EUGENE PERRY

April 16, 1996
–
Mame Warren,
interviewer

Warren: This is Mame Warren. Today is the sixteenth of April, 1996. I'm in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Eugene Perry. Now, do you like to be called Gene or Eugene?

Perry: It doesn't matter. Whatever is more comfortable for you.

Warren: Okay. So you grew up in Waynesboro?

Perry: Yes. My family's been there about three generations. I grew up reading about Washington and Lee, as a matter of fact.

Warren: Reading what about Washington and Lee?

Perry: Reading about the basketball team. I had attended Coach Canfield's camp when he used to hold the basketball camp at Ferum Junior College.

Warren: I don't know anything about the basketball camp, so tell me about that.

Perry: Well, he used to run a summer basketball camp for kids ages, I say, about ten to eighteen, I think. And I read about his camp in the *Roanoke Times*. I asked my folks if I could go and they said, "If you save enough money, you can go." So my brother and I went and that's where I met Coach Canfield, and that was my introduction to Washington and Lee.

We had a great time at the camp. In fact, one year when we went, John Wooten, legendary coach of UCLA, was the speaker for the week. But that was my introduction to Washington and Lee back then.

Then being at Waynesboro High School, Lexington was one of our big rivals, so I had been to Lexington many times. The church there, on Main Street, First Baptist, used to have programs that our church used to attend. So I was very familiar with Lexington. After our band had played there for half time, my high school band played at the football games at Washington and Lee. I had been around quite a bit. But I followed the basketball team and in those days the basketball team was very good. So I just kept up with the school through the basketball team.

Warren: So were you recruited to come to Washington and Lee to play basketball, or did you approach Washington and Lee?

Perry: No.

Warren: How did you come there as a student?

Perry: I applied to Washington and Lee. It was one of the schools that I applied. Back in '71, spring of '71, when I graduated from high school, if you were a black male and had good grades and had done well on the SAT, you could go to any school you wanted. I think my mother and I counted eighty-three schools that wrote to me. I mean, I was accepted based on the fact that they sent me this letter. There were eighty-three schools.

Warren: Good Lord!

Perry: This was all based on academics. I played sports in high school, but none of the schools wrote me because of athletics. So Washington and Lee was a school that I applied to, because I had checked schools in Virginia that I wanted to attend, and that was one of them.

Warren: So were they interested in you, like all the other schools were?

Perry: I don't think so, really. I don't think they had much respect for the public schools that were close to them. I didn't get that impression.

Warren: That's interesting.

Perry: Because I was recruited by Notre Dame, Stanford, Princeton, all these other schools. And I got a call on a Tuesday, one Tuesday evening. Someone from Washington and Lee called and spoke to my mother and said that they wanted me to come to Scholarship Weekend that Friday. I had been making visits, and I was actually getting tired of them. My mom said, "This is the school that *you* applied to. They want you to come for Scholarship Weekend, and they're going to pay for everything, all we have to do is drive you up there." Well, I knew right then that I hadn't been on their "A" list. I suspected because it was too spur of the moment. But I said, "Fine, I'll go. I want to go." And so my dad and I went there.

There were a number of young black men that were there that weekend. There must have been twenty of us, I guess. They were all invited there for that weekend.

Warren: Were there non-black men?

Perry: I really don't remember. I think it was Scholarship Weekend. I think there were white students there, too. I think there were.

Warren: They didn't have a segregated weekend?

Perry: No, I don't think so. I think we were all there for Scholarship Weekend.

Warren: You're the first person who's talked about Scholarship Weekend. I don't know what that means. Tell me what that means.

Perry: I hope that's what they still call it. But that's when they bring in the students that they really want, I think. You come there and they want to pitch the school to you, and they're going to offer you scholarship monies.

Warren: So what was their pitch?

Perry: We're really going back to ancient history. I'll just tell you what happened. My dad and I drove up there, and the first person we met was James Farrar, Jim Farrar, Sr. He used to referee games in the Valley District where we played, that's what that was called, so he knew me and I recognized him. And I was a little apprehensive about going. Even though it was the school I choose, I was still a little apprehensive about

visiting the college. He relaxed my dad and I immediately. I mean, he was so warm, and I really believed that he wanted me to come to that school and so did my dad. Any apprehension I had, I lost right there. And had he not been the man he was, I don't think we would've gotten past that.

Warren: Past your apprehension?

Perry: Past my apprehension, because he was what I think a Washington and Lee gentleman is.

Warren: I was hoping you'd use that expression.

Perry: Because that was one of the reasons I went to see the school. I had read a lot about Robert E. Lee. I was a history buff, even in high school. And I liked Robert E. Lee and I liked Stonewall Jackson, even though they were on the wrong side, as far as I was concerned. I thought that Dean Farrar was what Washington and Lee was all about. He was a Washington and Lee gentleman, and I didn't think it was fake. I thought he was genuine.

Warren: Did you have that concept of a Washington and Lee gentleman before you went there?

Perry: Oh, yes.

Warren: Tell me what that concept was to you.

Perry: Well, this kind of comes out of sports. Everything I talk about is probably going to come out of sports, but in Staunton, you may be familiar with Robert E. Lee High School. We used to lose to them all the time. I could not figure out who this Robert E. Lee was, what was this. I started to read about him and I found that he was more than a great gentleman, that his men admired him, they loved him. They worshipped him because of the man he was. Even Stonewall Jackson was a good man, but there was something special about Robert E. Lee, and I always admired that.

When I read the catalog, they talk about the Honor Code. Then I talked to a man in my town, I think his name is Ross Hershey, who was a Washington and Lee

alumnus—actually there are several in town—he talked about the Washington and Lee gentleman. So I had an idea what that man was. It was based on Robert E. Lee, though. That was my idea of what a Washington and Lee man was, was him and his integrity and all that. And I bought into that, because my dad was like that and my grandfather was like thatand my uncles were like that. So that was what a man was. So that's what I was looking for when I went up there, and that's what I found in Jim Farrar.

Warren: Did you find it in other people?

Perry: Not that weekend, but as time went on, yes, I found some there. Dean Farrar set me up with a student host, Bob Ford. And Bob Ford was a wild man. He was in that first group of blacks that had arrived there. He was a sophomore when I got there. He had just had an operation for appendicitis, I don't know, maybe the week before. It seemed like he had just gotten out of bed to be my host.

Warren: That was nice of him.

Perry: I thought he was crazy. And my dad didn't really know if he wanted to leave me with him. But I said, "Go back home. I can call you if I need you." And they put us up in the Robert E. Lee Hotel, whatever that little thing was on Main Street. And Bob Ford was my host, and he started to tell me all these horror stories, some funny stories and some horror stories about what it was like the first year and what it was like then, that particular year. And we visited some classes. I went to a history class. They had on my application that I wanted to be a history major, so I went to a history class. I don't know who the professor was, but he was very interesting. I think Ford was bored, but I was excited, because he was teaching history, he wasn't teaching dates. Whatever he was talking about, it was history. It was history that I liked. So I was pleased with that.

Then we went to another class, and I don't know what that was, and I was totally bored. We went to the gym. I met Coach Canfield and Buck Leslie and some of those

people. Then I started meeting some of the other guys on campus and seeing what the campus was like.

I could feel the tension between the black students and the white students, even then, that day, but the guys that were there kept saying that they needed us. The whole time I was surrounded by other kids who were high school seniors, too, so we were comparing notes. When we would come out of class, we would always compare notes. If one guy saw something he thought was interesting, he would share it with the rest of us, so we were getting these reports. We were like scouts, and we had decided we would do it that way. We wanted to know. Because we all couldn't be everywhere. But we had kind of organized ourselves that we would share information as the day went on.

Warren: Where were all these other guys from?

Perry: Atlanta. Virginia. There were some guys from, I think, Connecticut. It seemed that most of us were on the East Coast, as I recall.

Warren: So you bonded real quickly?

Perry: Oh, yeah. In those days black people bonded really quickly. We all knew why we were there. So it didn't take long. We got in that hotel, we all looked around and we found each other very quickly. We were having fun, too. You were away from home and you're in a hotel. So we were having fun. All of us had been through the same thing. We were all being recruited by all these other schools. We all had made visits. We were comparing notes. Have you been to this school? Have you been to that school? What are your first choices? It was really a great opportunity to met some other guys. I probably had an advantage because I was the one guy who had been there, had at least been on the campus.

