

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH ARMY LESTER III

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Location: CIE/CETL House at Kennesaw State University

TS: Army, will you tell us when you were born and where you were born and a little bit about where you grew up?

AL: I was born August 17, 1956, in a small wooden house in Byromville, Georgia. I lived in that house until I left Byromville in 1974 to go to college. One of the interesting things about my upbringing is that I was born with the name of Gregory Benard Lester. Some time around my senior year in high school, I started to really understand and appreciate all of the sacrifices that my parents were making to send my siblings and me to college. There were eight of us, and they made it possible for every one of us to have the opportunity to go to college. My parents always wanted us to be the best possible. They wanted us to work hard, be honest, and get a good education. They always talked about having a doctor in the family. I had already decided that I wanted to get my Ph.D. and become a scientist. That was my dream as a child. I can remember telling my 6th grade teacher that I wanted to get my Ph.D., even though I did not really understand what that meant. However, there was something about my family experience that never let me forget that. I decided in high school that I would work hard to realize my dream and to make my family proud: I would go to college, get my Ph.D., and change my name to Army Lester in honor of my parents for all of the work and sacrifice that they made for their children. I decided to do this secretly and not tell any of my family members until graduation day. I would let them come to graduation and discover what I had done. I thought that this would be somewhat of a special moment for them, a wonderful experience.

After graduating from high school, I started to live out those dreams. I went to college at Mercer University where I earned my BS in biology. From there I went to Georgia College where I earned a MS in biology. Although I went to college at a time when it was relatively easy for African Americans to get financial assistance to go to college, my parents helped me in every way they could. I was actually given the resources to splurge a little. This made me even more committed to the success that my family dreamed of. As a junior in college, my parents bought me a brand new car. I was even afforded the opportunity to live in places with the title of "Luxury Apartments." As I was working on my doctorate, I reached a point where I could definitely say that, "Yes, it's about to happen." I was going to earn my doctorate and change my name. I went through the process of filing all the papers, appeared before the judge, and even had to submit a statement to the local papers. After all was said and done, I received official word

that the name change was official. Then the Social Security office sent a new Social Security card to me, but they sent it to my parents' home. My parents received the Social Security card, and they said, "Now why in the world did they do that?" But one of my sisters was there and was aware of what I was doing. She took the card and she explained it as a mistake, and everyone went on without another word about it.

My parents arrived at graduation and sat excitedly awaiting the birth of a "doctor" in the family. As all parents would do, they quickly looked in the program to make sure that their child's name had been listed in the program with bold and bright colors. But what they saw was the most bewildering thing they had ever seen in the more than 20 high school and college graduations that they had attended. They looked at the program, and said, "Oh, my God, they messed up the program! How in the world could they make a dumb mistake like this?" What they saw in the program was Army Lester and not Gregory B. Lester. The immediate response was that there must have been an error in the printing of the program. They had no idea that I would do something like change my name. But then it all started to become incredibly clear, I had changed my name. I was called to receive my diploma as Army Lester III. My family then realized what was happening, and it was a shock.

DY: Were they very touched?

AL: My entire family was very touched by this event. It is important to note that this experience was the work of all my siblings. While we did not plan this out together, I did what they had empowered me to do. Any success that I earned could be directly attributed to all my siblings. They worked as hard as I did to encourage and support me. It was a very exhilarating experience. Even to this day, it is one of the most spiritual things that my family has ever experienced. And it is all because of my parents' unselfish desire to give their children every opportunity to succeed. My dad's name is Army Lester, Jr., but he never used Junior, because he wasn't overly delighted with the name Army. On the other hand, he received a lot of attention because of his name especially since he served in the Navy, worked for the Air Force, and had a cousin named Major.

TS: I guess so.

DY: What was the name they had given you before you changed it?

AL: I was given the name Gregory Benard Lester at birth by my oldest sister, Mary Jean.

DY: That's pretty!

AL: Well, it is a nice name, and I had no problems with the name.

TS: So you were called Greg when you were growing up?

AL: Yes, I was Greg growing up, and all of my family and friends who knew me before the name change still call me Greg, Gregory, or G.B. When I applied to Kennesaw, I was in the final process of completing the name change and interviewed at Kennesaw as Gregory. When I got here my colleagues in the Biology department had to figure out whether to call me Army or Gregory. It turns out that I named one of my sons Gregory Benard, so Gregory still continues on.

DY: Gregory is still going on.

TS: So he's going to change his name to Army IV.

AL: Well . . .

TS: Tell us a little bit about your family tree. Since you're the third, your grandfather, Army Lester I, how did he get that name?

AL: I have no idea how my granddaddy got his name.

TS: Did you know him?

AL: I didn't know him at all. As a matter of fact, he died as a relatively young man, and there are not many records of his existence.

TS: Was he a farmer in Byromville?

AL: I'm not sure exactly what he did. During that time, I'm sure that almost everybody was somehow affiliated with farming to some degree.

TS: It was a farm community, wasn't it?

AL: Yes, Byromville was very highly involved in farming and still is to this day. One of the interesting things about my family tree and my family background and history is that the town of Byromville was founded by William H. Byrom. The Byroms were said to have gone to North Carolina to purchase some slaves. One of the slaves that they bought was my great-great-grandfather, Henry. After being bought by the Byroms, he was given the name Henry Byrom. Henry Byrom had about ten to twelve kids who had some kids who had some kids who had some kids and so forth. My dad is the great grandson of Henry Byrom. Every two years we have a family reunion in honor of Henry and Fannie Byrom, and their descendents

DY: Do you think you have any people up in North Carolina?

AL: Well, actually my great-great granddad had two sons by his first wife. The kids and the wife were left there in North Carolina when Henry was brought to Georgia. But after freedom came, he went back to get his wife and kids and brought them back to Georgia. I don't know the exact story of how things happened, but the last name of those two sons was Williams, and their descendents are part of our family reunions.

TS: You said your father worked for the Air Force?

AL: Yes. He worked at Warner Robins Air Force Base. He actually started working there when he was about fifty-something and retired with nearly thirty years of service. So he was in his late seventies or early eighties driving from Byromville to Warner Robins, which is about a fifty-mile drive each way.

TS: What did he do?

AL: He did a number of different things; he started working in the Sanitation Department picking up trash and things of that nature and moved to a janitorial position. From there he ended up painting and detailing airplanes. Over the course of the years, he took on some supervisory positions.

TS: Was he career Navy?

AL: No. He only spent about four or five years in the Navy and then came out. He had a wife and four children when he was in the Navy. He went to serve his country and then came back home to his family who needed him even more. When he returned from service, he tried his hand at farming. He did not have much of a green thumb and decided that farming was not his calling. Most of his life he worked for the local doctor, Dr. Davis, there in town of Byromville. In addition to being the town's doctor, Dr. Davis was a big farmer. It is strange how one thing leads to another. My father worked for the doctor because his grandmother worked for him. As soon as he was old enough, my father's grandmother got him a job for the doctor. I think that he made as little as \$8 per month. Being the primary caretaker of the doctor's home for probably 30 years, after the doctor and his family had all died or moved away, my dad was responsible for helping the new buyers of the home move in. My father's position at Warner Robins Air Force Base came as a result of this transition. The man who bought the Davis's house worked at the Air Force Base and had some pull. Recognizing my father's ambition, he helped him to get a job at the Air Force Base. The plot thickens though; my sister Virlin worked for the new owners, the Brinsons. She would do things like clean and help take care of their three sons. A few years after she started, the Brinsons hired me to take care of their yard. I worked for them from the age of 12 until I turned 16 for a whopping fifty cents per hour. Although the salary was low even in those days, I was still one of the richest kids in the neighborhood.

DY: When would this have been—in the '50s?

AL: No, no, not the '50s. This was in the late 60s and early 70s.

DY: Right, right. You're younger.

AL: One of the ironic things about this experience is that I ended up working in the very same house that that my father worked in for years. While neither of us earned very much money there, we both left with a richness of experiences that would last us for a lifetime.

TS: What about your mother? What was her name?

AL: Both of my parents are still living there in Byromville and doing well. I have been extremely blessed to have two wonderful parents with an average age of over 90 and nearly 70 years of marriage.

TS: What's her name?

AL: My mother's name is Bertha Louise Lester. It was by chance that both of my parents had the last name of Lester before they married. Bertha Lester married Army Lester, and they didn't have to change names or anything. There were several different groups of Lesters in and around Dooly County. Since both my parents were Lesters, I was related to most Lesters in Dooly County. Nearly 10 percent of my high school graduating class had the last name of Lester. As you might imagine, the Lesters were big slave owners in Dooly County. The irony of life is amazing. It turns out that my wife (Etta) and I were the first minority owners of property on Main Street of Bryomville. The property was previously owned by the White Byroms and the Lesters.

TS: Did your mother work outside the home or did she stay at home and take care of the kids?

AL: She did all of the above. There were nine of us all together. One of my siblings died as a baby possibly from SIDS. However, there were eight of us who grew up in Byromville. In our days of growing up, my mother stayed at home. But she would do other things like pick cotton during the summers and work on weekends when the kids were at school. She did the housecleaning and cooking for some of the local White families in town. Eventually, after all of the kids grew up and left, she started to work as a nurse's assistant at a local nursing home. Thinking back on it all, my mother is a "do-it-all" type of woman. She seemed to be there to raise all the children, yet she was out helping bring in money that she mostly spent to buy special things for her children. One of the most striking things about my mother is that she is full of "class." She always wanted to be a cut above. She would do things like have tea parties. She would invite other ladies to our home for teacakes and tea. Many of my friends would always come over to see

what kinds of new things she was trying. She would build the most elaborate Christmas decorations with angels and a manger that included live animals.

TS: Are you the first in the family to get a college degree?

