier was — my East Denver High School class of 1964 that I was a part of was picked by *Look Magazine*, which then was a national magazine and each year it picked the top ten high schools in the country. And, in 1964, my high school was picked as one of the top ten high schools in the country. Our students or students at the top of the class at East High School are likely to be favorably considered by select colleges. And it didn't take too much of a brainer to realize that I was part of that group and part of that benefit and might have a chance to get into an Ivy League school. That was a — not eliminated as an alternative, but probably touted as maybe the next thing for our family to do. It's hard to describe to you, but what I understood from my family experience, that Black families across the country also did, was to ingrain a sense in us, in our generation, that our primary responsibility was to help carry our people a step further than what we inherited. And so that might not be going to a

Black university or college that already existed, that already had been taking us for generations. Maybe that meant some of us who had the opportunity may also have had the obligation to go to schools that didn't heretofore allow us to be there. That's pretty straight and clear cut to me and that's why I did it.

GEORGE: Right. And I think carrying your people further and further is a really good mantra. I'm excited to get to your high school years in a few minutes actually, but kind of reeling back to your mother, could you tell me a little bit about how and when your parents went?

NOEL: The "when" part is in the late 30s. She was working on her master's in sociology at Fisk and my father was in medical school at Meharry Medical College, both in Nashville [TN]. How they met after they were both in the same city, I do not know. I trust it was mutual friends. I don't think there was any family arranging or any family connection that started an introduction. I think it was more they were young people in a common southern city at southern Black schools that — the guys at the medical school, it was all men that knew the women were at Fisk. So, it probably didn't take my dad too long to figure out how to find Fisk.

GEORGE: Right. And it seems like from what I could tell in my research, they had a really great partnership. So maybe it was just divine intervention —

NOEL: The divine intervention also might have been the state of the world in the pre-war, World War II outbreak. The likelihood of war could have been and would have been on everybody's mind. They ended up getting married before my dad shipped out. So, I don't know how long they went together before that and the actual details, but I know it was a pre-war situation. They were both obviously older in graduate school. So, they somehow met in Nashville, Tennessee.

GEORGE: That's good to know. I didn't know a lot about that World War II context. So, going off of that information, do you think that they were eager to get married because the war was looming over them and they wanted to find love in the brief moments that they could?

NOEL: Oh, absolutely. I'm sure every couple in the late 30s and early 40s, particularly 30s and early 40s, particularly in our country and Europe, knew that was a possibility to get drafted. And if you got drafted, then you — in those days you were going to ship out. And if you shipped out, you might not come back. So that was a reality that a larger part of the population had to deal with then than certainly now.

GEORGE: Right. And I don't think a lot of people really think critically about how World War II and just conflicts in general shape marriage and domestic relationships. So, that's really fascinating. Your paternal grandfather, from what you told me, he was freed from slavery and then went on to attend Alcorn State University graduating in 1914. Is that correct?

NOEL: No, no. My father's father graduated from Alcorn State A&M in 1914, but that meant he was born long after slavery.

GEORGE: Right.

NOEL: In 1914, he was in his late teens, early twenties. I don't know exactly what his birthday date, year, actually was, but it was past slavery, probably, past slavery and certainly past Reconstruction. But I don't know a lot about my father's father, my grandfather or my father. I don't know much about his childhood at all. My understanding is that the Noel family came from Holme or Holmes County on a plantation and that my grandfather, Andrew Jackson Noel, was the first to leave the plantation as a young man. And he got a job after his college experience with the U.S. Federal Postal Service on a mail car run. And as such, he was a federal employee with a federal salary, which was automatically a dramatic difference for a person of color in the South, a Black person in Mississippi, to not only have a federal job, but to also have a gun on a mail run. That was a job of stature and repute in the community. Beyond that, I don't know how to describe it.

GEORGE: Right. And speaking of your father's very complex lineage, I found online that your father's half-uncle was Edmond Favor Noel. He was a white man who was the governor of Mississippi from 1908 to 1912. Your father and the governor were from different lines of descendants of Leland Noel, who I believe was a major white planter in Holmes County before the American Civil War. And this is one of the oldest and most prominent slave-owning families in Mississippi. The governor was your father's namesake, and then he became your namesake. I've asked you this before, but just to reiterate —

NOEL: Let me just object here. Let's take this namesake — let's not take this too far. Yes, my name is Edmond. My middle name is not Favor. And my father's middle name is not Favor. My father's name was Edmond Forrest Noel. I'm Edmond Forrest Noel, Jr. So namesake is the Edmond part. But full name, no. And if that was a distinction my grandfather made at the time when he named his

son, I guess it is. Why he did it, I couldn't say. You seem to know more about the connection through your resource than I really knew. All I knew was, the way it was explained to me, is that for some reason my grandfather, and I never got to talk to him, and my father never told me, but for some reason my grandfather was favorably inclined to somebody, if it was Leland or whoever it was, I don't know, and named my father Edmond instead of naming my father after himself. And so, his second son became Andrew Jackson Noel Jr. I never had a chance to talk with my grandfather about it because he died when I was, I think, fourteen or fifteen. And, I didn't even know what I would have talked to him about at that age. But the point is, yes, this is something in my family's history. You may know more about it than I do. Our kind of historian was my older cousin, Catherine Sue Bates. Her mother is a famous Mississippian, Gladys Noel Bates [*Gladys Noel Bates v. State of Mississippi*, 1948], and her husband, John Bates, filed one of the earliest lawsuits in Mississippi over segregation. In their case, it was over segregated pay as schoolteachers, for which their house was bombed, and they eventually moved to Colorado. And then Mississippi has since recognized my — and Gladys' — contributions. But the Edmond part, that's as much as I know.

GEORGE: Okay, that's good to know. And I had to do a lot of this for my research for this project, but when you look up the name Edmond Noel on Google, a lot of what pops up is articles about this racist man and how he upheld white supremacy in Mississippi's political system. So how does it feel emotionally having to carry the name of such a bigoted political figure?

NOEL: Pretty easy. I'm not carrying his name at all. I'm carrying my father's name. It's that simple to me. And as a mature adult, if I can't figure that out, something's wrong with me. So, no, I don't consider myself responsible for or supporting some racist anybody. But my grandfather made a decision that I don't know or fully understand. But I respect my grandfather. So that means I accept whatever his notion was. My father, for some reason, didn't explain it to me anymore. I don't know what my father's actual feelings might have been. But to me, it's an expression of my grandfather — my grandfather and my father. It's not an expression of everybody else.

GEORGE: Okay, okay. I never would assume that you were supporting the governor, but I'm glad to know that it didn't have —

NOEL: Let's put it this way. I'm a mature adult. So some governor in the history of Mississippi is hardly going to create any stress for me.

GEORGE: Right. And that's really good to recontextualize. And in my research, I found that the descendants of Edmond Noel, like the governor of Mississippi, they essentially faded into obscurity. I'm sure they're still very wealthy, but they're kind of irrelevant. While your family, your line of that tree occupies such a high position in society. It seems like your family was given so much less and you still achieved so much more than the descendants of the governor. So does that kind of give you a sense of satisfaction?

NOEL: No, that's not even relevant.

GEORGE: Yeah.

NOEL: It's not even relevant on a satisfaction meter. Whatever some other Noels have or have not achieved is their own benefit or their own problem. I don't have anything to do with it.

GEORGE: I think that's —

NOEL: For my family, I'm proud of my grandfather who came off of a plantation and ended up with a federal job and had four children. And three of them — one became a dentist, one became a doctor, one became a school teacher, and one became, actually, a successful factory worker. And they were all genuinely good human beings. And that's enough for me. I don't need to worry about somebody else's lineage at all.

GEORGE: Right. I think that speaks to your healthy mindset. And kind of going back to what you just said, could you tell me a little bit about your father's immediate family structure? Who was there for him when he was growing up?

NOEL: Well, my father moved from Mississippi to Colorado. And whatever your research would show you about traveling between our various states in the 40s and 50s and early 60s — it was difficult. So we didn't go back and forth to Mississippi all the time. Consequently, I knew my uncle, who was a dentist, and my aunt, who was the schoolteacher, in large part because they moved to Denver to have a better opportunity. And his youngest brother, the one that was a factory worker, stayed in New Jersey. And we went to New Jersey, because obviously it was in the north. And because my mother's sister, the Ida B. Hadden that I referenced, lived in New Jersey. So we could see my father's brother and my mother's sister in the same New York area trip. But trips to Mississippi, the first time I remember going was my grandfather dying and meeting people that I — some I heard of, most I hadn't even heard of, let alone

knew of. And so, on my father's side, I knew less.

GEORGE: Right. And could I get the full names of your father's siblings who you just mentioned?

NOEL: Well, the second oldest was my aunt, Gladys Noel Bates. And then Andrew Jackson Noel Jr. was a dentist. And then John C. Noel was the youngest factory worker in New Jersey.

GEORGE: Okay, that's good to know. And it sounds like your father grew up with a lot of siblings. I imagine that must have been a source of comfort for him.

NOEL: Well, he had three siblings. I only have one, so I can assume —

GEORGE: Right

NOEL: Two more must be more fun. Yes.

GEORGE: What universities did your father attend?

NOEL: My father went, undergraduate, to Alcorn State A&M. And then, medical school, to Meharry College in Nashville.

GEORGE: Okay. And from your recollection of what he told you, what was his experience like attending HBCUs?

NOEL: Well, they didn't describe it that way. You realize HBCU is a kind of thing that you toss around now. Those were just Black schools and Black universities then. And they were created either privately or publicly. If they were created publicly, they were intended to be segregated. If they were created privately, they might have had some integrative elements to them because they were privately funded. They varied. And they fit a dramatic need in the post-slavery, post-Reconstruction period. They fit an even greater need as the world ever opened up more after the turn of the century, where we still couldn't go to all of the private institutions, even all of the state institutions. And if we went, they were segregated state institutions. Some of which were treated as Black institutions, not all of which were fully Black. And so, when you seek to enforce a segregated society, you have hypocrisies and inconsistencies that all have to almost be individually explained to understand. But that was that — the South was riddled with that. It's no surprise that that's how the court system began to unravel segregation. At first, we were addressing they were not equal. They may have been separate, but they were not equal. So, then the

court system had to deal with trying to make them equal, requiring the state owned, operated institutions to make them “equal,” which proved obviously to be more difficult than the South was willing to address. But the role of Black institutions of higher education were integral, essential to try to get our people educated. And what we see left today are the vintages of that larger pool of schools that we can more easily identify now, but then there were more, and they were meeting a much larger need.

GEORGE: Right. And kind of like your mom, I grew up on Howard University's campus in DC, and I used a lot of their resources growing up. I'm a huge advocate of HBCUs and their lasting importance today. And do you know why your father chose to pursue a career in medicine when that wasn't such an easily accessible field for Black folks at the time and still even today?

NOEL: Well, it was, when you say easily accessible. At the time, it was “easily accessible” because there had to be a Black pipeline for doctors. So, yes, you had to have some resources to be even in that Black pipeline, but there was an assured Black pipeline that we're going to need to be Black doctors. There was a difficulty for surgeons or Black doctors at the hospital privilege level. But in those days, if you were educated with a college degree, you had a narrow choice, but those were choices. You could be a doctor, a preacher, a teacher, or you could be a doctor in the medical and dental professions. You could be a teacher and a preacher. Those were professional opportunities, and there was a pipeline to fill those. And, like I said, because we had a segregated society, we're going to have churches, we're going to have medical needs, we're going to have segregated teaching institutions. So we were going to have to have teachers. They weren't competing against a job with a white person. They were only filling spots on a segregated Black side of the equation.

GEORGE: That makes sense. So do you think your —

NOEL: Why my father chose to be a doctor instead of a teacher or a preacher, I don't know.

GEORGE: Okay. I think that context makes a lot of sense. So before you were born, your father was a doctor for the American military in World War II. Is that correct?

NOEL: My dad was a captain in the army at a station in the South Pacific, and he was in a unit that was a precursor to the mass units in the Korean War. What the army learned from the World War II

experience was — my dad was in a mass unit, it was in a precursor mass unit, it was more like massive triage — they get all of these wounded soldiers back to a hospital, and what they learned was they lose too many people trying to do it that way. By Korea, they decided to have mass units, which were essentially smaller mobile hospitals closer to the front line that saved more lives and reduced more the ultimate nature of the wounded.

GEORGE: Right.

NOEL: He was in a precursor to a mass unit in the South Pacific, and in the South Pacific, we didn't have Black fighting units in actual border localities fighting like we'd had fighting units in the European theater. So, the war wasn't a pleasant, saving democracy experience for my father. It was a segregated army that wasn't allowed to even fight for its country.

GEORGE: Right. So, was your father a medical practitioner during the war?

NOEL: That's what I was describing. He was in a precursor to a mass unit doing medical work as a captain —

GEORGE: Ok. That's good to —

NOEL: In the US Army Medical Corps. He was drafted out of his residency, so he'd already finished medical school. He'd already been an intern in his residency at Homer Phillips Hospital in St. Louis, Missouri, and drafted before he finished that residency. So, when the war was over, he went back to St. Louis to finish that residency, and quickly, I was born.

