Conversations with Theodore C. ("Ted") DeLaney, Jr.

II: "Lexington in the 1960s"

With Molly C. Michelmore, Interviewer

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Transcription: Barbara Muller

Video Production: Dave Pfaff

Series Editor: David S. Peterson

Michelmore: Welcome. My name is Molly Michelmore. I'm an associate professor of American history and the chair of the History Department here at Washington and Lee University. I am joined today by my colleague, mentor, and good friend, Ted DeLaney, for the second of a series of conversations with Professor DeLaney about his life, about Lexington, about Washington and Lee University. Welcome, Ted. Thank you for joining us.

Delaney: Welcome yourself! [Laughter] I'm glad we get to talk.

Michelmore: Oh, I love talking to you.

Delaney: I love talking to you as well.

Michelmore: It's a delight being in your office and chatting, but there are lights here.

Delaney: Right, and I hope the lights don't get too hot for you.

Michelmore: So today we're going to talk about the 1960s, right?

Delaney: Right.

Michelmore: I'm really interested in what the 1960s looked like in Lexington, and I want to start with desegregation. The Supreme Court issues its decision in Brown v. Board in 1954 saying that segregation is inherently unequal. Separate is inherently unequal. The next year they come down with a follow-up decision telling school districts that they need to move with all deliberate speed to desegregate. So did Lexington move with all deliberate speed to desegregate?

Delaney: Lexington did not move with all deliberate speed nor did the state of Virginia, because the state of Virginia's policy is massive resistance, which means we will close our schools rather than desegregate. And in fact, the governor closed schools in three different locales before a federal district judge told him that he didn't have the power to do that. Warren County in northern Virginia was one of those locales, Norfolk was another, and Charlottesville was another. The interesting thing about it is Senator Harry Byrd, whose famous Byrd machine ran Virginia politics, wanted then Governor J. Lindsay Almond to dig his heels in and resist the federal court order to reopen the schools and go to jail. Almond wasn't willing to go to jail, so he complied with the order.

One of the things that we ought to do is go back to Brown v. Board and Brown v. Board II, which is as you know and our audience may not, the "all deliberate speed" thing. One of the most unique stories that I know of has to do with not Lexington but our neighboring town— and I will pronounce it the way natives grew up pronouncing it, Buena Vista—and the dilemma for them, because the dilemma for that town illustrates the big problem.

In 1950, according to the census in 1950, they had 5,216 citizens in Buena Vista; 214 of those citizens were black. The problem with the Plessy decision is to provide separate but equal schools when you only have a handful of children. Buena Vista is also unique because at the very onset of creation for them, they were an independent city, which meant that they were not technically a part of the county. And so they may have thirty to fifty [black] school children, but not likely that number with 214 total black population; maybe thirty on the high side. They've got a two-room schoolhouse and two black teachers over there.

One of the most interesting things that I did as a researcher was to read the school board minutes for all of the locales I was working on. There's a joint meeting of the city council and the school board after the second Brown decision. It's the most extraordinary thing that I've ever read because we sort of historically, in Lexington, we tend to think we're better than those people over there and that's not really true. Actually, the Superintendent of the Schools was allowed to preside over this meeting rather than the chair of the school board. One thing that he does not want them to do is to consider segregation by sexes because this was considered across the South. Well if we've got to integrate our greatest fear is amalgamation, so we will segregate boys from girls instead. And so he starts off "we don't want to do that." He suggests that because Buena Vista cannot afford to go alone or cannot afford to continue with this separate but equal thing, to go on and desegregate. And at best, it's going to be token desegregation.

Michelmore: Right, because the African-American population was so small.

Delaney: Tiny. And so the conversation with the board is incredible because there are even people who are saying things about the moral obligation they have to their black citizens. You're sitting there and you're thinking, "my God, this is 1955." There is this progressive tenor, if you will, to the school board meeting. Then the city attorney wakes everybody up to reality. He says

the governor isn't going to let any locale go independent. The governor is going to require all of the locales to be in lockstep with the massive resistance to desegregation.

Michelmore: And this is in 1955?

Delaney: This is in 1955. How in the hell can you justify operating a school, a separate school, for perhaps thirty kids? You've got a building and two teachers who are teaching one through sixth grade. How do you do that with two teachers? At best it can't be equal.

And so the equal part is an interesting thing to consider when you come across to Lexington. In Lexington there is the only high school and Lexington, unlike Buena Vista, is a town rather than a city. The schools at the time that are in Lexington are jointly owned by the town council and the Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors. Probably about mid-1940s, for the first time, there was a complete high school at Lylburn Downing and it's terribly overcrowded because there are only two buildings, the old building that is now the community center and the very long building that's next to it without the gym.

Michelmore: And this is the African-American high school?

Delaney: This is the African-American high school. The high school is in that long, black building without the gym. There are two or three elementary grades that are stuck there because the old building is too small to house those elementary grades.

When I reach high school, one of the big problems for a black high school is usually you only have two sports; one is football and the other is basketball. Well, there was an excellent football field behind the school that has been encroached upon with the additions to the present Lylburn Downing School, but there was no place to have full-court basketball. Inter-varsity basketball was played in the auditorium space of the old building, so they could only play half court. Suddenly, in 1958, it's a brand new gym! I never realized when I was a schoolboy what was going on.

