

**The David and Barbara Pryor Center  
for  
Arkansas Oral and Visual History**

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**Arkansas Memories Project**

Gordon Morgan  
Interviewed by Scott Lunsford  
February 16, 2006  
Fayetteville, Arkansas

## Objective

Oral history is a collection of an individual's memories and opinions. As such, it is subject to the innate fallibility of memory and is susceptible to inaccuracy. All researchers using these interviews should be aware of this reality and are encouraged to seek corroborating documentation when using any oral history interview.

The Pryor Center's objective is to collect audio and video recordings of interviews along with scanned images of family photographs and documents. These donated materials are carefully preserved, catalogued, and deposited in the Special Collections Department, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville. The transcripts, audio files, video highlight clips, and photographs are made available on the Pryor Center Web site at <http://pryorcenter.uark.edu>. The Pryor Center recommends that researchers utilize the audio recordings and highlight clips, in addition to the transcripts, to enhance their connection with the interviewee.

## Transcript Methodology

The Pryor Center recognizes that we cannot reproduce the spoken word in a written document; however, we strive to produce a transcript that represents the characteristics and unique qualities of the interviewee's speech pattern, style of speech, regional dialect, and personality. For the first twenty minutes of the interview, we attempt to transcribe verbatim all words and utterances that are spoken, such as uhs and ahs, false starts, and repetitions. Some of these elements are omitted after the first twenty minutes to improve readability.

The Pryor Center transcripts are prepared utilizing the *University of Arkansas Style Manual* for proper names, titles, and terms specific to the university. For all other style elements, we refer to the *Pryor Center Style Manual*, which is based primarily on *The Chicago Manual of Style 16th Edition*. We employ the following guidelines for consistency and readability:

- Em dashes separate repeated/false starts and incomplete/redirected sentences.
- Ellipses indicate the interruption of one speaker by another.
- Double underscores indicate two people talking at the same time.
- Italics identify foreign words or terms and words emphasized by the speaker.
- Question marks enclose proper nouns for which we cannot verify the spelling and words that we cannot understand with certainty.

- Brackets enclose
  - italicized annotations of nonverbal sounds, such as laughter, and audible sounds, such as a doorbell ringing
  - annotations for clarification and identification
  - standard English spelling of informal words.
- Commas are used in a conventional manner where possible to aid in readability.
- All geographic locations mentioned in the transcript are in the state of Arkansas unless otherwise indicated.

### **Citation Information**

See the Citation Guide at

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**Scott Lunsford interviewed Gordon Morgan on February 15, 2006, in Fayetteville, Arkansas.**

[00:00:00]

Scott Lunsford: . . . typing up the stuff gets it exactly right.

Gordon Morgan: Hmm. [*Clears throat*] Gordon. *G-O-R-D-O-N*.  
*D*. Morgan. *D* period Morgan.

SL: What does the *D* stand for?

GM: *D* stands for Daniel. Gordon Daniel Morgan.

SL: Okay.

GM: Okay.

Franklin Everts [Camera Operator]: One second please.

[Tape stopped]

[00:00:21] SL: Did we get that?

FE: Yeah, we got all that. I just paused after that.

SL: Okay.

FE: So now we've got speed again. We're good, Scott.

[00:00:26] SL: Okay. So we're doin' [doing] this for the Barbara and David Pryor Arkansas Center for Oral and Visual History [David and Barbara Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History]. And it'll be archived in the Special Collections Department in Mullins Library at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. Um—we will take some of this material that you

and I talk about today, and I'll use it for a—a video presentation at the [2006] Silas Hunt Legacy [Award Celebration] event, which you have been asked to participate in, and you are an awardee—uh—for the event—uh—in the inaugural batch [*GM laughs*] of awardees. You have—you're among very distinguished company and—um—we're thrilled that you are, first of all, willing to participate in the event and also puttin' [putting] up with me durin' [during] this interview process. So I can't thank you enough.

GM: Thank you.

SL: You'll have to be a little patient with me.

GM: That's all right. I can do it.

[00:01:30] SL: Um—I—I have been reading your book, [*The*] *Edge of Campus [A Journal of the Black Experience at the University of Arkansas]*. I have not finished all of it, so I—I'm pretty familiar with the first half of it. But before we get to the whole University of Arkansas portion of your life, I really wanna [want to] start back with your very earliest memories of your childhood: where you grew up, what the conditions were like at the time of your childhood, what the community was like, what the—uh—how the—uh—society was at that time. So we can kind of maybe work on the progression . . .

GM: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . to the present. [*Unclear words*] I'm sure you have a very rich history, so let's start with—you were born in Mayflower, Arkansas.

[00:02:28] GM: Born in Mayflower in 1931—thirty-first of October.

Uh—my dad [Roosevelt Morgan] had been kicked off the plantation [Little's Farm] that was about five miles, I guess, west—uh—to the Arkansas River, and he had been evicted from the plantation for asking for receipts whenever they took something up at the commissary, which was a little store on the plantation. Mama [Georgia Morgan] was pregnant with me. She already—they already had one son—eh—my older brother [Thomas Morgan]. So they moved to Mayflower—uh—about seven, eight miles east, and up in the highlands. And—uh—we didn't have very much—uh—to—to work with. The person whose farm that my daddy was supposed to work on didn't have any money, and he couldn't afford anybody. So we stayed there maybe a couple of years, and by that time, my grandfather [Silas Morgan] had—uh—uh—on my mother's side—had a farm in the foothills of Arkansas in Faulkner County, and he took on my father as a kind of a tenant and—uh—they lived in this log cabin. By now, my brother and myself and my parents lived in

this log cabin on Beaverfork [Lake]—uh—about five—five miles outside of Conway. And—uh—in that cabin a couple of other children were born—and—uh—two more sisters [Geraldine Smith and Bobbie Dewberry]. By the time my brother and I reached about—he w—he would be about six, and I would be about five—they decided we needed to—to move to town, to Conway. And the main reason for doing that was so that we would be close to a school. [00:05:00] Now my mother had been a schoolgirl teacher, starting teaching in country schools when she was about sixteen years old. And she taught for three or four years—uh—but then—uh—when she started having four children—had four kids—that became inconvenient, and we moved to town, and the teaching field was hard to get into in Conway. So she lost her job as a schoolteacher. You didn't have to have a bachelor's degree in those days to teach. And so she became a domestic servant for about two or three dollars per week. And—uh—so we lived in Conway for about seven years before we bought a house and lived in that house for about six or seven years. And then my dad bought a farm—a little farm—fifteen acres. And—uh—that's where we finished growing up—on this little acreage, just in—outside of Conway. Uh—we were not very far from school, maybe a couple of blocks

in either case. And we all finished high school. My brother finished before me and went to college down at Pine Bluff. And—uh—I was next in line, so I sorta [sort of] trailed him.



Growing—growing up in Conway was not all that difficult. We did polish shoes, and we did other kinds of work. Uh—I do recall that my father insisted—uh—when we were early teenagers that we stay out of school about a month every year in order to pick enough cotton to buy shoes and other necessities. So we ne—we didn't get a full year of schooling for a few years that we were in high school.

[00:07:25] SL: Did that—how—how were the—what—what was the administrative end of that? Did that keep you from getting a high school degree, or did you just have to work . . .

GM: You had to work . . .

SL: . . . make up that work?

GM: You had to make the work up and—and work a little harder.