Warren: You were probably the tour guide around town.

Perry: Oh, no, I didn't want anybody to know that. But I knew what Lexington was all about. There was nothing there. So I kind of filled them in on what the town was like.

I couldn't tell them much about the school, but in terms of where they were, I was able to give them a good idea of where they were.

We had a lot of fun that weekend. We had some interesting experiences. One night, some of the local fellows walking on the sidewalk to the Cockpit, and hurled some names at us. So we went into the Cockpit where the upper-classmen were, we were supposed to meet them there. So we get in there and we say, "Look, these people called us names and they seemed like they don't want us here." Those guys, they said, "Where are they?" And we said, "They're outside." And when we went back outside, they were there. So this argument ensued and name-calling, and we kind of set back and watched this. And I said, "Does this happen every weekend? What is this all about?" And they told us that it had happened before and it would happen again. And it didn't really get physical. I think someone came and stopped it. But it was interesting to see that, that weekend, because we got to see Lexington for what it was. We got to see what the experiences were like in the dorms, walking on campus, going to the dining hall. You knew that there was going to be some pressure that had nothing to do with academics, and that's why most of the guys didn't come back.

Warren: That was my next question.

Perry: There was four of us came back.

Warren: There were four in your class?

Perry: Four blacks. And I know that there actually may have been a little scuffle that night. That incident, "Look, guys. I don't need this. I can go to Duke. I can go to Yale. I'm not coming here to deal with the academics and deal with this." So I know most of them decided that night. When we went back to the hotel, some of the guys were shook up about it. They said, "I'm not coming back here." And if I had any sense at all, I wouldn't have come back either, but that's when I knew I probably didn't have any good sense, because that kind of said these guys need help. I can go to these other schools and probably have a good time. But this is the struggle.

I had grown up in the sixties, the [Black] Panthers and all that. I was used to the struggle. My dad was the first black police officer in Waynesboro, Virginia. We had integrated some restaurants and some movie theaters. I had gone to an integrated high school and junior high school, so I was kind of used to that. So they kind of talked me into coming based on the fact that they needed help. They knew that a lot of us weren't going to come back. The black guys that were there were very disturbed that we had seen that. And so I kind of decided that night that Washington and Lee would be in my first. I narrowed it down to five, so they went into the top five, based on that weekend. And I thought I could probably play basketball. I probably could make the team, even though I wanted to play football, but that came later. I actually made another visit up there, now that I think about it, there was another visit after that.

Warren: Which way do you want to go?

Perry: It's up to you. But that was Scholarship Weekend. I went there, I met the people. It didn't frighten me that they'd had the confrontation with the rednecks.

Warren: It sounds like it sort of inspired you.

Perry: I got a little psyched, you know, because I wanted some excitement. I grew up in a small town. I knew I didn't want to go to a really big school. I knew that. My parents actually wanted me to go to the University of Virginia. They were going through the same things we were going through. In fact, I think the University of Virginia just went coed in '70.

Warren: I think so, too.

Perry: I was born on that campus. I started life there. I didn't want to go there. A lot of kids from my high school were going there. That was the big thing, to go to UVA. I didn't want to be around them. So that had more to do with it then anything. They offered me some good money, but I just didn't want to go with people from Waynesboro. No one was going to Washington and Lee, so that had something to do with my decision also. There were a lot of little things that drove me there.

Warren: So what were the tensions as you came on as a student? What was it like day by day? And what were the good things, too? Let's hear the whole story.

Perry: My first day there, my mother and my grandmother took me to school. My dad was in the hospital. I was very disappointed he couldn't take me. We went there. So my mother and my grandmother were down in the Quad. I was on the fourth floor of the freshman dorm, taking my stuff up with everybody else. And I saw these other guys helping each other. Not one person helped my mother and my grandmother and I, the whole time. It took us an hour or so to get the stuff up there. Not one person helped, where the other guys were helping each other. And this was two women and me, and not one person helped. I couldn't find the other three black guys. I didn't know it was just three others beside me. I didn't even see them that first day. But that was interesting, because where I grew up, you helped. Where I grew up, you didn't let a woman do that—period. I would've never allowed you to do that, you see what I'm saying, no matter what color or anything. I was raised that that's not what a gentleman does, right. So, I said, "Okay. Fine. Here we are. This is it. This is why they wanted me to come here with the other guys. So this is the challenge. This is what it's going to be like."

My mother didn't realize it was all-male. I guess I never told her that until that day. It was so funny. And she was happy. She said, "This is great." Because my grandma said, "Where are the women? Where are the girls?"

I said, "There's no girls here."

My mother said, "Great. That's good." But they were tired, going up and down the steps.

Warren: I bet they were.

Perry: But they didn't say anything. I don't think they noticed. If they did, they didn't say anything. So that was the first day. And so I move in. My mother and grandmother leave.

I think one guy came down who happened to be Jewish. I didn't know there was a difference between a Jewish person and a white person. So he comes in, and we get to talking. We both have this big thing about sports. He was from Detroit. We started talking sports, and he was a Marvin Gaye fan, and I had Marvin Gaye playing. That's why he came in the room.

Warren: That's why he came in.

Perry: He heard Marvin Gaye. So, we started talking. It was Mark Senel. We sat there and talked just like normal people would talk.

Warren: Was he a freshman?

Perry: Yeah. So we kind of bonded there. He was looking for a friend. I was looking for anything. I was just there, and I was going to be by myself for a while until I soaked it all in.

Warren: Did you have a roommate?

Perry: No, I would not have had a roommate. If they had told me that I had to have a roommate, I wouldn't have gone. They said that you could have a single. In those days, if a black student said he didn't want a roommate, he didn't have one. So I didn't want one. I wasn't ready for that. So I never had a roommate my entire existence in Lexington. I never had roommates 'til I went to the Academy for the FBI.

So that's the way it started. We had a dorm meeting and everybody came in. We had a good dorm counselor. I don't remember his name. He was a fair guy. He made an effort to keep me involved and tried to make me feel at home. At the dorm meeting, we all introduced and we talked, and then we went our separate ways after that. We talked, spoke on the hall, but it wasn't like it should've been. You went through the orientation and you hear all this about what is expected of you as a Washington and Lee gentleman. Most of the guys in my hall had never went to school with a black. They didn't know what I was. I had the advantage because I had been to school with whites since the eighth grade, and I had been in situations where I was the

only black in most of my classes, so I was used to that. They had no clue. As I got to know them individually, somewhat, they just had no idea how to deal with me or any black. Certainly not as an equal. They had black maids and they had their ideas of what blacks were like, I could tell. And I could tell in the first week who I was going to get along with and who I wasn't.

But Mark was a friend. I met another guy, he must've been on the hall adjacent to mine, who was from Pennsylvania. He didn't know he should've been prejudiced. He didn't know that. He loved everybody. He and I became friends—his name was John Clough. I actually was the best man at his wedding.

Warren: Who is this?

Perry: His name is John Clough. He went to Washington and Lee two years and then he transferred. He and I were very close. He was accused of being a "nigger lover" and all kinds of things he went through because he and I were friends. The same with Mark. They were accused, they were taunted. Little things were done to them because they were friends with me and another black student named Ernest Freeman, who we called Elf. We all used to hang together. We'd eat together. They were not too popular with the majority of the people there because they hung with us.

The blacks used to eat at a table in Evans dining hall. We'd go to class and we'd come at lunch and we'd always sit together. People were annoyed that we did that. They didn't understand why we did that. Some of the students were intimidated or they just didn't understand why we always huddled together in Evans dining hall. But after you've been to class with people who don't speak to you all day, then you don't want to eat around people who don't want to be bothered with you, so you gravitate to people that you can laugh with. We used to have a good time at that table. We used to get pretty loud there. Mr. Darrell, a great man, he kept the peace. He'd come by and tell us when we were a little loud. He would always come by and have something to

say about what was going on around us, if he found out something. He was a good man to have there at that particular time.

Warren: This is Jerry Darrell?

Perry: Yeah, Jerry Darrell. He would try to be a friend to us. He was a friend to us in those days. But the dining hall, there used to be tension in the dining hall. The white students would walk by and see us over there. I can imagine what thoughts used to go through their mind.