As a researcher, what I discover is that after the Brown decision, one of the things is an attempt to appease the court, the Congress, the president, whatever, but there's also an attempt to appease the black community because a lot of this is blamed on black activism, the NAACP and other

groups that are pressing, certainly, for desegregation. J. Lindsay Almond is the attorney general in 1954, not the governor then.

Michelmore: When is he elected governor?

Delaney: He's elected governor probably about—it's always the off years, so he would be elected governor probably in '57. I'm not certain about that but probably in '57. Governor Stanley was the governor in 1954. Almond makes a statement to the press that I discovered as a researcher that was just baffling.[1] He figured out that Virginia could both comply with the Supreme Court and maintain segregated schools. Then you scratch your head. How in the hell is he going to do this? The best I can figure is he's talking about complying with Plessy.

Michelmore: So just ignoring Brown and deciding to go with the 1890s precedent?

Delaney: Absolutely. What you have is this idea that somehow you can equalize the schools and so this equalization progresses. My friend William Perry , who was a black principal of the Rosenwald School up in Waynesboro, had been going to the school board year after year after year because they weren't accredited. They had kids, of course, who wanted to go to college and yes, the historically black universities and colleges wanted kids to come out of accredited schools. The reason they weren't accredited is they didn't have a science lab. He had been going time and time and time to the school board, begging for a science lab. The superintendent tells him in 1961, "you don't need to beg anymore. We're building you a new high school." 1961? So there is this great move that's going on to equalize buildings, but then when you go to Lylburn Downing High School in Lexington that has 122 students, your understanding of compliance and equality sort of is difficult.

Here there is an excellent faculty. All of the faculty is either professional or collegiate certified. All of the faculty are serious about what they're doing. But the curriculum for 122 students is not an equal curriculum, so no matter how nice the building looks … And the equipment gets better and better and better. It's like teachers tended to tell me when I was researching, they'd tell that their equipment at the white schools was no different than the equipment they had been using at Lylburn Downing. So there is a curriculum where there are essentially two math

[1] James Latimer, "Separation in Schools Hinted as Still Possible: Idea for State Stresses Equality of Facilities; Official Skirts Details." *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, May 19, 1954, p. A1, cols.8-9, p. A4, cols. 1-2.

courses, algebra 1 and plain geometry, sometimes there's an algebra 2, but there are not options between that. There is one foreign language, and French 1 and French 2 are offered in alternate years, so if you missed it one year you might not get out of high school with a foreign language. There were three science courses, general science, biology, and chemistry. When you think about the comparison with regard to the curriculum at a white school where you would have physics or where you might have pre-calculus or some of those things, those were completely lacking. The equalization thing was like window dressing. "We'll build a new building and it's nice and shiny and everything looks great and everybody will be happy."

The students, of course, realize the difficulty of what the curriculum looks like as they are planning vocations. At this point, there's a real push on the part of black teachers to have almost all the kids to be on college-bound track. Everybody is hoping to have better opportunities than their parents and to be able to graduate and go to college. Places like Hampton Institute were very difficult to get into in the 1960s. Places like Howard University or Virginia State College in the 1960s were extremely competitive. The curriculum had a great deal to do with people's ability to move.

The government is protecting all of this segregation that persists right up until 1965. Nineteen-sixty-five is the year for freedom of choice in Lexington where a few black parents decide our children are going to be getting things and we'll send them to the white schools. There's full-blown desegregation of the schools in 1966. I don't know if I've confused you totally.

Michelmore: No, I'm sort of interested in what that felt like to you as a twelve-year-old, as a thirteen-year-old, right? How old were you when Brown came down?

Delaney: I was twelve.

Michelmore: Do you remember hearing about it? Do you remember people talking about desegregation?

Delaney: Not at all.

Michelmore: What did it feel like in 1956, in 1957? Were you in school when you got the new gym? Did you wonder what that was doing there?

Delaney: I was in school when we got the new gym and by the time I'm in high school, when you take civics classes and that kind of thing, for sure you know about Brown v. Board.

Michelmore: So they taught you about Brown v. Board in the civics classes?

Delaney: Yes, and in history and government classes, yes, but certainly in sixth grade there was no understanding. A lot of the black teachers thought, you know, "this is just talk. It's never going to happen." Other black teachers did take it very seriously. Other black teachers' message to their students is that "you've got to do the very best academic work you can possibly do, because in order to survive when desegregation comes, you're going to have to be extremely competitive." Those teachers who had that message were also hard as nails. So it was sort of a mixed message. A lot of the teachers were terribly fearful of their own jobs because there was the message that when desegregation comes, black faculty [will] get fired and that you need to start searching for new employment.

There are a lot of facets to it that are scary at the time, but there is also a lot of angst by the time I'm a senior in high school about what the hell was going on, particularly at the beginning of my senior year when, all of a sudden, college students at black schools across the South are sitting-in at lunch counters and a kind of activism that was being seen for the first time. Even though the NAACP had been out there doing groundwork since 1910, and there were other civil rights organizations before then, the student activism was something new. One of the things that's incredible that bothers me about the scholarship, even on this student activism, is that I did an essay on student activism where I found sit-in lunch counter demonstrations in the '40s and in the '50s. What happens in Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1960, is not the first one as a lot of history books said.

Michelmore: Right, just the first one white people paid attention to, the national news.

Delaney: But we had television by then and televisions in almost everybody's house by then. National news is something that you're looking at over supper rather than having to fan through a newspaper to see. I think historians have failed with their coverage of those events because they forget that there's this new technology and there were sit-in demonstrations before then.