Most of the kids in my family were fairly good students—uh—and so we didn't have any trouble making up—actually, did not have a lot of competition because the school only went from—it was a—by our time—uh—it was a grade one through twelve. But for some of that time, it was only grade one through nine. And before I reached high school the students, upon reaching grade

eight or nine, thought they had finished school. They considered that they had finished school and were ready to hit the job market. Well, our folks wouldn't let us quit at grade nine. Uh—and so we had to go on through high school. My high school was the largest—had the largest graduating class in the history of the high school, which it was only ten years by the time I graduated. Uh—and it had fifteen graduates. [00:08:49] That was the size of the class. There was a girl in class that married a—well, she got pregnant, to make a long story short. And the rules of the [clears throat] school were—were then that if—if the girl got pregnant she could not stay in school. And if she stayed in school she could not be an honor student. So this girl, whose name I shall never forget—she is—uh—deceased now—was named Katie Belle Harpole. Katie Belle always stood out way ahead of me in terms of academics, in terms of everything else. Well, I was kind of at the low end of my class in terms of raw ability and any other kinds of—uh—talent. But this girl was really outstanding. But she got pregnant, and once she got pregnant, it opened the opportunity for me. And so I could move forward—uh—since I didn't have to contend with the talent of—of—of Katie Belle. [00:09:59] So I was able to get the valedictorian scholarship, which was a one hundred dollar

scholarship for the year at UAPB [University of Arkansas Pine Bluff]. So that paid the tuition—uh—fifty dollars per semester, I believe—could've been on quarters. But you had one hundred dollars to cover your tuition. [00:10:25] Otherwise, you—in—in—in addition, you'd have to get a job and work. My job was working in the sociology department as a student and keeping up with their records and—and—uh—proctoring examinations and things like that. So I gained a little notoriety—uh—there as—as they used to call me "Little TC." In one of those books there that you see there, there's a book—one—I think the one in black—that is named—uh—that this man, Tilman Cothran, was a very distinguished graduate of the University of Chicago [Chicago, Illinois]. That's where he got his Ph.D. And I was so proud to work in Dr. Cothran's office. And the students on the campus, since I tried to move around like Dr. Cothran, they used to call me "Little TC." And—uh—that worked out okay. Bec—I didn't—I didn't know that I wasn't as smart as Dr. Cothran, so I had a little swelled head, so I didn't take any notes and—and stuff and—and—uh—didn't make as good grades as I should have. But it was a good experience. So I did okay in college—graduated with—uh—minor honors but not outstanding. And—uh—from that time on it was—it was a—but as far as having

difficulty growing up, we had—uh—we didn't have all that much difficulty, because we think the whole situation was flat. So if—if the entire thing was flat, you didn't have much competition. Outdoor plumbing, leaky houses, and—and—uh—part-time work, polishing shoes and all those kinds of things.

[00:12:36] SL: Well, back then, that's [Great] Depression era.

GM: It was Depression. I . . .

SL: So it wasn't—I mean, I—let's go back to—um—uh—  
Mayflower . . .

GM: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . and your father losing his job and—and, I mean, that was going on everywhere, even across race.

GM: Exactly.

SL: I mean . . .

GM: Exactly.

SL: . . . the whole country was . . .

 GM: You had about thirty-some-odd percent of the entire country that was outta [out of] work . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

GM: . . . from about 19—I would say about 1930 until 1941, when World War II opened, so it was not unusual. So we did not suffer any more than anybody else. I can recall Mama making—

uh—our shirts out of sugar sacks and—and other kind—flour sacks. And one of the things that [*clears throat*] sort of got to me—I must've been about the ninth or tenth grade, and she made a sugar-sack shirt, and that sack has such strong dye in it that the—that it wouldn't—wouldn't bleach out, and so you ended up wearing a shirt to school that says, like, Godchaux's Sugar or something. [*Laughter*]

SL: Well, now—see today that would probably be popular. [*GM laughs*] You'd just probably pay thirty dollars for a T-shirt that had that on it, but [*laughter*—well, that's—so—now tell me—so y'all were living—you got to Conway and—um—when you bought—when your—first of all, how is it possible under those conditions that y'all—that your father could wrangle a way to even buy fifteen acres? I mean . . .

[00:14:33] GM: Well, this is—this came after we'd been in Conway quite a number of years. We moved to Conway in 1935. My sister was about five months or six months old—the baby . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

GM: . . . was. And my brother and I were just school-aged. He was eligible to go to the first grade. My mother had started working in domestic work across town, as we said. And my father was doing whatever he was doing, like common labor. Well, what

happened was nobody was left to look after the children. Now my aunt's brother and her husband had kids about the same age as we—we were, but this aunt could look after the two little girls in our family. [00:15:22] My brother was going to school, so that left me for the most part without anybody to go. So I was not quite old enough to go to school. But nobody was keeping records. And you had this teacher named Mrs. Madison, who said, "Well, let the boy come on to school with the first gra—in the first grade." My brother was in the first grade, so I went to the first grade and was crying and so on. And Mrs. Madison said, "Well, you sit on my knee." So I must've sat on Mrs. Madison's knee for a whole semester. Anyway, she would give me cookies and—and some—uh—you know, suckers and things to kinda [kind of] keep me quiet. Well, what happened was I learned my ABC's and how to count and how to write a little bit in the first grade. So the next year was a real problem. "How are you going to go? Are you gonna [going to] be promoted to the second grade and be in the same grade with your brother?" And this went back to my parents, and—and—uh—they decided, "Well, maybe we'll just let him repeat the first grade because it's not good to let your—you be in the same grade with your older brother."

SL: Your older brother. Uh-huh.

[00:16:44] GM: So they had me to repeat the same grade—uh—even though I knew the content of grade one. The only thing was that Mrs. Madison no longer gave me any cookies and suckers.  
[Laughs]

SL: You got no slack.

GM: That's right. [Laughs] So that's a—so I fell back in line with . . .

SL: [Unclear words]

GM: And it didn't—it didn't damage me, anyway. I'm glad I had to repeat the first grade because—uh—I didn't gain gr—ground on my brother. [*Scratching sound from bumping microphone*]

SL: Uh-huh.

GM: But we did not have—uh—any real problem.

SL: Oh, be careful about touching your . . .

GM: Okay.

SL: . . . mic there.

GM: Mh-hmm.

SL: Go ahead.

GM: We didn't have any real problems of hardship or even—uh—race problems of any consequence. Uh—I don't remember many—uh—that I could—that really hardened us because in—in—in—uh—Faulkner County at that time, we didn't have over about

fifteen hundred blacks, because the black population thins out after leaving Little Rock. And headed west and headed north they get pretty few. So Conway didn't have much of an Afro population, even then. So—uh—I wouldn't say it was harmonious, but it's not something that we worried all that much about.

[00:18:18] SL: So there weren't any noted confrontations?

GM: Not really. You had some teenagers that got into a few fights at the county fair.

SL: Mh-hmm.

GM: But—uh—that happened only once or twice. I would say that relations were pretty, you know, benign. You did—basically you stayed on your side of town. And they stayed on their side of the town, although there were a few people that were in both sides of the town for various reasons or the other. But we essentially got along okay.

[00:19:01] SL: So—but there were—it was still definitely segregated, I mean.

GM: It was def—you could see the segregation.

SL: I mean, you still had the—did you see the different water fountains and . . .

GM: We never saw any—any black fountains in our area.

SL: Uh-huh.