AL: No, I am not the first in my family to go to college. I have six sisters who went to college before I did. Five of my sister had already graduated by the time I finished high school, and three already had master's degrees. With my dad working as a butler and my mom working as a maid, they sent five children to college and paid for most of it. Out of their eight children, seven went to college. I had one brother who was probably the smartest of the entire group who didn't go to college. He followed in my father's footsteps and went to the Navy. Six of the seven who went to college have master's degrees, and my youngest sister is in school now and will likely complete her master's by December 2006. My parents who lived their entire lives in the small town of Byromville, GA, orchestrated a movement that resulted in fifteen, soon to be sixteen, college degrees from seven of their eight surviving children. When you consider all that my parents had to go through to make this happen, while still maintaining a happy productive life for themselves, it is easy to understand why I feel that I am truly blessed. What is even stranger is that my parents have more net-worth than any of their educated children.

TS: How do you think they got that interest in education?

AL: When I think about it, my parents' interest in providing their kids with an education was no different than that of many other people in Byromville or any other part of the U.S. I think that if you were to ask parents if they would like for their children to be educated, they would say yes. If you ask the parent how much education they want for their children, they would likely say all that they can get. What really set my parents apart is that they were born with the ability "to be." They could do what so many others could only dream of. My parents were able to sacrifice many things that other people enjoyed to make sure that their children had an opportunity to get an education. My parents were able to get up and go to work when they were tired while others had to take a rest. As much as I would like to believe that my parents were self-made success stories, I realize that it was God who blessed them with the ability to be. But also, when I look at my parents and their siblings, my parents always wanted to be the leaders of the pack. They wanted to set examples of being Godly and wholesome. This, in part, accounts for the notion that they held an unquestionable belief that if you're going to make it, you've got to get an education.

TS: Well, you came along right at the age to where I guess you went through the integration situation. How did that work out in Byromville or that area that you were in?

AL: In terms of integration, there was no real problem in Byromville. There were some upset and stubborn people who resisted change. However, overall it was a

relatively smooth transition that everyone knew was coming. In Dooly County a great percentage of the Blacks and Whites were already doing many things together. Integration gave Blacks a closer look into the private lives of Whites, but not many things changed in terms of how Blacks and Whites lived.

When integration came, the primary notion of many Whites was that “I’m not going to school with those Black folks,” so Whites sent their children to private schools. A great number of private schools sprang up everywhere. From a business point, this was not good because there were not enough White students to keep all of the schools open, so many schools closed within a few years. However, a large number of White students went to private school. What this meant is that many of the best White teachers also went to private schools. The public school did attract a significant number of White teachers and students, but we still had segregation; integrated public schools and White private schools.

TS: How old would you have been by the time that it happened?

AL: I was in ninth grade when schools integrated in Dooly County. Integration came in 1970. However, even before integration, there was a lot of prep work that went into getting students ready. On the part of my elementary school, there was tremendous effort in a getting the Black students ready for integration. One of the common statements was, “It’s going to be tougher, because they’re not going to give you anything.” Teacher and parents basically were telling us that we would have to work harder for what we get. Those kinds of statements and attitudes were used to strengthen the students and make sure that the Black students performed as well as Whites. One of the unfortunate consequences of that time was that the Whites took most of their best students out of the public schools and placed them in private schools. In one sense it made it easier for the Black students to take the top position in the class. However, it also made school less productive and competitive.

DY: “You’ll have to work harder for what you get.”

AL: Yes, “You’ll have to work twice as hard to get things.”

TS: Was that true?

AL: Yes, it was true especially during the first two or three years of integration. The unfortunate fact is that you still didn’t get anything. [laughter] You did all the extra work, and you tried to make it, but you were still left with a marginal experience in a sense. Only if you were exceptional were you afforded the experience of real success. As I look back on my childhood, there were people who were truly gifted. There were potential musicians, athletes, scientists, beauticians, carpenters, and orators who did unbelievable things with no training and no evidence of how great they were. It would be unfair to blame Whites for this neglect. The truth of the matter is that it was just the time and place that we were in that caused much of the problems. Many Whites were really not much

better off than the Blacks. While they were able to convince many of the Blacks and even themselves that they were, the reality was that only a handful of Whites were truly privileged. To make sure that everyone bought into this concept of superiority, Blacks were given inferior positions to their White counterparts.

TS: What do you mean?

AL: Because almost every position in our society is determined with some level of human discretion, we tend to determine the best as those most like us. When it came to who should be the quarterback, the speaker on a program, or the leader for a project, those who decided who would take those positions generally selected someone who was most like them. What I am saying is that the best of the Black students were not put at the same level as their White counterparts.

TS: In other words, they didn't think you were capable of doing it, is that what you're saying?

AL: Well, it's not so much of being capable of doing it. You were simply not given the chance to try. Even when somehow you did manage to show what you were capable of, you weren't given the credit for having done it. Black students were not assessed or viewed in the same way as White students. The unfortunate thing about all of this is that the conditioning that it took to get most people to accept this attitude was so strong that even the Blacks bought into it. Blacks used the way Whites did things as a standard of what was good and bad—right and wrong. There were lots of different factors that were used to create these perceptual differences. If you wore a certain fashion it meant something. Eating fish and drinking red soda on Friday was bad. The most ridiculous, if you said things in a certain way it meant you were not very smart.

TS: Had an accent.

AL: It wasn't just the accent, although that was a big part of it. It was bigger than that. Somehow Blacks were inferior because they didn't say words in the same order that Whites said them. That gave Whites and even Blacks a justifiable reason for not giving the Black student an equal playing field. The concept of stereotypes took on a functional meaning. Opportunities were not there.

TS: What about for the black teachers? Were all the teachers white when you got to an integrated school, or did the black teachers go over, too?

AL: There were Black and White teachers, and in this environment, there were probably more Black teachers than White. Some of the Black teachers would do as much as they could to help the Black students. But one of the things that the Black teachers faced was that they were subordinate to the Whites. Even if Black teachers were in top positions, there was still this fear that the Whites could come and take their jobs away. Blacks had to be very careful, somewhat covert, in helping Blacks. Let me be very clear in stating that all Whites did not act to hold Black students back. I would even go as far to say that most Whites felt that they

were trying to make the Black students better. The problem was that many of their concepts of “better” meant more like Whites.

Also, in the Dooly County area, some people were just simply naïve, inexperienced and uneducated. There wasn’t much that many Black or White teachers could offer any students in terms of helping them to advance. Teachers could be supportive and encouraging and things of that nature, but most teachers had very little idea of life beyond the local communities they lived in. In the ’70s, White teachers were just as encouraging as they are now, maybe even more so. There were few overt actions of “I’m going to hold you back” or “I’m going to prevent you from excelling,” or anything of that nature. As a matter of fact, I would say the opposite is more likely to have been true. Black and White were very encouraging; they were very supportive. As I stated earlier, the real problem was that the concept of good was so terribly different between Blacks and Whites. In private circles, Blacks often joke about a common saying of Whites; “Oh, you’re one of the better of your kind” or “You’re one of the good ones. We’re going to help you; we’re going to make you an example for the rest of them.” These were very common statements of Whites or implications gathered from their actions. So in this contorted sort of way, there was support and help but very little positive results.

TS: As best they could support given their own mental framework.

DY: I know Maya Angelou has this essay that she calls “Graduation,” and she talks about how the graduation speaker addresses the black students at the black school. This would have been in the ’50s because it was segregated. [The speaker] gives their goals as vocational. And the same speaker would go to a white school and talks about being doctors and lawyers and that kind of thing. So there’s a tracking that went on. Was that the case, you think? What was your experience there?

AL: Yes, there was a general accepted expectation that most children would grow up and be like the adults in the community. It wasn’t that the people had low expectations of the children in the community, but success is a systematic process that takes you through a series of specific predictable steps. Blacks like Whites probably need to acquire vocational skills and progress from there to professional skills. Looking back on things today, I wish that the Blacks had listened and developed those vocational skills. It was not long before the ’50s that the speakers might have talked to the Black students about obtaining freedom. While it is sad to think that we must tell one group to go for vocational skills while telling the other to go for professional skills, it might be tragic to have a people go from bottom to the top with no intermediate training. This is analogous to going from a baby to a seasoned adult with no adolescence or young adulthood. You would miss so much of the maturing process. Just to finish high school was a major accomplishment for a people who were denied any form of public education. It is extremely difficult to expect a people to make such a significant level of progress in such a short period of time.

DY: But you did and your siblings did. How'd you do it?

AL: Well, that's one of the things that I've often thought about. What was the difference? What was the difference that made one group go to college and another group not? When I go back and reflect on my environment or my community, I see pockets of people where the entire family went to college. You would find one family where virtually everybody went to college. In contrast, there were families where almost no one went to college. We're not talking about families with two or three children. I am talking about families with eight, nine, or ten children. So what made the difference between the groups?

One of the things that seemed to be a factor was a "man-woman household" with a strong spiritual influence. The families that went to college were generally families that had a husband and a wife, where the father was a leader in the church, and the wife was very active in the church also. This pattern seemed to be consistent throughout the community. Those families where no one went to college generally consisted of a single mother and grandparents, alcohol drinking and smoking were common, and only the grandparents generally went to church. But then again, some of this fits a logical pattern. If the parents were drinking and doing what would be called sinful things, then it's not likely that they would have an attitude that fosters education and productivity.

TS: I've heard Lee Rhyant tell a very similar story—the [first African American] general manager of Lockheed Martin came out of Sasser [Terrell County] in southwest Georgia. I think all eight of the children in the family got at least a master's degree. But it was a two-parent family like you're describing.

DY: And you went to Mercer, which was how far away?

AL: Yes, I went to Mercer in Macon, which is only about sixty miles from Byromville.

DY: About as long as your daddy was commuting, wasn't it?

AL: Yes, Macon is only 10-15 miles north of Warner Robins.