Certainly my parents and my family had no idea that there were college students who were going to be taking part in what we would certainly call then civil disobedience. Black families, and oftentimes because black parents had to work so hard, the best advice they were giving their children: "don't get in trouble. The worst thing that can happen to you is to go to jail." Suddenly, you've got these kids who are putting themselves in …

Michelmore: The direct line of fire.

Delaney: Yes, to get arrested. It's a real moment of reckoning and certainly a real moment of reckoning in my own life, but it's really odd in Lexington because even though me and my classmates—and there weren't but fifteen others because our class was only sixteen people—me and my classmates were certainly aware of what was going on in the South, but I cannot recall a single conversation that we had together about the sit-in demonstrations and the student activism.

Michelmore: Did you talk about it at home? Did you talk about it with your family?

Delaney: It came up with my family in a way that I had not anticipated. It came up in this way with my family which sort of knocked my legs out from under me. My mother was an overly protective mother probably because she was divorced twice and had five children to care for.[2] And we were poor. Some of my family didn't like to admit that we were poor, but we were poor. I was the oldest one and I certainly know that we were poor.

When I finished high school, black students did not typically take the SATs. In fact, black students took a similar test that was sponsored by the United Negro College Fund. I did end up taking the SAT because I did apply to a Catholic college that required it as well, but there wasn't a dime's worth of difference, as far as I could see, between the tests from the United Negro College Fund and the SAT. They were absolutely the same kind of test. But the interesting thing about the United Negro College Fund test is that they would send the scores out to the pool of historically black colleges and universities. And what they would then do is they would issue scholarships that were specific scholarships that you could use at a specific college. When my scores came in from the United Negro College Fund they gave me the option of a scholarship that could be used only at Morehouse College in Atlanta.

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[2] She had sons Ted and Charlie by her first marriage to Theodore Sr., and daughters Theresa Marie, Janet Dorothea, and Carla Benita with her second husband, Harry J. Morgan. See Conversation I, p, 1, note 2; p. 15, note 10.

My mother was very fearful of racism and the ugliness of the South in her lifetime. She vowed she'd never go south of Roanoke. There was great danger south of Roanoke. The idea that her seventeen-year-old was going to go to Atlanta was pretty hard for her. The idea also that her seventeen-year-old, who did not know that he might be politically an activist, would be sitting-in at lunch counters and going to jail or worse, caused her to say, "You're not going to go down to Atlanta and sit-in at lunch counters and worry me to death." And I was not a defiant kid. The only thing that I could think of at the time was I had a scholarship and we're saying no to a scholarship. You have no money and so this is a problem. Certainly it was a problem for me at the time, but I'm sure that my situation was not unique. I do feel that in retrospect and in hindsight, particularly after getting to know some of the people who made a lot greater sacrifices than I did during this period, that I sort of missed out.

For instance, one of the people that I'm good friends with is a white woman named Joan Browning, who was expelled from college and ostracized from her family during this period of time. She was from south Georgia and she became a civil rights activist. She was even arrested on a Freedom Ride. She was ostracized by her family for thirty years. That's a real price to pay for what your beliefs are. I felt like there are a lot of men and women, black and white, who paid very large prices for their activism, and it was something that, because I was not defiant of my mother, I sort of missed out on. That's one of the realities of growing up during that period.

Michelmore: Did you ever become an activist? You said that you didn't talk about this with your friends in the '50s. Did you become an activist as the freedom movements became more popular?

Delaney: I did. I did become an activist, a local activist. Lexington certainly was a segregated place. I'll put this in a little bit greater context so it stays chronological, at least.

One of the things that happens, as sort of an interlude, is my mother offers me something that was not an option when I was fifteen years old. When I was fifteen years old I wanted to go to seminary and both she and my usually absent father vetoed that. The idea of a celibate priest was something that was beyond them. That was something they would have no part of. After everything seemed to be closing in my face in 1961, "why don't you do that now?" I wasn't as

turned on to doing that then, but there's about seven months of my life, from June 1962 into the end of January 1963, that I'm in a monastery.

When I come home I need a job, and one of the first jobs that I get is at a restaurant. That place that we look at now with oftentimes disdain, a nursing home called the Mayflower, it was pretty much an upscale hotel in the 1960s. On the end, right there on the corner by Jordan Street, was their restaurant and the restaurant was pretty upscale. I ended up with a job there that was a pretty unique job inasmuch as I never dreamed that I would have a job in Lexington where, in 1963, where the relationship between me and my employers race did not matter. Religion did, but race did not matter. There was this Catholic family who had lost, according to them, a couple of hotels during the Depression. They were Northerners who owned hotels in Florida and they ended up in Lexington operating the Mayflower restaurant for the owners of the hotel.

At one point I began to notice black guests in the hotel and was like, what in the world is going on? This is a Jim Crow town and this is 1963. Then one night there are black guests in the dining room and they are accepted by management just as though nothing is unusual. The old man who was in charge of the restaurant, John Spanburg , I asked him, "What's going on here?" I guess this is typical Lexington. Apparently the merchants had gotten together and decided that they did not want Lexington to turn into a Birmingham, Alabama, because 1963 is the firehose year in Birmingham. They had decided to quietly desegregate without any advertisement. There are certainly people who are traveling through the South during the time testing places. These people who are checking into hotels probably are surprised in Lexington, the historic then "Shrine of the South"—I mean, that was even on people's license tags—that you could check into a hotel without any resistance. It certainly was a surprise to, at the time, a nineteen-year-old native that I'm seeing these black people receive service at a place where I'm working that is segregated, technically.