GM: And—uh—you know, separate fountains. Everybody knew where to get a drink of water if you needed a drink.

SL: Uh-huh.

GM: But as far as the county courthouse having two sets of drinking fountains and the bus stop having two sets of drinking fountains and so forth, we didn't see that although everybody knew that you were supposed to go to the back of the bus and—and—and do whatever you were supposed to do. Yes, the segregation was definitely there.

SL: Uh-huh. Now your . . .

FE: Scott, sorry to interrupt. Your reactions are close to [*unclear words*].

SL: Oh, okay. Okay.

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:20:02] SL: Now your mom and dad, though—different generation—did they have—I mean, did they talk to y'all about—or in your upbringing did they make it clear to you that you were supposed to be over here and not over here or . . .

GM: They never . . .

SL: I mean, did they give you a set of . . .

[00:20:21] GM: I do not remember any rules that they gave us about

how to behave among quote "white" people or the other people—somehow you were supposed to know that you don't go in the front door of the cafe to get a hamburger. Go to the back door, and people will know that you want hamburgers or something. There was nothing to confront, in other words, at least in our area. So we didn't have that confrontation experience. As far as other activities—now let's take during the county fair season. We had the black exhibits. They did have separate exhibits, and I won two or three of those over the years for little exhibits that I put in and my sisters and so forth.

[00:21:28] But as far as having the big-time segregation and separation that led to confrontation of the kind that you had in so much of the Deep South, we didn't—I don't remember any of that. Now when I was polishing shoes approximately at age thirteen or maybe it could've been fourteen—in the downtown barbershop, which several of us did—I—and it was interesting because you were invisible—I went to—at one time I was in this barbershop, which was about the size of this room, and it was a four-chair barbershop and, of course, downtown on kinda Main Street. And I would go to my stand in the back of the barbershop and polish shoes of whomever brought shoes. Well, we had to—there was a hamburger joint nearby that you had to

go and go to the back and get a hamburger. And they put it in one of these little nickel bags that you—and you carried it back to your shoeshine stand. And I was back in my shoeshine stand, and after I finished my hamburger, I took this brown bag [*makes blowing sound*] and blew it up. And the barber—his name was Johnson—had—was shaving somebody, and they had the razor right there. [Gestures to throat]

SL: Oh!

[00:23:16] GM: And I burst that bag. [*Laughs*] Pow! And it was really something because the walls were slick, and the sound bounced off the walls. And I don't know how this barber kept from cutting this man's throat. But, anyway, the guy said—I don't know what they called me—Gordon? I may have had a nickname. Let's see, "Morgan, get your stuff and leave. Don't ev"—and then he says, "don't even bother to get your stuff. Just leave anyway." [*Laughs*] So I left and—but that was really—it was—that's the only thing that I had . . .

SL: Was that your last day there or . . .

GM: That was my last day. They fired me on the spot. And then I couldn't get another job polishing shoes except in a black barbershop. And that was—I did that for a couple of years, but that's the only incident that I had. But most of the people were

okay. Now one of the guys that was a barber was the brother of the owner of Ward Body Works, the bus . . .

SL: Bus company.

[00:24:34] GM: Bus company. And [Dave] Ward was really big, and his brother [Burl Ward] was kind of a drunkard and a ne'er-do-well, and he was a barber. He should've been more than what he was, but he was cutting hair in that barbershop at that time. Well, to make a long story short, about 1985 or something, I'm sitting at the university, and I was teaching a graduate class in sociology of education, and we had the people to tell who they were and so on and so—this young man in class introduced himself, and he said, "I'm something Ward." And I say, "Where are you from?" And he says, "Conway." And I went on to tell them about his daddy and so forth, being the barber in this shop. He said, "Well, how did you know that?" I said, "I used to shine shoes in that OK Barbershop." And then I pointed my finger at the students. I said, "Now you let this be a lesson to you. You better be good [*SL laughs*] to your shoeshine boy because he may be on your doctoral dissertation committee."  
  
[*Laughs*]

SL: That's right.

GM: That was . . .

SL: That's right.

GM: So . . .

SL: That's so good. That's a great story.

[00:26:00] GM: . . . so we had that—and later on, his sister got a



degree from us, and I had her in class. So we had some good experiences. My mother, in fact, before I was born—or maybe it was shortly after—but she attended classes at—then—it was then called Arkansas State Teachers College. They had some kind of a—oh, teacher classes that every—all teachers had to attend. And she actually attended classes over at the state teachers college before 1930. All that history is forgotten but—and somebody that later became prominent in state education was the instructor. But Conway was sort of different. It was—I still say it doesn't have an identity because it's close to Little Rock, and it's kinda hard to get an identity. So not a lot went on in Conway during my time anyway.

[00:27:18] SL: Throughout our talk, I'll ask you to kind of assess what was going on with the rest of the state and the rest of the country and how that compared with your experiences at that time. Do you think that you were in kind of a [pause]—well, a place with no identity? But at the same time, I mean, compared with what was going on with the rest of the country, how was

Conway in that context?

[00:27:49] GM: I would say that [*clears throat*]*—*that the rest of the—well, let's take the South—well, take Arkansas first. What I've described in Conway, I believe about Conway could be said about three-fourths of the places in the state of Arkansas, because everybody had discovered it was very difficult to operate in a community if you're gonna be at everybody's throat. So you needed to have—work out patterns of agreement or patterns of cooperation, something to cut down on the extent of conflict. So even in the delta portions, you see incidences of race intolerance. They are spikes. They're not the everyday kind of activity because you couldn't operate communities if you didn't have a degree, a sort of harmony and understanding. So this degree of understanding, I think, was fairly common throughout much of Arkansas, throughout much of the South, and throughout much of the nation. [00:29:15] Now the sociologists called this various names, but the one that sticks out in my name—in my mind was the idea of caste. So they said you had a color-caste, and this says "If colored, do this. If non-colored or white, do this." So the—there was not—it's—everything was regulated so that everybody knew exactly what to do. And this kept down a lot of conflict between them. So

the issues were issues of conflict, such as—who—let's see, Rosa Parks in [19]55 saying, "I don't think I want to sit at the tail end of the bus anymore. I want to sit at the front of the bus" or wherever. Now, you see, she didn't agree with the pattern any longer, and so that's the kind of thing that causes conflict—when people ignore the patterns that are—have been established.

SL: But, still, I mean . . .

GM: I'm not saying that you need to agree with the patterns, but I'm saying the more patterns that you have that people understand, the less the conflict.

[00:30:48] SL: In your household as you were growing up, and even though they were not the conflict that was going on, there was still—did you sense a repression? Or was there—did you start to sense that there was something unfair about that situation? Or was it just the way it was, and it didn't really enter . . .



[00:31:14] GM: Well, I would say it was the way it was, but as far as feeling, for instance, that I can't do anything or whatever I want to do because I am black or colored, as we used the word then—I didn't—that wasn't—if I wanted to be a doctor, then I would study hard to go to Meharry Medical school or Howard [University] medical school. If I wanted to be something else, you had the equivalent schools that you could go to even if not

going to the Anglo schools. If you—whatever you wanted to do, you had an option within the black community, nationwide, that you could do. So that kept down a lot of conflict. They call it the operation of parallel societies. So what you want on your side of town, we have on our side of town—may not be of the same quality, but you could have the same thing. And so that helped to keep down a great deal of the conflicts, so we didn't have to spend a lot of time worrying about whether—what you wanted to do or what you could not do—at least we didn't. Now



I will say that there were people that were ambiguously placed—we call 'em [them]—they were called a "tragic mulattos"—these people that were half-placed between white and black and didn't know exactly what to do. So they were in all kinds of problems that created kinds of problems for them. But most of us have worked out ways of being whatever we wanted to be or could be within the context that we were living.