Warren: So how many of you were sitting together?

Perry: No more than—

Warren: There were four in your class.

Perry: Four in my class and fifteen, I think, in the class ahead of me. We were never all there at any one time.

Warren: I'm sure it was real frightening to see all of you sitting at that table.

Perry: Yeah, I mean, surrounded by four hundred other students.

Warren: That's real intimidating. [Laughter]

Perry: Yeah, isn't that something. They were intimidated by us and they didn't like the idea. They thought that we were prejudiced because we sat together, you know what I mean. I used to eat breakfast, I'd get there early, seven, whenever it opened, I would get there early to eat breakfast, and I would be sitting at the table by myself. Now, if John Clough or Mark didn't come by or one of my friends—I was on the freshman basketball team—so if one of those guys didn't come by, no one sat with me. [Tape recorder turned off.]

I never felt the school was prepared for the black males as they were for the females when they went coed. They did a lot of studying and they were very prepared when they made that decision. They did everything they could to make the transition easy for the women.

Warren: Of course, you were just a freshman and you weren't there, but they didn't make a decision to allow blacks, did they? I mean, they had to allow blacks when it happened.

Perry: My understanding was the board got together and decided that we were going to integrate Washington and Lee. They didn't have to integrate. That was my take on it.

Warren: As a private school, I guess they didn't have to?

Perry: That was my understanding, freshman year. Because I used to wonder why did they make the decision when they did, and just from talking to people around, they said the board made a decision. I guess they were getting some federal money, because they were giving student loans.

Warren: They were getting some federal money, so they probably had to.

Perry: But I don't think they were prepared for us at all, because when I got there I realized, I said these people—it's a very well run school. I could tell immediately. But with all the intelligent people around, they didn't have one black professor. No black assistant dean. Every white school in America, in the seventies, decided that when they were going to have these blacks on campus, "We've got to get us some assistant deans, if, for no other reason, just to have them there for show." Washington and Lee didn't even have the sense to do that. So you have these eighteen- and nineteen-year-old young men running around there with no role models, no man to talk to, except for the janitors, the people who worked on campus, who were great, by the way. But we had no one to talk to. Like I said, it was a very well-run school, but they didn't think about that.

They didn't think about, you know, we'd have these mixers and they'd go to Hollins and bring all these girls to these mixers. They couldn't find the black girls, and I know they didn't want us to talk to the white girls. Right? So I thought that was stupid. I thought it was stupid that there were no adults around there, except for Mrs.

Marjorie Poindexter, who was the secretary in the financial aid office, and the mother to us all. She kept us in school, kept us from fighting, all of that. When we got depressed and didn't want to call home because we didn't have enough money to call home, she had to be the mother to all of us.

Warren: Marjorie Poindexter.

Perry: Yes.

Warren: Who is she? I've never heard that name.

Perry: She was the secretary in the financial aid office, for Dean Knowles [phonetic]. She died. I always felt we should have started a scholarship for her, in her name. If I hit the lottery tomorrow, I'm going to do that, Thursday.

Warren: What a lovely idea.

Perry: I may do that anyway. They should've done that, really, the school, because they knew she was keeping us together. They knew that. We always ran to her. We had no one to talk to. When the ladies got on that campus, they were ready for the girls. They didn't do anything for us. They figured we were just boys and we could just mix in with the other boys, and that was stupid for them to think that, in my opinion, it was stupid, because we didn't mix with them, because nothing was done to make it easy for us. They just felt we could make it on our own. We knew that.

We had a sense that we had to make it so that the other kids could come along after us. We were just guinea pigs. Pioneers is a better word. We were pioneers. There were days we would sit around, we resented that, that they didn't think about what they were doing. We were just there. Then they would try to make up for the fact they hadn't thought this out.

Warren: What would they do?

Perry: I don't know. We would go to them and say, "There are no black girls at these things." Then one of them would say, "Well, take my car and go down the road." We

used this one, I can't think of his name, a young guy, he was assistant dean of something, we used to use his car to go down the road, as they called it in those days.

Warren: They still call it going down the road.

Perry: Good. It's a good thing some things still exist. But you know, they would do that. We'd sit around for a month or so, and they could see the tension. It was boiling. You've got to get out and do something. We had no place to have our own parties. We used the parties to go into town—to the parties in town. I think sometimes we'd party up at what was the Preston House, which is where some of the guys who were sophomores were staying, at the Preston House, and they'd have some parties up there.

Warren: I guess it goes without saying that no one was offered to pledge in a fraternity.

Perry: Not that I know of. I wouldn't have done it anyway. Why would I do that? I'm a member of a fraternity now. I did it after I got out of school, a black fraternity. But what was the point of that? I was going through enough.

Warren: What happened during Rush Week?

Perry: I have no idea.

Warren: You weren't approached at all?

Perry: Oh, God, no.

Warren: None of you were approached?

Perry: No! [Laughter] I didn't know what rush was. There were guys I know who were friendly, and I would ask them, "What is this? What are you doing?" They would tell me what they were doing. I said, "That's cool." A couple would ask me, "Are you participating in rush?" And I think you had to pay money to be involved with rush. I don't know. I didn't have the money if it cost any money, and no one asked me. They didn't ask me a thing. I wanted to play basketball. I wanted to be on the basketball team, so I was practicing when I had some free time, for the tryouts for that.

Warren: So how did that go?

Perry: It was very competitive. Very competitive. It was very competitive.

Warren: Was it fairly competitive?

Perry: Yeah, I thought it was fair. They kept a lot of kids; they kept fifteen guys. I don't think there was any reason to keep fifteen guys. There's never a reason to keep fifteen basketball players on a team. I mean, I've coached Little League youth sports, and you don't keep fifteen kids on a basketball team because there's not enough time. And especially you don't keep fifteen players in college on the team, because you're too competitive at that age. So I thought that was a joke. It just showed that they didn't have the guts to make the cut. If I had been cut, then I'd just been cut. They should've cut it down to twelve, which is the normal number for a team, but they had fifteen.

We got along. I don't know if there were some guys who were prejudiced, there may have been. There were some guys from Dallas. Bo Williams was on the team. I don't think Bo ever knew—I may have been the first black he talked to. He was a nice guy. We got along fine. There were times when we would talk, and I don't think he knew exactly how to reach me, what we could talk about, but I don't think he was a malicious guy or anything like that. I don't think he was used to that.

I hurt my knee before the season started, which was a very traumatic thing for me, because the first game was going to be played in the new gym that year. We were going to play the University of Virginia, to open up Doremus Gym [sic: Warner Center]. I had circled that day on my calendar. I mean, that was a big day. I mean, whether I played or not in the game, it was a big day. Opening the gym, historic occasion, and I would be there. Well, I wasn't there. I had my knee operated on. That took a lot out of me that first semester.

Warren: Freshmen year you had a knee operation?

Perry: Yeah.

Warren: What a drag.

Perry: Napoleon says in every battle there's a moment where either gentleman can win or lose, and that was my first moment in terms of whether I was going to stay there,

because I had put so much into being on the team, and at that age, that was very important, it was probably more important than going to class, but that was very important to me. My knee exploded. I'll never forget that, and I would've cried, probably, had there not been all these white guys around me. The pain, I really wanted to cry. But the guys really took care of me. The school, in terms of—I got the best medical attention, everything was done for me.

Warren: Was the operation at Stonewall Jackson?

Perry: No, I went to UVA. I would have never allowed that. My parents wouldn't have allowed that.

Warren: No. Good move.

Perry: I went to Charlottesville, which worked out fine, because I grew up fifteen, twenty minutes from Charlottesville. So I had the operation. My parents came, took me home, and I came back to school. And it was funny, when I was on the fourth floor, I had gotten used to the guys up there, and then I was moved down to the first floor, so I wouldn't have to go up the steps. I wasn't well received on the first floor. It was like going from the North to the South. As I recall, I had this red, black, and green flag, the flag of liberation, it was on my door, just a little stick-on. I was in my room, in my cast, and the guys on the hall knew I was in there and I couldn't get to them. So they came by and banged on the door and ripped the flag off, and poured something under the door. I don't know what it was, water, whatever, beer or something, they poured under there. There was nothing I could do. And they banged on the door, just banged on the door. I said, "Wow," and I knew when I moved in that they didn't care for me, and then they made it obvious that they didn't care for me.