GEORGE: Right. And kind of what you just said, I know while the war department agreed to allow Black doctors and nurses to serve in the war, they had to work in separate facilities from White people, and there was a lot of really harsh segregation. So, what was his experience in the war like from your recollection of what he told you? I imagine it was terrible, but were there any specifics that stand out to you?

NOEL: Well, first of all, I told you the soldiers were not fighting, so the soldiers had to be stored someplace. The Black soldiers and the other soldiers behind lines — imagine lines across islands in the South Pacific. So, there were lines of islands that were closer to the fighting lines than were further. The Black soldiers were in the back. They were not going to see action. They were on islands training and going through, well, training exercises, but not ending up

actually fighting the enemy. And so, the medical corps on those islands was not dealing with an ever-increasing number of wounded and all of those things from actual combat. They were in ready without actual combat happening. So, he spent his time on various islands. I don't know how many or where — how it was, but the way he portrayed it to me is that his soldiers didn't see action. So, he didn't seem battle-wounded on any kind of extraordinary basis.

GEORGE: Okay. And did he work in segregated facilities during the war?

NOEL: The whole island was segregated Black soldiers. That's what I was trying to describe to you. So, the islands had — toward the front were white soldiers and white doctors. Toward the back were Black soldiers who didn't get to go fight and Black doctors who would have been treating wounded that didn't come back wounded because they didn't get to fight. And they were already segregated by where they were located.

GEORGE: Right. And so, when your father returns from World War II, it was around when you were born in 1946. I imagine that your father being a war veteran had to have immense trauma from those years, especially working in segregated spaces. So, how do you think that trauma impacted him when he got back home?

NOEL: Well, I mean, you're assuming a trauma that neither you nor I can actually say existed. So, let's back off of the trauma assumption. My father came back from the war pissed off as much as how any soldier, whether they fought or didn't fight, might have felt. And I'm sure a soldier who fought was more traumatized than a soldier who didn't. So, it's not relevant to get into levels of trauma in the question or the answer. My father came back from the war pissed off that segregated soldiers had been drafted and sent to a war that they did not get to fight in for their country like anybody else. And that they came back to a country that did not welcome them on the same basis as white soldiers. And going back to a segregated South on that basis was not something he was ready to do. It's part of why he headed to the West and we ended up in Colorado, and not unlike hundreds of thousands of other Black families and former soldiers.

GEORGE: Yeah. So, you're —

NOEL: Segregation is bad. Segregation pisses people off. But not everybody's traumatized as much as they're pissed off.

GEORGE: Yeah, that's a good distinction to make. So, your parents get together and they relocate from the South to Denver, Colorado. You touched on this a little bit earlier, but can you tell me more about the factors that motivated this move?

NOEL: Well, a primary factor was he decided when he came back from the war and got his full medical credentials, finishing his residency programs, that he would not move and try to establish a practice in a segregated South. That left whether he would go north to the middle part of the country, like Chicago, or to the East Coast, maybe to the West Coast. Colorado was a known place where legal segregation did not exist. Segregation in practice existed in various mores, practices, cultural approaches, but not legally. So, the school system was not by law segregated, but it had de facto resultant segregation. Housing was not by law segregated, but housing patterns, neighborhood creations were de facto segregated housing patterns with the cooperation of realtors, and white families, and mortgage companies. We all know this de facto history of how we end up with segregation when it's not required by law. Well, in terms of what's less and what's more, less segregation would occur in a place like Colorado than Mississippi, and he chose to go to Colorado.

He chose to go to Colorado serendipitously at the time that the Jewish doctors were being still segregated against in the hospitals in Denver and decided to build their own hospital. So, my dad was coming to Colorado when the newest hospital in the country was being built, and the Jewish doctors were intent on not segregating, had an anti-discrimination provision in their medical doctors association bylaws, and they were receptive to my dad as an army surgeon looking for a place to live and a hospital to be associated with, and he became the first Black surgeon with medical hospital privileges in Colorado when we moved here in late 49, early 1950.

GEORGE: Right. I think that's a really good rationale. And, in the Great Migration, most Black folks relocated to northern cities where there were substantial Black populations, and Colorado didn't really have one. I think even today the demographics of Colorado are, like, less than ten percent Black. So, why do you think your parents knew this and still made the risk of moving there?

NOEL: You see it as a risk. They saw it as a net benefit. I was just describing, it was a net benefit against St. Louis, to where they were. It was clearly a net benefit against going back to the South, whether it would have been any different if we'd gone to Los

Angeles [CA] or other Rocky Mountain or western cities that had small Black populations.

If you study these, and Lord knows I haven't, but my guess is the sociology of cities where there are smaller minority percentages may well have been places where there was greater minority opportunity. You're used to being in a city where Blacks get something because they have more than fifty percent. You didn't grow up in the Rocky Mountain or west where the frontier ethic had Black cowboys, Black farmers, etc., not who were achieving because they had large numbers, but who were achieving on their individual abilities and accomplishments. That means we get, perhaps, some mobility with fewer numbers. Maybe we get more resistance with a few more numbers. Who knows the mentality of bigoted people? Lord knows I don't. But what we have seen in Colorado and places like Denver — Black folks have achieved beyond their percentage power. I'll give you an example. I became a partner in a large law firm as the first Black partner in a large law firm in 1977. I called a friend of mine from law school in Los Angeles. He was congratulating me and he said, you just tied the entire state of California. There was one in Denver and there were only four in Philadelphia. So, sometimes the quirkiness of bigotry is just hard to gauge.

GEORGE: Right. Touching on what you just said, I do want to speak to the difference between Black Denver and other urban Black areas a little bit later because I think there are very stark differences. Going back to your father's occupation, like what you were just speaking to, he was the first Black surgeon with hospital privileges in Denver. Do you remember what obstacles he might have faced practicing medicine there?

NOEL: Well, he would have faced the obstacles of running medicine as a business. I mean, it's one thing to be a qualified surgeon. It's also — you got to find patients, to have office space. He was moving to Denver and the local pharmacist, the top pharmacist in the Black community, was also kind of the man who knew everything in town and had political connections with the Democratic Party. And, he offered my dad medical space above his pharmacy, which was a good way to be able to start your medical practice. You had a place and you're right there with a pharmacy where people know you exist. And I don't know the exact number of Black physicians there were. Just when I was growing up, I can kind of recall two or three others, but I was just a kid. I don't know what the Black medical community looked like in the 50s, but I know it was growing and opportunity was being opened up. My dad just was one of the early

ones. And the idea of how difficult it was, I'm sure that there were White doctors who would have wanted to resist. I don't know how, I don't even know if my father was a part of the Colorado Medical Society, for example, when he first started practicing. I don't know if they tried to keep him out of the medical society. I know the Black doctors, as they got more numbers, created their own local medical society. But the state medical society, I don't recall. I know that the Black Bar Association allowed Blacks when I became a lawyer, but I don't know when that changed. Probably at some earlier point, maybe Blacks were kept out of our Bar Association.

But the larger point I'm making, I think, is that my dad was given an opportunity just by virtue of having that hospital open to him to start medicine as a business. He had a general practice and he could do surgery on his own patients and maybe surgery on patients of some other doctors who didn't have hospital privileges. I doubt if he was being sent White patients to do surgery on, but Black patients were not having to have a White doctor when they had my father as a surgical alternate on a hospital staff.

GEORGE: Right. And that pharmacist you mentioned and his office space, was that in the Five Points neighborhood of Denver?

NOEL: Yes. Right.

GEORGE: So that's why your parents initially moved to Five Points?

NOEL: Well, they actually didn't move to Five Points. When they first came to town, somebody knew somebody and we lived in the basement of a friend of somebody until my father, and I think it took a year or so to find a house to buy, he ended up finding a house to buy on a block. At the time, the neighborhood was east of Five Points, but west of a Main Street called York Street. Blacks had not bought property east of York Street and nearer to York Street was beginning to open up. And when my father bought a house a block off of York Street, or two blocks off of York Street, we were the second Black family. And I can remember as a young kid, that phenomenon of being the second Black family on a street. White families that didn't necessarily appreciate us being there. Some white family had sold. They didn't have to. The law didn't stop them from selling to a Black family, and they did. And then once one sold, then there were going to likely then be white families running and leaving and allowing other Black families to come. And eventually our block had more white families, but I can remember the house next to us. I don't think my parents ever said a thing to the adults that lived next to us, but they had a teenage boy who was a very

good baseball player, and he taught me how to play baseball. And I don't think he said a word to me ever. He would stand out in front of our houses, in front of his house, and they don't build houses like this anymore with front steps, but it had front steps from the house to the next level, and then another set of steps down to the sidewalk level. That created two separate step structures. And he could stand, he'd stand way back in the street or he could stand on the easement from the sidewalk to the street, throw the tennis ball at the steps and create different occurrences. It might go to a grounder, it might go to a fly, might go left or right, and he could practice catching by throwing this tennis ball against the steps. So, he's a teenager and I'm a six-year-old. And what does a six-year-old do anytime they see a teenager? They watch them and they're fascinated by them. And if the kid even acknowledges that you're alive and looks at you or says hi, you're like elated. So, I don't even know that this — he could have been called Joe Palooka for all I know. I don't even know his name. I did watch him practice all the time and then he would see me — I got a tennis ball, and he would see me try to do it. Then he eventually showed me how to try to do it. But again, I don't know his name. We're not talking about him being white and me being Black. I'm just a kid. And he taught me how to play baseball, or at least he taught me how to throw and catch. And the larger lesson to me has always been if you want people to change, which is what we are always asking ourselves, of course, we want the world to be different. We want people to change. Then we have to allow the change to happen. I had to allow, as a young person, that man to help me and not look at his whiteness as something to stop me from having that happen, but let it happen anyway. So now, he naturally, his family moved out. I have no idea who he was or where he went, but I'll bet his life was changed by working with me, just as my life was changed by him being a baseball mentor.

GEORGE: That sounds like that early experience was really meaningful for you.

NOEL: When my father then built a house, six or eight years later, in a different part of town that also had been recently segregated and was opening up to Black families to buy, he did that move. And of course, that move required more of a financing challenge than the original first house purchase. And at that point, my father was meeting banking segregation, banking discrimination. And he and some other Black professionals and businessmen, to accommodate their collective financial aspirations, created a savings and loan association, a Black owned savings and loan association, part of which was to finance their own home building and collectivize their

financial aspirations. If you look throughout the rest of the country, you would see that's exactly what was happening in major city after major city.

We were post-war, having jobs, creating wealth, whatever limited level, because Black people were doing that. But we had professionals and some businesspeople who were creating that wealth and who were then experiencing discrimination. So while, in education, segregation fell with a Supreme Court decision, the Brown School Board case, in the rest of commerce, the Civil Rights Act didn't get finally passed until 1964. The Brown case was 54. And between 54 and 64, Black communities across the country were — Martin Luther King is not the only person involved in the struggle across the country — city after city. It was like building on the Brown case as bringing down segregation and wanting to have it apply to all walks of American life, as well as an effort to get statutes passed, primarily initially at the federal level, to simply make it illegal. But both strategies were being utilized in that decade between 54 and 64.

I don't know if your research has gotten to Dartmouth's experience, but my understanding is that in 54, the faculty approved allowing more minority — probably principally Black — students, immediately in light of the Brown Supreme Court case, but elected to study the “how to do that” before doing it. The “how to do it” didn't get triggered until my class, the class of '68, which arrived in the fall of 64. So it took them ten years to study, to decide how they decided. I mean, that report I've never seen or known its contents, but I know there was that stepping of stones here before I got there. And I think what I observed happened — they decided there would be fourteen of us, however that ended up happening in the admissions process, but they didn't decide how to do it. It was like, we're coming, but the support system for us or whatever the broader plan would be to accomplish it in the various corners of academic life and student life, those hadn't all been thought out. We arrived without preparation, if you will. And if you started with one class in the class of '68, then these classes that were going to follow behind us had more and more admittees with the same lack of preparation. I'm faulting the college for not being as prepared as maybe it might have, they stopped using time as an excuse anymore. They basically just said “to hell with it, we're taking them. We'll figure it out when they get there. Okay. If we do that, there are going to be some problems, but we're not going to stop the pipeline from filling.” Each ensuing class had larger and larger numbers of Black students. And my recollection is that in five or six years, six or

seven years, whatever it was, we got up to something like a 300-person critical mass and had three Rhodes scholars.

GEORGE: Yeah.

NOEL: So something was working in finding Black Dartmouth students.

GEORGE: And I'll touch back on your college years in just a second, but kind of going back to your childhood, just to clarify. So your family never lived in Five Points proper. They lived surrounding Five Points?

NOEL: They lived in an area east of Five Points near the next street barrier. And then our next house was near the next street barrier. So in both instances, we were the early Black family on the block.

GEORGE: Right. And Five Points was a predominantly Black neighborhood. Is that correct?

NOEL: It was, yes. It's being gentrified as we speak, but it was, yes.

GEORGE: Could you tell me a little bit about how Five Points compared to other urban Black neighborhoods around the country at the time?

NOEL: I have no idea because I don't know about other neighborhoods, but in a city in which we were then probably less than five percent of the population and we were, by practice, segregated into a small neighborhood physical area. What happened in the Black community commercially happened around the commercial establishments in the five-street corner called Five Points. One of which, for example, was a hotel and a stage club. And so if Lena Horne came to town or Duke Ellington came to town, they played at the Rossonian on Five Points. They probably stayed at the Rossonian Hotel. I think — I don't know if I'm making this up, but I think I remember my father being called to treat some entertainer like that because he was the doctor in town and they had a cold or whatever in their hotel room.