[00:33:28] SL: So the—those that shared a racial heritage—the mulattos—were they equally—were they—was it troubling on both the black community and the white community?

GM: I don't think . . .

SL: The two communities [*unclear words*] . . .

GM: . . . I don't think so because—and I fault a lot of these scholars

for bringing up the tragic mulatto problem because every black family of long-standing in this country had those kinds of people in the family—two or three of 'em or one or somebody was always in that category. We certainly had them in—on both sides of my family. [00:34:18] And it was not uncommon—you had these people in the community that were ambiguously placed, and a few of them acted crazy, but most of them did not. So I don't think that being between poles was as difficult as Richard Wright said it was for Bigger Thomas in his books, *Black Boy* [*A Record of Childhood and Youth*] and *Native Son* [*The Biography of a Young American*]. Bigger Thomas was that kind of person, and he went crazy. But I don't think it was all that much of a problem for the majority of them.

[00:35:12] SL: Okay. So were—you get through high school. And now, if I remember right, there wasn't any real legal requirement for anybody to go past eighth or ninth grade in Arkansas back then, that your public schooling after that point in time was—it was voluntary.

GM: Could stop. Yeah. Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

SL: I mean . . .

GM: That's true.

SL: And if the—and that was probably because it was, I would guess,

an agricultural-based society that—left over from that and people needed help with the family farms and . . .

GM: That's certainly true.

SL: . . . whatever businesses were going on and . . .

GM: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

[00:35:58] SL: They just expected the children to jump into the business of whatever the family had going at the time. So—but you stuck it out and your family—I guess your family—all of your family . . .

GM: Yeah, my brother went to college before me, and then I went and my sister went, and my baby sister decided she didn't want to go until very much later. We had a college graduate or two on my father's side, one or two teachers, and one or two on my mother's side, so it was open. My mother went to college—a preparatory school at [Arkansas] Baptist College in Little Rock. Her sister went to Philander Smith College. So, yes, the educational option was one that we sort of took advantage of. But others could drop out and go to work. So—and a lot of them did that. But you're absolutely right. There was no requirement that you stay in and finish high school. And, in fact, it was not required that teachers have a bachelor's degree until around about 1955 in the state of Arkansas. And my high school—my

elementary school teacher and I graduated from college during the same year. [*Laughter*]

SL: That's good. You know what? I need to take a break.

GM: That's all right.

SL: Just . . .

[Tape stopped]

[00:37:47] FE: We are rolling, Scott.

SL: Okay, great. So if we could—I—I'm just not quite ready to leave your household yet when you were growing up. I have this crazy notion that folks kind of—their basic building blocks are kinda set in place before they really can remember anything—just the way they're handled early on—first, you know, four or five years of their lives. And that stuff that happens in that five to ten years of age kind of sets a path for where we end up. I don't know why I just . . .

[00:38:35] GM: Well, you may be right. I don't know.

SL: . . . I mean, I—I'm not saying that it determines everything, but I do think that you must've had a really supportive family life—one that was not—I don't know—anyone that can go to college [*GM laughs*] and obtain the degree of educations that you've got [*GM laughs*] and to be as productive as you've been in this society under the adverse conditions of growing up, first of all, in

the Depression era—I know that that—my parents went through that. They didn't actually grow up in that. They were already married at that time, but that affected their lives, their—every decision they made, I think, was impacted by just surviving the Depression era. So I'm curious.

GM: Mh-hmm.

SL: I mean, the—I'm also a fisherman.

GM: That's all right.

SL: I like to fish.

GM: That's all right. We fished.

SL: And we fished in Beaver Creek.

GM: Mh-hmm.

SL: At Conway.

GM: Mh-hmm.

[00:39:42] SL: And I was wondering, was that creek always running or was it—did it dry up in the summer or . . .

GM: Well—well, it's Beaverfork . . .

SL: Beaverfork.

GM: . . . was five miles outside of Conway . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

GM: . . . and it was the—it connected to the Arkansas River. We called it the Cadron [Creek]. And then it kind of made a little

curve and became a little bit of a stream, and we fished in that. And that's where—but it was called Beaverfork. Now, my grandparents lived out there and—on Beaverfork, and—as I said, my dad—my granddad owned some acreage out there closing in on a hundred acres that later got flooded into Lake Beaverfork, which is a big lake in central Arkansas now. So we—I don't remember anybody saying, "We are poor." But we could go in our own community and see people much worse off than we were. Now we didn't ?have?—we didn't have very much, but I will not say that our situation was very desperate. It didn't affect what we thought—certainly didn't affect what I thought of what we could do or what we could be. Now when my—the rent that we paid in Conway for the first six or seven years that we were there was on the order of one dollar per week, and the house was kinda falling down and so on, but other houses were falling down. So it was not all that much of a problem. Parents never told us what we could not do. [00:41:58] They insisted that we go to Sunday school and church and be in school every day and make sure that we got our lessons. But as far as saying, "You can't do this. You can't do that. Don't expect to do this or the other." I asked my father somewhere along the way—we call him Papa—"Why didn't you take us to the cities like



your several other brothers did at the opening of World War II?"

And he said that he didn't think that we would've survived in Kansas City [Missouri] and Detroit [Michigan] and St. Louis [Missouri] and all the other places where his brothers went and carried their families. So he said, all things considered, we could do better, he thought, by sticking it out in Conway. I think he was right because when you look at the statistics from all of his brothers and their offspring that are approximately our ages, they didn't do quite as well. Some of 'em went to jail. Some of 'em are dead. Some of 'em did other things. But I think they didn't survive as well as we did, so overall I think with the limitations we may have done better staying in Conway than they did by heading to the big cities.

SL: It gets complex.

GM: Mh-hmm, it is complex, yeah.

SL: The density increases.

GM: Mh-hmm.

[00:43:54] SL: Okay. Yeah, I remember my dad telling me that they met in Cass, Arkansas, on the Mulberry River.

GM: Yeah, I know.

SL: And they—he used to fish as a means of food. I mean it was not a recreation thing. I mean, that was something that they put on

the table. So I don't know—I would assume having some land and you probably had a garden and . . .

GM: Yeah, we—every . . .

SL: . . . everyone did.

[00:44:23] GM: Everybody had a garden, and Mama was a good gardener, and she knew how to raise beans and sweet potatoes and all that kind of stuff. So it was not a matter of not having enough food. I don't think any of us ever went without enough food. We just didn't have all that much money. And so—but at the opening of World War II, more money started coming in. My brother and I were big enough to make a little bit of money, and we polished shoes out at State Teachers College. You had the offices out there, and they had this good leather, and they needed all that leather polished. And we made good money. We'd call it good money. But by 1947, after the war and everything, my brother had accumulated about five or six hundred dollars. I'd accumulated four or five hundred dollars, and this money was used by my father to make the down payment on this farm, which only cost thirty-five hundred dollars, so we could pay a thousand dollars—a five hundred or whatever it was, and get fifteen acres and an old house on it, which we managed to improve. So that's—it gave us a lot more

leeway and more options owning your own acreage and so forth.  
So we pulled up a notch by that. So we didn't have it all that  
bad as far as food and shelter compared to some of the others.