So I got word to the upper-classmen that I was having problems. So they came over to talk to the guys on the hall and make sure they understood that that was not to happen again. They didn't quite say it like I'm saying it to you, but they came over to

make sure that everybody understood that if that happened again, that we'd have to deal with that not as gentlemen, but we would deal with that.

I think I told the dean of students that that had happened. Of course, he didn't do anything, because he said, "Who was it?"

And I'm saying, "I didn't see who it was." He asked me did I see them. "No, I didn't see them. I can't see through the door." But I know who it was and you're not going to do anything about it." There's nothing in the manual that says you can kick a kid out of school for being an asshole. Right? So nothing's going to be done, that's why I called my guys. I don't know what they did, but they took care of that. The rest of my time there, I didn't particularly care for it. I didn't like living down there with them. I was really glad when that year was over.

Warren: So it was only freshman year you had to live in the dorm, at that point, right?

Perry: Yes.

Warren: So where'd you go?

Perry: There was an upperclass dorm across the street, Davis Dorm, and I moved there.

Warren: So, you continued to live in dorms?

Perry: Yes.

Warren: All four years?

Perry: Yes, because I was lazy. I liked the idea I could walk to my classes. That's one of the reasons I applied for those type of schools. I didn't want to have to drive to class. I liked the idea I could walk on campus. I liked the campus, and I liked walking to class. I liked walking on the Quad.

I lost my wallet and I found it on the Quad, and I found it on the Quad. A guy, I think, returned it to the Quad. So I knew that the Honor Code worked. In spite of the racism, the Honor Code worked. Somebody borrowed my bike freshman year—I had a bike. Somebody borrowed my bike and they brought it back. I use the term "borrowed." But I don't know if they borrowed it to use or if they were being mean. I

tried to always give them the benefit of the doubt. Because if you're in a situation like that, you can't get caught up in everything being racist, because it just eats at you. You don't have enough tape for me to go on about that freshman year.

Warren: Did you ever think about leaving?

Perry: I thought about leaving when I had my knee operation, because I was just depressed about that. But I went back to school, and when I was on that bottom, first floor I thought about leaving. But I said they weren't going to run me away. They were just punks, and they weren't going to run me away from the school. So I became more determined.

Warren: What did you think of it academically? What were your experiences like in the classroom?

Perry: I was fortunate to have Charlie Turner for history. I don't know if you've heard about Charlie Turner. But he could talk a mile a minute. He was famous when I got here, on detail, trivia, and all that. I had him at eight o'clock in the morning. I enjoyed him. I enjoyed the history. He was demonstrative and he was something else. But I enjoyed, at eight o'clock in the morning, going to his class. I had a calculus class with Felix Welch and I thought he was a racist and a redneck, and I didn't enjoy that class at all. I probably wasn't prepared for calculus, quite honestly. It was a big jump, so I struggled there. I've got to stop using these names, but my English professor—

Warren: Oh, no, please. Please name names, because we're real interested in talking about the faculty in particular, please.

Perry: Dr. Ray was my English professor. We had to write a composition or something, and I wrote it, and I think he gave me a D or an F on this composition, and I was mad. I had never seen a D or an F on a report card beside a subject of mine. And it was also Parents Weekend. So I got my mid-term grade, and the man gave me an F on this thing. My parents were—it was bad timing—of course, that's what they wanted, of course. So my parents come in, they definitely wanted to meet this man, and I wanted

to talk to him. When you write something, how can you tell me that what I wrote was a failure? How can you tell me that? Grammatically, anyway. I wasn't too pleased with that.

So we go in, my father and I and my mother were sitting there, and Dr. Ray says, "Well, I figured Gene would have these problems, you know, coming from a black high school."

My dad said, "What are you talking about? What are you talking about?"

He said, "Well, you know, sometimes they have difficulties writing."

My dad said, "Well, let me explain something to you. My son went to a white high school, where the blacks made up about fifteen percent of the student body, a high school that has a good reputation. So he was trained and taught by white people and did very well at that white high school, and that's why he's at this white university. So give me another reason why my son got an F on this test. Tell me that he can't write or he made some grammatical mistakes. Do not tell me that he got this F because he went to a black high school, which he did not." And looked him right in his eye and said those very words.

And Dr. Ray had nothing to say. Then he went through, "Well, he made these mistakes," and blah, blah, blah. So, I mean, a professor can give you an F for anything in English. I didn't realize I had to be perfect, grammatically, when I went to Washington and Lee. That woke me up. Because in high school, my high school, you were penalized for making grammatical errors, but no one would ever give you an F for your thoughts. These were my thoughts, and I didn't feel like I could get an F for my thoughts. But he gave me an F. I'm pretty sure it was an F. And I thought that was stupid. But he said that's the way he graded. I said, "Fine. Those are the rules and I can play by the rules. But I know that you're prejudiced. You played your trump card when you said to my dad that I did that because I went to a black school."

Now, I can no longer respect him. I could not respect him. For me to say that was a big thing, because I grew up, you respect your elders. My parents, I didn't know the difference between black and white, even though I grew up in a segregated town. I was taught to respect white people, adults, unless they said something or did something, they you didn't have respect. So I didn't respect him anymore after that. I just wanted to get out of his class. I just wrote him up as one of the bad guys. I always resented that about professors who would do that to an eighteen-year-old. If you don't want to teach black kids or Hispanic kids or Jewish kids, then you should say that and you shouldn't teach them. Whether it's in high school, college, that's my opinion, don't teach them. Over the years, Dr. Ray and I, we got along. He probably never thought that I felt that way.

Warren: Did you take other classes from him?

Perry: No, I don't think so. No. I avoided him.

Warren: I would think so.

Perry: I didn't even like the idea that he was chairman of the athletic—he had something to do with athletics. But I was never taught to hate. I was brought up in the church. I avoided him. I thought he was a bad person. He wasn't what Robert E. Lee wanted. My opinion is probably extreme because I think Dr. Ray is probably a good man, I mean, I never had a problem with him after that. He would see me on campus and we'd talk. He was concerned when I hurt my knee. But I never forgot that.

Warren: I bet you didn't. I need to turn the tape over.

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

Warren: I've been looking forward to talking with you.

Perry: There's so much going on. When you ask me about day to day, I mean, every day it was something. We'd come back to the table and somebody had a story to tell about something that happened to them.

Warren: You were like having group therapy every day, weren't you?

Perry: Oh, yeah, that's what it was, and that's why we had to sit there and talk this out. We'd talk guys out of wanting to fight someone, guys out of wanting to go home. You know what I mean? Guys would come there—when you're living in that situation, the slightest thing can really upset you. Your girlfriend. Something could go wrong in any little aspect of your life and it can affect you. We weren't really students, if you know what I mean. We weren't allowed to be just students. We were still those pioneers. We had to deal with a lot of things. When they first came to this country, they had to survive. There was no vacation. Every day you were trying to survive. So we were in a survival test.

We couldn't think about homecoming, for instance. Homecoming came, I didn't know about it. Homecoming had no meaning to me at Washington and Lee. It was bigger for me when I was in high school. I remember guys asking me, "What are you going to do for homecoming?" I wasn't going to do anything. It didn't have any meaning to me. I was struggling to make sure I could stay there with my grades. I didn't feel a part of the school to go to homecoming. Guys didn't even go to the games. We didn't even go to the football games.

Warren: You didn't?

Perry: Most of the guys. I did because I was into sports. I would go, I mean, the team stunk, so there was no real reason to stay there.

My dad and I, my second visit there, when I was in high school, my dad, we went to talk to the football coach. I had played on a championship team. I had played quarterback. We went to talk to Buck Leslie. He started telling me about the quarterback that they had there, he was ranked sixth in the nation and all this kind of stuff. And I said, "Well, that's all well and good, Coach, but you don't win any games. So what are you telling me? Are you telling me I can't compete with him, that he's going to be the quarterback? What are you telling me?"

He said, “Well, you know, he’s going to be here. He’s ranked sixth in the nation.”