TS: Did you get a scholarship to go to Mercer, because Mercer's not cheap, is it?

AL: I did get a scholarship. But one of the things that made going to Mercer possible was that I went to school in the '70s during the birth of integration. Colleges were looking for minority students. I was part of the first groups of Georgia students to spend four years at an integrated high school. There were many sources of money for minorities at majority institutions.

DY: Did you find a mentor, or mentors, there at Mercer?

AL: Absolutely not. From an academic point of view, Mercer was a disaster. It truly was. I was put there, and I was just left. "You're here, so do it." There were

some people who were there who were supportive to some degree, but nothing in terms of guidance, directions, or help in understanding how the educational system works at the college level. I don't mean how to navigate through courses and graduation—but someone to help you understand how the whole academy works.

DY: The culture, yes.

AL: Yes, the culture of education.

DY: What was the percentage of Black students when you were there, Army?

AL: Probably about 7 or 8 percent, maybe 10. It wasn't a large population.

DY: But you made it somehow.

AL: And it wasn't hard. As a matter of fact, it was as easy as anything I can imagine doing. There was never a point where I thought that I wouldn't make it. But that was my problem. I never understood what I should have been doing. I didn't understand how what that 19 year-old student was doing would impact this 49 year-old man.

TS: So explain why it was a disaster. What do you mean?

AL: Well, basically I didn't learn much at all. [chuckle] I wasn't engaged in the academic process; I never became part of the culture. I was smart enough to get by. I put in enough effort to make sure that I was better than those who would fail. But I never became competitive in the educational process.

TS: So it wasn't hard, and you didn't learn anything.

AL: Right.

DY: Oh, shame. But then you went to another traditionally white institution when you went to graduate school, right? To Milledgeville.

AL: Right, I went to Georgia College. But what do you do when you don't know what to do? What are the chances of making the best decision?

DY: Was it any different there?

AL: No, the same story for the most part. However, there was a professor by the name of Bill Boone who made me feel that I had some real potential. He brought me much closer to being a part of the system; however, there were justifiable reasons why I could not be as involved as some of the White students. At Georgia College, I had matured to the point that I wanted to be part of the system and worked much harder to make that happen, and it did to some degree. What I found was that my role in the system was not that of a true participant but rather

that of a spectator. I guess Georgia College was better than Mercer because at Mercer I would say that I did not even get to watch the game.

DY: “Once you get here, you might not have a seat at the table.”

AL: Well, there was definitely no seat at the table. Now, “If you somehow managed to get in here and sit down, then, okay, we’ll tolerate you. But don’t even think that you’re going to be invited or that you’re going to be deemed as the person who ought to be there.” What is so sad about this is that everything was completely justifiable. No one would ever do anything to deny me opportunity and, God forbid, hold me back. It was just that I was not aggressive enough, didn’t apply myself, and just was not smart enough.

TS: They make you feel as though you shouldn’t be there?

AL: Oh, it didn’t go that far. There were no deliberate efforts to say that you are not to be there, not in an overt sort of way. There were just rules to the game, and I did not meet the qualifications of any of the rules.

TS: But you feel on the margin?

AL: Marginal is a good way to define it. There was never an invitation; there was nothing that was done to say, “Come in.” At Georgia College I was able to distinguish myself through hard work, perseverance, and some success in research. At Georgia College I got a chance to look in and see what was going on.

DY: So you break through the invisibility barrier and become visible.

AL: Right. I think that at Georgia College I may have earned the distinction as being “One of the better of my kind.”

DY: Well, did you have any kind of nurturing or mentoring on the graduate level? You would have the expectation that your faculty is going to be looking for sharpness.

AL: The very nature of graduate school requires much more mentoring than in undergrad because of the research that is required. The thesis and dissertation require a major professor, which means that you must have someone to work with one-on-one. So from that standpoint, yes, I did get that. The people that I worked with as my major professors were much closer to being a mentor than ever before. I think that most teachers don’t know how to be mentors. They have not been trained to be mentors. I am not sure about other teachers, but I find it difficult to be an effective mentor. In many cases I never know my students well enough to be a mentor. This is why it is so important to have faculty that students can relate to. To be most effective as a mentor, faculty should believe in the student as a person and not see them as just another student. As a student, I wanted a faculty

member who saw the unique qualities that I had and responded to that rather than just being a wonderful teacher to all students.

DY: Which do you think it was in that instance?

AL: At this stage in my career I have no reason to make a decision one way or the other. I can understand both sides of the issue, so there's no advantage for me to make a decision. I can just let it go and say I see both sides.

TS: Well, are there any mentors outside the faculty at either undergraduate or master's level that were able to help you, or do you feel like you were just there on your own?

AL: There was no one outside the faculty, not even my family, who filled that role in my life as a mentor. Part of who I am, is that of a somewhat solitary person who is not very outgoing—and to some degree—a Type A personality. My personality made it a little harder for people to get close to me and know me and do all of those nurturing things that I think a mentor should do. Those things didn't happen. In the doctoral program, there was much more peer mentoring. For the first time since high school, I became part of the system. But this is because I went to a HBCU [Historically Black Colleges and Universities]. I went to Clark Atlanta University, and things were very different.

DY: That was a different world, wasn't it?

AL: It was a totally different world. For the first time since I had left high school, I felt as though I was a part of the system, and that's a very different experience. And you have to almost experience the two to really understand how much of a difference that makes. Not being part of the system makes things seem almost worthless and useless and insignificant; you have very little reason to care. But at Clark AU, I became a part of that system. It was a wonderful, wonderful experience from that standpoint. One of the shortfalls is that the resources were limited and that created challenges.

TS: You mean lack of lab equipment?

AL: Well, lack of lab equipment, lack of opportunities, lack of vision to see something bigger than the experience that we were having there. Those types of things were missing and added a different texture to everything.

TS: How did you get interested in histology?

AL: Histology came about as a result of teaching here at Kennesaw State.

TS: Really?

AL: Yes. I was trained as a developmental biologist, and my interest in developmental biology came from Georgia College. As mentioned earlier, my major professor

was Bill Boone. Bill Boone's father had been one of the pioneers of a technique called the "Tripod" shell-less chick culture system. A shell-less—chicken embryo is an embryo that has been removed from the eggshell and placed in an artificial growth environment. So basically, you take the embryo out of the eggshell, you place it in an artificial environment, and you manipulate the environment and see how the embryo responds. The ultimate goal was to create a test-tube chicken. I started work on this project at Georgia College and came up with a technique that seemed to work. When I went to Atlanta University, I took that study with me. One of the great things that happened to me at Atlanta University is that I was allowed to continue my study on chick embryos. It was very different for a graduate student to say, "I have my own project that I want to introduce into the lab." The department chair even offered me my own lab. There was no way I would take that because that would have alienated me too much. I might have never succeeded in that sense.

DY: From your peers you mean?

AL: It would have alienated me from my peers and from the faculty too. That would have been the kiss of death. The most significant element of graduate school is the relationships that you build in lab. If I had gone into a lab alone, I would have missed too many things. I was afraid that I might have caused some problems with faculty if I had been a student with my own lab.

TS: They didn't have their own labs?

AL: Well, faculty had their own labs, but can't you just hear the whispers of "Who is this student who has his own lab? Why do you not want to be a part of who we are?" But even more, I was not mature enough to make it at that level of independent work. So I was smart enough not to go into a self-directed lab, although the intent was honorable. I didn't go in that direction at all. I continued to work on this shell-less chick system in developmental biology with Dr. Curtis Parker. As a result of that, I took the courses like histology and cell biology, which were akin to what I was doing.

TS: What was your dissertation?

AL: My dissertation was on the effects of oxygen on shell-less chick development. Chick embryos removed from the eggshell and placed in a shell-less culture all die before reaching the hatching stage. Scientists couldn't figure out why, but the chick embryo would just die after three or four days of incubation. However, it was well known that if you keep this embryo inside of the shell for the first three days of development and then remove it from the shell, you can get the embryo to survive for up to twenty-one days. One of the things that I did was to try to solve this problem by placing the embryo in high oxygen. This idea came to me while working at Georgia College. It seemed important because I had tested many other factors such as temperature and humidity that did not yield any promising results, yet other scientists had reported that carbon dioxide seemed to

enhance the development and survival of the embryos. I started to manipulate oxygen concentrations, and, sure enough, if the oxygen concentrations were increased high enough, the embryos would survive up to 21 days of development outside the eggshell. You could take them out of the shell and place them in a shell-less culture system and they would survive to the point that they were supposed to hatch. They did not hatch, which meant that there were other parameters that needed to be adjusted; however the oxygen solved the first problem. So I continued my studies and ran a number of permutations of that study and completed my dissertation.

DY: When you finished your dissertation in '85, then you came right here?

AL: Yes, I came straight to Kennesaw.

TS: Talk a little bit about that.

AL: Well, you know, it's important to be in the right place at the right time, like going to Mercer during the integration era or going to Atlanta University where there were many programs to support minority students in math and science. Well, I was in the lab one day at the Morehouse School of Medicine. Although I earned my degree from Atlanta University, I did my research at Morehouse School of Medicine. One of the people who worked at Morehouse had a spouse who worked here at Kennesaw. One day this person came to the lab and said, "Hey, you know they're looking for Black faculty at Kennesaw." [laughter]

DY: [laughter]

AL: And that was exactly the case. . . . The person from Morehouse was a down-home kind of person, and said it in just those terms. I said, "This sounds interesting." So I was finishing up, and I thought, "Okay, I'll put in an application." I wanted to finish some work that I was doing, so I thought that Kennesaw would be a great place to finish my research. I often reflect on an event that occurred during this time. I received a post-doc offer from the University of California in San Diego. One of the faculty there called me and offered me a post-doc. I had been to a conference and put out some resumes, and someone called me and said, "Would you like to come out to San Diego and do a post-doc in my lab?" And I asked, "Well, what do you do? Do you publish? Are you any good?" I asked him to send me samples of his work to allow me to make sure that I wanted to work in his lab. He said, "Okay, I'll send some materials out to you." And that was the last conversation that I had with him. I guess that I sounded a little arrogant or maybe just naive. But whatever the case was, he did not respond. I had that opportunity, and I often wonder, "What would have happened had I gone?" But that's a whole different story. My fate brought me to Kennesaw.