[00:46:02] SL: Okay, so let's get to college now. You're at Arkansas  
AM&N [Agricultural, Mechanical, and Normal College] . . .

GM: Right.

SL: . . . in Pine Bluff.

GM: Mh-hmm.

SL: This was a—this was the option that the "colored" or black  
community had . . .

GM: Mh-hmm, mh-hmm.

SL: . . . if they wanted to go to college.

GM: Exactly.

SL: And Philander Smith [College, Little Rock]. And then there was  
a place over . . .

GM: It was Shorter [Junior College, Little Rock].

SL: . . . in Oklahoma.

GM: Oh, Langston University . . .

SL: Langston.

GM: . . . in [Langston,] Oklahoma.

[00:46:27] SL: Uh-huh. And there was another place—Shorter.

GM: In—you had, Shorter College—these are private—Shorter,

Philander Smith, and Baptist were private colleges—religious colleges in the Little Rock area. But the state college for blacks was AM&N College.

[00:46:48] SL: And what prompted you to go there rather than . . .

GM: Well, we didn't . . .

SL: . . . Philander Smith . . .

GM: These others—Philander Smith had a better reputation than the state college, and the tuition was higher, so we—if you wanted to minimize, you know, the tuition, go to AM&N. If you're gonna be in what we call the bourgeoisie, go to Philander Smith, which actually had less than AM&N, because—but you had a better—you know, it's like going to Harvard [University, Cambridge, Massachusetts] or going to U of Arkansas.

SL: Right.

GM: You pay for that little bit of name that goes with it, but you didn't get any better education.

[00:47:36] SL: Before I—you mentioned going to church every day—or every Sunday when you were growing up. Were you singing in the choir back then?

GM: Ah, yes, all the kids sang in the choir. But in—even if you couldn't sing, but if your girl—if you're a guy and your girl was in the choir, you had to be in the choir. And so—and the girl and

the boy—you know, it's kind of—who cared whether you could really carry a note or not? You did the best you could. But that was an activity that so many of us did enjoy participating. I was happy when I got to Pine Bluff and had had the little experience in singing with the choir. And I will be honest—if I had been able—I had a lotta [lot of] guts, and if I'd been able to get up to a hundred and forty pounds, I was going out for the football team. [*Laughs*]

SL: But you didn't make it?

GM: I couldn't get to a hundred and forty.

SL: So the coach didn't want anybody less than . . .

[00:48:37] GM: He didn't, you know. He had one or two out there right at a hundred and forty. But it was getting dangerous. I never had much talent anyway, but I had guts. So I said, "Well, what activity can I get in? I'm gonna go out for the choir." So I went out for the choir, and you had a hundred people coming out—going out for the choir during my freshman year.

SL: Wow.

GM: And they—some of 'em—I had never had a music lesson in my whole life. And some of these guys were from Memphis [Tennessee] or St. Louis or Kansas City, and the big cities where they'd had some music. A hundred kids went out, and they

published the list of the people that made the choir, and my name was one of the six freshmen that made it, and I was so happy.

[00:49:27] SL: How did you do that? Just . . .

GM: I don't know. The . . .

SL: . . . you got your bluff in on 'em?

GM: Well, I don't know what happened. [*SL laughs*] But years later—three or four years later, we had—gave a concert in Little Rock, and my mother came down, and father came down to hear the concert 'cause [because] we were only thirty miles from Little Rock. So they came down to hear the concert. I think it was at Baptist College or somewhere. Anyway, at the end the conductor was going around just kinda mingling with the people, and came to my folks, and they introduced themselves. He introduced himself, and he said, "Now was your boy or girl in the choir?" And they told him, "Gordon Morgan." And he—"Oh, yeah, yeah, I know Morgan. I know that little guy sitting over there. He's kind of interesting and so—but that kid is not all that great a musician, but he's got all kinds of guts, and he will try anything." And the conductor kind of took me under his wing, and I think he gave me a little bit of a boost because I wasn't that good of a tenor in those times. But I enjoyed that and did it

for three or four years.

[00:50:50] SL: You know, there—where do you think you got that guts from? Do you think you got it from your dad's side or your mom's side or—I mean, that's really something that people—it's kinda hard to describe . . .

GM: It is hard to describe.

SL: . . . they can latch on . . .

GM: It is.

SL: They can latch onto it, and they appreciate it.

GM: Yeah.

SL: And it does open doors. It does.

GM: It—a lot of people claim that that's what they lacked, but they had said I had guts all along, even in high school. Believe it or not, I've played seventeen games of high school football, and you had to have guts. And you didn't shy away from anybody, and you didn't—and you did what you could and then didn't look back. And I think that helped a great deal. So I don't know whether that came from Dad's side or Mama's side, but they all seemed to have had kind of some "get-up-and-go" to them. And I guess that much was inherited. And what you don't have in natural talent you just make it up in other kinds of guts, I guess.

SL: That's probably one of those things that was given to you before

you knew it.

GM: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

[00:52:17] SL: Okay. So you're at—you're in Pine Bluff now.

GM: Mh-hmm.

SL: Now is Pine Bluff—I—that's gotta [got to] be a different community than Conway.

GM: It is. It is. And it was at that time badly segregated and you could draw a line between the communities. The college was in the black side of town—very bad part of town, and so forth. Lot—the numbers game was much bigger, because you had tons of people that—see, Pine Bluff is in the—kind of on—in the Delta, not completely, but it's on the verge of being in the Delta, where you have the strength of the Arkansas black population. And it was different from Conway, but you stayed, again, in—on your side of town. I never went into the so-called white part of town while—during the four years approximately that I was in Pine Bluff. Not that I was afraid to go, but just didn't have any reason to go. I wasn't cutting yards or anything, so I didn't have to go into that part of town. And so many other students didn't either. But it was a different experience.

[00:53:47] SL: So did you sense that there was just less tolerance between the two races or . . .

GM: I think . . .

SL: . . . the two communities?

GM: I think there was—everybody knew, I think, there was intolerance and to, again, reduce conflict—just do what you have to do and keep your head down. And that may have taken away from some of your intentions or spark, but it wasn't enough to kill it altogether.

[00:54:26] SL: In a way it probably—it was a simple . . .

GM: It was very simple.

SL: It was simple. It made—maybe it allowed you to focus more on what was right in front of you—what was in your immediate surroundings and—was there something—was there a moment when you were at Pine Bluff where you—a light turned on and you knew what you were gonna do there as far as your degree work, as far as your interests? Were you like most freshmen and underclassmen—just trying to get a broad . . .

GM: I . . .

SL: . . . appreciation of what was available?

[00:55:08] GM: I think that the latter is probably is true. I didn't know what I was gonna be. The only reason I majored in sociology was because I worked in this sociologist's office, and he made a big impression on me. Also, my brother had

preceded me in sociology, and I—and he—?and I?—when he told me what he was doing, I said, "I can do that. I believe I can do that." And I was right. I could do that. And so—but as far as wanting to be a great known, noted sociologist, I didn't study it that hard. I didn't worry about what I was gonna be in the future. In fact, I studied mathematics more than I did sociology. And that, of course—I never took sociology that seriously in college or even in—at the master's degree. I never saw that my whole life depended upon whether I knew that discipline or not. That cost me a few steps later on because when I got to Washington State [University, Pullman, Washington], they didn't—I was a teaching assistant, but they didn't see me in the office late at night with my head over the, you know, books. And I passed my first tough courses—you had only two courses that were really tough, and one—they were foreign languages and statistics. I passed mine the first semester. [*Snaps fingers and laughs*]

SL: So . . .