I kept saying, "But you don’t win, so what are you telling me?" My dad was getting annoyed because I wasn’t supposed to be speaking up to this man like this. But I just wanted to get everything out on the table. So I walked out of the office. I left my dad in there with him. I left. I went in and talked to Coach Canfield. Because I knew he wasn’t going to let me quarterback and I wasn’t going to play any other position. I’d never played on a losing team, anyway. So I wasn’t going to play there anyway. I decided they couldn’t win, they weren’t going to win with those attitudes. So that was my experience with him. Some of the other guys had had a problem with him the year before, as I found out the next fall, that they had a problem with him.

But there were some good people. I want to mention some good people. Bill McKinley [phonetic], the athletic director, made sure I was taken care of when I had my knee operation, good man. I switched faculty advisors my freshman year, I think, or sophomore year, to Barry Machado. He liked basketball, so we could go play basketball and I could talk to him. He was more than my advisor, he was my friend. He was an advisor, but it had nothing to do with him being on the faculty. I could talk to him. We could talk very frank. He would be frank with me. When I had an attitude that wasn’t quite right, he'd say, "Gene, why don’t you think about this." Instead of saying, "Gene, you’re wrong," he would say, "Gene, why don’t you think about that." Because he was an educator, you know what I mean. He knew what he was there for. That’s the role of an educator. I’m there, I’m young, a little impetuous, and wanting to strike back at some things, and he said, "Why don’t you think about this." He would make me think. He helped me to grow as a young man and as a student, because I had him in class. He would tell me, "This is what you do to write a paper. This is what I’m looking for when I ask you a question on a test." To me, that’s what he was there for, to make me improve.

I started to improve, as a student, my sophomore year. My freshman year, it was a struggle and I was just struggling. But I knew that Washington and Lee would make me a better student, I knew that and I was prepared for that. I didn't want to deal with a professor who was prejudiced or racist.

But I knew that I had some work to do, and some of the other black students, who were really good students, really were inspirational. They inspired me because I could see that they were a little bit sharper then I was. Guys like Bill Hill, who's a judge in Atlanta, Johnny Morrison, who's in Portsmouth, these guys were sharp and they, even though they were only a year older than me, they inspired me. They were my role models. I wanted to be as good a student as they were. Even though I knew they weren't getting the grades that they should've gotten, but I knew they were bright guys. The professors knew they were bright guys.

Warren: So were you able to pretty quickly figure out which professors were sympathetic, and take courses from those people?

Perry: We weren't looking for that, for sympathetic, we were looking for fair.

Warren: Well, that's what I mean. I mean, maybe sympathetic was maybe not the right term.

Perry: The guys ahead of me, when it was time for me to pick my classes, I would go to them before I would go to my faculty advisor. I'd say, "These are the classes I need to take because I'm in history." They would say, "Don't take him and don't take him and don't take him, because he's not fair. And avoid him and avoid him." They would say, "take this guy because he's fair, he's interesting, and you will get something out of the class."

Warren: Were there enough of those people?

Perry: Well, we all graduated, so obviously there were.

Warren: But were there enough that you felt that you weren't cheated out of some courses you'd like to have taken?

Perry: Yeah. I mean, there were more Washington and Lee gentlemen there than there were not. I don't want to give the impression that these professors—most of the professors were good men, good people. There were just very few that I thought had a problem. Most of them were fair. It's a good school. It's a great school. Most of them were fair. It was new to everybody, this integration thing.

Warren: Sure.

Perry: But there were people that you just avoided, and I avoided them to the extent that I could. If they were in the history department, then I had to deal with them. Like they said, "Don't take Jefferson Davis Futch III," who I was told didn't like women, blacks, nothing. He believed in the monarchy. Have you met him?

Warren: Yes.

Perry: Okay. You know what I'm talking about. They said, "Don't take him. He's never taught a black, doesn't want blacks. Don't take him." So I didn't have to take him, because I was really into American history and he was teaching the European stuff. But I said, "I want to take him. He's going to teach me." Because all the white guys said he was great, that he was funny, he was interesting. I'm saying, "If they think he's good, then he's going to have to tell me I can't take his class." Because you had to go and ask him.

So I marched up in his office during his office hours, I think they call it, I walked in there and he looked up. [Laughter] He was a little surprised. I introduced myself and I said, "I'm a history major and I would like to take—" Whatever that course was.

And he said, "What are your grades in history?" And I told him. He said, "Okay." He says, "You have to wear a tie to my class, every day."

I said, "I own a tie."

He said, "I expect you to be here every day."

I said, "I expect to be here every day."

He said, "Who's your advisor?" And I told him Machado. He said, "Okay."

I said, "Thank you very much, I'll be here." And I enjoyed his classes. I loved his classes. I mean, I knew where he was politically. I don't know if he knew me, where I was, because he never asked me. But I understood that. And I enjoyed his class. When I sat down in that class, he looked at me, the guys in there were shocked that I was in there. I sat in the back and I enjoyed his classes. And I took every class I could with him.

Warren: Really. Not just one?

Perry: No.

Warren: Not just one?

Perry: No, no. I enjoyed it. I felt that whatever grade I got from him, I would earn. On the first test I got back, I felt I was—I mean, I was ready for him because I had heard all this stuff that he was what he was. And he was all right with me and to me that's what it's all about. He was fair. He had his ideals. He was very opinionated. He was funny. I enjoyed him.

Warren: So did everybody have to wear a tie to his class?

Perry: Oh, yeah, oh, everybody wore a tie to his class. It was a requirement. The guys were in there with jeans and ties. I had a tie on.

Warren: When had conventional dress code fallen by the wayside? Not very far ahead of you.

Perry: The year before, I think, they had gotten rid of that. But guys were still wearing ties.

Warren: The upper classmen were probably still in that—

Perry: Some of them. I was there during the age of revolution, now, you know, the Vietnam thing. They had had the big sit-in, I think, in '70 or '69.

Warren: That was '70.

Perry: They had the big—and there were hippies walking around and they were our friends, the blacks and the hippies, we got along fine. There were revolutionaries there.

There were guys bucking the system, more white than black. We were conservative compared to some of these other guys, because we couldn't afford to be too radical. We were radical just by our color.

We formed the Student Association for Black Unity there. I think that was formed in '71. We used to wear these jean jackets with the red, green, and black patch on the back, it had "SABU" and "Washington and Lee University." There were a lot of students that hated that organization. They didn't understand why the organization was there, why the administration would allow us to have this black separatist organization on campus. Occasionally there was a white student who wondered why he couldn't join SABU. There was a lot of animosity because we formed that organization.

I think we had the first Black History Week my freshman year, I know we did, because my uncle died during that week. People were resistant to that, students, maybe some professors. They didn't know why we had to have that. They didn't know why we had to do anything. We had to fight for that week. I don't know where we found all the money. Well, there were always people in administration that would give us money to do what had to be done.

Warren: There's always money at Washington and Lee.

Perry: There's money. They saw that we got what we needed to do what we had to do. Our functions weren't that well attended by the white students. My friends that used to hang with me, the white guys, they would come. A couple of guys I played basketball with would come.

Warren: What kind of functions did you have?

Perry: We just had speakers to come in. We had two or three speakers come in. I think we had a choir to come in a sing some spirituals, Negro spirituals, and we had the Black Ball at the end of the week, which was really a very nice formal affair, a very nice affair. That turned a lot of people off. You're walking on Washington and Lee's campus, and

you see on campus a sign that said "The Black Ball." I missed the very first one because I had to go home for the funeral. I was really disappointed, because I really had a good date all lined up and I missed that one.

Warren: So you had a Black Ball. Did you all go to Fancy Dress?

Perry: No.

Warren: In your whole four years, you never went to Fancy Dress?

Perry: Yes, I went. I went as I got older, yeah. I was not going to go to Washington and Lee and not experience the Mock Convention, Fancy—I mean, I wasn't going to leave there and have isolated myself. You have to understand, I grew up with white kids, you know what I mean, so I played with them. When I went to Washington and Lee, that was really an experience for me. Like I said, I grew up with white kids. So I was not used to white kids like the ones I met at Washington and Lee. But I wasn't going to let them keep me from Fancy Dress or anything. I was going to do what a normal student did.

Warren: And did most of the black students go?