I put in my application at Kennesaw. I was scheduled to make a presentation at the Georgia Academy of Science, and I called up Pam [Pamela J.] Rhyne, who

- was chairing the search committee in biology. I said to her, “I’m going to present at the Georgia Academy of Science, and I’ve applied to Kennesaw. Maybe you’ll come by and see me.” And sure enough, she did come by. I think she brought Kathy [Kathleen Ann] Fleiszar with her. There may have been a couple of other people from Kennesaw who came by. I guess it helped that I won “Best Graduate Student Presentation Award” at that event, and sure enough, I got an interview and ultimately a job offer.
- DY: Whom did you interview with? This was, of course, back in the days when you saw everybody.
- AL: Yes. I interviewed with all the faculty of the biology department and several chemists. Everybody was there—Dorothy [D. Zinsmeister] and a host of other people.
- TS: Was Dorothy the department chair then?
- AL: Yes Dorothy was the department chair then. I also interview with the VP for Academic Affairs, Herb Davis and students.
- TS: Ed [Edwin A.] Rugg would have been VP, wouldn’t he? Or not in ’85.
- DY: Art [Arthur W.] Dunning was also here then. You might not have met with Art.
- TS: Of course, Herb [Herbert L.] Davis would have been the dean. That may be a little early in ’85 for Ed, come to think of it. Was it Jim [James W.] Kolka?
- AL: Jim Kolka, that’s right. That’s who it was. I had a wonderful experience throughout the interview, and I was offered the position. I thought it was great to get out here. I have to admit, I came to Kennesaw with the notion, “I’ll be here no more than three years.” Three years would be the absolutely maximum time that I would be here because my intent was to get into industrial research; that was where I thought that I was heading. But I wanted to finish up some of that research that I was doing and then move on. But I got here, and teaching was more of a challenge than I had ever imagined. So it took me a few years to get my feet down.
- TS: Had you taught at all at Atlanta U?
- AL: No, I did no teaching at Atlanta U. I did some teaching in middle school during my transition between degrees, and that was it.
- TS: So you didn’t have any college teaching experience.
- AL: No, no, I had no college teaching experience. But I got my feet down the first year. The second year, [I thought], “Okay, I got through it the first year. Now I can get it right.” I wanted to be a great teacher, so I spent the next year trying to become a much better teacher. The challenge was much greater than I could have

- imagined. It was not easy to master the skills of teaching. It seems as if the institution devoted much less of its resources to building great teachers in those days. Now things are much more supportive in developing good teachers. So a couple of years passed, and then I got married. I started to engage in community activities; I started programs. And before I looked around, wow, five years had gone . . . ten years gone. Fifteen years had gone. Time just seemed to zip by.
- DY: Where did you live? Did you move out here or did you commute from Atlanta?
- AL: The first year or so I lived in Marietta. Then my sister Virlin got a divorce, so I moved in with her to share the expenses and reduce the blow of the divorce. I stayed there for a year or so, and then I got married. Then Etta and I moved back up here, and we've been here ever since.
- TS: I guess I'm kind of interested in why you would have chosen Kennesaw in light of your experiences where you finally felt back at home when you were at Atlanta University. We must not have had over 200 black students when you came here in '85, so you were coming to an overwhelmingly Caucasian-type institution. Of course, the demographics of Cobb County have changed a lot since '85, too, but that's at a time when . . . Well, the population of Cobb County was probably about 7 or 8 percent black when you came here; it'd be 10 percent by 1990. But that's pretty low. I'm just wondering why you would want to get back into this kind of environment again, given the fact that you felt alienated at Mercer and alienated at Georgia College?
- AL: The concept of alienation may not be the most accurate way of describing the situations. The problems with Mercer and Georgia College were more about not being included than alienation. Alienation implies that someone takes the time and effort to separate you from the masses and to put you in your own little world. My situation was that I was ignored. I was not included. While I was not included, I had a great time at Mercer and Georgia College and was able to do my thing in a sense. There were challenges and difficult times, but I still made the most out of the experience. Coming to Kennesaw, I had no doubt that I could manage here at Kennesaw. One of the questions that they asked me in my interview [was], "Now, you know Kennesaw is mostly White? Are you going to be able to deal with that? Do you know what to expect?"
- DY: Well, that's good that that was out there on the table. Why play any other way?
- AL: Yes, the open attitude was good or at least better than trying to hide things. My response was, "Yes, I went to Mercer. I went to Georgia College. I understand."
- DY: "I know how those white folks act in those schools."
- AL: I know how people act, so yes, I had no problems in terms of being able to manage and succeed. Plus, my notion was [that] I was here for a very brief period of time.

TS: It's amazing how many people we've interviewed that came here for two or three years and stayed twenty or thirty years.

AL: Really?

TS: That's been a very common refrain in the interviews. It really has.

AL: Really? Well, my sister Johnnie Mae told me, "Gregory, if you go there, you're never going to be able to leave. You're going to end up stuck there."

DY: Oh, how interesting. Why did she say that?

TS: She was warning you against coming here?

AL: Well, not so much [against] coming here as that she didn't think I should be in teaching, period. She said this although she was a teacher.

TS: Oh, you should have gone into research.

AL: Yes, I should have gone more into research or something that would allow me to earn a lot more money.

DY: Your sister was a teacher?

AL: Yes.

DY: Oh, was she?

AL: As a matter of fact, five of my six sisters are educators.

DY: That's really interesting. Where was she teaching?

AL: My sister Johnnie and Lucy both started teaching in Dooly County, Georgia, and then move to New Jersey. I have a sister Patricia who teaches in Virginia, and my sister Pamela works as a counselor in Detroit. My oldest sister Mary is a retired counselor of Twiggs County, Georgia.

TS: And she's probably right in the sense that you could have gone in a research track and continued to do nothing but research. But you took a track at an institution that put an overwhelming emphasis on teaching and, really, in the sciences didn't have the money to fund the lab facilities and so on anyway.

AL: Right. As a matter of fact, they said when I came here, "Research? Ah, don't worry about it. If you get a chance to do something, it'll be okay. But you don't have to worry about research; we're on a different path." And that was true.

TS: So you made the conscious decision that you wanted to go the teaching route by coming here?

- AL: No, I am not sure that I made a conscious decision to become a teacher; it happened because I followed a commitment to do the best job that I could do.
- TS: Because you talked about wanting to finish your research projects, didn't you?
- AL: I made the conscious decision that teaching would serve as a great buffer in transitioning into a research position. This was to be somewhat of a post-doc experience for me. And, basically, this shows how naïve I was even though I thought that I knew everything. My notion was that, "Okay, I can come to Kennesaw. I can start a career. I can get three years of experience. I could use my experience as a benefit to get to a research position. And so everything is going to be great. It's an academic environment. You do research, so I can do lots of research while I'm doing a little teaching on the side." But it wasn't that way at all.
- DY: You got involved in the teaching, didn't you?
- AL: Yes. See, what happened is, after coming here and becoming a teacher, I couldn't let the teaching go. I had to give my all to becoming the best teacher that I could be. I had to do a good job at that. So in terms of getting to that point of being a great teacher, it was a lot more time-consuming and demanding than I could have imagined. I found that the best I could do was to just survive my first year. After the first year, I knew that I could become a great teacher. To become a great teacher I would have to work much smarter and harder to improve my performance.
- DY: I guess what I'm thinking, Army, is you really could have said, "Okay I'll do what I can over here with teaching" and gone ahead and pursued your own research.
- AL: No, I couldn't do that. I could not do that and become a great teacher. I could not do that and call myself a successful person. Also my ego wouldn't let me go down like that. It was necessary for me to do a good job. I had been hired to teach, and I had to meet my commitment.
- DY: Right. But it sounds to me like you had the integrity and sense of commitment to what you had been hired to do to do it.
- AL: Exactly. Yes. That's the case.
- DY: But you said you got involved in teaching, and then you got involved in the community. How did that happen, and what did you do?
- AL: Well, being involved is part of my personality. As I mentioned earlier, I am not a very outwardly spoken person; I'm a person who prefers to *do*. I want to do things. Knowing and talking about things are good, but the bottom line is what you *do*. In sort of a Biblical sense, where you are to feed the hungry and clothe the naked, doing these things is what makes you a great person. My opinion is

that it's a lot more important to do these kinds of things than to talk about them. So my efforts in the community were to become engaged in organizations that focused on doing something specifically to help less served students perform at a higher academic level. I started to work with the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] and ended up serving as a tutor and mentor. I moved on from being a tutor to become the chair of the education committee and started to set up and operate programs. My involvement led to contacts with other people in the community who were running schools and doing other things, so I started to grow relationships with people in the community. I then started to look for funding to support some of these things, and I was successful in getting funding. With the start of the funding, it catapulted me to a whole different position in the college and community.

So I probably could have left Kennesaw, maybe even after five or six years, had these things not put me in this very different position where I knew that I was of service to the community. I became a resource for some in the community in terms of enrichment activities for youth as related to gaining access to college. So I got involved with that, and one program led to another program, which led to another program, which led to another program. Before long, I was involved with a number of different programs. It was very rewarding to do these programs because I could see students get really excited about learning in a relaxed environment. As teachers, we tell stories about how rewarding it is to see students get excited about learning. I found great pleasure in helping student understand concepts that they've been told are extremely challenging and too difficult for them to understand. We were interacting with parents and teachers and people who were truly excited about what was happening. It was very encouraging and motivating for me. So I continued to work on it.