[00:57:01] GM: And that may up—kind of upset the department and upset the other students in the department because some of 'em been sitting there for seven years struggling with foreign languages and struggling with statistics.

[00:57:15] SL: I was gonna say that your math—your interest in math probably . . .

GM: Yeah.

SL: . . . saved you in statistics.

GM: So I—it probably did. I knew a little arithmetic. I didn't, you know, never had any heavy courses in it, but I could get by. So the reason I really got concerned about sociology was when I took my preliminary examinations after one year of study, and they cut me down by asking questions that I had never—whose—which courses I had never had. And so I got cut down, and I got scared, because you had two chances, and so I thought I was gonna blow the . . .

SL: You'd used one chance.

GM: So I'm down to one chance. And I got so scared, and I got sick and went to the doctor. The doctor looked at me, and he examined me, and he says, "What are you doing?" I say, "Well, I'm in the Ph.D. program." And he says, "How are you doing in it?" And I say, "Well, right now I'm not doing too well." And I told him, and then he looked at his charts and stuff, and he said, "Well, there's nothing wrong with you. There's nothing wrong with your stomach. There's nothing wrong with your physical body. You have to make your mind up as to whether you are

going to get that degree. If you don't make your mind up, you'll forever be in a quandary." So I went back. I was still scared. I wrote my dissertation, and the department had to force me to take those examinations.

SL: The second time. So—now this is at Washington State.

GM: Mh-hmm.

[00:59:16] SL: Now tell me how you got from Pine Bluff to Washington State.

GM: Okay. When I left Fayetteville in 1956 . . .

SL: Okay, now wait a minute. I've gotten you from Conway to Pine Bluff.

GM: From . . .

SL: From Pine Bluff you went to Fayetteville?

GM: No, from Pine Bluff I went to the US Army.

SL: Okay.

GM: Spent a couple of years.

SL: Okay.

GM: After the Army, I went—I came to Fayetteville.

SL: Okay.

GM: This puts me in 1955.

SL: Okay.

[00:59:45] GM: Okay. By 1956 I get my master's, and I start

teaching in Conway [Pine Street School].

SL: Okay.

GM: Which was common enough, and I taught everything that they needed taught. Well, and then a guy got fired down at—oh—I know what happened. Martin Luther King [Jr.]—when was he—in [19]69?

SL: Mh-hmm.

GM: No, no, no. That's not what happened. This is—I'm talking about [19]59. Something happened on the national black scene. I've forgotten what it was.

SL: Oh, it was [the desegregation crisis at] Little Rock [Central High School].

GM: Little Rock was [19]57.

SL: Right.

[01:00:32] GM: So—but, anyway, the schools started opening up—the black schools—so the black professors were getting promoted to better schools. And this Professor Cothran got promoted to Atlanta University [Atlanta, Georgia] where he became chairman of the department. So this raised an opening in Pine Bluff in that department. So I had a master's degree in sociology. So I'm in my little house in Conway one Saturday just before September school opening, and in comes the chairman of

the department of sociology at Pine Bluff. He walked the footlog to get to my house in Conway, which I'd been living in a couple of years. So you know how you walk a footlog . . .

SL: Yeah.

GM: . . . and he was kind of nervous that he was gonna fall in this hole. [*SL laughs*] He made it across and made it to our little house, and he says in so many words, "Well, Gordon, do you want to—how—we need you at Pine Bluff coming Monday." This is, like, Saturday. Well, I already had a contract for—to teach high school again, and he said, "We really need you for Monday, and we can give you, like, five hundred dollars more than you're getting here."

SL: Per year?

GM: And—yeah, per year. And I said, "Okay, let me go and resign from"—well, they had a big argument. I went over—talked with my parents, and my mother got scared, and she says—she called me "Wax" and my father called me "Little Man." Anyway, she says, "Wax, don't go down there. You have a little baby that's just about less than a year old and your wife and so on, and it—just stay here. You will be principal in two or three years because the principal is old and gonna retire." [01:02:49] And my dad looked at her, and he says, "Little Man, you go. You are

a young man and you need to see if you can fly." So he said, "Get going." So I gave my resignation to the superintendent, and Monday I was down at Pine Bluff teaching. And it was a bad experience, because when you send somebody . . .

SL: Okay. He's gotta change tapes.

FE: I'm sorry.

[Tape stopped]

[01:03:25] SL: Your dad says, you know . . .

GM: "Go."

SL: . . . "Go."

GM: Mh-hmm.

SL: And you—you're young. You gotta fly.

GM: Mh-hmm.

SL: You gotta try things.

GM: Mh-hmm.

SL: So you resigned at the high school in Conway.

GM: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

SL: And now you land in Pine Bluff.

GM: In Pine Bluff.

[01:03:41] SL: Okay. So what happens in Pine Bluff?

GM: Well, I stayed there only one year, but I taught a full round of courses, and I cannot say I was the most popular instructor

because I was under qualified. They were placing so much emphasis upon getting Ph.D.s at that time. And those that didn't have them were almost "unpersons." We didn't have about fifteen or twenty on the campus, and they were walking on water. But . . .

SL: Right.

[01:04:13] GM: . . . what got me more than anything, and I'm sitting in my little office with six people in it—six desks in the same room about this size, and in walks one day a man from India, and he had on the patch—patches on his sleeves, and he was smoking a pipe, and he was mature and everything. And he came around, the chairman introduced him to me and so on, and I went back home that evening and told the people about Dr. ?Mazumda? and that he was interviewing for a job. And it dawned on me, "What job? I haven't seen in any bulletin anywhere where we have an opening in this department." And I looked around—lined people up according to experience and degrees. I said, "By jiminy, this man is looking for my job." [Laughs] So I told my wife. I said, "We got to pull up outta here. This is not good. I need—if I'm gonna stay in this business I need to get certified." So we packed our bags that summer and headed for Washington State, where I had a

teaching assistantship and stayed out there for three years. Then headed to Africa for a couple of years for research. So that's my trajectory. After Africa it was to Lincoln University in [Jefferson City,] Missouri for four years and then to Fayetteville.

[01:05:58] SL: Okay, so after Pine Bluff you entered the service, right?

GM: After—yes, mh-hmm.

SL: And out of the service you went to Fayetteville.

GM: Exactly.

SL: And were you not the first Afro-American to get a degree?

GM: No.

SL: Graduate degree from . . .

GM: No.

SL: No?

GM: I was not anywhere near because at that time they had opened the graduate centers in the state of Arkansas partially to handle the black enrollment. The graduate center—so you sent the professors down to Little Rock or down to Pine Bluff or down to El Dorado to conduct the classes and—but the people who finished those degrees could have their names put on the walkway at Fayetteville [Senior Walk]. Now they did that for some years, and then they started requiring that those people

spend some time on the Fayetteville campus—mainly summers. So you had a whole bunch of people from, like, 1948 that were getting master's degrees from the University of Arkansas.

So . . .

SL: But at remote locations.

[01:07:31] GM: At remote locations, but some of it being done during summers on the campus. So when I became—when I entered in 1955 in the spring, you had some others that were working on master's—just a handful of 'em. We never had more during the regular year than four or five. But I was not the first by any means.