Perry: No. No. I believe the first Fancy Dress I went to, I may have been a junior. And I think just me and Elf went, the guy that was in my class, that I'd hang out with, and two or three others. The other guys didn't go. They never bought into it. Most of the guys in that first group of us didn't buy into the Fancy Dress, homecoming, or anything. We didn't stand for *The Swing*. There was a lot resentment, there was a lot of protest going on in the first couple of years.

I remember one time we weren't going to sing for the national anthem, stand for it, but I always had a problem with that, because my uncle was all for it and the war, and I had a cousin who was fighting in Vietnam at that time. So I had a problem with that.

Warren: You didn't have any problem with standing up for the national anthem? Is that what you're saying?

Perry: Well, there were guys that didn't want to stand for the national anthem or *The Swing*. The national anthem I could stand for, because in my family they're all for that flag, so I would never disrespect them or the flag, really. But *The Swing*, I pick and choose when I stand for the Swing. It didn't do much for me when I first got there. By the time I graduated, though, I had bought into *The Swing*.

Warren: You bought into the whole program. You stayed and went to law school, right?

Perry: Yeah. I think Washington and Lee's a great school. I had a great time there, in spite of all of that. There was some bad times there, but there were more good than bad. I made a lot of road trips. I made a lot of friends. I had to grow, I had to mature into it, too. I was young when I got there. I made a lot of friends there that are still my friends today. My brother was inducted into the Hall of Fame back in October, the first black to go into the Hall of Fame. And John Clough, a white man, was here, and he and I went there, met in Lexington, to attend the ceremony. John Clough lives in Alaska. He was there. He and I, we've always been there for each other.

Warren: And you were his best man?

Perry: I was the best man at his wedding.

Warren: How do you spell his name?

Perry: C-L-O-U-G-H. A very courageous young man, because he caught hell freshman and sophomore year because he was my friend. He had white friends who said, "John, we like you, but why do you have to hang around with Gene or E? Why do you do that?" He probably lost dates because we were together. He would've had a better time there, he may have graduated from Washington and Lee had he not been my friend, because it cost him a lot, I think. But he was always there for me, I'm always there for him. We will always be there for each other, no matter what.

Warren: He probably got the better end of the deal.

Perry: And Mark left after freshman year. I think they ran him away. He couldn't take it.

Warren: The Jewish kid?

Perry: The Jewish kid. He was very unhappy there. But Mark had a car. He and I could drive. So Mark gave me the keys to his car. I'm sure that kept me in Lexington because I had a car, I had access to the car. My parents hated that. But Mark didn't like to drive. Mark would go home with me—okay?—to this southern town, go home with me and eat food that he shouldn't have been eating. My parents loved him. They loved John. And he just became part of our family.

I was in Mark's wedding. I was in a Jewish wedding, years after we had graduated. I was in law school. I was going into law school, I think, when he got married, after I graduated in the summer. He called me, and I was in law school. He called and said, "Gene, I want you to be in the wedding."

I said, "Mark, I love you, but you don't have to do this. I will come. I'll be there and we'll have a great time, but I don't have to be in the wedding. I appreciate your asking me, but you don't have to do that, because I know your parents will go for this, I don't think your bride is going to go for this, her parents."

And he said, "She's fine with it." Well, she was. Her parents almost fainted when I walked in there. They got married in Flint, Michigan. Whew! I drove up there in my car, my dad's car. Johnny White was with me, he's another guy went to Washington and Lee. We drove up there and I was in this wedding. It was an interesting week we spent up there. Those are the friends I met there and we've been friends forever.

Warren: It is a place that makes friendships.

Perry: Yeah, because most people there are good people. But the first couple of years, it was not a happy place. We made the best of it. We had so many stories to tell about things that happened to us. I remember Parents Weekend, and I was walking across

campus, and this elderly alumnus came up to me and said, "Boy, can you tell me where such and such is?" And he had the little alumni thing on.

I said, "Yes, sir, I can tell you where it is. In fact, I'll show you, if you like."

He said, "Fine."

I took him to wherever it was he wanted to go. He had graduated, I think in the forties. He was an elderly man. We were talking and he said, "Well, how do you like working here?"

I said, "I don't work here."

He said, "You don't? Do you live in town?"

I said, "Well I go to school here."

He says, "You do?"

I said, "Yes."

He said, "You know, I didn't know they had colored boys here."

I said, "Yeah, we've been here for a couple years now."

He said, "Really?"

I said, "Yeah."

He said, "How do you like it?"

I said, "I'm getting along pretty good. Good and bad times."

He said, "Wow." No, actually he said, "Damn, I didn't know that." He said, "This is interesting." He says, "Come and walk with me." So we talked. He just couldn't believe it. I wish I knew his name. He said, "I shouldn't have called you boy, should I?"

I said, "Probably not." I said, "You probably shouldn't have said that." I said, "But, you know, we got past that, didn't we?"

He said, "Yeah, we did." And we shook hands and he went—I think I took him to the library. I don't really know where I took him. But it was interesting, because we were from two different worlds, but we had something in common.

Warren: That's a beautiful story.

Perry: That we were on that campus. I was going to have that little button in a couple of years. And halfway through the walk he realized that I was going to have that. He was annoyed at first, and by the time we got to where we were going, I don't know if we liked each other, but we understood that we were going to have something in common. He realized he shouldn't have said "boy." But he appreciated the fact—and I had grown, I think I was probably a sophomore or junior, and I took him, instead of saying, "I don't know where that is," which I would've done when I was freshman, I said, "Fine. I'll take you." Because I bought into what a Washington and Lee gentleman is.

I teach my son. I was raised to be a gentleman, not at Washington and Lee, but I was raised that way, so I respected my elders, so I took him. And he caught me on a good day. On a bad day I may have said something else then. But it was always interesting when the alumni would come and see the guys who were not there when it was integrated and probably didn't want it to change, to see their reactions when they saw us. And we always watched. We had the advantage of knowing our situation and just watching people, to see how they would react. Sometimes we'd probably do things, be a little mischievous to make them or make people react to us. That was part of the fun that we had.

There was an occasion when one of our black guys was accused of an honor violation in the biology department. He was doing an experiment, I think, with a white girl, who was probably an exchange student from Sweet Briar or somebody, they could come there their junior year, I think. They were doing the experiment. He was doing the work, she was taking the notes. Okay? So at the end of the day, she says, "Well, here are the results of the experiment we're doing." So he writes the notes down. I'm sure that's what everybody did that were in these groups. People did the work, they all had the same results of whatever it was they were doing. He was accused, I don't know

who accused him, if it was the professor—I think it was. I don't think it was another student.

But he was accused of an honor violation. I was a junior. He was in my brother's class, freshman class. He was very upset. He was crying. He really wanted to go to Washington and Lee, and they were going to kick him out for cheating. So we had a SABU meeting and we discussed this and we listened to him. We knew this kid would never cheat. Willy Harrison was his name. He would never cheat. It was obvious what had happened and what was happening. So we decided that we were not going to take that; we would all leave school. If they kicked him out, we would leave. And I think almost all of us, maybe two or three guys said they weren't going to do that. But we said if they kicked him out for nothing, we had to go.

We communicated that to the powers-that-be, Huntley on down, that we believed in the Honor Code and if you lie, you cheat, you steal, you have to go. But this was not that, and we were going to take a stand. If that was going to happen, if anybody arbitrarily can do this and get rid of a black student, then we were not safe and we had to go. There were guys that were sitting outside that—we were sitting outside the courtroom that night. There were guys sitting there who were seniors. I was a junior. But I had decided that I was going to Virginia Tech, that I was going to leave. I told my brother, I said, "You just got here." He was a football star. I think he was All-American his freshman year. I said, "You've got to make a decision." He said, "Well, I'm going, too." So we decided that was it.

Now, when he came out of there, he was innocent. I'm sure there was some special dispensation, because those students were going to get rid of him, I believe. Maybe they saw the light, maybe they did, I don't think so. But when they came out of there, he was innocent.

There was another case where a guy was accused of cheating. Two black kids were accused of cheating because they had similar homework or something. Now, they

studied together, they would talk about it. I don't know what kind of class this was, it had to be a science or math class. They had the same tutor. The tutor was showing them how to do this work. So guess what? They did it the way the tutor showed them to do it and they did it the same way. I was in law school by this time. The professor says they cheated. Now, who would cheat? These guys had been there. Who would hand in the same work if they thought they were cheating? You know what I mean?