They couldn't go to the Broadmoor, which was one of the top resort complexes in the country, which was only sixty miles down the road in Colorado Springs [CO], but they went to a Black-owned resort in the mountains, kind of due west of Denver that was called the Wink's Lodge and it had a nightclub and a resort housing cottages. It was in a county called Gilpin County [CO] where the county had set aside land for Blacks, for Black second home resort cabin properties. And down the valley from these properties was the Wink's Lodge. So, if Black people went to the mountains to recreate

or Lena Horne wanted to get away after performing in Denver and spend a few days in the mountains, that's where they would go.

GEORGE: Right. And I asked that earlier question because I'm also from a Black urban area in D.C. and our community has very poor living conditions. Was that the same standard in Five Points?

NOEL: Well, I think in relative terms the housing in Five Points would have likely, in the main, been less than other white areas in Denver and the surrounding county. But, in comparative terms to older East Coast cities, our housing would have been much better. And everybody who had family and friends come from the East Coast to Denver would remark just that, that the housing stock was newer, nicer, had yards. We had a different level of opportunities for a much smaller population of them.

GEORGE: Right.

NOEL: Now, if you look at Denver versus some other parts of the country, what was happening after World War II was the regionalization of federal agencies. And this large region west of the Mississippi [River] and east of the West Coast, I refer to as the Rocky Mountain West because of the Rocky Mountains and the continental divide for Colorado and Wyoming and Montana and these states that are on the Rocky Mountain east side of the mountain range, that became the location for regional offices of several departments of the federal government, which meant those jobs were supposed to be not segregated. Those federal jobs were supposed to be available to Black folks. And so that resource alone was going to differentiate us from other cities, again, for a much smaller population number to have comparatively more economic opportunities. And so, a lot of us had federal jobs because of that.

GEORGE: Right.

NOEL: There's a very large finance center, for example, here. So, a lot of Black folks, particularly with military credentials who had served, who would have preference for federal jobs because they were veterans, came to Colorado.

GEORGE: Right. I think that's a really interesting parallel to where I'm from because, of course, D.C., we have a lot of federal agencies that were segregated. There were a lot of federal jobs open for Black folks, but that didn't seem to economically uplift us in the way that it sounds like those jobs did in Denver.

NOEL: Well, also think about Denver as — this is kind of perhaps too large a generality, but let's just use it for conversation's sake. Maybe upward mobile people are more likely to get in a wagon train and ride it all the way across the country with the promise of a piece of land. And the same way with our folks coming to Colorado because you might get a job at the Air Force Finance Center because they're hiring 300 people and some of those people are going to be Black. So yeah, I think upward mobile Black people came to Colorado and got their upwardly mobile opportunities.

GEORGE: Right.

NOEL: And maybe that relative difference of opportunity resulted in some difference of success for all I know. But I know that that was part of Denver's growth after World War II and dramatic growth.

GEORGE: I think that explains a lot. So kind of going back to your childhood again, you started your K through 12 experience attending Wyman Elementary School, which was predominantly Black. So how —

NOEL: No, no, no. Wyman was not predominantly Black. Wyman was predominantly white because we're only less than five percent of the total population. So, we're hardly going to be able to make a school predominantly Black by ourselves. And if we do, it's going to be close to Five Points where most of our people are living. The first house that I was describing near the York Street boundary, I, in that house as a second Black family on the block, went to Wyman. Wyman was not predominantly Black, but it was the first school I went to.

GEORGE: So—

NOEL: It was nowhere near at the academic level of the second school I went to, Park Hill, that was also predominantly white, but just in a wealthier, more highly educated neighborhood and was the top elementary school in the city. But Wyman was inferior in comparative terms to Park Hill, not simply because of Wyman being predominantly Black, because it just wasn't as good a school as Park Hill.

GEORGE: Right. So you were bused to Park Hill Elementary School, is that correct?

NOEL: I was bused to Park Hill because when we built that house, we were in an area that had been all white and had not turned all Black. In fact, we were just a block inside the line that the realtors

were trying to hold. And so, when my father bought the lot, he bought it because our city councilman who looked white bought the land from a white man who thought he was white. And he wouldn't have sold it to him unless he was white. And so, my father's councilman friend, then sold it to my father. We ended up, then, one block inside a neighborhood that was still almost all white. And because it was all white and its neighborhood school, its closest school, had already turned all Black, the school board let those white parents opt in to a voluntary busing to the best elementary school, Park Hill.

GEORGE: Okay.

NOEL: And because we were one block inside that option, my parents selected the option also and put me on the bus. And that's how I ended up at Park Hill for one year of sixth grade.

GEORGE: Okay. That error was my bad, because when you talked over the phone about being bused to Park Hill, I imagined that the school you had left was Black and Park Hill was a school that you were integrating.

Your mom first got involved in educational advocacy in Denver by joining her children's PTA associations and working her way up from there until she was able to really, really drastically change the public school system in Denver for Black children. So how did it feel knowing that you were the reason your mom first stepped into Denver public schools and that you indirectly caused so much change in the district?

NOEL: Well, I didn't do anything, but my mother was educated. And my mother had a master's degree in sociology that gave her a background in a kind of viewpoint range that was wide. And, you know, my mother worked in the mayor's office on human relations. So, she was a professional involved in community change. And of course, we all know community change has a lot to do with the educational institutions in our various communities. All of this was because she was a parent and because she was a professional. And I think my sister and I got a bit older, and she was able to come to a place where she began to work outside the home.

GEORGE: Right. So your mom already had this background in sociology from her master's degree at Fisk University. And you think you entering Denver public schools kind of gave her an opportunity to use that background in meaningful ways in the school district? So this was

more so a door opening for her?

NOEL: Well, I think the PTA was a way for her to be involved as parents are involved with their children. And then that, that ends up with her having an opportunity to be a part of a larger and larger community of interested parents about a public school district in which their kids reside and use the educational services. So, she then becomes part of a community of other parents who care and want the system to do more and do better. And I, you know, I was a kid, so I don't know how she met the people she met, did what she did with the people she did things with. But I'm sure that was the process. It was a springboard. I know ultimately she ended up on a study committee that was created from like-minded individuals wanting to have the school district as a practical matter be less segregated and not as an intentional matter be segregated and continually more segregated. And that was being illustrated by the school boards posing the possibility of a new high school or new junior high. I think it was a junior high at a certain location that when it opened could be predicted from the neighborhood location selection to be all Black or nearly all Black, which they were advocating would have negative consequences. If the resource allocations continued like they were, then that school would have fewer resources, et cetera. They thought integrating schools would end up with better equitable allocation of resources and opportunities. They chose integration over segregation. That school proposal was a linchpin of opposition to get them organized. And the study group existence and my mother's participation in it was a place, I'm sure, where she showed her own capabilities and her own strengths. And she was encouraged to run for the school board.

GEORGE: Right. So, your mom was a huge champion of civil rights in Denver. And just for anyone who's listening and who's not as familiar with the work of Mrs. Noel, I'll run through a brief list of her big victories. And this is very, very brief. She was the first Black woman elected to public office statewide in Colorado. She was the first—

NOEL: No. Yeah, she was the first woman elected statewide. And that was for the University of Colorado Board of Regents. She became the first elected Black woman, though, earlier when she was elected to the Denver school board. So chronologically, the Denver school board came first. That made her the first elected Black woman to public office. And then subsequently, when she was elected statewide to a statewide position on the University of Colorado Board of Regents, that's how she became the first Black statewide.

GEORGE: Right. I didn't mean to go in chronological order, but that's a good clarification. Thank you for that. She was, like you said, the first Black representative elected to Denver Public Schools Board of Education, and she became the first Black member and the chair of the University of Colorado Board of Regents. So we know that she—

NOEL: They call the Board of Regents chair, they call it the president of the board. And I was the president of a competitor university, Colorado State University had a governing board. And for the year my mother was president of the Board of Regents, I was president of the board for Colorado State University, which was unique, as you can imagine, and resulted in an article in *Ebony* magazine. Of course, you know what *Ebony* magazine was. And then it was the only magazine of national note that we had. We had a smaller one called *Jet*. But the *Ebony* magazine was the Black magazine comparable to *Life* magazine. And was the *Life* magazine for the Black community. And so there was an article about my mother and I being presidents of governing boards of Colorado's two top state universities.

GEORGE: Right. And kind of circling back though, we know that your mom began her activism in Denver Public Schools because her children attended them. But what do you think motivated her to keep working even after you left for college?

NOEL: Well, my mother was committed to whatever she could do in the Black community. These were opportunities that she and others that she planned things with decided was a role that she could play. I mean, both of these were elective offices in a situation where we've got less than five percent of the population. So we're not planning how we get fifty-two percent of the voters to just show up and elect somebody. It's a different kind of election. Both of these positions are elected positions. And there's a lot of community planning and execution before they actually happen. My mother was part of the active community, politically active community in the 50s, in the 60s, and 70s principally as our, you know, as our community progressed.

GEORGE: Right. And while I was watching the several documentaries that are available online about your mom and her work, I noticed that she is a light-skinned Black woman. And I was wondering, like, do you think she still would have been able to rise to power and incur so much change in the school district if she was dark-skinned?

NOEL: I'm not sure that at that time it had anything to do with it. My mother was particularly and keenly aware and made no bones about —

that she was Black. I mean, her Blackness was clear. So, she couldn't have been accidentally elected because she was light-skinned. That just wasn't a reality.

GEORGE: Right. I don't think she was accidentally elected, but you don't think maybe people were more receptive to her and her policy ideas because she was more palatable for white folks due to her light-skinned complexion?

NOEL: It certainly didn't stop the opposition to her. Now, whether on the margin some white person was more comfortable because of my — I just don't know how to answer that. But I do know there was no question my mother was not letting that potential confusion exist. She was clear that she was Black. So, someone could not have been confused.

GEORGE: Okay. It sounds like both of your parents were extremely successful, but your mom was more of a public figure. So do you remember if your dad ever resented your mom for being more in the limelight?

NOEL: No. They had a marriage that started in 1941, I think, until 1986 when my father died. No, that wasn't it. My father actually was my mother's biggest champion. And like a lot of couple situations in the 50s and 60s particularly, both people are working, they're trying to be upwardly mobile, they're trying to provide resources for their children, they're involved in their community, and they just are involved in different ways. It helped my mother, I'm sure, that my dad had delivered most of the Black children in town. My dad was not a politician, but he knew a lot of people and he worked to support my mother's involvement as she chose to do it. They were a team.

GEORGE: Right. And that sounds like a really healthy partnership. I'm glad they had that. And I know much of this intimidation happened after you left for college with the Noel Resolution, but your mom, because of her educational advocacy work, received phone calls that were personal threats against your family. And in one of the documentaries, they stated that your family home was said to be monitored by the FBI. So how did those threats make you feel?

NOEL: I, just judging from my own experience and in the conversations with my parents, I would suspect most families in those situations have to make a decision about "am I going to do this" in the beginning? They're consciously entering into that possibility. And even when it starts, are they going to continue when they have

options to bow out? Are they going to continue? It becomes an assumed risk. And that's kind of the end of the story. You do what you have to do, and you are prepared for the consequences. One of the things that happened for my dad was that he was still doing house calls and his practice required our phone to be available for people to reach my father. Changing our number and having it be a private number wasn't an option. We were going to have a public number and we were going to keep it. And people were going to call, and they were going to say whatever they said. And we were prepared for that. And that's what we did.

We had a unique occurrence though. Once my mother got on the school board, somebody started calling. We nicknamed this person the Phantom. This person called — I don't know if it's a man or a woman — this person would call and not say anything. If you normally answer your phone, the person calling in our culture normally says “hello, this is so-and-so” or at least “hello.” And then you respond as a person picking up the phone and say “hello.” Well, the Phantom would not say hello first. Then he or she expected we would be saying “hello, hello, hello,” or we would get anxious or whatever. And so my dad said, what we're going to do is not say anything either. If the Phantom starts with silence, we don't say anything. Now there's just silence. Now, there's silence for a pregnant moment, then there's silence for another pregnant moment. And then the Phantom either hangs up or we hang up. And we don't play the game of being intimidated. We also have created the way we're going to play the game. Let's see, my mother must have been on for eight years. I think it was — well, maybe it was longer than that — whatever two terms were, the Phantom called every day and usually once. And then the Phantom called and we didn't say anything. The Phantom didn't say anything. We hang up, Phantom hangs up. We just have this relationship that lasted for years. And, of course, if we don't say hello when we pick up the phone, other people who call will wonder what's wrong. They'll say “is anybody there? Is anybody there?” And then we would know it's not the Phantom. And then we'd say “hello, so and so,” or “this is the Noel residence” if it's a new person. But we played the game of the Phantom the entire time. Now, it takes a lot of hatred to do that for that long.

GEORGE: Yeah.

NOEL: That's just, and there were other kinds of calls. I don't know about written threats. My mother was — whatever — she didn't need to share that with us. And so we didn't ask her to share that with us.

GEORGE: So when your family got these threatening phone calls, you always had to answer them because of your father's practice. Is that correct?

NOEL: We had to have a public line because of my father's practice, yes.