I'm also appalled by some locals who came in to have dinner. These were older people who lived on the same street that I grew up on; people I had known ever since I was old enough to walk. They wouldn't even speak to me. They wouldn't even look at me. My thought was, what's going on with you? Can't you at least say hello? I really had problems with those people at the moment. Why do you think that you have to behave differently to somebody that you know and

have known ever since he was born because you're eating in a white restaurant? So things begin to change in Lexington and begin to change very quietly.

With regard to becoming an activist, my activism doesn't begin until probably around 1964. I had been a Scout leader and the unit I had was all black, but the Scout council was integrated. I met this guy who taught chemistry at VMI [Virginia Military Institute] who was originally from Chicago. His name was Jim Vlazny and he was a real progressive. We found that we also had in common Total Action Against Poverty. They used to have meetings here in Rockbridge County and they had helped to build a water system over in Natural Bridge, especially the Buck Hill area of Natural Bridge, where black families lived. Jim and I would talk about politics and things via Total Action Against Poverty.

Somehow we came in contact with these black women who had wanted to be telephone operators. The local telephone company, which is where the visitors enter is now, Central Telephone and Telegraph Company, was truly a Jim Crow organization. These women had gone down and applied for jobs and they had been given excuses for why they would not be hired as operators. One of them had even been offered a job as a maid there. So Jim and I decided on our own to look into these. This is not with the help of the NAACP or any other civil rights organization. We ended up working with about eight black women who had applied for jobs. I guess in a small town—and I don't remember how we identified all eight of them—but in a small town word gets around and we have eight women to work with.

Michelmore: And this is in 1964?

Delaney: This is roughly '64.

Michelmore: After the passage of the Civil Rights Act or before?

Delaney: It's after the passage of the Civil Rights Act. My memory is cloudy enough. It could have been anywhere between '64 and '67 this is happening. One of the things that is just fascinating about this is that Jim and I go to see the manager of the telephone company. I'm a good bit younger than he was, although he was certainly a young professor at the time. He was like being with an attorney. I mean he had all of the ducks in order and in a row. I was very impressed. He was able to discover that there was a test that operators had to take and none of

these women had ever been offered this test. So we arranged for these women to take the test and they did. They reported to us that a week later they went in and, I think as a group, although I'm not really sure at this point, it was like you passed, you failed, you passed, you failed kind of thing and no real explanation for what they had really done on these tests.

So Jim and I really forced the issue with this. It was beginning to make the manager of the telephone company very uncomfortable and he deserved to be uncomfortable. Ultimately, he decided to hire two of these women. We felt like we had won something. This was sort of a small town operation and, all of a sudden, there are two people who get to be telephone operators. Telephone operators were a big deal then because there were information services and all of those kinds of things. To place a long distance call you really had to go through an operator back in the '60s. We thought we had really scored big. Here are two black women in Lexington who are able to have jobs that would ordinarily have been reserved for white women. Interestingly enough, these were gender-specific jobs as well.

Michelmore: Were they advertised as gender-specific jobs?

Delaney: I can't say that they were but gender-specific jobs were pretty common. My wife discovered in 1974 when she became the Treasurer of the City of Lexington that the Virginia code that describes the duties of the treasurer says "the treasurer, she shall …" So there are gender-specific things that are even written into the code of Virginia. I don't know whether they advertised that the operator jobs were female …

Michelmore: But they only ever hired women.

Delaney: They only ever hired women and, at the time, it probably was difficult to imagine that you would deal with an operator and get a male voice. It was a cultural thing, too. That probably was the large extent to my activism, helping to desegregate the telephone company, which was small potatoes. There was nobody burning a cross in front of my house, and there was nobody turning a firehose on me or that kind of thing, and I certainly didn't go to jail.

Michelmore: But that's a real thing you did and made a real difference in at least two people's lives, if not more.

Delaney: And one of those women, I think, ended up being an operator until she retired, so that makes a difference. Also it's a salary grade up from what she might have otherwise been able to earn.

Michelmore: Did that give you a taste for more activism? Did you continue to be politically active?

Delaney: I became more politically and community active as I grew older. As I grew older, I was involved more and more in community causes, but community causes were not always things that were as dramatic as, say, civil rights activism. In fact, I firmly identified with the local Democratic committee and probably the second thing that I did that was a thing of activism was political.

There had been two black men in the community who had run a couple of different times for city council and had not won. I have to be really careful with what I say about this because one of the men presented an image that I think a lot of the black community felt uncomfortable with, so garnering support for one of those men would have been very difficult. He was not as progressive racially or as forceful as people in the community would like for him to have been. And so I got this idea that maybe the best thing that could happen with regard to a city council race—and all city council people, all Lexington people who run for political office, run as independents—was to have a mass meeting of black people in Lexington and let them decide who they wanted to run as a city councilman, and won a real enemy with one of these men as a result of this suggestion.

There was this mass meeting that took place in the basement of the First Baptist Church and there were a lot of people there. There essentially were three men who were interested in running for city council. One of them had never run before. One of them had his own business and was the local undertaker. His name was Benny Lewis and he won. The assembled group of black people let it be known that he was their preference for candidate. I became his campaign manager and I'm not really sure …

I had started a friendship with Pat[3] at the time. She was eighteen years old and I was seven years older than she was. She ended up on that campaign committee, so that was one of the first things that we did together. Her dad had inherited a house here in Lexington in 1968. He had been career military and they retired here, so her family pretty much settled in Lexington. She and I were very active in this campaign for city council.