So, anyway, they went to the trial, and a lot of nonsense. Again, we were up in arms because we knew this was—we were really mad because the professor did this. He should've known better. And what happened was, one of the kids took the blame so the other could stay there.

Warren: Wow.

Perry: That's right. They were all in a room, and this kid says, "I will go," because he was a freshman, I think, he just got there, I think. He said, "I'll go. I'm not that happy here anyway, so he can stay." Maybe he was a junior. But we made those kind of sacrifices for each of us all the time, whether it was you were giving somebody your last dollar, you letting the guy have the car because you think he needs it more than you do, because he's been under some pressures that you're not under. In that little group we made sacrifices for each other all the time, daily. You know what I mean? This didn't happen like once a month. Daily, somebody was making a sacrifice just to keep him there. Whatever happens.

We saw a lot of tragedy. I met a guy whose daughter died, his mother died, had a tremendous effect on us because we were all so close. But that was a very interesting thing. I was there. I caught myself counseling them, and this kid said, "Look. I'll go." So we're there and still there are not a lot of black men there. There are not a lot of black professors there, and we were making these adult decisions. You've got nineteen-year-olds counseling eighteen-year-olds, or twenty-one-year-olds counseling eighteen-year-olds, because we had no one that could step in there and help us make these

decisions. At the same time you have to be a student, too. You're being a brother and a father and all this, and you have to go to class. There were days where emotionally I just couldn't even go to class because something happened to me or my brother or somebody else. We would get all wrapped up, sometimes too much, we'd get too wrapped up in that, and you're just tired. But again, when you fight for something like that, then, at least in my case, it made my attachment to Washington and Lee stronger. There are other guys who will not come back there.

Warren: Do you go back for alumni weekends?

Perry: Oh, yeah, I was on the alumni board. I'm in the Washington Society. I haven't been able to get back recently because of scheduling, but I like going back to Lexington. I could retire there. I don't have a problem with Lexington or Washington and Lee. Washington and Lee was a very good experience for me. I took the bad with the good.

Warren: Tell me about law school.

Perry: I don't know. I consider that different than my undergrad years.

Warren: Yes, but we're doing the law school, too. Tell me about being a student at the law school. First of all, I'm intrigued that a history major goes to law school.

Perry: I didn't want to teach history. I didn't know what I wanted to do, to be quite honest, so I figured I'd go to law school. My dad said I had to work. I didn't want to work. I was having too much fun. By the time I got out of Washington and Lee undergrad, I was having too much fun. I was having a ball. It had become Washington and Lee Country Club for me, too, so I was having a good time.

Warren: Oh, now, wait a minute. That's interesting. You had gotten into the country club way of thinking. When my husband and I went to Fancy Dress last month, when we walked out of that place, Henry said, "I swear, every one of those kids was born in a country club." He said, "They're so comfortable with the whole thing."

Perry: Yeah, I had become comfortable with my lifestyle. I had found my niche. I knew I could graduate. Once you realize you can graduate, you can make it. That's

one thing. I realized I could live there, I could deal with all the other stuff going on around me. I had my friends. I enjoyed going out on the road, I liked the girls. I had friends in Lexington. I had a surrogate mother, Margaret Carter, who fed me, who nurtured me, who got mad at me when I was sick and would then care of me. She was there for me. She was there. I talked about her in that article. So I had everything I needed, and my parents were only forty-five minutes away. So I could call the troops to me or I could go to the troops. So I was comfortable there and I was having a good time. I had found a way of rising above this other stuff.

Warren: So, with law school, did they offer scholarships to law school, too?

Perry: I received some money to go to law school. My brother was there, and he wanted me to stay there while he played football. I should've left, really. I should've gone to another law school, but I stayed. My brother and sister were in school, we were all in college at the same time. Washington and Lee offered me some money, and that was the difference. I should've left, really.

Warren: So what year did you graduate?

Perry: '75 and '78.

Warren: So you were there when the law school moved into the new building.

Perry: Yes. My first year we were in the old law school.

Warren: In Tucker Hall.

Perry: Which I found stifling. I couldn't deal with that. I didn't like going to the library. And then we went down to Lewis Hall, which was nicer. My law school years, I don't really know what happened. You're working and you're studying. I don't know if people had time to be racist or whatever. I don't know. That's kind of a blur. I had my fun as an undergrad. There were only four of us in my class, again, in the law school. We weren't invited into any study groups. I lived in a law dorm.

Warren: What's a study group?

Perry: You know, guys who get together and study. I think if you're going to learn law, you've got to be in a group. You have to study it, you have to talk about it.

Warren: So did you form your own group?

Perry: No, because two of the guys were married, the black guys, and one guy was a loner. And I was the youngest of the bunch. I was the only one that came right out of undergrad. So they were a little older than me, a little bit more mature than me, and I was kind of out there on my own. But, again, there were some good guys in my dorm. We had some fun.

One of my best friends was a guy named Mike McDonald. He was a big football nut. He got me to play football on a team my second year there, the law school league, and we won. It was funny. We used to have a draft. He drew the number-one pick in the draft our second year. I had never participated in football there. I used to tell him that I could quarterback in high school. I would brag to him, tell him little tales, and he believed me. I didn't go to the meeting, but he stands up and he got the first pick and everybody figured he would pick one of the older upper-classmen who had established himself as a player, and he chose me. Everybody looked at him. "Why did you do that? Are you crazy? Who is he?" This type of thing.

And he came back and told me, in my room, he said, "E, I drafted you first."

I said, "When it came around to you, you drafted me first?"

He says, "No, you were the first person picked. Period."

I wanted to jump out the window. I said, "Why would you do that? Why would you put me under that kind of pressure? Why would you do that? You could've drafted these other guys who had played." But anyway, he drafted me.

So we formed this bond, and we won the title. We had a crazy team, misfits basically but we won the title.

Warren: I didn't even know there was a law school league.

Perry: It's a touch league, and they keep weekly standings. There would be a write-up of the games and they would write the teams. It was really very nice. It was very competitive, too. I was on our team. I think we had a girl on that team. Did we have a girl on our team? I don't know if she played, but she was around. I was very close to the guys on that team, though.

Warren: Were there many people in your undergraduate class who went on to the law school?

Perry: There were a number of us. I don't know. We weren't friends in the undergrad and we weren't friends in law school. We just knew each other, but we weren't friends. Law school's competitive and you're into your own thing.

Warren: When you make that trek into the law school, do you then say goodbye to what's going on at the undergraduate?

Perry: I guess you should have. I didn't.

Warren: Did you continue to go to Fancy Dress and things like that?

Perry: I don't know that I went to a Fancy Dress. I participated in homecoming. I was an alumnus. I went to homecoming. I may have gone to Fancy Dress at the time. My friends were in the undergrad. William Hill and Johnny Morrison were in the law school. I thought I had to act like a law student. I couldn't act like I was acting when I was undergrad. I didn't hang out too much. My friends were basically the undergrads, and my brother was still there, and those are the guys that I partied with. If I went down the road, I would normally go down the road with one of the guys from my undergrad years.

Warren: Where did you go when you went down the road?

Perry: We had expanded going down the road. When I went there, I guess guys went to Mary Baldwin, Sweet Briar, and Hollins and Southern Seminary and Randolph-Macon Women's College. We soon found out that there were not enough black women at those schools, so we had to go into the new world. We had to go to Madison, James

Madison, Radford, which was ninety miles away, but there was a whole lot of black women at Radford. The woman that I eventually married was at Radford. I met her when she was a student there. So we went to Radford or James Madison or University of Virginia. We had to have some numbers. If we would go to Hollins, it was the same amount of girls at Hollins as guys at Washington and Lee. So it didn't work too well for us. But we were fine. Guys would go to Virginia Tech. We found them or they found us. That was rough.

That dating game was rough because we didn't have the money. We got lucky my freshman year because Mark was there with that car. That was just a gift from God, I think. I don't know what would've happened had he not been there. Sophomore year, I think some of the guys were juniors then, and they had cars. They had gone home to work and brought back some piece of junk that we could make it in. Going down the road was therapy. You had to do that. Otherwise you'd go crazy.