GEORGE: Wow. That seems like it made your family pretty vulnerable.

NOEL: Well, like I said, families in situations like that, then and now, have to decide, am I in this public line of fire for a reason? And this is what comes along with it. I admire the people, perhaps even more, that now are in positions where social media and all these other ways in which people get attacked for trying to do right — I think it's worse than it was for my mother.

GEORGE: Your mom passed the Noel Resolution in 1968. Could you tell me what that was?

NOEL: Yeah, she didn't pass it. It was passed by a majority of the board. She proposed it. And she proposed it in April of '68 after Martin Luther King was assassinated and the Noel Resolution was written with a white lawyer on the board who's a very good friend and ended up being a law partner of mine when I was starting out, Ed Benton. It could have been called the Noel-Benton Resolution or the Benton-Noel Resolution. Ed chose to keep his name off of it to try to enhance his chances of it passing. But they needed to get four votes out of a seven-member school board. And proposing a resolution was just the beginning. It was a resolution that called for integrating the schools and required the superintendent to come back with a plan to do so. The resolution is calling for a plan. The plan ultimately has to be created and voted on to become legally required and implemented. The time period of the superintendent studying the matter and coming up with a proposal and then the proposal being heard in the resolution, pardon me, the ordinance, that's not the right word either, whatever the bill process for the school board itself, there's a process. So that takes time. There's a study time. He creates a proposal. Then there's a process for the proposal to be passed and enacted.

And that's how the year between April of 1968 and May of 1969, that's what happened during that time frame. The city was in a tizzy. White people went crazy, or some of them, many of them. The public hearings were chaotic. School buses at a depot of the school system were torched. That ended up on the cover of *Life* magazine. It was not unlike it is in places in the country now where the soft underbelly of our democracy has just unleashed itself. The school

board narrowly passed four to three, the resolution or the plan that the superintendent proposed, which involved some busing. It ironically involved less busing than ultimately imposed by the court system. So, a plan that involved busing is passed in May of 1969. And soon thereafter is a school board election in which the two proponents for busing lose, and the two opposing busing win, and the majority shifts four-three against busing. And at the first meeting of the new board for their first legal action, they vote to rescind the plan that was created by the Noel Resolution, which since it was their first action, and clearly without any study in the school board case, the Keyes case [*Keyes v. School District 1, Denver, CO, 1973*], it's pretty clear how that they were going to lose on the legal question of intent to discriminate, because they knew exactly what rescinding the plan would do. The Keyes case resulted in the school board losing twice up to the Supreme Court and took 26 years before it was ever settled. It was never really — the plan from the court never really got a chance to work well, it had so much opposition. And Black parents even became opposed to it because the larger community just didn't let it work.

GEORGE: Yeah, so the Keyes case was spawned by the Noel Resolution, and that case made it all the way to the US Supreme Court in 1973. And at that point, you had already graduated college. That's very interesting.

NOEL: It went to the Supreme Court twice.

GEORGE: Right.

NOEL: Initially went to the Supreme Court in the fall of '69.

GEORGE: Right. And kind of circling back to you, what activities did you do in high school?

NOEL: High school. At East Denver High School, in my generation, high school was three years in Denver, so it was not ninth grade. Junior high was 7, 8, 9. So high school for us was 10, 11, 12. And I was involved in student council. I was president of the sophomore class. I played four sports. I played football, basketball, baseball, and golf. I went to practice on some sport every day for three years. And I was in some clubs, the Letterman Club, and the Key Club was a kind of service club. But I probably spent most of my time studying and playing ball and being involved in student council.

GEORGE: And during your time of attendance, like you mentioned earlier, East Denver High School was ranked by *Look* magazine as one of

the top high schools in the country. Did many kids from East Denver High School go on to attend Ivy League schools?

NOEL: Yeah. My senior year, I was president of the Delegate Assembly, which was like our assembly of kids from each first period class. And that was in addition to the student council that had at-large class level and president rank level from each year. So we had this two-pronged kind of student government set up. And my senior year, I was very involved with that Delegate Assembly piece. And I want to go back to your question again?

GEORGE: Oh, yeah. My question was if many kids from East Denver High School went on to Ivy League schools?

NOEL: Oh, okay. I got sidetracked. Yes, but not just because of 1964. East High School was the oldest high school in the system and probably the best high school in the system. The Ivy League had years of experience with East High School. The Ivy League was going to come back to East High School because that was a pool of students that they had been dipping into for years. And even after I was there, East High School may have changed or not, the Ivy League still would come back to East High School because there would always be a pool —

GEORGE: Right.

NOEL: — of top students. So yeah, there were a pool of top students and the Ivy League came and we had opportunities. And I mean, for me personally, it would have been — yeah, they're going to take some Black kids to come to Dartmouth in the fall of 1964. If we're going to take a chance on a kid, well, here's a kid from a top ten high school who excelled at a top ten high school. So maybe he's a safe bet. I don't know.

GEORGE: I was a senior in high school applying to colleges a few months ago. And I remember that's exactly how I thought about the system of admissions and it worked. So I think you had a good mindset.

NOEL: Well, I didn't have the mindset because I had the mindset — I'm a little older looking back — at the time, I'm like any kid trying to get into college and not knowing what the hell I'm doing. I was fortunate there was a group that included top students from each of the high schools. And by so doing, this organization had an easy pool of potential Ivy League candidates because we were already selected as top kids out of our high school. And one of the adult advisors was a Dartmouth alum who I had gotten to know. And he had, for

whatever reasons, thought I was a good candidate for Dartmouth. And I didn't know anything about Dartmouth. And we didn't have junior year visits in those days. And we wouldn't have had the money to do it anyway. But the idea was he thought I could be a good candidate. And all of the kids in the organization would be encouraged to apply to select schools, not just me. I mean, I was one of a handful of minority kids in the organization to begin with. But this gentleman said, I'm going to tell you a lot about Dartmouth between now and April. And when you get in, I will have convinced you to go. And I did get in and he did convince me to go. So I ended up at Dartmouth because of the enthusiastic referral, enthusiastic promotion of Dartmouth by a local alum. And what I could read about Dartmouth. I applied to Brown and Princeton and Cornell. And what I could read about any of them was going to be about the same. I wouldn't have known for sure why I was going to any of them because I didn't know anybody. At least I knew one person at Princeton, but I really didn't know other people. I didn't have any family background that would have steered me there. I was relying on the enthusiastic recommendation of a friend.

GEORGE: I remember earlier over the phone, you telling me about a discouraging experience you had with a college counselor in high school.

NOEL: Right.

GEORGE: Could you tell me a little bit more about that?

NOEL: Right. The college counselor, the head college counselor for my East High School senior class, would talk to each person, even though there were more than 900 of us. He whittled that number down, I'm sure, by those he thought were not college bound. But those of us who at least had excelled academically enough to be considering select schools, he was sure to talk to us. And he told me that I should not apply to the Ivy League. He told me I should not waste the time. I would never get into an Ivy League school and that I should apply to the University of Colorado. And that would be the best I could do. And then he had a number of other state schools that I should apply to just in case I didn't get into the University of Colorado. But he was adamant that I had no chance at the Ivy League. And it wasn't like I might not get in and "be braced for rejection." It was really a directive not to apply at all. I came home to tell my parents that I was shaken. Fortunately, my father spoke first after I told this story and said, "I don't even know where the damn Ivy League is, but they will be the ones to tell you you

can't come, not this college counselor." And as a people, we've had to do that for centuries.

GEORGE: Yeah, I think that's true. And it seems like your family has very deep roots in academic excellence and they valued education to the utmost degree. And in my research, it almost felt like your family's work was manifested in you getting accepted to the Ivy League, which is seen as the pinnacle of American higher education. So positioning you in the context of your family's work looks pretty incredible. How was your acceptance to Dartmouth treated in your family? Was it seen as like a big victory or less so?

NOEL: Well, I think my father, but I'm sure my mother too, didn't want to blow my head up because I'm just a kid. I'm seventy-seven now and I'm reflecting, but when I was seventeen, I would have been just a kid. I would have been happy enough from it just happening. And I'm sure they didn't feel they needed to give it any more importance than that just to keep my feet on the ground and my orientation in the direction they wanted. I think they wanted me to be appreciative of the opportunity, but they also wanted me to be satisfied that I had actually worked hard to be in a position for luck and an opportunity to happen. They didn't want to make it sound like you only get this or you always get this because you work hard. No, they wanted me to realize you could work hard and it still could not happen. But you did work hard, and you should feel good about that. And you should feel lucky and that you got an opportunity, with a lot of people that are going to work hard and not get it. A lot of Black people aren't even going to get the opportunity. So you've got a responsibility that goes with your opportunity.

GEORGE: Yeah. And kind of going back to what you said earlier, as a senior in high school, you didn't have a lot of connections to students at the Ivy League. So, I'm sure what that college counselor said to you must have stung even more, but I'm glad you were able to overcome that.

NOEL: Well, he couldn't stop anything.

GEORGE: Right

NOEL: And I don't know. Well, I didn't say that right. He might not have had full power to stop anything, but he could have had influence if he had, you know, campaigned against me, because I'm sure his influence and recommendations might've had some weight. But the fact that I had the alumni person, as you know— the process, it was even stronger. The alumni presence in the admissions process was

even stronger fifty years ago. So ,the fact that this alumni person would have been writing a recommendation for me as well, even if the, the college counselor had written a negative or less than enthusiastic, it would have been measured against the actual one from an alum and probably would have created — well, didn't keep me from getting in, let's put it that way.

GEORGE: Right. And in 2023, at least in my experience, applying to Dartmouth, I don't think the alumni recommendation holds so much weight as does the counselor recommendation. It's interesting that the roles were kind of flipped.

NOEL: It was a lot, it was a lot stronger then.

GEORGE: Yeah.

NOEL: We used to do the alumni — you know, somewhere the alumni role became informational in the process and that part of the selection communication as it was then. So the alumni person's role who did the interview was a real evaluative part of the process. And you got your kind of “who we are and what we do” discussion with somebody else, other alumni. And then you had your official alumni interview with a single person. It wasn't this kind of group gaggle that kind of is now that's informational, essentially.

GEORGE: Right.

NOEL: Then, there was a key person who had an evaluative role, and it was always somebody who had a very continuing close relationship with the college and perhaps even more so because we were so far away.

GEORGE: Right. That's fascinating how admissions processes have changed in the past few decades at Dartmouth. But at around the same time as your college acceptance, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 passes, which gives the legal basis for the desegregation of schools throughout the US. And it seems like these two events were both fruits indirectly of your family's centuries long struggle for racial equity in education. What was this time like for your family? Was it generally positive?

NOEL: I think I need to correct the premise of your question. The Civil Rights Act isn't the underpinning for educational discrimination eradication in America. The Brown case in 1954 [*Brown v. Board of Education*] is that. And in fact, for the longest time, the resolution of segregation in education was a judicial procedure.

GEORGE: Ok.

NOEL: You sued for discrimination constitutionally because the Supreme Court said segregation was unconstitutional. The litigation for decades has been based on Brown. And it's only been doubted because of the current Supreme Court and the three people [President Donald J.] Trump was able to put on it. Up until then, the route, the procedural route, was not suing on the Civil Rights Act, but really suing on the constitutional basis from Brown. The Civil Rights Act becomes a codification of the constitutional principle that separate cannot be equal. And therefore, we can have statutory remedies, statutory statutes addressing areas of American life from employment to whatever, that statutorily will be a violation. But they all stem from eliminating the separate but equal, *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), underpinning that is Brown.

GEORGE: Okay. Thank you for clarifying that. I don't know. Yeah. I'm not too familiar —

NOEL: So then how did I feel? Probably as a kid, not having an effect very much. As a kid, to me, Dartmouth was a place I could apply, or Princeton. There was no law that prevented it. There was a feeling in the 60s and 70s that these schools wanted to open up, wanted to make their educational opportunities more available. We were in a period of trying to take advantage of new opportunities. The litigation had, per se, kind of ended with Brown. And now we were trying to enforce Brown where there were institutions, organizations, school districts, whatever, that resisted what Brown dictated. We then have to force them legally. But for those who reacted positively, like Dartmouth, and made themselves available, I just took that as the next progressive step, I guess.

GEORGE: So was the Civil Rights Act in 1964 meaningful for your family, coming from a line of educational advocates?

NOEL: Well, sure. I mean, it's a threshold. What is the word? I'm forgetting. A transitional step in American history, let alone American legal history. It was felt to be so. I mean, it took ten years for Congress to codify what Brown established as the constitutional underpinning. That was an enormous political fight to take the general principle and put it into statute, specifically applying as the statute would say. That's a tremendous political fight, even though the underpinning from Brown is clear. And so, then as it turns out for my — I got the sun coming in here — for my perspective in just the education field, I'm still a kid. To me, it's just I got to fill out all these forms and write

all these essays and pray that I get in. I'm a high school senior in 1964. I hardly know the Civil Rights Act is even being passed. You know, I got to go to practice every day. I'm just a kid.

GEORGE: Right. So you arrive at Dartmouth in the Fall of 1964. What are your first impressions of this place that's so far away from your home in Colorado?