The interesting thing about the campaign for city council is that the Washington and Lee community got very excited about it. Faculty members from the Washington and Lee community became involved in the actual campaign. Of course, at the time, all of the faculty members at Washington and Lee were white, and all of the faculty members at Washington and Lee at the time were also male. But some of their wives also became involved in the campaign, which was really, really interesting. There was one deceased chemistry professor whose last name was Desha[4] and Mrs. Desha, who was an old lady, came to at least one or two of the campaign meetings and let it be known that she thought it was high time for there to be a black elected to city council.

Michelmore: Would this have been the first African American elected to the city council?

Delaney: Right, and that year is 1969.

Michelmore: So four years after the Voting Rights Act. Had African-American citizens in Lexington been more or less disenfranchised before that?

Delaney: Well, it was not difficult to register to vote in Lexington in the 1960s. I wonder seriously how difficult it was before then. My maternal grandparents were registered to vote and my grandfather died in 1951; my grandmother died in 1958. I know that they had been registered to vote. My mother was registered to vote.

Registering to vote was very, very odd in Lexington. Even when I registered to vote with an October birthday, the first time I actually was old enough to vote legally was in 1965 because Virginia requires that the registrar close the books a month before the election. If Virginia didn't have that law, I could have voted in the election 1964.

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[3] Patricia Ann Scott (1950 -), Ted's future wife.
[4] Lucius Desha.

Michelmore: Was the voting age then twenty-one or eighteen?

Delaney: Twenty-one. I turned twenty-one on October 18, but that wasn't enough gap between my registration and the election date because it's only about two weeks.

Michelmore: But that would have been the case for anyone. That wasn't just because you were African American.

Delaney: Yes, that would have been for everybody. Registering to vote was almost farcical by comparison. There was no public office where you registered to vote. The city registrar at the time was a woman named Mrs. Tetlow. The Tetlows had an appliance business on South Main Street. You could go in there and you could by a dishwasher or a washing machine or whatever. Well, she was the registrar for the town of Lexington, so you went in there to register to vote. She took time out of the business that she was doing. I can't say that I was treated differently by Mrs. Tetlow. I told her what I wanted and there certainly was no literacy test. All I had to do was fill in a form and raise my hand and swear to whatever oath, so it was easy to do.

The Voting Rights Act, I'm not really so sure that it affected Rockbridge County or the City of Lexington so much. Certainly 1969, there is enough stuff that's happened in the country that at least the local black community is motivated to get out there and vote and, in this case, to elect a black city councilman. That was a lot of fun. That was an incredible amount of fun. I think he served three terms before he decided to step down; that would have been twelve years. Before he died, Doug Harwood,[5] about a year or two ago, had an interview with him. I wrote Doug Harwood an email after the interview and it said, "Doug, did Benny Lewis just not want to talk about the years that he was city councilman?" because there was no place in this long interview. I guess the reporter hadn't known who interviewed him. I never realized that that email would become a letter to the editor. Never write Harwood an email. [Laughter] This man served at least three terms and so it was another example of being locally an activist.

I guess from there we could probably, if you want to, start talking about the campus.

Michelmore: Yes. You mentioned that W&L faculty and W&L faculty wives were interested in this city council race. I was wondering about the attitude of W&L generally towards the things

[5] Editor of the monthly news magazine *The Rockbridge Advocate*.

that were going on in the country, towards the civil rights revolution, towards the black freedom movements. How did that play out on campuses and was there a kind of town/gown division in Lexington?

Delaney: For sure. One of the things that I learned, at least as a scholar, that I did not know in the twenty years that I worked here as a nonprofessional is how much people in the administration and the faculty were activists. For instance, one of the things that you know from your training, and one of the things that I certainly know from studying history myself, is that there were different divisions of white people in Virginia and where they were with regard to this desegregation thing. The most liberal whites belonged to something called the Human Relations Council, which was an integrated group. There was an old dean here who was fairly infamous named Dean Frank Gilliam. I knew Dean Gilliam. I used to do gardening work next door to his place and his place was Belfield. Dean Gilliam obviously was a man who not only was the Dean of Students but a man of some wealth. I was really surprised when I was doing newspaper research to discover that Dean Gilliam had been the president of the Human Relations Council. The Human Relations Council had both black citizens and white citizens on it.

Then, of course, there was—my mind is slipping me—the kind of stealth group, the Committee for Public Schools, I think, is the name of it. There's a chapter in Lassiter's book about it.[6] These people are opposed to massive resistance, but they wanted to be an all-white group because they don't want to sway or push away those segregationists who understand that it's important to have at least token integration.

And so there's a division, for sure, within Lexington of where white folks are, and certainly at Washington and Lee with regard to where white folks are. One of the people that I worked with for a number of years in the Biology Department believed that the civil rights movement was a communist conspiracy, although he was never careless enough to say that in my presence, or I guess he was too polite not to say that in my presence. Certainly others would say, "Did you know that he believed that this is a communist conspiracy?" There were people who were all

[6] Paul Hershman, Jr. "Massive Resistance Meets Its Match: The Emergence of a Pro-Public School Majority." In Matthew Lassiter and Andrew B Lewis, eds. *The Moderate's Dilemma: Massive Resistance to School Desegregation in Virginia.* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1998), ch. 4.

over the place on this. There were people who were all over the place on both the desegregation issue and the parallels to the desegregation issue to co-education would be striking.