[01:08:04] SL: Okay. So let's see now. Silas Hunt was in

[19]40 . . .

GM: Forty-eight.

SL: . . . [nineteen] forty-eight. But he didn't finish.

GM: He did not.

SL: But there were those in his class that did. Is that right? I—I'm a little [unclear words] . . .

GM: There are some people. Yes, there are some people that came either shortly after he did that finished.

SL: A year or two . . .

GM: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . after. So, [pause] I guess you can—we should go ahead and talk about the University of Arkansas at this point. We've kind of skipped over . . .

GM: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . your service record.

GM: Mh-hmm.

[01:08:44] SL: Tell—let—let's talk about your service record so we don't forget about it, and we try to keep this in some kind of order on the tape. You leave Pine Bluff. You are in the Army.

GM: In the Army.

SL: And you are a lieutenant?

[01:08:58] GM: No, I was—I enlisted. In fact, I knew that I was gonna get drafted, so I enlisted early since I did not have a job. I got out of Pine Bluff in, like, February. We were on the sem—on the quarter system. So I got out, let's say, in February. By the first of March or something like that, I was in uniform. And then by the end of October, maybe—yeah—I was in Korea and spent, like, fourteen months in Korea and then came back to Fayetteville—came to Fayetteville. And, again, with my military obligation I continued to get after the commission thing. And after some while I did get commissioned, but I didn't do—I—any active-duty commission. Mine was in reserve, which I held that

for quite a number of years. Now when I got back to—got back from Africa in 1965, I was still in the reserves, and it looked like I was gonna get called back into active duty. So I resigned my commission in the mid-[19]60s.

SL: So was that Vietnam that . . .

GM: Vietnam. I said, "I've done Korea. I can't do another one. You all are gonna have to get somebody else," so I resigned my commission. I believe it was in [19]68.

SL: So in Korea . . .

GM: Mh-hmm.

[01:10:53] SL: Tell—talk to me about Korea. What . . .

GM: Well . . .

SL: What happened in Korea for you?

GM: . . . in Korea I didn't have any trouble. I was in a—an artillery battery. And this—they called it middle-level artillery—medium artillery. We fired one-five-five [M114 155 mm] howitzers or guns—one of the two. I've forgotten what. But, anyway, since there was no—I got there after the shooting—about three months after the shooting—so I didn't get a chance to shoot at anybody.

[01:11:36] SL: That would be what year?

GM: That would be [19]53.

SL: Okay.

GM: They stopped shooting in, like, June of [19]53, and I got there maybe in September in Korea. So I didn't see any live action. So I did whatever I was doing. They didn't—the rules were such that you didn't spend a lotta time on the guns and not acting like you're preparing for war or anything, so I ended up with kind of an office job and a writing job with my regiment. So I was shipped to the regimental headquarters and had to publish what they call a regimental newspaper, which I got a chance to meet lots of people and make some—visit different places and get out the regimental newspaper. I don't know how many people are in a regiment. Must be at least three thousand.

[01:12:40] SL: So what's going on—black and white relations at this time? I mean, you've left Pine Bluff—clear, delineated lines . . .

GM: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . where blacks were and where whites were. You go to Korea. You missed the fighting side of it, but what's going on socially . . .



GM: Socially . . .

SL: . . . [unclear words] Korea?

GM: . . . there was nothing happening. Nobody had a moment's trouble. In my tent there were about for or five white guys. I

may have been the only black one in there. But it was—we never had any problem. I don't remember any problem coming up during the twelve or fourteen months that I spent over there. *Brown [v. Board of Education]* decision happened while I was over there, and it didn't even raise a ripple over in Korea.

[01:13:39] So what I discovered was that these—you know, we—there's something binding about Americans, and you can only see it when you go overseas. And then you find out how much you've got in common. And so you felt as comfortable around the white guys as you did around the black ones, and they the same. It was amazing. And it turned out to be the same way when I went to Africa, the same thing. It was amazing how much binding there was across the ethnic and racial lines. And we had people from various places. The Belgians were maybe a half a mile from us. And because all this is United Nations Command, the Ethiopians were half—a few blocks on the other side of us and the other groups, and everybody got along okay. And we'd go to Japan, and we were—I think the black soldiers were more popular with the Japanese girls than anybody else.

SL: [*Laughs*] Well, so . . .

FE: Oh, sorry.

GM: Hmm.

[01:15:05] SL: So within your tent, the—you had a really—a complete turnabout as far as your living experience. All of a sudden . . .

GM: Yeah. I mean . . .

SL: . . . you were—you were living day and night, sleeping . . .

GM: Exactly.

SL: You were with whites all the time.

GM: And these were Southern guys, maybe one or two from the Midwest and—but they were usually Southerners.

[01:15:35] SL: [*Laughs*] And so—and then there was a greater allied community . . .

GM: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . that furthered the diversity that was available to interchange with.

GM: Mh-hmm.

SL: So you're going—you were in a foreign land. You vacationed in a foreign land. There was this camaraderie not only at the American level but at the allied level. So you got a big dose of what it's like to be human.

[01:16:04] GM: Yeah. I mean, it was a very humanizing experience. We did find that there were some that were not as popular as us.

Now the Ethiopian soldiers had it a little bit rougher than we did with the Korean girls and the Japanese girls—and—but it wasn't a color thing. It was based on the idea, so they told me, that Ethiopians were thought to have certain degenerations—kinds of venereal diseases that the medicine wouldn't touch.

SL: Ah.

[01:16:46] GM: And so they steered away from the Ethiopians but gravitated toward the black Americans and then the Anglo Americans. So we didn't suffer anything on that score. But the whole thing about getting over ethnicity, getting over racism, and so on—it was a good teaching experience 'cause you could see that you could do without it. I'd heard about that later on—heard some of it—how it happened in Europe. Some of the older guys in there were in World War II told me that they had friends that got to Europe during that conflagration, and they decided—one decided that they were not coming back here because they didn't want to face the racism back—so they stayed in Europe. One guy says—from Mississippi—"I escaped"—let's say "Bilbo?, I escaped Strom Thurmond and so forth, and I'm over here, and that woman I have back in Mississippi, as mean as she is, that settles it." [*Laughter*] "I'm not going back." So he stayed. [*Laughs*] Stayed over in Paris [France]. [*Laughs*]

SL: Yeah. Well, I mean, that's . . .

GM: Makes sense to me. [*Laughs*]

[01:18:33] SL: Yeah. Yeah, you can't blame a person for that.

Well, so, okay, you have basically what sounds like a very positive enlisted experience . . .

GM: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . in Korea.

GM: Mh-hmm.

SL: And I would venture to—I would hazard to guess that's probably why you continued in the National Guard.

GM: Hmm.

SL: That set in your mind that this is basically a good thing, and you didn't have to really reassess that until it looked like Vietnam was going to be in your future. So . . .

GM: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

[01:19:10] SL: . . . you get out of Korea, and you end up in Fayetteville. Is that right?

GM: Exactly.

SL: And what made you decide to go to Fayetteville?