NOEL: At the time, I'm not sure how I could pinpoint what my feelings would have been. I would have been glad to find out there were fourteen of us and we would spend some of our time finding each other. We were put into dormitories essentially based on, as you know, what they cost. I ended up in the Bissell Choate cinderblock things, I think I was in Bissell, because they were the cheapest. And then I ended up with friends in the suite that I was in. Eight men, guys, boys, having no idea where the other Black students were as we slowly began to find each other, made difficult by the imperative of studying and staying there. We didn't have a lot of time to be political in our first trimester. It was more of a — I come from a public school, no matter how good it was, I had no idea what college was going to be like. I ended up getting a citation in English in the first term at Dartmouth in the English seminar. I don't know, do you still have that?

GEORGE: We do.

NOEL: So, maybe there were ten in this seminar and that was the hardest work I've ever probably done in my life, was adjusting to that environment, having never had a class like that. At that level of preparation and proficiency, you were supposed to be able to learn to do. And out of the ten of us, there was one guy, I think there were probably three or four who had gone to private school, but there was one guy who had gone to a boarding school, a top boarding school, and the seminar was no problem for him. That's how he'd gone to high school. He was already game and he got the only A in the class. I got the only B in the class and I got the citation instead of him. And I went to talk to the professor about it and he said "Look, we know what we're teaching and we know who we're teaching. And so he was supposed to get an A. You were not supposed to get a B. This class was supposed to beat you down so hard and so far from your public school experience that you were going to learn how to go to college and it was going to be exhibited after you had this class experience. The fact that you had done something enough, hell, by accident for all I know, to get a B is why you get a citation." They still give citations?

GEORGE: I actually don't know what a citation is. I was going to ask you to clarify that.

NOEL: When I was there, the citation for a class was the most important academic achievement in the college, the academic system. It was singularly more important than magna cum laude, which is like a four-year accomplishment. But the citation was intended to be on a course-by-course basis for excellence in that course. So if you were a top student, you were counting your magna cum laude. That's one thing you were counting. You were also counting your citations because they would be the tangible proof of the exhibiting of excellence in your academic pursuit. And that kind of like, of all the things I did at Dartmouth, that's, obviously, you can tell, one of the most important things that I thought I did.

GEORGE: Yeah, that sounds like it. That sounds like a really meaningful experience for you, especially in your freshman fall. I know that can be a really tumultuous time —

NOEL: Freshman fall is tumultuous, yes. And on top of that, for us to be fourteen Black students with — I don't think any of us had gone to private school. I don't recall that any of us had gone to private school. And I think the seven students who left after the first year, I'm not sure if any of them were forced to leave. I know several just didn't like the winter enough, didn't like the lonely life enough that they didn't come back.

GEORGE: So there were fourteen Black students in your class when you entered Dartmouth, and after the first year, only seven remained. Is that correct?

NOEL: And seven graduated.

GEORGE: Okay. And do you remember how many Black students were in the college overall?

NOEL: Well, there were classes of 800. So 3,200.

GEORGE: No, do you remember how many Black students were in the college overall?

NOEL: Oh, so there were fourteen of us. There was one junior and two sophomores, or one senior and two juniors. I'm not sure. There were three others. I forgot their years now.

- GEORGE: Okay. So you were raised in the upper economic strata for Black folks with your father being a doctor. How many Black students at Dartmouth do you know had a similar economic background as you?
- NOEL: I think most of the fourteen, to tell you the truth, that's my recollection.
- GEORGE: Okay. And at Dartmouth right now in 2023, it seems like African students seem to outnumber African American students. Do you remember what the specific ethnic backgrounds were of your Black classmates in the late 60s?
- NOEL: You mean African Americans versus Africans?
- GEORGE: Africans or Caribbeans or just different parts of the Afro diaspora —
- NOEL: I wouldn't think there were very many, to tell you the truth. I don't know. I'm not picturing somebody offhand. I know that as Dartmouth began to accept African Americans, it began to accept more non-whites of all types. The Afro-Am society was in a dormitory. What was that? I forgot what it was called.
- GEORGE: It's called Cutter Hall?
- NOEL: Yeah. It's Cutter Hall, but it was a dormitory for international students. So, while there were international students there before, there began to be more international students, more reason for recognizing international students and their unique resource needs by the college. Any willingness, ultimate willingness to deal with the Afro-Am as another organization dealing with non-white students, that was after there was already an international student recognition, but both were being increased in numbers in this timeframe.
- GEORGE: Okay. It sounds like the demographics even within the Black community have changed substantially since the late 60s. But one big culture shock for me coming from D.C. to rural New England is that back home, in cities, everybody is so ambitious, it feels like, and everybody is always hustling. Everybody is always moving. You look out the window, you see people running down the street, but at Dartmouth, life seems to move very slowly. What was your experience transitioning from an urban center like Denver —
- NOEL: Well, life moves pretty slowly and you can decide how to deal with it. If you decide that you have to change it, well then you're just

barking up the wrong tree. For example, it didn't take us very long to realize just what you're talking about. You walk down Main Street. Yeah. What happens to Black students before long is that we need a haircut. And in those days, we cut our hair. We need a haircut and there's nobody in town to cut hair. There's no Black barber. So what are half decently intelligent college students do? You can whine about it, or you can drive to Boston [MA] to get it, which occasionally we did do. And/or we went to the white barber in town, and I think his barber shop was next to Casque and Gauntlet, if I can remember, on Main Street there. But you went up a side entrance, sort of. Anyway, he was on the second floor and we talked to him. Then we said "We have haircuts that need to occur and we can teach you how to cut our hair. And then you can cut our hair." And, fortunately, he was a decent white man and said "Fine, yeah, I know how to cut hair. So, I can cut hair the way you want me to cut your hair. The fact that I've not cut it that way for somebody before doesn't matter. I know how to cut hair." And of course, we were telling him "You're going to get our money. [Laughter] We're going to be a given piece of your business and we'll come here on a regular basis." We bargained with him and he cut our hair for a while. I think some of the guys cut each other's hair. I don't know the particulars about all of us, but I know I was part of the group that got that guy to cut our hair because we taught him.

GEORGE: Yeah. And speaking of Boston, I was wondering how you coped emotionally with having hundreds of miles of farmland separating you from the nearest Black community, which I believe is Dorchester or Roxbury, but it's all the way out in Boston. How did you deal with that? That loneliness. That separation.

NOEL: Well, fortunately for me, I guess, I had staying in school as my primary object. And the fact that I had chosen to go to a men's school in the first place meant I'd made, already made some decisive decision that whether I had a date tomorrow was not the driving force. And I like the guys who were in the suite I had in the dormitories. They were good people. They were comfortable with me being there and we were good friends and close friends. And so I didn't feel this, you know, loneliness that I have to go to Boston and find Black strangers to bond with. That's just too impractical. One, strangers. Two, too far. And I've got to study, so not very often. So, yeah, not very often. We were pretty particular about how we stayed in school. And that's why there are big weekends. That's why there are football games. That's why there are big track meets, because they bring conglomerations of folks to meet girls easier or whatever. See friends that you knew from high school or at other

schools. So, yeah, I might get to Boston for a larger opportunity to be in places where I might meet people easier, see people I already knew than to worry about a weekend going down to find strangers to be with. That was not, that was not what we were trying to do. And quite frankly, we're just, we were there as freshmen and we were trying to get the work done. The recreation wasn't the primary element, but when we got to fall weekend, the homecoming weekend, then the upperclassmen that we knew were working with women that they had dated and knew to try to find blind dates for us to come up, take the bus up. And we, you know, would have paid for their — to have a hotel room to stay in and stay for the weekend. And a lot of the fraternities turned the top floor of their house into places where girls could stay. And so, if you had a date that these upperclassmen helped you find, that's what I had my freshman year for homecoming and I dated a girl that came up from Smith [College]. And we had a nice time during the weekend. Then I went to see her another time and maybe it didn't work out. But that wasn't the most important thing in my life. Certainly the first trimester of Dartmouth.

GEORGE: Yeah. I mean, I think I feel the exact opposite about race, racial isolation. I just feel a lot better and a lot more like myself being around people who look like me, but it's interesting that that doesn't seem like it was your experience in your first term.

NOEL: Well, so, so even if I did what I guess you're saying, if I felt that way, then I would have necessarily been miserable at Dartmouth because there were only fourteen of us in a school of 3,200 and there weren't any women. So why would you even go there in the first place? Because that would have been just setting up a torture chamber. I had to already be accepting of the fact that there are nothing but men there. Then accepting the fact that the women I'm going to find, at least initially, are going to be at schools like mine and the few of them, and so, yeah, I hope I find one of those few of them. And then if I were trying to find women in a city like Boston, where would I even start? I'm just a kid from Colorado.

GEORGE: I mean, I'm not talking about women. I'm just talking about, like, people who are the same race as you —

NOEL: Well, I was going to school. I wasn't trying to worry about how many people of my own race I found in other cities.

GEORGE: I think that, yeah, I think that mindset is good. And I think that probably benefited you a lot in your time here. So I'm glad you had that.

NOEL: See, I think we're talking about the same thing, different ways. So if there's something going on at Harvard that is a symposium and Black folks are coming for that event from different schools around New England, those things were happening all the time. And we would make a point to try to do something like that. And as we became larger, more critical mass at Dartmouth, to sponsor that kind of opportunity for people to come to Dartmouth. But when I was there that kind of thing would be happening because there's a multitude of schools to get a critical mass in Boston. It's not just Harvard. And so there's a critical mass of higher education institutions in the Boston area for things to be happening where if you drive down there and go to that, yeah, you're going to be around a lot of Black folks if you want to be that way. Or you could be too young and too green, not green Dartmouth, but green inexperienced and worried about whether you can stay here, that you might not do those activities your freshman year. [Laughter] You might be too afraid to not study that night. So I don't recall I — no I can't even recall whether I even tried to do something like that my freshman year. Likely not.

GEORGE: Yeah, but kind of going back to campus a little bit, we talked some about this over the phone. The Foundation Years Program transported, I believe, gang members from Chicago to Dartmouth from 1967 to 1973. It was organized to admit mostly Black students for two probationary years, and it was meant to diversify the campus. I believe you mentioned you stayed in the same dorm as some of these students at one point. What were your memories —

NOEL: Or they stayed in my dorm. That's another way to say it.

GEORGE: Oh, right.

NOEL: They were put in our dorms, probably because we had older students than the college dormitories. And these young men that came were all older young men. They were young men in their early twenties instead of their late teens. And they were men. They were not gang members. They were gang leaders. They were, as I recall them, they were older, more mature. And sure, they were street smart. But everyone that I remember talking to was smart. They just hadn't had an educational opportunity or taken it, but they were smart. And they were deciding now to explore this.

GEORGE: Right. And I know you can't speak to this question firsthand, but from your distant perspective, did you think that Dartmouth

accommodated these Foundation Years students well?

NOEL: I don't remember talking to them about complaining about Dartmouth. I think they felt, I think I remember the perceptions that they felt the small numbers of them in the large whiteness of the campus. But because they weren't seventeen-year olds they didn't come there feeling like somebody had changed the cards for them. They knew exactly what they were getting into. They didn't sound surprised or pissed off. There was — they had been promised something and didn't get it. They knew exactly what they were getting into. And like I said, they were just older and more mature and ready to investigate it. A seventeen-year old acts like somebody owes him something. These guys had bargained for what they got and understood exactly what it was.

GEORGE: Yeah. And I think that is a mindset that carried them through here. In the early 1960s, speaking of another inclusive recruitment initiative, in a joint effort between the Independent Schools Talent Search program and Dartmouth, the A Better Chance program, which was called ABC, was formed with the goal of granting underprivileged students the skills to attend college. And that funneled a ton of Black youths to Dartmouth. It was a product of the National Scholarship Service. We talked, again, we talked a little bit about this earlier, but do you remember any of your Black peers being recruits of the ABC program?

NOEL: I don't know specifically. No.

GEORGE: Okay. Do you have any recollection of this program at all?

NOEL: I remember some Black students behind me who were working with the program. My white roommate, my freshman year, continued to work with the program while I was at Dartmouth. I knew Dean [Charles F.] Dey, who was the dean for the program. I didn't work with the program specifically myself, but I know there were other Black students who came behind me who were more associated— or volunteering in ways to work with the program.

GEORGE: Okay. So it sounds like you kind of observed the program from a distance.

NOEL: Yeah.

GEORGE: And it seems like your family was very invested in giving Black folks the access to a great education. So how did you feel about these inclusive recruitment initiatives doing just that?

NOEL: Well, it seemed to me no effort was too small or large not to try to have collaboration with the overall goal of providing more educational opportunities. I wouldn't be harsh on evaluating any of them in a singular way and I'd be supportive of all of them contributing to something rather than nothing.

GEORGE: Yeah.

NOEL: We couldn't afford to be picky.

GEORGE: Right.

NOEL: We could certainly afford to be conscious and critical and constructively critical. But we didn't have to be — we couldn't afford to be picky. We had to take the goodwill and the interest and the support when it came and work with it.

GEORGE: Yeah. And since your mom was, it sounds like, a big presence in your childhood, how did it feel at Dartmouth to be on a campus with no women at all? Because the school only went co-educational in the early 1970s. So, it was just men. How did that feel?