What was going on at Washington and Lee in the early ’60s was that it was a very white place. There are people who will still argue that it’s a very white place, but it’s not as white as it was in the early 1960s. There was a student group that’s mostly from the South. You do not have a lot of students in the 1960s who have names that end with vowels. One of the things that I discovered quite accidently during this period is that anti-Semitism was rampant on this campus. All of the fraternity charters were white Christians, so the Jewish students could not join most of the fraternities. There were two Jewish national fraternities on the campus, Zeta Beta Tau and the other one, PΣP are the initials, but I forget whether Phi comes first or Pi comes first in the PΣP. They were national Jewish houses and it’s not until probably early 1970s that the other fraternities removed that clause “white Christians” from their charters.

Michelmore: Was that just in the charters of the sort of specific local chapters of that, or was that in the national charters?

Delaney: In the national charters.

There was a chemistry professor that I became acquainted with when I was fifteen years old who I will quote some of the stuff that he told me. I’ve not done historic research to check out his stories, but I think that there’s enough evidence to support the things that he said. I knew him because of St. Patrick’s Church. He was a really eccentric, very huge guy who taught organic chemistry. His name was Keith Shillington and he was one of our professed bachelors who was here, basically, for almost all of his teaching career.

There’s no way in the world that I would say that Keith Shillington was a liberal or that Keith Shillington was somehow a progressive, but he told me once that when he interviewed, because he was Roman Catholic, near the end of the interview the dean said, “Oh well, you’re just going to teach organic chemistry, so we don’t think you can do any harm.” Arguably he was the first Catholic to be on the faculty and he was hired in the mid-’50s. He used to argue that there was a quota and only a total of thirty Catholics and Jews were accepted a year. He said sometimes it would be fifteen each, sometimes it might be twenty-nine/one, with the other religion having the majority of the admit seats the following year. I don’t know whether that is born out in fact, but

some of the people I've recently talked to about it said that would be really easy to find out. Of course it would, but I haven't taken the time to do that. I did encounter that in conversations with students. In fact, some of the students that I dealt with back then would be surprisingly vocal about their anti-Semitism and sometimes I would offer, "Well, I wonder what you'd say about black people when I'm not around." To me there was always this parallel that was something of a problem.

When Washington and Lee decides to desegregate in 1964, they do it in ways that are somewhat devious. The faculty understood, and certainly President Fred Cole understood, that the board of trustees had to approve desegregation. What the board of trustees essentially does is they dig their heels in and they, as Blaine Brownell argues in his new book on W&L,[7] rather than become the leader among small southern colleges with regard to desegregation, they push to support the status quo. Eventually with this impasse with the faculty about desegregation, they sort of throw it back in the faculty's lap and say that Washington and Lee has never had a policy on segregation and that the faculty may admit any student they deem qualified to Washington and Lee. But then the other side of this is that they veto the idea of it being advertised and even make the argument that to advertise it would discriminate against white people, and that there was to be absolutely no recruitment of black students. The faculty retorts "well, if they don't know we're [not] segregated how are we going to get black students? The trustees, [it's] almost as though if black students are truly interested they will apply and the ones that are qualified will be admitted. What President Cole does is essentially to give the story to the *Ring-turn Phi*.[8] He's not permitted to give it to the general press but he gives it to the *Ring-turn Phi* and it leaks to the press from the *Ring-turn Phi*.

Two years lapse between '64 and the first admission of black students, one in the law school and one in the college. I know the guy who was the freshman that year in'66.[9] He was one of six boys in his household. He lived at home. He transferred out at the end of the year and you might imagine that there was no reason for him to want to stay here. I cannot imagine the fishbowl that he was in when he was on campus and in classes. I've not seen him in many years.

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[7] Blaine A. Brownell. *Washington and Lee University 1930-2000: Tradition and Transformation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017), pp. 257-267,
[8] The student newspaper.
[9] Dennis Haston.

He has two brothers who are on the facilities maintenance crew who still work here, but he transferred out. The other student,[10] who graduated from St. Paul, which is a historically black Episcopalian college down in Lawrenceville, Virginia, that's now closed, managed to graduate Order of the Coif from the Law School and I think he was also on *Law Review*. He did quite well, but his Jewish roommate called and volunteered to give me an interview once, and the Jewish roommate talked about how difficult it was for them to find a place to live together in Lexington. They ended up having to live in the black neighborhood because there were no white landlords who would rent to Leslie. The neighborhoods still became staunchly segregated so that black students were going to have a difficult time living where other students might live.

The next two black students who come to W&L are also local boys. They manage to persevere, and they graduated four years later. Unfortunately, both Linwood Smothers and Walter Blake, who were in the class of 1972, have fairly recently died. Washington and Lee sort of has a slow start with regard to desegregation. I might add, as far as I can remember, both Linwood Smothers and Walter Blake joined the Zeta Beta Tau fraternity, which is the Jewish fraternity.

Michelmore: How aware were you, as a resident of Lexington, as a twenty-something, of the things that were going on at W&L?

Delaney: Very. It was a much smaller community than it is now, not only with regard to the population but vastly smaller with the building plant that's just on this side of the ravine. There's hardly anything that happened on the campus that other people didn't know about.