DY: Where did you get funding? Where did you find funding?

AL: I received funding initially from places such as the National Science Foundation.

DY: So you were writing some grants to do this?

AL: Right. I got some grants funded. Organizations such as Verizon and Kellogg and Georgia Space Grant Consortium that's funded through NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Association] funded programs. So there were funds that were coming in from any number of different sources.

TS: Who in the community was helpful to you or [who] did you work with on these projects?

AL: I probably have worked with almost everybody that you can imagine throughout the community. I worked with a number of community organizations such as NAACP, the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, churches, educators social/civic organizations and other concerned citizens.

TS: Let me just phrase it this way: Who in the community mentored you as you were getting into these things? Anybody in particular?

AL: One person that comes to mind is Jackie Whitt, who was a principal in Cobb. She took on the education committee [after I left] with the NAACP. She has been here in Cobb County a lot longer than I have and was a lot more grounded in the community. She was very helpful in terms of getting things going and programs started. But, really, much of what I did happened because I tried. I was not afraid to try and fail. I understood that some good no matter how small is better than none at all.

DY: And this started when you'd been here how long, Army?

AL: Well, I probably got involved with the NAACP maybe even my first year here. We started to do some things, but by the third year, things were definitely well on their way.

DY: Did you find connections on campus? Did you find people on campus?

AL: Yes, the campus was much smaller then, and faculty and staff were eager to work together. There were several people on campus. This is back during the days when Julia [M.] Griffin was here—Julia Collier in those days. Diane Wilkerson was involved. Those kinds of folks were good in terms of doing all these programs and brought students, parents and community leaders on campus.

TS: You went through programs real quickly; “This one lead to this one that lead to this one.” Why don't you talk a little bit more specifically about what the names were of some of these programs and just exactly what they were doing?

AL: Well, in terms of organizing funded programs, the first funded program must have come around '91 or '92. It was a program called the Summer Science Camp. It specifically targeted middle school minority students. It was designed to get middle school minority students into the pipeline to go to college. We ran that program for about three years. It was designed for about twenty-five to thirty students. We had a very successful program, and we got additional funding and increased our numbers up to about fifty or so. We would bring students here to campus for about a month, and they would go through all kinds of hands-on activities. [We'd] take them on field trips; we even took two groups of students up to Washington [D.C.] for a conference. One year, we took the students down to Florida to the Space Center to see the shuttle and Epcot. So we would do all kinds of wonderful things with the students. Yes, I was a very different person then. I was young; I was energetic. I could get in with the students. I could work them, and I knew all of them by name, so it was a wonderful sort of experience.

We went on from the Summer Science Camp program to the Young Scholars Program, another National Science Foundation (NSF) program in 1995. NSF cancelled the Summer Science Camp program because of a lawsuit. A White female was denied admission to one of the programs in Texas, I believe, so she

sued NSF. It was as if NSF said, “All right; we’ll cut our losses and cancel everything.” We then got the program called the Young Scholars Program. That was another NSF program, and it was designed for high school minority students. We did the same kind of things; we got talented and gifted high school students onto campus, gave them lab experiences and so forth, and got them ready for college. There were several faculty in the College of Science who mentored these students. We had a great time with that program.

DY: Who were some of them?

AL: People like Joe [Joseph M.] Dirnberger, Al [M.] Panu, Dale [L.] Vogelien, Huggins [Z.] Msimanga, Dan [Daniel J.] Williams, and Marty [Martha] Williams were all involved in that program. Al Panu was the co-director. These faculty were people who would take the students into their labs and guide them through on-campus science fairs and presentations—they did all kinds of neat things with the students. One of the after-gratifications of that experience [is] that I see a lot of these students and parents even now, and they say, “Oh, yes, I remember those days. We had a great time.”

DY: Where are they now?

AL: Many of these students have already gone through college and graduated. They’ve been everywhere from Spelman to Morehouse to Georgia Tech to Georgia Southern to Kennesaw and Harvard. These students could be found all across the U.S.

DY: That is just wonderful!

AL: In reality, I know that their success wasn’t just the result of these programs. However, their success occurred as a result of many different experiences. I am grateful that Kennesaw could provide a significant chapter in this story of success.

DY: Community service is a communal effort.

AL: That’s exactly right.

TS: Is the Young Scholars program still going on?

AL: National Science Foundation ended that program as well. It seems as if every time we got a program going well, it ended. That’s the reality of service life. Programs aren’t designed to be funded forever. They’re seed money more than anything else.

DY: Right. But you hope that these students who have been through this program will, wherever they are, start similar programs.

- AL: Well, those things would be wonderful, too. But, really, it's the institution's responsibility to take grant funds as seed money and then institutionalize the program so that they could continue as long as we deem them necessary.
- DY: Did that happen here at all?
- AL: Absolutely not. When you consider the talent and resources that we have at Kennesaw, it didn't happen. There were some very modest things that happened, but nothing to give the programs life. If I ever have a bone to pick with Kennesaw, it's that, in terms of the success of my work—and it wasn't enormous—but for the kinds of things that I did and the persistence and the longevity of it, to have the institution never say, "Okay, this is a significant part of who we are; we will embrace that," or, "We will put something significant into it"—the fact that it never happened is still disheartening to me, even though, right now, as I sit here and talk to you, I'm still trying to make that happen.
- DY: Well, the university—I know this because I'm on the Strategic Planning Task Force—is articulating the mission statement and the vision statement—and sprinkled throughout those documents is the term *diversity*. Here is an instance of, whatever you want to call it—it could certainly be under that umbrella. I know that the vice president, Lynn [Lendley C.] Black, has asked that the dean of each of the colleges have a diversity committee. Are you on that in your college?
- AL: No.
- DY: So, here's an opportunity for the institution to make good; if, indeed, we are going to be welcoming diversity and living diversity, here's an instance when, as you say, [we can be involved in] institutionalizing programs . . .
- AL: Right.
- TS: Why do you think that the institution didn't follow through?
- DY: That's a good question.
- AL: Well, I fault myself to a great degree, being of the attitude [that] you influence what happens to you. But I didn't take the approach of making that the ultimate goal from the onset. I didn't leverage my influence and didn't make the correct political maneuvers to make that happen.
- DY: Oh. Well, you might not have known that at first—that you needed to.
- AL: Well, yes you are correct. Being a—what is it?—a Monday morning quarterback? I can see it very well now. Institutionalizing the program is definitely where I should have been heading and how things should have been done. I often think that it is almost crazy not to devote a significant amount of resources to ensuring that we get the best students by helping to prepare them for college while they are in elementary, middle, and high school. But the other side

of this problem is that we were working with pre-college students. That's a hard concept for a college to understand, that my class of 2020 is in elementary school right now. Those elementary students are my students, and I have a commitment to their success even though they're in elementary school. It seems as though our attitude is that if the student is not sitting here in my class right now, then I have no real interest in them. It seems as if this is an opportunity for a true visionary. If you don't make some effort to make sure that what comes in is prepared to succeed, then we have the horrendous task of re-educating these students before we can prepare them for their chosen majors.

DY: Well, how about even getting them in.

AL: Well, even getting them in, yes. However, getting students has never been a problem here. But then again, when we start to think about the needs of the community, there are many students who can not get in. This is especially so when you're dealing with minority students. Many of the minority students are just not prepared to attend an institution like Kennesaw State. And what does Kennesaw State say about this? Based on actions, I can almost hear us saying "Well, the door is open; what more do you want us to do? I've done my share. I've opened the door." Or, "I took the lock off of door."

TS: It's almost like there's a disconnect though, because I've had the impression that Betty Siegel really wanted to recruit minority students.

AL: Well, I've been doing this for ten years—more than ten years—and I've asked for at least office space, and I've never received office space. I've asked for all different kinds of supports, and I've never received any kind of supports. While Dr. Siegel is certainly committed to diversity, she can not be in all places.

TS: But there are several levels of bureaucracy.

AL: Yes, there are lots of steps you've got to go through to get up to the president. And I can't ever think of asking her anything that she wasn't willing to give or at least say, "I'll do whatever I can." But you've got to go all the way up the ladder, from department chairs and deans and vice presidents. I've been through all of those and never received any substantial support.

TS: "We're all for you if you go out and get the money to do it."

AL: Oh, yes. I was specifically told, "All the money that you can bring in is good, and, yes, you can use that to do whatever you need to do." "That's going to be wonderful." And, "We don't have that money to do those kinds of things. But if we did, we would surely share some with you. You should go out and get as much funding as you can to keep on doing good things. We're behind you 100 percent."

TS: I think that's a theme that we're hearing more and more, too—of people that are trying to do all kinds of different programs on campus.

DY: I do, too.

AL: Well, if you step back and examine what is being said—it sounds like you have heard the same thing many times—what the administrators are saying is, “Okay, there’s one of me, and there’s a thousand of you, and each of you is coming to ask for something. Now which one am I going to give the something too? I do have something in my hand to share but it won’t go around to the thousand.” The unfortunate case here is that over the years, I have not been one that has received that something from anywhere across the line. However, from an optimistic point of view, there is always some challenge before the success. I will continue to work for what I believe is important.

DY: You know, Army, listening to you talk about this, I’m thinking about a couple of weeks ago when we had that book discussion group. I raised the issue of what are we doing with our minority students right now to help them succeed academically? And the answer came from a member of the group—I was talking about writing, getting their writing skills up to par—and the member of the group said, “Well, we’ve got English 099, and we’ve got this.” Another thing that I think happens is that they’ll say, “Well, we’ve got this course for those people. Why don’t those people get in this course?” So it’s a thing of saying, “We’ve got it set up here.” Well, the question is, why don’t they? And maybe they do, and maybe that isn’t what they need or all they need. And that is a very different thing from saying we have the English 099 course for remediation from what you’re proposing. You’re proposing before they get here . . . what do we do with them? The issue I think, too, is what are we doing now when they are here—those students who are struggling more so than other students?