NOEL: Well, I was conscious of what it was going to be. I hadn't been at an all-male school, but I was very conscious about what it was going to be. And at the time, at least for me, I could grumble about it, but it wasn't going to change. School was hard enough that I didn't mind not having the temptation during the week to be not studying. And it kind of, probably suited my personality to study hard during the week and find out a way to get somewhere on the weekend or entice somebody to come up. The game of how you date in an all-male school is an art form, not a science. And I learned how to play the art form as well as I could, but I appreciated when I needed to study, which was a lot, I didn't have to have temptations too nearby.

GEORGE: Yeah.

NOEL: As I got older, as I was more of an upperclassman, I had a car and I had a girl I dated at Smith. And, if I wanted to or whatever, I could go down there for a movie and a pizza and drive back in the dark. Like any other guy, I was willing and able to go when I needed to be. But the principal reason I was there was to study. And as I mentioned to you earlier, I graduated in three years instead of four. I was necessarily not getting to play because I had work to finish, to

go to graduate school.

GEORGE: Right. And speaking of dating and engaging with women, I was listening to the Dartmouth Black Lives oral history interview of Robert Bennett, who was a student in the year below you, the class of 1969. And in reference to this problem, he said in his interview, I'm going to quote him "It was an all-male school at the time. And our social life was each other, with each other. There weren't any women there. And so it was a very limited social life and without means to travel to the nearby, fairly nearby, women's colleges like Mount Holyoke [College] and Smith. We didn't have a means to go to those schools. I mean, nobody had a car or could afford a car. And there were so few Black women students. We didn't try to date any of the white girls. That was something we didn't do at the beginning." So my question to you from that interview is, what forces stopped you guys from engaging with white girls in the area at the time?

NOEL: I don't think there were any forces. I mean, I think— I guess the girls made their own choices and we weren't trying to date any white girls that first year, I know. We would — probably would have dated a kangaroo, but the chances of having a date were so slim just because we had to work and just because we didn't have a car and just because we didn't know anybody. That meant our chances were pretty slim and far between. I got a car, I think in my junior year. But blind dates were a kind of predominant way of initially dating. Somebody had a date who was an upperclassman and that woman — girl — helped get other girls to come up to Dartmouth and meet other guys.

GEORGE: So, yeah. So, interracial dating — that wasn't stigmatized in the late 60s?

NOEL: No

GEORGE: Okay. I mean —

NOEL: That doesn't mean that's what happened, but I didn't — I don't think there was anything that — I just didn't feel there was a prevention about it.

GEORGE: Yeah, okay. That's surprising to me. And can you tell me about the connections between your Black classmates? Like, were you close with each other or was there less of a sense of unity?

- NOEL: There was a time problem that kind of — and a distance problem. For example, you said you're in Hampshire?
- GEORGE: I'm in New Hampshire.
- NOEL: Which New Hampshire dorm?
- GEORGE: Oh, no, I'm in a different dorm. I'm just in the state of New Hampshire.
- NOEL: Oh, okay. What dorm are you in?
- GEORGE: I'm in Shabazz Hall, which is for Black students.
- NOEL: Oh, okay. Well, there wasn't such a thing as that, obviously, too few of us.
- GEORGE: Yeah. [Laughter]
- NOEL: And we were spread around the campus. So there were no other Black students in my dorm or in the Choate Road, those three dorms. We were spread out. That was part of it. And so, yeah, I remember getting to know a number of the seven that left, actually. But we didn't have an organizational need that first year, I don't think. I think we were all just trying to survive.
- GEORGE: Okay. And in another oral history interview for this Dartmouth Black Lives Project that I listened to, J.B. Redding, who was a woman in the class of 1967, spoke about how a Dartmouth professor pulled her aside and said verbatim, like, he does not give A's to Black students. How were your experiences with white faculty? Were they similarly difficult, or were they positive?
- NOEL: You say Redding was a woman?
- GEORGE: Yep. Judy Redding. She went by J.B. Redding.
- NOEL: In the class of '67?
- GEORGE: Class of '76. That's my bad. I'm sorry.
- NOEL: Oh, okay. No, I don't know what it was like there in '76.
- GEORGE: But your experience?

- NOEL: Yeah, I didn't have any professor tell me "You're not going to get an A because you're Black." No. I mean, if a professor was that bold to tell her that, what does that say about the college? And yeah, I can't even imagine. Now, when I was there, if a Black professor — or if a white professor — felt that, they didn't need to tell me. They could just give me the bad grade, I guess. And I would never have known. I would just...
- GEORGE: Yeah. And this professor —
- NOEL: No, I didn't feel that any of my professors treated me differently. I didn't feel that.
- GEORGE: Right. This professor in the J.B. Redding's interview was unnamed, but he did tell Black students in his class. He was a sociology professor. He told Black students in his sociology class.
- NOEL: Sheesh.
- GEORGE: I know. I know, that's surprising. He told Black students in his sociology class that he didn't think they had the capacity to succeed. He invited them to after-class tutoring sessions where he would try to grope them and make sexual passes at them. That was one of the first years that women were allowed at the college. So it was very —
- NOEL: Oh, God.
- GEORGE: I know. Very, very torturing.
- NOEL: What a sick person. But when I was there, the sociology — I'm going to move over again. The sociology department had some of the more liberal professors. So that surprises me even more. But the experience for women at Dartmouth is a whole other subject for her to have given her oral history for sure, because I don't know anything about that. We were not at the point where women at Dartmouth were yet going to be by the time I was leaving in '69.
- GEORGE: In terms of, like, racial dynamics, though, you have generally positive relationships with your white professors?
- NOEL: Yeah. A white professor changed my life. I had a professor, [Dr. William L] Baldwin, in the economics department, asked me to write a paper with him. In the summer of '68, I went to the Justice Department, spent a month doing research in the Justice Department, came back up to the college and helped him write a

paper. And I was an economics major, and I had to finish my major before I went to Tuck [School of Business at Dartmouth]. And yeah, I had no inkling I was being treated differently if I was, but I certainly didn't have anybody threatening that that was going to or would or did occur. I didn't have that. I had the difficulty of the work. So it didn't come easy and I had to work hard, but no, I didn't feel that resistance like that.

GEORGE: Yeah. So touching on what you just said, since your mom is an activist and your dad is a doctor, why did you decide to major in economics? Because that seems kind of random given your family.

NOEL: No, it doesn't seem random and "given my family" is not a constraint. "Given my family" was supposed to be support for expanding opportunities. My family's particular selection of opportunities was not intended to be a constraint. It was never ever proposed to me that way. My parents, whatever their choices were, and their family references to those choices were posed as "we want you to have the broadest selection of opportunities like other people so you can have a wide range of opportunities like other people." No, it was not "I'm an activist and I'm a doctor and this is where you're at." No, just the opposite.

GEORGE: Okay. That sounds healthy. And when you decided on that economics major —

NOEL: Well, it sounds more than healthy. It sounds intelligent. It also sounds like common sense. What are we as a people trying to do? We're not trying to replicate each other. What we're trying to do is broaden the availability of opportunities for our children. We're not trying to pin our children into what we were able to do. We're trying to broaden the opportunities for our children to be able to do whatever they might want.

GEORGE: Yeah. And a follow-up question to that is when you decided on an economics major, what were your initial plans after graduation? Like, were you thinking, as so many economics majors now do, were you thinking about a career on Wall Street?

NOEL: I was an economics major who had been admitted to the Tuck School. I was already going to graduate business school. I had already decided to go to graduate business school and what opportunities that might provide. That summer before going, I did research in the Justice Department and helped a professor write a paper on antitrust policy and became more aware of the legal profession than I might have otherwise been. So now I'm going to

business school having had this legal arena kind of experience and opening my mind to the thought of maybe law school. But I have already been admitted to Tuck. I already have a full ride scholarship that pays for everything and provides a job during the summer between my first and second year. I'm definitely going to business school and finishing it before I then decided to apply and go to law school.

GEORGE: Right.

NOEL: Wall Street is like a nickname or a misnomer. If you're talking about future opportunities, nobody would go to business school and limit their opportunities to Wall Street. The world's too big. No, I would have gone to business school and thought about, was I going to be in some kind of business environment? Maybe Wall Street, maybe corporate on a regional basis or a national company or a local company or — but I would have thought about business opportunities that made more sense where the MBA would be valued. That would have been the first filter. Am I trying to get a job in places where the MBA has value? And I certainly wouldn't have limited it to Wall Street.

GEORGE: I think that makes sense. And we'll get back to your postgraduate track in a second. But circling back to your college years, what Black organizations were you a part of on campus?

NOEL: I'm not sure there were any other than the Afro-Am. But the Afro-Am was getting put together when I was in the throes of going to graduate school. I don't know if I was an official member of the Afro-Am or not. Probably not. I know I wasn't an active — was not an active participant. I was trying to finish school in three years and get to Tuck.

GEORGE: Right. And you were in the same class as Woody Lee. Both of you were in the class of 1968. And he was one of the founders of the Afro-American Society. What are your memories of that organization's inception? Were you close with him?

NOEL: Well, I wasn't particularly close with Woody, but we knew each other and we were doing different things on campus. But Woody was much more the campus leader. I mean, Woody was a campus leader, not just a Black student leader. Woody was — do they have Palaeopitus still?

GEORGE: They do.

NOEL: All right. So Woody was a member of Palaeopitus. I don't know if he was — Bob Reich ['68, Robert B. Reich Secretary of Labor under President Clinton]], I think, was the head of Palaeopetus. But Woody may have been another officer of Palaeopitus. He was a campus figure, not just a Black student.

GEORGE: Right. And George Wallace, the racist Alabama governor, he visited Dartmouth twice in the 1960s. Once was during your time here in 1967, which incited a protest from the Afro-American Society. What were your memories of that event?

NOEL: This far long ago, very, very little.

GEORGE: Right.

NOEL: I'm pretty sure I wouldn't have been there. I would have supported them being there, or I would have said to my friends "This is what should happen when somebody like Wallace comes." But I wasn't there myself. I'm not even sure when, you know — in '67, I would have been in my first trimester at Tuck. So I would have been viewing it from afar.

GEORGE: Right. And we talked a little bit on the phone before about how everybody has their own role in the fight for racial justice, especially on Dartmouth's campus. At the time, your role was not maybe on the front lines of the George Wallace protest, but what was your role at the time?

NOEL: I didn't have a role. I was not at Dartmouth. I was at Tuck. So I would have been viewing and appreciating and glad that Woody wasn't by himself. Wally Ford ['70] was probably the most active of any of the Black students. There were Black students at the college level who were kicking ass. I didn't have to be the one that was standing next to him when I was at Tuck.

GEORGE: Yeah. You were more of a supporter from a distance?

NOEL: Yeah, that's what I just said. I was a graduate student at Tuck. I was not an undergraduate at Dartmouth.

GEORGE: Right. So your mom was an activist who made positive change from the inside of institutions, like Denver Public Schools. So what was your view on physical protest? Like, did you think that rallying people together in that way, as they did in the George Wallace protest, accomplishes much?

NOEL: Of course, it accomplishes what it accomplishes. I've tried to say throughout this interview that if we aren't prepared to optimize our positions in any number of different pursuits and any number of different strategies and approaches, we miss out on opportunities. So no, not everybody needs to be a demonstrator. And not everybody needs to be on a school board. But we need to make sure we've got somebody placed all over the place.

GEORGE: Right. And what motivated you to join your fraternity Sigma Alpha Epsilon?

NOEL: Well, it's hard for you to imagine what it was like, one, with no women. You would not have gone to Dartmouth. There were no women. And that meant the social life really revolved around weekends where women would come into Hanover, or you would go somewhere else. And that's what the social life really was. So...

GEORGE: I think that's understandable.

NOEL: If the social life is the fraternity system, you're in the fraternity system for the social life. And that was primarily where it was. That's primarily where the parties were. And certainly for the seven of us who remained, that's what we did. If all seven of us didn't join a fraternity, I'd be surprised because I can think of four or five of us that did. And the fraternity system was open as well. So even if you weren't a member, you could go to the parties at the different houses anyway. Some were more "open to that non-member guest coming" than others, I guess. But all seven of us could have joined a fraternity if we wished to, and most of us did.

GEORGE: Right. And that was very surprising for me because I don't know a lot about Greek life, but when I think about it, I imagine pretty aggressively white spaces. So that was kind of a shock—

NOEL: When you say aggressively white spaces, what do you mean?

GEORGE: I mean spaces where Black students would feel uncomfortable even at a party.

NOEL: I don't think that was — I don't think that was the case. That may have continued to be the case as we got larger numbers of Black students who then — larger numbers of those students not wanting to be in the fraternity system, and needing to create spaces, organizations, whatever — Afro-Am like as an example, where those social opportunities were going to then be created. I think that was certainly an expected evolution.

GEORGE: Yeah.

NOEL: But at the front end, at the very front end, when we've just arrived, and the next year, all the parties that are likely to happen are in the fraternity system, and the fraternity system is welcoming us, we responded and joined.

GEORGE: Right. In my research, I found that SAE, Sigma Alpha Epsilon, was founded by a Confederate chaplain at the University of Alabama in 1856. What was the extent of your knowledge about SAE before you joined it?