Warren: It still is, from what I can see.

Perry: I'm sure it is. I'm glad to see some things still last. Law school was different. Obviously there were some problems there, because we didn't have the numbers. You were getting people who are coming to Lexington from other schools, who were older, so you had people who were not tolerant of what went on. There were a lot of people in the law school that resented that preppy—that stuff that they saw in undergrad. They thought it was childish, because they had gone to bigger schools or different schools. So they kind of were people you could talk to as a black student. Then there were people who came to Washington and Lee because they wanted that experience, so they were kind of rigid in their thinking. It was a professional school. There were things that went on there that I didn't like, that I didn't have time to fight them. I didn't have the numbers to fight them and I didn't have the time to fight them. Again, I probably should've gone to another law school. But law school, I just went. I don't have the emotional attachment that I have to the undergrad.

Warren: We're getting close to the end of the tape. I want you to say whatever you want to say.

Perry: What do I want to say?

Warren: To end this up. You've given me pure gold.

Perry: Well, I'm really proud that I went to school there, Washington and Lee. I try to support it any way I can.

Warren: Do you help recruit?

Perry: No. I think they recruit the type of students that they want. They don't recruit the type of students I would recruit there. If you had more tape, I could go on and on about that. I don't recruit for Washington and Lee. I recruited one, two people for Washington and Lee. My brother—and I had mixed emotions. He used to come visit me and so he wanted to go there. I had mixed emotions about him coming. I didn't want to be responsible for him coming in, but he made the decision, and I'm glad he did. My cousin, I tried to recruit. They rejected my cousin, because some biology professor, probably I think the same one that tried to get the kid kicked out of school—you had to write an essay in those days on the application. He thought that my cousin's essay was weak, and so he rejected him. I remember Barry Machado really fought for him.

He was a basketball player, so if he would've come there, he would've played basketball. As fate would have it, he went to Roanoke College and so did some other guys. Because he went to Roanoke, they went to Roanoke, and Roanoke had been losing, year after year. This group of six guys goes to Roanoke, not only did they turn the program around, in terms of they were ranked nationally when they left there, but they all are successful. My cousin's a vice president at Allstate. He was a Dean's List student. He's probably to Roanoke what I am to Washington and Lee, if you get my drift. The fact that you're here. Well, if they were to write a story about Roanoke

College, they would go to Kenny Velt [phonetic]. He's a great man. I'm very proud of him and the man he's become.

He was what Washington and Lee needed, but they couldn't look past whatever it is their little stand's worth, to see his family. The same reasons they let me in there, they should've let him in there. We were similar. We were brought up the exact same way. We did the same thing in high school. We were leaders. There wasn't that much difference in our grades, but they rejected him. Once they did that, I stopped recruiting. I'm not that enthusiastic about the way they recruit kids. I mean, they want a certain black student there. They don't want Eugene Perry, William Hill, Johnny Morrison, Johnny Whitesop, Ford, Ernest Freeman. They don't want those guys back there. They're proud that we went there and that we've done okay. They don't want us back there now. I don't like that. I don't like the fact that they don't want black kids with some character and with some social conscience.

When I went back there in November, the first black was inducted into the Hall of Fame. If that had happened while we were there, we would've put something together for him, with the monies and resources that we had, for him and his family. We would've been there at the ceremony. How many blacks do you think were there or even knew that that was going on? None. Not one black student spoke to my brother the whole weekend. He brought his family up there from Tampa. I was there. John Clough was there from Alaska. All of Waynesboro was there, a lot of people from home were there. No one black student said anything to him. And it's embarrassing, actually, as alumnus, when my friends are there—

[Begin Tape 2, Side 2]

Warren: This is tape two with Eugene Perry, April 16, 1996.

Perry: I did want to say, I think Bob Huntley was a great president. He was the right man at the right place.

Warren: I'm glad you brought that up, because I wanted to ask you that.

Perry: He was great. He meant a lot to us. We did a little protest, and we even took over his office one time on a dispute that we had on campus. He was cool. We came in and he said, "What do you want?"

We said, "We're going to take over your office."

And he said, "Fine," and he went home. He went home. We could always go to him. That's one thing I liked about Washington and Lee. I could go to the president of the university and say, "I want to talk to you," or make an appointment, and he would see me. I mean, I didn't make a habit of it. But he would listen to us. You know what I mean? And you can't beat that, when the top man, at least he will listen and will make a fair decision. Sometimes he would tell us that we were wrong. "Why don't you let me work on this? Let's slow down." He was a great leader, that's what he was. Because we would go in to him with some strange requests. We weren't always right just because we were an minority. We weren't always right. He had a way of separating the good from the bad and the ugly. He did a very good job of that, and I always admired him. If I had a company, I'd make him the CEO.

Warren: That's what Sydney Lewis did.

Perry: That's right. I'd have done the same thing. I always admired him and his integrity, his sense of fairness and his sense of humor. The fact that we would go in there, we'd make him smoke a whole pack of cigarettes while we were in there.

But I remember when they were going to name the Chavez House. They didn't ask us, the black alumni, what we thought of that. We didn't know who this guy was. Some black guy, I guess, who went to school there hundreds of years ago. And they did it on purpose, again, not wanting to make a stand. They could've named that house after Marjorie Poindexter, anybody. They could've asked us who we wanted to name the house after. Ostensibly it was our house for us, but they gave it this name of this guy, because they didn't want to offend somebody. But the students there, they went along with that. I will not go in the house.

Warren: Tell me what the Chavez House is.

Perry: I don't know what it is. It's supposed to be a house for the minority students. That's where they stay. I believe they have pictures there of some of us, some of the alumni who've gone there. I don't know. I know when they were having the dedication, I was actually in Lexington. There were a lot of us in Lexington. I think somebody was getting married. We were there, but we wouldn't go, because it was stupid. They didn't ask us about it.

They had some lady there who thought she was doing the right thing. She got rid of the name Student Association for Black Unity. What do they call them now? The minority thing. What is that? They're minorities now. So what is a minority? Which minority are you talking about? She wanted to take the emphasis off "black," because we're all in this together. But what you find out when you leave school is that we're not all in this together. You know what I mean? When you go for a job, you're black. You're what you are, and you have to deal with that. That effort to be somewhat color-blind, I think that's a farce. She does that because she doesn't want those kids to stand up and be what they are. She doesn't want anybody protesting. She doesn't want them to be activist. You know what I mean?

I don't think that's what Robert E. Lee would want. I think he'd want you to come there and be a man, be a woman, be what you are, but be honest. You have some integrity. You have your beliefs. You be the best that you can be, but you are what you are. I don't think that's what he would want.

Warren: You say that they didn't ask your opinion. What was your role being on the alumni board?

Perry: I think that actually happened just as I got on the board. I was asked my opinion. I told them I didn't like it. I thought it was a cop-out. I told them in the alumni meeting, I said it was a cop-out to do that. There were some other names that you could've found. They could use Martin Luther King, for all I know. But who was

this guy? They found him in history someplace. They did it on purpose. They didn't want that house to have any real meaning. It was a cop-out.

You look at the people who built Washington and Lee. You don't build a school like that with cowards and people who want to take the easy way out. You build schools, institutions, businesses like that with some integrity, for people to have something, not like that. So that doesn't represent me and my group at all. I will not go in there. It's meaningless. If they want it to mean something, they could've put Marjorie Poindexter's name on it. It would've meant something, not only to us, but the community. It would say, "Wow! Washington and Lee recognizes the contribution of a black person, a real black person, not somebody that stumbled on the campus 150 years ago that they admitted into the school, that they had forgotten about until they dragged him up for this." I don't mean to be disrespectful to his family, but that's the way I see it. That's the way it is. If I win the lottery, I'll give them a building to put somebody's name on it, but it wouldn't be someone—it will have some meaning. It has no meaning. The lady that's there now, she wants it that way, Anece McCloud, she wants it that way. They like having people like that around. Okay?

It's time for me to go.

Warren: Okay. All right. Thank you. This has been really wonderful. I could keep asking you questions for hours.

Perry: I have a lot to say.

Warren: But you have given me loads and loads and loads of time, and I'm really grateful.

[End of interview]