TS: What proportion of your time do you think has been devoted to counseling students over the years? Have black students been inclined to pick out black professors to be their counselors, and has that become a huge chore?

AL: When you say huge chore, it almost sounds like that’s a burden or something that you don’t want. It’s been an honor, and it has been the case that I’ve served as an advisor, officially and unofficially, to a large number of minority students. There is this sort of comfort zone or comfort level of finding a minority faculty member and interacting with that person. In the early days of being here, students seemed to share a greater sentiment of there is a high level of prejudice or discrimination at Kennesaw—there’s something negative that White faculty are doing, so I need to or want to talk to somebody who I can talk to about this.” That’s not so much the case today; students don’t come in and talk about being singled out because of their race anymore. But they still come in the same numbers. The general notion now is that, well, “I’m coming in because I want to find someone with whom I can relate, and I wanted to get some help to succeed.”

DY: Just to navigate the system sometimes.

TS: So the same proportion of students or the same numbers, but different issues.

AL: Right, different issues.

TS: Which sounds like you're saying more like all students are having.

AL: Right. Black students are not coming in to talk about overt racial problems, although problems happen every once in a while. These students are talking about strategies for success.

TS: That's a positive change, isn't it?

AL: Yes, that's very good. And that's in part why it's such an honor to work with these students. Some of them are absolutely brilliant. They come to me saying they want to do these wonderful things. Yes, the benefit of being the only Black faculty in the department, or actually tenure track faculty there, is that I get virtually all of the black students coming through at one time or another. Some of these students have a 3.9 GPA, and they are capable of all kinds of wonderful things. So it's a pleasure to be able to work with these students and help shape their paths.

DY: Are you still doing service in the community as much as you were? Are you balancing between community and institution, or is it primarily working within the institution?

AL: I am still doing community service activities. In the last year, I have become much better at balancing things. One of the programs that I didn't talk about is the PREP program that's run by the Board of Regents—or was run by the Board of Regents. It was designed to get middle school students in line to go to college. The Board of Regents provided this money to support this program.

DY: Is that what it's called, PREP?

AL: PREP. Post-Secondary Readiness Enrichment Program. It was to get students into college. I worked with Dr. Loretta [M.] Howell and Dr. Raynice [E.] Jean-Sigur. We did that for about four years, and we had roughly five or six different schools with roughly 50 students per school—25 students per school per semester. We did after-school programs, and they would come to a summer camp. That was enormously time-consuming—there was some release time involved in it—but I was always going and really involved in a lot of activities with PREP. The Board of Regents cut that program last year, so this year we aren't doing it. As a result of that, I haven't picked up anything new to continue to work on—a couple of small things, but nothing of that magnitude. So I'm not doing nearly as much now out in the community as I did just last year.

DY: What's your teaching load?

AL: My teaching load has been absolutely wonderful over the last many years because I've had a number of grants that have carried some release time. But I only do two preps a semester at most.

DY: That's good.

AL: Yes.

DY: So you've had that kind of institutional support at least; although you bought it for yourself is what you're saying.

AL: Yes you are correct. I agree that the institution has been supportive in not making an issue about the amount of release time. My department chairs have always been wonderful in adjusting the schedules so that I can take the release time.

DY: That's what I meant.

AL: You are correct.

TS: Do lab responsibilities go with all the courses? Do you calculate the number of contact hours and all of that?

AL: When considering the teaching load, lecture and lab times are both considered.

TS: So you say two preparations, but these are four-hour courses? Or three hours?

AL: Sometimes the classes are four hours, sometimes they are three. Right now, I have a three-hour course. But now I'm more back to full time teaching—still with only two preps, but one of the classes is a two hundred-student class. Ron [Ronald H.] Matson, our chair, does an excellent job in making sure that our teaching loads are manageable. We generally have between 12-15 contact hours with about 75-150 students total.

DY: Whoa!

AL: That's a whole different animal. It takes a couple of years to understand the dynamics of a two hundred-student class . . . even passing out papers or collecting papers . . .

DY: Takes all your time!

AL: I know.

DY: It does in a forty-person class. I know from Gen Ed classes.

AL: So, I've got to figure out how to pass out papers and deal with that. With two hundred people, you're going to have ten people who got sick . . . their dog died . . . something happened, and they couldn't get to the exam. You've got to deal with that. So it's causing me to really have to think about what's happening and how to deal with that.

TS: I had no idea you all were teaching classes that large.

AL: Oh, yes. But as I say this, having 200 students in a class is not what we get every semester. For most biology faculty, this will happen only once a year or even less. Also, there are other adjustments when we have classes that large. One of the things that Ron will do is to give us only one prep with a class that size. We might teach one sections of Science with 200 students and another section of the same class with only 50 students.

DY: You all don't have any teaching assistants either.

AL: Oh, no. But it's okay. And actually I'm enjoying that class now. I was telling one of my colleagues it's like being on stage. You've got this gigantic audience of people out there, and you're doing things, and they're responding. I can enjoy it; I can get into the zone and just have a great time with it. One of the things that I did for two years was to serve as a CETL Fellow. I started the CETL fellowship with a notion of student success, and I was thinking that student success would tie into what I've done with the pre-college minority students. But I also got involved with the fellowship on reflective practice, where we talked about how cognitive and affective concepts enhance teaching and learning.

Also, I was involved in some Parker Palmer training. We went through experiences of being true to your inner self, letting your inner self come out and connecting with the class, students, and subjects. This year has been the first time that I've been able to slow down enough to say, "Let me look at some of these concepts and try them in class." And being in a class of 200 students—or even in my smaller class—it's allowed me to look at this affective side of teaching and learning to see how much who I am as a person impacts the experiences that students have in the classroom. I have enjoyed myself this year—fall semester and this semester have been absolutely wonderful. It seems as if I have been able to shed off all this other stuff, and now I am teaching in my comfort zone. The responses from the students have been absolutely great. In many cases I saw the classroom experience as over-tasking work, but, now, I see it as such a wonderful experience that I'm having. How did I not see that as clearly just two years ago? I sort of rambled off in a whole different direction to tell you that story!

DY: No, I can see the connection easily. It sounds like to me that you've been doing this anyway but in a different venue. You've been doing it in the community, and you've been doing it for those groups of children, and now you're seeing yourself as a seasoned senior professor teaching this.

TS: And we probably should say for the record that Parker Palmer is senior associate of the American Association for Higher Education and author of *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998) and other books. He came here and lectured at a Convocation assembly four or five years ago. That's where these concepts are coming from.

AL: Right.

DY: I read his book, and I think they're very interesting concepts, too. What I liked about his book is there was the spiritual component to it and who you are and the inner self that you are. I think that can tie in with your service, too, Army. "What are we doing here? Why are we here? What are we accomplishing?" With that group of two hundred people in a biology class, or those children that you're taking down to see exhibits or do experiments with. It's interesting that we're talking to you at this point in time when you, yourself, are reflecting on what you've done and where you're going. Where do you see yourself going?

AL: There are a couple of possibilities. Retirement . . .

TS: You're too young.

DY: You've got twenty years in.

AL: Well, I started my first teaching job in 1978, which means in 2008 I'll have thirty years in. I've got to go back and buy those years, but if you start to factor in maybe a year or two of sick days that you can convert, the numbers really look good. .

TS: You're not even fifty years old yet.

DY: Where did you teach? Middle school, you said?

AL: Right. I taught in Milledgeville and Macon.

DY: Right.

AL: So that's one possibility. Another possibility is the notion of getting into the administrative side of things. A part of the CETL fellowship helped to open my eyes that there is a whole different level of teaching, and that's teaching the teachers—teaching the teachers who are actually teaching right now, not the future teachers, but those teachers who are teaching. There's an enormous need for that. The whole concept of faculty development is real. We need those enrichment kinds of things to renew ourselves, to become better at the craft. That's a possibility that I like to entertain—getting into the administrative side of things. Another possibility is to get into research. The only problem with that is that I have gotten so far behind in research until it might take forever to get back up to speed. Another possibility is to devote all of my time to classroom teaching and classroom teaching only. It would be to say, "Okay, you can really enjoy teaching; teaching is good." And this is a true statement. As I was thinking about class today, I planned to tell the class how much I enjoy teaching, how much I enjoy getting up and coming to work. And that's the truth; I really enjoy that. I could very easily say I'm going to be a teacher. I'm going to do teaching, and I'll do classroom kinds of things with the labs and focus on that, maybe with the research—research is just another way of teaching from this level—and just do that. Just have myself a selfish good time—just for me! Enjoy it from my standpoint.

- DY: Oh, you can bet other people would benefit from that—your students.
- AL: Well, yes. But which of the directions I'm taking, I'm not sure. Part of my nature is that of an opportunist, but I say that from the standpoint that I adjust and adapt to what is. Maybe an opportunist isn't the best term to define my personality, but I'm not the kind of person who will push for a situation and push things down a particular path. You may have gathered that from my discussion of pre-college programs. We talked about why haven't the pre-college programs been institutionalized? Well, I was of the attitude that I can make the programs happen whether they were institutionalized or not. From my viewpoint, I was able to make it happen. With these three scenarios, I will probably allow the cards to be dealt, and then decide which is the most advantageous option for me, and then go down that direction. I don't know what you call a person like that, but that's sort of the notion.
- DY: I think you're very wise. I think you're reflecting on where your strengths have been and where you want to play it out as you finish up your career. If you go the administrative path, you may well want to be in a position so that when you have a young Army Lester come into the faculty, working outside with the community, you can help institutionalize what that faculty member is doing. You can do what you know needed doing when you were working.
- AL: Right. And I guess it's obvious that I didn't talk about doing more community service.
- DY: It seems like you've taken a hiatus. It doesn't sound to me like you're going to be done with it.
- AL: Well, from the standpoint of being out on the court, it's sort of the Michael Jordan sort of [thing]. I've got to retire. I'm too old for it now; it requires a lot of work and energy to be out there doing those things.
- DY: Yes, traveling and . . . right.
- AL: And I can't do that any more.
- DY: So you can mentor people to do it.
- AL: I can mentor people, and that's the administrative side that I could enjoy. That's sort of what you were saying about if there's a young person who can come out and has the energy to do those kinds of things . . .
- DY: Then you can be the support and guidance.
- AL: Right. But I do realize that, the body is growing much older. This gray—I didn't paint it in.
- TS: There's not that much gray there.