NOEL: Well, before I joined it, probably — well, before I pledged, probably zero. During rush week, or rush night, I guess it was, you were invited or, I don't know if you were even invited, I don't know how you chose to go or what happened. But you went to houses and met people. And, of course, you had already been there for a year and had friends from your freshman year. So, I remember the guys in my suite who are now sophomores together, we had gotten a suite arrangement, and I was the chairman of our dorm, so I got the best suite, and we were good friends, and we did this rush process together, and kind of informally decided we might join this house. If the most of us or all of us got invited to join that house, we were going to make some kind of collective decision. And I was a part of the group, and we went to the different houses and met the different people and got invitations to join different houses, and, like I said, all or most of the seven joined a house, and I joined a house that several of my friends and I seemed to like the men that were there the most. After one night, how the hell did we think we knew that? And we decided to join SAE together, and I didn't know any more about SAE's background than any of the other twenty-eight fraternities. But the pledge process over whatever number of weeks it was, one of the obligations was to read the pledge manual, which included a history of the fraternity, and, of course, perhaps I was more interested in that history than other pledges. It turns out I may have been the only one that really read the book, because when we had a test on it, I got the highest grade and was the pledge of the year, because I got the highest grade because I read the book. That's when I learned about the history of the founding of the fraternity, that it not only is the largest fraternity in the country, but it was formed in that manner, and certainly strong throughout the South, but since it's the largest, it's strong around the country. But I didn't realize that it had a "No Blacks" member prohibition. That wasn't explained to me when I was pledging, because the upperclassmen in my fraternity had already decided to ignore that. I

became aware of it later, naturally, but when I inquired, they said “No, we're not going to do that. And we told the National, and we're not going to do that, and we didn't do that, and here you are.” And the night of the pledging, I got the pledge of the year award for the test and the Grand Imminent Archon from SAE National was there to see me inducted, maybe because I was the first Black pledge. And that's all I know about that.

GEORGE: Right. So you were the first Black member of SAE in the local chapter and the national organization, is that correct?

NOEL: That's my understanding.

GEORGE: Ok, and —

NOEL: That was our understanding at the time.

GEORGE: Right. In Robert Bennett's interview, again, when asked about white students' response to the racial justice protests on campus, he said that, and I'm going to quote him, “The white students, which was ninety nine percent of the student body, generally certainly opposed it.” So I'm curious to know what your fraternity's response was to racial justice protests that were happening on campus, like maybe George Wallace, what did they think of that?

NOEL: Well, I think as a collective, probably not to worry about it at all. I would imagine most of my SAE brothers simply let it happen and ignored it. It didn't impinge on them one way or the other. I don't know how they personally felt about it. Nobody discussed it with me personally, other than the friends I had that I would probably more closely discuss such things. But no, there wasn't some fraternity-wide discussion night. There were individuals who cared more than others.

GEORGE: Okay. And the Dartmouth chapter of SAE was initially de-recognized by the national organization in 2016, I believe, due to an investigation of a hazing complaint, and the fraternity was then de-recognized by Dartmouth College due to this national suspension. When I read that, my question for you was, what is your current impression of the Dartmouth chapter of SAE? Are you close with any members? Are you—

NOEL: I went there and graduated in 1968. What do you think? I'm not involved with the local chapter of SAE at all. I'm hardly involved with Dartmouth. So at this point, I'm not involved with my local SAE chapter at all. I'm dismayed and probably pissed off that they're

unrecognized or whatever infractions that they did to get to that point. That seems to me entirely unnecessary and inappropriate. I can't imagine who the adult leadership is that would allow the local chapter to even come close to that. I mean, that's troubling, but I'm no longer connected with SAE or that local house. It was good for me while I was there. I have lifetime friends because of it, but I can't believe that the college would let it get that bad. I'm sorry the college let it get that bad.

GEORGE: Yeah, so you've distanced yourself from SAE since graduating?

NOEL: I didn't distance myself. I didn't consciously distance myself. I live in Colorado, so the chances of me getting to Dartmouth physically are, one, poor. And then am I going to have SAE be the focus of even getting to Dartmouth? No, SAE is way down the list. If I got to the college more when my oldest son was a student at Tuck, and that got me to the college in those years. In earlier years after graduating from Tuck, I was involved with admissions efforts and part of the early group of early alumni working with Tuck to try to get more Black students and Black faculty. I was on the board of overseers for Tuck for six years, I guess. And so there was a time in the 80s where I was much more involved, but, like, I'm seventy-seven, so there have been a couple of decades here where I'm not involved in a lot of things and certainly not things as far away as Dartmouth and Tuck.

GEORGE: Ok, so —

NOEL: And certainly not, even when I'm going to worry about Dartmouth, would it be SAE.

GEORGE: Okay, that's good to know. You were also the first Black president of Green Key, which even today is like a huge cultural event at Dartmouth. Could you tell me about the pressures that that role must have induced for you?

NOEL: You know, you call it a huge cultural event. I'm not even sure I understand that. When I was there, there was three campus-wide big weekends. There was Homecoming in the fall, Winter Carnival in the winter, and Green Key in the Spring. It wasn't a cultural event. I don't ever remember anybody calling it a cultural event. It was a big weekend.

GEORGE: Yeah.

NOEL: And big weekends meant there were bands at all the houses and there might be a national entertainment group that came in and performed on campus. And there were lots of women that came up because it was a big weekend. I'm not even sure what cultural part of Green Key ever existed. It was just a big weekend.

GEORGE: Yeah, at least now —

NOEL: What is it now, as a cultural event now? How do you describe it as a cultural event now?

GEORGE: Yeah, at least now in 2023, from my very limited understanding as a freshman, the other two terms, their events, which I believe are Winter Carnival and the Fall Festival, they've lost a lot of importance. So when most students think of big Dartmouth events —

NOEL: So there's a Fall Festival that's not Homecoming weekend?

GEORGE: Fallapalooza, that's not Homecoming weekend. But yeah —

NOEL: Okay, so that's new. We didn't have a Fall Festival. We had Homecoming and —

GEORGE: What I'm trying to get at is that since the other two events of the year have lost so much importance, we all get very excited for Green Key weekend. That's like the only event that we really look forward to.

NOEL: So, okay. So Winter Carnival doesn't have importance anymore?

GEORGE: It has importance, but I imagine not as much as it was decades earlier.

NOEL: Well, of the three, Winter Carnival was by far the biggest when I was there. And the spring weekend was called Green Key and organized by the Green Key Society, I think was the name. And not even sure the rest of the name, but the Green Key folks organized it. But it was one of the three big party weekends. That's what they were. And there wasn't anything cultural about it. That's what's throwing me, when you call it a cultural event.

GEORGE: Yeah—

NOEL: I didn't think it was a cultural event. It was a party weekend.

GEORGE: And I imagine that Green Key in 2023 is structurally very different from what it was in the 60s.

NOEL: Yeah, sounds like it.

GEORGE: Yeah. Can you tell me about the structure of the event back then?

NOEL: It was a party weekend. That's my point. All the fraternities had parties. They didn't all have parties throughout the term, but for all the fraternities to have parties at the same time meant a lot of people coming in, a lot of women, a lot of friends, a lot of people coming in for the weekend with parties on Friday and Saturday night. And the Spring, there was always a major entertainment group. I think the Lovin Spoonful was the group we hired in the Spring of my junior year when I was still on campus. And that's what Spring Green Key weekend was, parties and a major entertainment opportunity, and parties. That's what it was. Nothing cultural beyond that. Now, I don't know. Maybe there was a symposium during the day. I don't think so. So you're saying now, what kind of events do happen?

GEORGE: Yeah, I think the only big part of the format from the late 60s that we kept is the concert aspect.

NOEL: Uh huh.

GEORGE: So now Green Key is centered around music and the artists that we bring to campus. We look for the artists that are headlining. It's all about music. It's all about the concerts.

NOEL: Well, and I think the essence of the distinction is, fifty years ago, it was all male and fraternities, and that social opportunity for parties at fraternities was the primary thrust of the weekend. So if that changes, then the weekend changes, of course.

GEORGE: Right, right. And as the first Black president of Green Key, did white students in the planning committee respect your leadership?

NOEL: Well, I didn't know if they disrespected it. That's a harder question to ask, "I'm God, and I know that they love me." That's just hard to say. So yeah, they were my friends, and I was selected to be the president from a group of people I thought I knew and respected, and it went well. So I didn't know if I was disrespected. I didn't have — that was not brought to my attention if I was disrespected.

GEORGE: Okay. That's good to know you had a good experience. And we touched on this a little bit over the phone, Dr. Errol Hill was a huge father figure for Black students at the time. He was a professor —

NOEL: Oh yeah.

GEORGE: Yeah, he was a professor, and just an administrative officer overall. And in my research, I found that after William Shockley, who was a Stanford lecturer, gave a speech here at Dartmouth in 1969 about the genetic inferiority, supposedly, of Black people, Dr. Hill wrote several papers in response and in support of the Afro-American Society's protests of the speech. I know that you were close with him. Could you tell me about your relationship with Dr. Hill, what that was like?

NOEL: Well, Dr. Hill, if you're the first Black academic presence on campus, you just are, and you don't kind of get to plan and have an organizational infrastructure. He knew, because he was a decent human being and a strong family, he knew we were there without our families. And we were, some of us, far from home. I'm sure I would have met him, because he invited me to dinner, or me and a couple other people or something, to dinner at his house. We were all meeting him, because he was the adult and he was reaching out to help us and provide a little bit of home away from home and a shoulder, like any good mentor, but in a deeper way because he was a nice person and he had a nice family, and he might extend his hospitality and come to his house.

And then I'm sure some of us got to know him better than others. And other people followed and the critical mass began to build, certainly by the time I was leaving, the critical mass was starting to build rapidly. If the college did anything that was either correct or, from my perspective, admirable, it was not to gingerly do its affirmative action effort, it was to do it wholeheartedly. And just bring the people in, increase the numbers and increase the numbers inside of five years and see what would happen and to do the best you could with what you created, instead of bringing ten and studying it some more. They studied it for ten years before we arrived. And for the next ten years, shit happened. And from time to time, I'm sure there were mistakes made. But, at the same time, like I said, we had three Rhodes Scholars and we had a lot of successes. So that first ten years was, looking back on it, I guess, could have been done in different ways. It might have been nice if there were ten Dr. Hills all at the same time for all of us to go to.

GEORGE: Right.

NOEL: But we didn't do it that way.

GEORGE: I'm glad Dr. Hill was a fatherly presence on campus at the time, because — maybe not you, but in a lot of other oral history interviews for Dartmouth Black Lives, a lot of Black students recounted pretty bad experiences with faculty. And I want to clarify something I stated earlier. I don't think J.B. Redding had the experience of a professor tell her verbatim that he doesn't give A's to Black students. I think that might have been the interview of Dr. Adrienne T. Lawson ['82]. I can't be quoted on that. I think that was a different person. But I think in her experience, a professor alluded to Black people's intellectual inferiority, and inability to get an A. And he used that as a guide to lure students so he could sexually harass them in after class tutoring. I believe those are separate instances. And that actually makes it worse, so...

NOEL: Of course it makes it worse. In any case, it's just inexplicably stupid. But yeah, out of a number of faculty members, would there be some who were bigoted and difficult and getting away with it? I'm sure. I fortunately didn't run into that. If I ran into something, maybe I was just too focused on where I was going to let that matter. I mean, my parents had clearly taught me "We don't stop doing what we're doing because we meet resistance from white people who don't want us to do it. In fact, that's what we come to expect. So we do what we do because we do it." So, if I'd had somebody say that to me, by that time I would have just kept on trucking. I wouldn't have, I would have been pissed off and I would have told people. But that's not what happened to me. Now, again, I might have been lucky in the choices, the courses I had. I don't know.

GEORGE: Yeah. So, you stated earlier in the interview that the creation of the Noel Resolution was fueled in part by the death of [Martin Luther King Jr.] MLK. Is that correct?

NOEL: Right. Dr. King was killed in that day. Ed Benton, my mother's closest of the fellow members of the school board, and Ed and some of the other white citizens in Denver that supported what my mother and I were doing, they paid the price. They had calls. Ed had the best response. Now, imagine yourself being a white man that other white men are calling because you've been supportive of Black issues. You're going to get a hateful person calling you. But Ed had this wit, this kind of quick wit. So somebody calls Ed's house and he wants to speak to Ed Benton. And before Ed can say anything, he starts saying how awful Ed Benton is and what's going to happen to him. And Ed has the presence of mind to say "I'm

sorry, you must have the wrong number.” And the man goes, “I’m terribly sorry. I apologize.” And then hangs up. That takes — that takes wit. That takes intelligence. That takes a lot of things. But they got Ed and Monty Pascoe, those two families got — the two candidates who were pro-Western candidates — they got their more than fair share of hate calls as well.

GEORGE: Yeah. It sounds like your mom was pretty inspired by MLK, given that, like you said earlier, she was also happy to have the same birthday as him.

NOEL: Well, Martin Luther King had come to Denver. She had met him when he came to Denver. She not only, like every Black person in America, knew who he was and what he was doing, but part of his travels included coming to Denver. And she was part of a smaller group that met with him. And she, I’m sure she was influenced by that occasion. That’s what we all understood.

GEORGE: Right.

NOEL: He told her that you do what you do where you are and what you can. Not everybody can be at a national level. And our movement is not only what you see on television.

GEORGE: Right, right. He died in the Spring of your senior year, I believe—

NOEL: Right.