The campus is also segregated in other ways. Black men were janitors. White men worked on the grounds crew. White men were plumbers. White men were carpenters. White men were painters. I don't know whether there was fear, because these people would have been working class, that these working class people wouldn't be able to get along across racial lines. As I look at the campus facilities maintenance crew now, it's very different. I know very few black people who are janitors there anymore or custodians or whatever the term, and a great percentage of them are women. Certainly there were no women who were doing that kind of thing in the 1960s and the 1970s. The idea that working class people were segregated as far as the jobs that they were doing

[10] Leslie Smith

on the W&L campus was, at least to me, pretty noticeable. I don't know to what extent the faculty was thinking about this kind of thing, but it was certainly there.

Michelmore: OK**.** I think maybe we have time for one other question before we have to get out of here. I was thinking about if you noticed W&L changing over the course of the 1960s, not just in terms of desegregation. Did the students start to look different? Did their hair get longer? Did the [Viet Nam] war interfere in Lexington at all?

Delaney: The war interferes a lot and this is not something I can do very quickly. The war interferes a lot and student activism with regard to the war at W&L begins in the academic year of 1969–1970. Those kinds of changes never happen quickly at W&L.

Michelmore: So that's later than it had cropped up at other places.

Delaney: And Nixon's president. There's not any real anti-war protest that's going on on the campus during the Johnson years. And, as we both know, there are lots of reasons for there to be anti-war protests during the Johnson years.

Michelmore: And there had been at other universities and across the country.

Delaney: Absolutely. The one thing that you do see, and you do see it because it is all male, is "how the hell do I stay out of the draft. Some of the things that students were doing were even dangerous to their health. For instance, I had a work-study student when I was laboratory technician in biology.

Michelmore: What year was this?

Delaney: I had that job from 1964 to 1983. I had this work-study student who was a really skinny lad and he was from Pennsylvania. Every time he would get a notice that was calling him up for the physical exam for the draft, he would write a letter to get the physical transferred to Roanoke rather than going home to Philadelphia or wherever for it. He knew it was going to take weeks and weeks and weeks of red tape, and so he would start fasting. Well, this guy had no body fat at all, and so by the time the physical exam would be scheduled for Roanoke, he would be in bad health. In fact, he told me that the last time he went for a physical exam they were

really concerned about what bad health he was actually in. So there were students who were doing extreme things like that.

Initially, pre-med was a draft-exempt major, so for one period we had more pre-meds than you could shake a stick at. Here's a major that requires organic chemistry and calculus. The history boys usually wouldn't be pre-med, so there are people who are moving from other majors to stay out of the draft. I know one of those people who was in the class of 1970 who practiced medicine about two years after he became a doctor. So people are finding all kinds of ways before there are actually protests.

The first protest at Washington and Lee was almost laughable. It was in front of the dining hall. At this time, classroom dress is a requirement in 1969; 1970 it ends. But in 1969, you've got about fifteen to twenty guys in Khaki pants, shirt and tie, navy blazers, with poster boards that are anti-war slogans on them that are lined up in front of Evans Dining Hall. Two of them have long hair.

Michelmore: Was it a very polite-looking protest?

Delaney: Very polite-looking protest in coats and ties. But then the protest accelerates during that year in ways that become extremely dangerous and extremely interesting for this campus. The faculty created this stupidly, inadvertently. So sure was the administration that W&L students were so conservative that nothing like this could happen at Washington and Lee, the faculty made a really idiotic decision—but the administration started it. It was the first year of the spring term; 1970 was the first spring term.

Michelmore: So April/May of 1970?

Delaney: Right, and it was a six-week spring term. That first year with spring term there's an alumni weekend, a staged referendum, on alumni weekend, for the students. There was a group of students who were pushing to close the university so they could spend the spring in Washington lobbying for the end of the war. So convinced were the administration that this was not going to fly in the student body that they encouraged this referendum on alumni weekend. I can remember picking my paycheck up in the treasurer's office that day and the treasurer saying to me, "What do you think is going to happen in this referendum?" And I said, "The largest

number of students who have ever voted in a student election will vote and the overwhelming majority will vote to close the school down." He said, "You couldn't possibly believe that." I said, "I've been listening to students all week. The conservative students want to go to Myrtle Beach for the spring term. The progressive students want to go to Washington and lobby the end of the war." I don't remember the statistics, but something like 90 percent of the student body voted and over 80 percent voted to close the school. I can remember students who were extremely conservative who wanted to see Viet Nam nuked until it glowed. Faculty met in emergency session one night and vetoed the student vote.

The next morning when I came to work it was a totally different place. Somebody had done some silk screening really quick and people were wearing white tee shirts with this great, big red fist. Some of the conservative students that I knew who wanted to nuke Viet Nam until it glowed were wearing strike tee shirts.

Michelmore: Did they have a blue blazer on over that strike tee shirt?

Delaney: No, not at all. I'm not really sure what happened with classroom dress but I think that it may have been suspended by then. One of the things that a student responded to me was, "I'm really pissed off at the faculty. We voted to close the school down and they didn't respect our vote." One of the students told me that there were seven hundred students in Evans Dining Hall waiting for the outcome of the faculty vote. When they found out, they marched on Washington Hall because they were going to occupy Washington Hall. I said, "Why didn't you?" And he said, "The door was locked." [Laughter] I thought, well that's not stopped them at other schools! So there was this personality, this Washington and Lee personality, that sort of protected the place.