- AL: Oh, no. There's enough to say, okay, you can't do those things any more. You've got to work smarter now.
- DY: Well, Army, realistically, do you think that the institution is ready for that now?
- AL: Ready for . . . ?
- DY: Ready for nurturing and institutionalizing, nurturing the young Army Lester who's going to come in and do these community outreach programs and attempting to institutionalize these programs.
- AL: Yes, I certainly think that the institution is ready. While it has not really happened in the many years of the history of higher education, I feel certain that this century will bring about a change in the way institutions look at who are their students. It will not be long before students will be identified as belonging to an institution early in elementary school. The diversity of our country and changing demographics will require us to change many of the practices that we have today. I think Kennesaw is an education leader and we will be at the forefront of such positive changes. I would like to be part of that.
- DY: Well, it sounds like you built the foundation.
- AL: Well, I have some experiences and stories to tell that might help along those lines.
- TS: Looking at things now from twenty years here, first of all, I wanted to ask you about students and whether you have seen a change in students over twenty years here. I guess one thing I've got in mind is, I know I got involved in a situation eight or ten years ago with a faculty member that was having a good deal of trouble. I was on a committee, and it was eye-opening to me to hear Black faculty members talk about the way students challenged their credentials—even—in the classroom in ways that they didn't challenge the credentials of White faculty. That's just one example. I'm wondering, did you have that kind of experience? Is it still a reality or have things changed?
- AL: In terms of students challenging faculty credentials, specifically Black faculty, yes, I've been through those kinds of things. I've received the horrible evaluations; I've had all those kinds of things happen. Those things have changed a lot since my earlier years. That was part of my drive to get it right. I knew that I was a much better teacher than some of the evaluations were saying. And those evaluations didn't make sense. They'd say, "Oh, look at this wonderful person." But when the numerical data were analyzed, they were horrible. So it made me wonder what was going on? I was often asked, "Where'd you go to school?" The question was stated in a tone to sound like, "Where'd you get your degree from? Which K-mart?"

But those things passed, and they passed in part because I made a deliberate effort to make them pass. There are many different things that can be done to change things, from the physical image that you project, to the kinds of activities that you

- hold in class, to the kinds of relationships that you build with your students. One of the things that hit me like a ton of bricks is that I could change my evaluations from horrible to almost stellar strictly by increasing the amount of time that I spend with my students. If I spent no time with the students, evaluations were bad. If I spent a lot of time with the students, evaluations were very good.
- DY: What do you mean, spending time with them?
- AL: Spending time can involve individual conferences, working with students in labs, interacting with them on the community projects—you know, just the amount of time that we can interact.
- DY: So that they got to see the human being.
- AL: Yes, so they got to see me, the human being.
- TS: So if they like you, they rate everything high. If they don't like you, they rate everything low.
- AL: If they don't like you, or if they don't know you, then they rated you low; they would rate me low. But one of the things that happened is that if you're doing all these other things such as community service, you may lose sight of the time that you really have to spend with students. So you get caught in that Catch-22. Coming back to a position of being able to spend much more time in the classroom has been positive because now I can spend a lot more time with students. So I'm seeing the shift again; now the relationships and the evaluations are shifting back up again. Time is not the only thing that makes a difference. There are many other things such as the quality of teaching, being consistent, being clear about expectation, being fair, the list goes on and on.
- TS: So it's not so much the students have changed as you've changed?
- AL: Right, that is part of the story. After 20 years, I have definitely changed. However, students have changed, too, over the years. Students have gotten younger and I have gotten older. The age difference has changed between my students and me from about a three or four-year difference when I first came to about 25-year difference now. My students now see me as that older guy to be respected rather than someone who they can challenge.
- TS: Yes, they're younger.
- AL: They're a lot younger relative to my age. That makes a difference. Younger students come in with a slightly different personality than a more mature student. And, generally, people have a lot more respect and tolerance for people much older.
- DY: Do you think, too, that it might be different in terms of gender? That is, a Black female faculty member might have problems that you might not have.

AL: I can understand that. I've talked to Black females, and they've told horror stories in terms of how they've been treated by students.

DY: Yes, I've heard some.

AL: And I don't doubt that at all; I know what can happen. But we're talking about human nature, and we're talking about human behavior to some degree. We're talking about a culture, and those kinds of things can be expected. Now, from a notion of being on the administrative side, someone has to say to Black female faculty, "But you're in control, and you have the greatest influence over what happens in that classroom. So, although some students are going to see you as a Black woman and somehow inferior, you're still in control." Black female faculty, as well as all faculty, must somehow develop strategies to influence this attitude. The negative side of this is that it puts Black female faculty under a lot of stress, and they have to do a lot more work. But in terms of being able to enjoy this environment, they must ask, "What can I do to make this environment more enjoyable?" Black female faculty must start with the question, "If I could do something to make Kennesaw State the most enjoyable place that I could make it, would I do it?" And if the answer is "No," then we have some other things to talk about. If the answer is "Yes," then we're off on a journey to find out exactly what needs to be done. But it's not an easy task, and it does put minority faculty at a disadvantage.

DY: Do you think our institutional culture supports minority faculty? Now?

AL: Kennesaw's institutional culture supports minority faculty? No. You said *support*? You said an affirmative sort of concept—that means that you're doing something deliberately for it.

DY: Yes.

AL: No, it doesn't do that. Does Kennesaw do anything to deter or to inhibit or to destroy the success of minority faculty? No, it's really not doing any of that either, not deliberately. Now, doing nothing is very specific, and it can be used as an advantage to drive outcomes in a very specific direction. When you start to understand the circumstances and situation and you do nothing, you understand that doing nothing is going to drive circumstances in a very predictable direction. Kennesaw has some of the smartest faculty and administrators in the world. It is very obvious that Kennesaw is not doing things to place minority faculty on the same level as majority faculty. In reality, I think that we have more important issue than Black/White issues. Issues such as student success, faculty development, and community service are much more important. I feel that success in those areas would solve many of the race issues.

TS: You're saying we shouldn't spend a lot of time on this.

AL: We shouldn't. Our primary focus should be on student success. One of the things that Ed Rugg mentioned to me many years ago, he said, "Army, you could make a

lot more progress with your efforts if they were about college student success.” I didn’t understand that at the time, but later I came back and said, “Okay, I can understand what you’re saying. We are here in an environment basically with a single focus, and that is student success.” Let me be clear, student success doesn’t just mean getting an A in a class; it’s a much broader concept than that. It is about the whole student, her community, her career, his health, his enjoyment of life, her contributions to a better world. The moment we start to say we want all students to succeed it’s not nearly as necessary to talk about Black and White. Well, yes, there are some Black issues, but there are some White issues and there are some age issues. There are some gender issues and many other issues. We must make sure that we do whatever we can to make student success our measure of success as a university. It should be 100 percent of what happens here.

In terms of being brilliant people, one of the first things that we ought to start to look at is where is student success most challenged? Once we understand exactly what the challenge is, we must then define where it is that we can best apply our talents to promote student success. It would be just ideal if our talents matched the most challenged area. It would be even brilliant to hire people who have specific talents to solve the problems of student success. I wonder if that would mean my work with minority students could be deemed more important than the number of publications on gold fish. We are a great institution, and we are maturing. I feel that we have much work to do. I hear us talk about student success in different areas. But I don’t think that we have a culture in higher education that puts it first. I believe that if President Siegel could just, “whoosh” and make things happen, she would. But I don’t get a sense of commitment from the trenches. I get the sense of, “Okay, there is a set of things that we have to do to earn tenure and promotion. We do these things and everything is okay. Everything is great.”

As faculty members, we’re extremely challenged with lots of responsibilities. Sometimes it’s not easy to see the benefits of student success, and we say, “Student success? Now what am I getting out of this? Why is this so important? Why devote all of my time and extra time to make this happen when I’ve got this committee to go to . . . I’ve got these publications to write . . . I’ve got these grants to apply for . . . I’ve got service to be done?” It can be extremely difficulty to buy into the notion that ensuring student success would solve many of our problems. What is going to make that shift in culture even more of a challenge is that I often hear students being talked about as though they are the enemy. We must be true to overcoming this attitude before we can start to look for a solution. As an observant person, I can understand this attitude because there’s this student-faculty-administrator kind of relationship, where everybody is blaming everybody up and down the chain. It would be so wonderful to be in an environment that says, “We’re on the same team. You’re my coach. You mean you want me to win, too? Wow, that’s a wonderful concept. We’re on the same team, and the coach wants this team to win. What a wonderful concept.” That would really be great. There is some sense of this kind of attitude in the institution, in pockets, but I don’t think it’s our culture.

DY: I agree with you very much there.

TS: I sometimes wish we could get away with some of the things that coaches do when you can see them. They may be screaming at the players on the sidelines, but the players know that they want them to succeed, so they're able to get away with it.

I have one general concluding question about intellectual life on campus, the intellectual climate. Do you have any opinions on how that has changed over the last twenty years? Or, what is the intellectual climate on campus now in your perception?