GEORGE: —in April of 1968. Could you tell me your personal memories of his death? Did it impact you in any way?

NOEL: Well, it impacted me like it impacted any intelligent or merely intelligent human being with a conscience and a heart. I guess if you were bigoted and prejudiced and hateful, maybe you thought that that was appropriate. But everybody else with any heart at all or sense of morality would be outraged.

But for a Black person, it was beyond outrage. It was a clear feeling of loss. And sharing that with people that you cared about was, I think, what happened certainly around the country. But in Denver — Ed Benton, the moment he heard it, he called my mother. And my mother was out running errands and he got my father. And my father said “Rachel is not here. She should be back soon.” And Ed says — Ed’s told this story publicly. Ed hung up the phone, got in his car and drove over to my parents’ house. And he chose at that moment to share how he felt and how they felt as closest of friends

together. And he said they sat on the front steps of my parents' house and they hugged and cried together as they talked about what they felt about it and what it meant. That's got to have happened around the country. And, that afternoon, I actually was at the fraternity house with some of my closest friends, watching the television and being gutted. It would be hard to tell you this many years later how anybody felt that day. Because we didn't realize we were going to be watching something that we were going to repeat over and over and over again. Maybe not at the magnitude of what Martin Luther King accomplished, but at the senselessness of such events over and over again.

GEORGE: Right.

NOEL: I was a senior in high school in November of 1963 when John Kennedy was killed. And I was too young to understand what I thought I understood by 1968. And certainly by June of 1968, my generation saw an awful lot. We had no idea it was going to be so little compared to what was to come.

GEORGE: And one sort of existential question that I had to wrap up the Dartmouth portion of this interview is something that I've been struggling with in my own freshman year at Dartmouth. Do you think the strength of this bachelor's degree is worth enduring the racism that it takes to get it?

NOEL: I think it's telling that you asked the question. It's a question you probably should have asked yourself before you decided to come. But if you didn't and you still came and you're asking the question now, think for example, you're thinking about how hard this might be. The racism against your sense of self. And think if you were Frederick Douglass, is that the metric you would have applied? Or would you have already said to yourself "Shit, I know this is going to be tough. I'm actually deciding to do this knowing that it's going to be tough. It's inescapable that it's going to be tough. So that's why I'm doing it. That's a part of why I'm doing it. I know it's going to be tough and I'm deciding that the tools I'm going to get at a top place to get the tools, the relationships that I'm going to create at a top place to get the relationships. I've already decided that's worth it. What I haven't decided yet is, am I up to it? Am I up to the challenge to get the advantage that could be offered? Regardless of how tough it is. Shit, life is tough." My parents taught me that at a young age. "Kid, you're Black. It's already tough." It's not about whining about that. It's about what are you going to do? Yes, I think the value of all the other things that you can take from Dartmouth on top of or against what some of the difficulties will be, will far

outweigh the difficulties, but it's up to you to make that happen. And people have come before you who have had far tougher barriers, taller barriers, stronger barriers, more hatred-filled barriers, and they survived. And you will too. The college already decided if you're there, that you're capable of being that person.

GEORGE: Yeah, I agree with that. I think that's a really empowering way to look at it. And I'll internalize that from now on. So now moving on to just a few postgraduate questions that I have for you. We already passed the three-hour mark on this interview, but I only have a few more questions, I promise.

NOEL: That's because I talked too much.

GEORGE: No, you're okay. We touched on this a little bit earlier in the interview, but can you tell me why you pursued an MBA before law school?

NOEL: Well, I pursued the MBA because I thought I wanted to have a business career. I might have still wanted to have a business career if I went to college for four years. But because I was fortunate enough to win the Scott Paper Scholarship Award and get a free ride to go to Tuck and go a year early, I saved my father one year of college and two years of graduate school in one fell swoop. If you look at it that way, I didn't have any choice. I was going to have a career that I thought I wanted to have in the direction of business, and I was going to get an MBA for free and save my dad a year of college. That's a no brainer.

GEORGE: Yeah. So you were the fourth Black student at the Tuck School of Business. You were in a program that let you start your MBA in your senior year of college, or instead of your senior year, is that correct?

NOEL: Instead of my senior year, yes. They called it "3-2." You went to the college for three years and Tuck for two years.

GEORGE: Right. Can you compare the racial climates of Dartmouth College versus the Tuck School? Was there more hostility, less?

NOEL: Oh, I think there was probably less because it was smaller. Our class was — I think our class must have been sixty-five or seventy. I don't think it was any more than that. Tuck was the smallest of the top MBA programs. Tuck is the oldest MBA program.

GEORGE: Right

- NOEL: But it's also the smallest and it's larger now than it was then, but it was quite a bit smaller then. And, you know, treating me differently, there were two guys in the class ahead of me that I knew. And so treating the three of us differently in that small an environment, it would have been contrary to the Dartmouth way and it would have been stuck out like a sore thumb.
- GEORGE: Right. Because, yeah, the Tuck School, they invented the Master's in Business Administration degree. Is that correct?
- NOEL: Well, I don't know if that's the way you'd say it. They were the first school to have a graduate program in business. Other schools followed. The Harvard Business School is not as old as the Tuck Business School. So yes, they were the first. That means, yes, I guess they invented, I don't know about the use of the word "invented," but they certainly established a graduate program specializing in business. And they were the first to do so.
- GEORGE: And speaking of Harvard, why did you choose Harvard Law School after your MBA?
- NOEL: You know, there's a lot of reasons I don't even know. Certainly Harvard Law School would by some be thought to be the top school. And I got in it. I got into Yale, and some would think Yale was the top school. And I didn't go. I went to Harvard. Because—why do you think I went to Harvard instead of Yale? After all this interview, why do you think I chose Harvard over Yale?
- GEORGE: I think if I was in that dilemma, I would choose Harvard Law School because there's more students overall in the student body of the law school. So, there's more Black students. That's why I would choose Harvard Law School.
- NOEL: Well, that couldn't be a reason because it wasn't a reason for me, but I guess I didn't know how many students were there really. I found out after I got there that Harvard Law School in my '69 to 1972 timeframe was the third largest Black student — law student — body behind Howard and Southern. Harvard with its 150 Black students was the third largest. I didn't realize that until I got there, but that wasn't my reason. I'd been in Hanover for five years. And so the thought of being in a smaller city with a smaller school like Yale versus being in a larger school didn't matter that much. Larger city mattered a lot.
- GEORGE: Yeah.

NOEL: I went to Harvard because it was in Boston, or Cambridge, instead of New Haven. Flat out simple. Either school was a top school. Wouldn't have mattered. Yale, I probably would have liked better because it was so much smaller and it was more like Dartmouth small. And I probably shouldn't have gone to Yale for that reason. But I decided to go to Harvard because it was in Boston. It's trivial, but that's true.

GEORGE: So your maternal great-grandfather, A. W. E. Bassette, passed the bar exam after being freed from —

NOEL: He did not pass the bar exam. They did not have a bar exam in those days.

GEORGE: Oh, okay.

NOEL: You, "sat for the bar," which means you were recommended by a person that was in the bar. You were taught by a person that was a member of the bar and you passed the knowledge of being a lawyer threshold, however that was established, but there was not a written test that everybody took at the same time.

GEORGE: So, he sat for the bar. He did not — Right, okay. So your maternal great-grandfather —

NOEL: Which means he did not go to law school.

GEORGE: Right. Right.

NOEL: There was not a requirement that you actually have three years of accredited law school back in the 1800s.

GEORGE: So, he sat for the bar and became an attorney, and then your maternal grandfather, his son, who carried his same name, also became an attorney, and you did the same, decades later. So does that pattern mean —

NOEL: And I had an uncle, one of my mother's brothers. My mother was a sociologist. Her sister was an educator. Her brother was a doctor, and her other brother was a lawyer, and I became a lawyer. Yes. So there's a Bassette line of lawyers.

GEORGE: Is that super meaningful to you now?

NOEL: No, but what's super meaningful to me is that they had an opportunity to be a lawyer when it was really difficult to become one, and I benefited or stood on their shoulders to have a much wider opportunity to become a lawyer years later. And that — for my way of thinking, the people that came before me are the ones that had it much harder and paved the way. I'm proud of the fact that my family has had those opportunities and didn't waste them. I mean — I'm more proud that we didn't waste them because we didn't have anything to do with having the opportunities. And I think my grandfather that I never got to know, or my great-grandfather, they probably would have been proud that there were succeeding lawyers in the family. My kids are not lawyers, so on the Bassette side, we don't have any more lawyers, but I mean, that's kind of correct. Beyond my generation, my cousin is a super lawyer. She's a former dean of a law school and dean, chancellor of a college. She's a super lawyer, but our generation doesn't have any of our kids becoming lawyers, and fortunately, she does. She has another super lawyer in the making.

GEORGE: That's a lot to be proud of.

NOEL: Well, like I said, I feel my cousin is the one that's keeping the line going — not my family— but my cousin, Phoebe Hadden, and her daughter, Kara, are super lawyers, and they're keeping the line going.

GEORGE: Okay. Can I get your cousin's full name, just for the record?

NOEL: Well, Phoebe Hadden is a former professor at Temple, and retired now, and then she was a dean of the University of Maryland Law School, and then chancellor of one of the Rutgers campuses. I'm not sure which campus, but she was a chancellor of one of the Rutgers University campuses. And her daughter, Kara Hadden, is a professor at Penn Law School.

GEORGE: Wow.

NOEL: So they're the super lawyers.

GEORGE: I know you have a younger sister. Does she have the same occupation as you?

NOEL: She's a journalist. She has a master's in journalism from Stanford [University], and she and my cousin, Phoebe, both went to Smith College together, and then Angie went to graduate school at Stanford, stayed on the West Coast, and wrote for Associated

Press for a while, and has been a journalistic editor with different companies, and is retired.

GEORGE: Wow. That's very impressive. Can I get your sister's full name?

NOEL: Angela B. Noel.

GEORGE: Okay. And why did you return to Colorado after getting all three of your degrees on the East Coast?

NOEL: Because I like living in Colorado, primarily. I didn't like living on the East Coast nearly as much. And I worked for a law firm in the summer in Colorado, and I liked the firm, and I came back to work there.

GEORGE: Ok, and—

NOEL: Now, one of the reasons I ended up in Colorado was, in Boston, I put my sandals at the front door and swore if I could wear my sandals before June 1, I might get a job in Boston. But that didn't happen.

GEORGE: But, yeah, why did you choose to become a solo practitioner at the Noel Law Office after being the first Black lawyer at Holme, Roberts and Owen?

NOEL: And I was the first Black partner among the large commercial law firms. I got tired of being a pioneer and tired of large people organizations and decided I wanted to help, instead of the Fortune 500 clients, I wanted to help small business people and people at the other ninety nine percent of the system.

GEORGE: I think that's really admirable.

NOEL: Well, admirable is not the word I would use, but we all have career choices and we make career choices throughout our career. I had done thirty years downtown with large law firms, and that seemed at the time to be enough. And whether I was going to succeed enough with helping people with lesser means, small business people who otherwise weren't affording legal talent that I'd been privileged to have, that's what I decided to do.

GEORGE: Yeah, I think that's reasonable. So my last question—

NOEL: The fact that I'm a solo practitioner means I no longer want to work for anybody. That's why I'm by myself.

GEORGE: Yeah. And my last question for you is, what advice would you give to current Black students at Dartmouth?

NOEL: Stay connected. Take advantage of opportunities. Take advantage of ferreting out what the opportunities are, and then taking advantage of them. Learn one lesson from the successful elders of whatever generation. They probably whine less than the average soul — white, Black, American, whatever. Those of us who've succeeded, and I'm not counting myself in that category, but what I'm saying — those of us Black people that we look up to who have succeeded, have been doers rather than whiners. They have been knowledgeable about injustice and discrimination and unfairness. It's not that they aren't knowledgeable. They're not lightly moving. They're consciously aware of what's wrong, but they don't whine about it. They just go about doing something about it. So, there's a common trait between Woody [Lee] and Wally Ford and some of the other people that you come in contact with these histories. I'm sure you'll see the common thread is they know what the hurdles were, but they didn't whine about the hurdles. They just did. That's what I would pass on to those of you who have the privilege to be Dartmouth community members. Take this opportunity to wring every advantage out of it you can. Make yourself as aware as you can of every benefit you can possibly gain, and do it. Take it. Own it. And if you need to whine, find a friend, an alum, or whatever. Whine all you need to, but don't let it ever interfere with what you might get out of the college. And, of course, never give anybody at the college the opportunity to know you had any whining moments. That's what people in the South did when they were slaves. That's what they did when they were victims of Jim Crow. They whined at home if they whined at all, and they never let people know — the white people know — that they were ever having a problem, having a difficulty. That strength of character, that resilience, that sense of perseverance, it's part of our DNA. And, therefore, Dartmouth's an opportunity. Shit, it's like free bread. Go get it.

GEORGE: Yeah. [Laughter] I think that's really valuable advice. Thank you.

NOEL: Okay.

GEORGE: Okay. And I wanted to thank you again for participating in this interview that has been almost four hours long. [Laughter] I really appreciate you sitting down for this and carving out the time.

NOEL: It's because I talk so much I forget the question and keep talking, but that's all right. You're very kind. Thank you.

GEORGE: Thank you. I'm going to stop the recording now.