The University of Virginia offered to come and help them close the school down.

Michelmore: Students at the University of Virginia? Were they affiliated with the SDS [Students for a Democratic Society]? No, SDS would have broken up by then.

Delaney: Probably would have broken up by then, but student activists there were willing to help shut the place down. The liberal students were afraid that these outsiders would damage the place, and so then they formed themselves into guards, into security guards, who were assigned

to different places. There was one that I know who was assigned to the president's house and apparently, late at night, Mrs.[Evelyn] Huntley saw him sitting out on the porch. She went out and asked him why he was there, as the story goes, and his response was he was there to make sure that the president's house was safe through the night. It was a cold, chilly night, as spring nights can be in Lexington, and she said, "Well, if it gets really cold out here, knock, because I might want to bring my pansies in." Everybody got a big laugh out of that, but the idea that these activists were also ready to protect the school …

The other facet of it is that the students also decided to educate themselves about politics and the war at the time, and they formed what they called the Bakery Free Library. The donut pastry shop had been where Artists in Cahoots presently is located. After years and years and years of fried donuts in that place, it smelled like donuts. And so they rented this building and they had seminars down in this building. There were two activist faculty members. One of them is no longer here; his name was Henry Sloss . The other one is an emeritus of the Classics Department, Mario Pellicciaro. They were sort of the mentors for these radical students.

The radical students also formed themselves into a regional strike center and I'd have to do more research on this. As I recall, there were four regional strike centers: Brandeis, Berkeley, Washington and Lee, and I can't remember what the fourth one was. The interesting thing is that these student activists who were part of the strike brought in speakers and the speakers were extremely interesting, I mean everybody ranging from Black Panthers to whatever were invited to speak. There were two Black Panthers who spoke in Lee Chapel during that year.

Michelmore: I think I've seen pictures of that.

Delaney: But they were women. The faculty member who was assigned to go to see what was happening said that when these two women arrived and he realized they weren't male, fire-breathing Black Panthers, he was greatly relieved.

The one that I went to hear because he was so infamous and the idea that they brought him in was incredible was Jerry Rubin. Jerry Rubin's talk was well attended. It was in the gym and he brought with him the newly elected sheriff of Berkeley, California, who was a student who had blond, electric hair. So they made quite an appearance when they came in. I was struck by the fact that because of Jerry Rubin's reputation I envisioned that he was going to be a really large

man, and he was about my height and very trim. I was really disappointed when I realized how small he was.

I was even more disappointed by his speech. Even though I can't recall the content of it, one of the things that I kept thinking during the speech is that I'm sure he doesn't believe any of this stuff himself, because his speech was so radical that it would be destructive of what most people took for granted as being good in the United States. I think that because he becomes a fairly conservative businessman later in life, that the speech sort of was a hint to the fact that he really wasn't as radical as he was making out to be back then. His speech was supposed to be at eight and, whether by design or not, he didn't get there until eleven o'clock. I can remember the fact that there were a lot of people who were tired of waiting, and I certainly was one of them, but I wasn't going to miss seeing Jerry Rubin speaking at Washington and Lee because he and Abbie Hoffman were all in the news then.

Nixon was also a part of this because he had mined the harbors at Hai Phong and people were scared that they were going to have to go over to fight a war that they thought was unjust or indefensible.

And so it was sort of an interesting time here. I don't think that I've ever seen that kind of transformation of the student body before. It was like one of those very brief moments. There are oftentimes now that I think the student body, as conservative as that student body normally was, I think the student body now is ten times more conservative than that whole student body was in the fall of 1969.

Michelmore: How so?

Delaney: I think that there is an effort to preserve certain things that they think are worth preserving here that I'm not really sure specifically what those things are. I don't think that most students are as conservative as *The Spectator*[12] by any stretch of the imagination. But I think that most of the students here are economic conservatives, although I'm fairly convinced they're not social conservatives, It seems to me that because there's not a great deal of economic diversity here—certainly an increasing amount—there seems to me to be a lot of tendency, well, "let's protect what Dad has." I think the students from a long time ago were mostly from families who

[12] An independent student newspaper.

were not new rich and families who had some sense of noblesse oblige, and I don't detect that in the present student population. So I'm not really quite sure where I'm going with this right now.

Michelmore: But that's your sense.

Delaney: That's my sense.

Michelmore: That even the conservative students of 1969, who certainly were conservative in relationship to the students at Columbia or students even at UVA, were perhaps more interested in political change, social change, than students that are here now?

Delaney: Right. One of the things that I've always been struck by with American history is that there were those people for whom service and service to the nation and to the common good, was something that they thought they had a responsibility to do because of privilege and the privileges that they had enjoyed. I don't sense that so much anymore. I would love to think that people have some sense of noblesse oblige. I'd love to think that some people have some sense of the common good and lifting everybody else up, but I don't know whether you have that experience with your interaction with students given the things that you teach, but most of the students that I encounter I sort of hope to hear that. When I'm around Shepherd students[13] I oftentimes do, or when I'm around QuestBridge students[14] I oftentimes do, but I think that oftentimes I'm just disappointed.

Michelmore: Well, all right, I think that's probably a good enough place to leave it. Thank you very much for your time. This is really interesting.

Delaney: Thank you.

[End of interview]

[13] Those involved in the Shepherd Poverty Program seek to understand and address issues concerning poverty.
[14] A program to assist low income, high achieving students.

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