AL: What do I think about the intellectual climate on campus? One of the attitudes that I have about working at a university is that there is no place that is richer in terms of resources, intellectual capital, and all those kinds of buzz words than a university. To be able to work in this environment is a dream come true in terms of opportunities to learn and to enrich yourself or your lifestyle. Over the years, I've seen that grow here at Kennesaw. I have to really commend the efforts of CETL in terms of creating a whole host of opportunities for faculty members to learn new things, to have conversations around all kinds of diverse topics. The concept has spread across the campus, and we have seminars and all kinds of things that go on, so that's good. I will have to say that I had a chance to work at Georgia Tech for a year, and they're at a whole different level than we are. There the intellectual level was way out here—and you can't see "way out there" on the tape—but it was much greater than here at Kennesaw. Even so, Kennesaw has a wealth of opportunities and experiences to become engaged in intellectual activities.

DY: What did you find the key differences [were]?

AL: The consistency of the activities was one thing. Here, intellectual activities are special events almost. At Georgia Tech they were a daily routine. At Tech, the caliber of the people who come to campus and the activities they conducted were great. But part of my attitude comes from my interest in research. At Tech, you might have a Nobel Laureate on campus, and it wasn't a school-stopping event. Those kinds of things occurred regularly. The level of the conversations was different. It was as if people asked questions because they needed to know the answers for their work and not just to sound intelligent. Georgia Tech is a research institution. They put a lot of effort into research and they are good at it.

DY: Do you think that faculty are intellectually engaged here at Kennesaw for the most part?

AL: You know, I say this, and maybe you'll put it in here, and maybe you won't.

DY: You can edit anything out you want.

AL: Maybe I'll take this out after I say it. Speaking strictly about myself first, from an intellectual side—in terms of intellect from knowledge and knowing—I probably have no right to be at a university. I don't pride myself in that I know a lot of facts and figures. I don't see raw information that is just for the pleasure of knowing as being very useful. I don't boast of that kind of thing. I was telling my class the other day, "Isn't the Internet wonderful? You can become knowledgeable instantly. Almost anything you want to know, you can get it." We were talking about Socrates and the Socratic way of teaching. I hadn't even heard of it, but I went to the Internet and got a whole history of that. All kinds of folks have done research on it. And, in a matter of seconds, I went to class, and the student's thought, "Wow, this guy's brilliant!" And I had just pulled it up on the Internet. But, yes, I think that there are plenty of intellectual activities around here. The caliber of the activities is great, as far as I'm concerned. What I think though, is that there isn't enough application of this intellect. In this intellectual world, you are a genius, but we can't figure out how to stop 50 percent of the students from failing a freshman level class. See, while I can understand it, it doesn't make sense in terms of being astute and knowledgeable. A person who is truly smart would not let students suffer the way that they do in some classes. Let me go back and point out that Georgia Tech has these kinds of student success problems even though they start with some of our most talented students.

TS: It sounds to me that you are concerned with the students at the bottom or the students that are struggling—the ones that are falling through the cracks. I guess there's a certain faculty personality that wants to deal with the really superior student, and there's another faculty personality that wants to nurture those that are struggling. You seem to be in the latter category.

AL: Well, I wouldn't say that. What happens is sort of in the Biblical context of the lamb that was lost and you left the others to go get the one that was lost. Well, that's sort of the notion here, that those others are important, and there's a lot of time and effort that's put into those. But there's a different level of gratification in being able to help the student who wasn't able to succeed for whatever reason. And this person that's already succeeding, you're saying, "What am I going to do to keep you doing what you're already doing?" Well, you could continue to provide that person with an environment to keep doing what they naturally do. It is somewhat like the "Harvard Factor." Harvard attracts the best and the brightest students in the world and then what? Well, I don't know, but one thing for sure, they didn't make the students smart because some other institution had already done that. Everyone wants the student who is already succeeding, but what about the student who is challenged. The ability to help that student succeed should be a significant measure of success.

DY: And you see the potential in that student, but the trick is to figure out how to get them to know it.

AL: Right.

DY: That's a very interesting answer. Anything else you want to add or say?

AL: There are all kinds of different things that I would probably like to say that I can't think of right now. Time won't let me search my mind to remember. I can't think of anything that's just going to jump right out. Actually, there is one last thing that I want to talk about, and I would be remiss if I didn't mention it—the concept of equity pay among faculty and especially minority faculty. In terms of the institution, one of the things that I notice is that minority faculty are not paid at the same level as White faculty.

TS: Really?

AL: The year I came in, I came in as the lowest paid faculty member in the institution. That really hurt after I found out. I actually think that I was supposed to be hired as a master's level person, and I got a salary that was comparable to a master's level person. As a matter of fact, I've seen documents where my position was described as a master's level position. But I know that I was hired as one of the lowest paid persons the year that I came here. What's even worse is that three of the five lowest paid faculty members in 1985 were Black. As I go through and I look at the salaries, you can say, "How many faculty members do you have making \$100,000?" Okay, there are some minority faculty—Black faculty—in there.

DY: And they're in administrative positions too.

AL: Yes.

TS: Or in the business college.

AL: Yes business faculty earn a significantly higher salary than most other faculty. But then when you start to look at those administrative positions, those minority faculty are never at the top. And you say, "Okay. Well, where are they then?" Well, they're around average or a little below average. You say, "Well, isn't that okay? They're average." But then, is it by chance that not one is the top of the salary scale?

TS: You mean, comparing deans' salaries across the board?

AL: Yes, deans' salaries and all other positions. I've raised this to Dr. Siegel and [Ed] Rugg and [Lynn] Black, and that's why I definitely have to say it here: While there's an institutional attitude that Kennesaw wouldn't do anything to discriminate in that kind of way—well, we would get sued off our socks!—the reality is that there has not been enough done to correct this problem. I can remember when there was an equity adjustment made after a student and I raised this issue in a public forum during the uproar of the Rodney King issues. The pay issue existed from way back twenty years ago, and it's been brought on through the years. Even now, I'm still not earning the salary that I think I should be.

DY: Have you hollered about it?

AL: Oh, yes, I have.

TS: Why do you think they haven't corrected it?

AL: Because there's a justifiable excuse as to why I ought to be paid less than others, and that justifiable excuse is whatever the system uses to justify it. People who have come in later than I came in have higher salaries than I have. But we know that salary is not about the number of years of service. It is about the quality and quantity of services and productivity.

DY: You can apply for an equity raise.

AL: I've asked for them and always asked for them, and in most cases I'm told, "No, there's none for you this year." Actually, I've had several equity raises, and I'm still earning below what I think I ought to earn, which is an awkward situation. From a mathematical point of view, an equity raise cheats you out of years of pay. It is somewhat like the delayed raises that we get now. The system saves a ton of money by delaying the start of raises just five months. Think about how much money you don't get if your salary is low for two or three years before you get an equity adjustment to catch up. You think that no one understands the mathematical or should I say financial implications of this. So I think there's a real issue around pay. And one of my attitudes is that I come to work for one reason and one reason only: That's to get paid. I don't say that in an apologetic way, and I don't think that that's a negative. When we go to church, we go to church for a purpose. When we come to work, we come to work for a purpose. We go into the community and do community service with a purpose in mind. When I come to work, I come to work to get paid. I often think, "Well, let me see. Is that why all people come to work?" I would hasten to say that if you take away the salary, most if not all people would not come to work and there would be such a fight that some people's lives would be threatened. One strategy that is used to keep people from wanting a fair salary is to make them feel small for being concerned about it. I am sure that salary is the one thing that you could take away and a person would no longer come to work. Work means for a salary. It is important to understand that if work equals salary, then the more work that you do the more salary that you earn. People will work harder and smarter when their salaries are tied directly to their productivity, thus merit pay. From the advantage point of the employer, it would be good to increase productivity and reduce salary. So you say, salary is the reason that I come to work. So I come to work to get paid, and the amount of pay that I get is an indication of what you think I'm worth. To be at the bottom of that list, I can hear you saying, "We don't think much of you at all." You're insignificant. We'll tolerate you, and we'll do okay with you, but, you know that you are not truly valued. . .

TS: We haven't reached the Promised Land yet.

AL: No, we've got a long way to go, but the journey is still on.

DY: I guess the best you can hope for is some good boots to march in.

AL: I'll put that creative ability to work and figure out a way to make this thing [work]. If we're smart, then we can make it work. That's what everybody is doing; everyone is sort of protecting their own. Some people are smart enough to understand ecology—the ecological balance that what I do impacts you; what I do to you impacts me and vice versa. So I will make sure that you're okay because it enhances who I am.

DY: Well, that may be a level of awareness that not everyone has reached yet. That's what I'm hearing.

AL: Yes, maybe.

TS: We've done about twenty of these interviews, and I'm increasingly amazed at the commonalities that we're seeing. We've got a whole number of people who, if they weren't the first in their family to get a college degree, were at least of the first generation to get a college degree. I think there's a sense of not feeling that we were the brilliant ones—or we don't think of ourselves as the brilliant people so much as maybe the plodders, the people that work hard. I think that makes for a good teacher, to be in that category. It impresses me more and more that this type of person is a big part of our institutional history.

DY: I think that people see opportunities because the institution changes all the time.

TS: That's certainly something else that we've been finding in the evolution of the institution over time. And it may very well be that the new faculty members that are coming are not at all like the faculty that we were when we got here.

AL: Right.

DY: Those of us sitting here. [The new faculty] come in with research agendas; they're driven toward that. Somebody like you, Army, who's done this wonderful work in the community . . . I hope that our institution is going to continue to value that, and I'd like to think that they'll pay for it.

AL: At some point in time, I believe they will. There will be some resources allocated to those kinds of things.

DY: There should be.

TS: Well, we thank you for a wonderful interview.

DY: Yes, thank you so much for your time.

AL: I've enjoyed this. This has been great.

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