GM: Ah, it was a financial thing. I had been accepted at I think it was the University of Iowa [Iowa City, Iowa] and one or two others, but I would've had to pay out-of-state fee there, and the GI Bill

[of Rights] was very convenient for meeting the expenses within the state. So I didn't have to pay anything and so—because of the bill. So this was the most convenient place for me. Also before going to Korea, I had asked the John Rust Foundation in Pine Bluff, which at that time had been experimenting with the making of cotton picking machines. And they knew that the cotton picker was gonna put all the black people out of business because they would not have any jobs on these farms when the cotton picker was brought in. So they could anticipate some problems in the rural communities, so they gave me a scholarship to the University of Arkansas in rural sociology. That's what I was supposed to study. But before I could take the scholarship, I went to Korea. And I don't know what the scholarship was, three or four hundred dollars, but it would not have covered everything.

SL: Right.

GM: But I decided I'd—since I had the obligation, and ?it looks? like I was gonna be drafted, I would go and get it over with. But that's what . . .

[01:21:07] SL: Was the GI Bill in place—I—it was in place before you went to Korea.

GM: Oh, yes, it had been in place.

SL: So it was an established path.

GM: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

SL: Post-enlistment.

GM: Mh-hmm. Right, right.

[01:21:19] SL: Okay. So financial—once again, the finances available to you—it kinda—that—it steered you away from the private black . . .

GM: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . colleges out of high school. You ended up in Pine Bluff. This time you take advantage—you had an obligation with the armed services, and there was the financial opportunity through the GI Bill to stay in state, and you end up in Fayetteville, Arkansas. Now I venture to say that Fayetteville was different than Korea, that it was also much different than Pine Bluff—maybe a little closer to Conway in some ways. But you hit Fayetteville po—and this is 1950 . . .

GM: [Nineteen] fifty-five.

[01:22:03] SL: . . . [nineteen] fifty-five. I would say the population is no greater than fifteen thousand people—just guessing. I was born in [19]52.

GM: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

SL: And I can remember—I can start remembering Fayetteville

about [19]58 probably. And I believe that it was a fairly small town at the time compared to now.

GM: Mh-hmm. Exactly.

SL: Black community was a few hundred.

GM: Few hundred—couple of hundred maybe.

SL: So you didn't have as large of a community as you had in Pine Bluff.

GM: Mh-hmm.

SL: You probably didn't have the camaraderie and the dependence on . . .

GM: Hang on. Let me run to this . . .

[Tape stopped]

[01:22:49] FE: Speed.

SL: So I'm trying to get clear in my mind [*GM clears throat*] what you saw and the perspective you had by the time that you got to Fayetteville as a student. And you had already—you already had an undergraduate degree. You'd already been a teacher at a high school level and . . .

GM: No.

SL: Oh, you hadn't?

GM: I had not.

SL: Oh.

GM: No.

SL: Okay.

GM: So I came from—directly from Korea to the university.

SL: Oh, okay.

GM: Mh-hmm.

[01:23:24] SL: So you had not been back to . . .

GM: To Conway.

SL: Okay, Conway. So you—oh, all right. Now—okay, now I get that. So through the GI Bill, easiest path, simplest path was to stay in Arkansas. You chose the University of Arkansas because I assume at the time, it was probably considered the state university or the best place to get an education. I know it also had some other reputations as a party school and all that, and maybe that didn't happen till the [19]60s, but—so you land in Fayetteville. Small black community, not like in proportion to Pine Bluff. You didn't have the reliance camaraderie needed in the armed services that you had just experienced and had probably strengthened your perspective of how humans can get along. So new town, new society, I would guess, new institution, in your mind. What—tell me what . . .

GM: Well, okay . . .

[01:24:36] SL: Tell me what happened your first day in Fayetteville.

GM: First—when we got—when I got to Fayetteville in the spring of [19]55, nothing happened. Nobody was unkind. The three or four black students that were here introduced me to what was happening and what you—what was open and what was not open. I can say on a stack of Bibles that we were not denied a hamburger at any hamburger joint along Dickson Street. We were allowed to go to the movies—what movie there was—downtown, and there was one on Dickson Street. But the one downtown did not allow the local people to go and sit wherever they wanted, so the students decided we wouldn't go if the black community people could not go. So we didn't go downtown. The movie on Dickson Street was open to any students. So we didn't have any trouble there, and you—I think one or two guys on the campus—I know there was one black car among us, and then we'd all pile in that and go down to eat hamburgers at the drive-in. But . . .

SL: Jug's.

[01:26:10] GM: Whatever it was called, but it was on Dickson. And there was no problem. I'd always been kind of interested in writing, and I'd been aware of these kinds of changes. So I started keeping kind of notes about my experiences at Fayetteville, and these notes turned out to be a kind of a book

that had never got published. It was entitled *No Violence Is Progress*. And to the best of my notes and to my recollection, the students did whatever they wanted to do. We ate in—I've forgotten what hall it is, but it's the one at the end of—hmm—Dickson Street.

SL: Oh, Brough [Commons] now.

GM: Brough. Is it Brough?

SL: Mh-hmm.

[01:27:20] GM: But, anyway, we ate there and didn't have any trouble. We had our extra sessions at the old student union building—didn't have any trouble. One student did get involved with some girl—Anglo girl—and we thought, "Hey, you better cool it a little bit." But he didn't, and I've forgotten what happened to her, but it's all in my book. But you had guys majoring in, like, speech and drama, where you had to be in little productions. They did those—mostly minor roles, but they did participate. So I cannot—one thing that happened to me was Dr. [Anthony Stephen] Stephan, who gave me this chair, was chairman of the department, and he asked me to be a teaching assistant. And I would've been the first teaching assistant at the University of Arkansas that was black. And I didn't want to do that because I didn't know what teaching



assistant meant. I would've had to handle a class and do other things, but I didn't do it because I didn't want it thought that I was cheating up to somebody. But it would've been good experience. I'm sorry that I didn't take that experience. But I didn't have any trouble. I didn't make good grades. I think if I'd made another C, I would've been out of here. But did enough to get by, and nobody was ever, to my recollection, unkind or threatening. That's during my graduate days here.

[01:29:26] SL: Where did you live?

GM: We lived in a place called the barracks, about where the—well, about where Tyson Center is—the poultry center [John W. Tyson Building]. It was an old military barracks there and blacks and whites and anybody else sorta mature lived there. And so we didn't have any trouble in that old barracks.

SL: Was that left over from the influx of the . . .

GM: Yeah, of GIs.

SL: . . . veteran students that came in.

GM: Uh-huh. That's right. And we had access to anything on campus, and I don't remember having any real problems. Now, what was going on with the teachers may be something else. They may have charged us a few points on some exams, but most of us, I would say, were not that well prepared, so [*laughs*]

they may have granted us a few points, [*laughs*] all things considered. But it was not a bad experience. We went to the Razorback games all—you know, the ones that we wanted to go to, and sat where we wanted. And it was nothing to write home about.

[01:30:55] SL: Well, so your social activities were fully integrated or . . .

GM: If . . .

SL: . . . did you guys kind of hang with the local black community?

GM: Well, the local—we—there were some us—by now, we are a little bit older than the young people in the black community, so we tried to make a few dates now and then with some of the younger blacks in the community, but the big problem I think was that they were not going anywhere. We didn't perceive that they were going anywhere. So let's say I was twenty—let's say twenty-four and the girl I may be interested maybe nineteen or twenty. But she would be out of high school or out of high school age but not headed to college, so you would view that as not positive. And so we didn't strike up all that many relationships with the people in the community, but we were not antagonistic with them. That did come later on, after the influx of black students into the university, where they were coming

essentially from eastern and southern Arkansas and central Arkansas and they had traditions of sort of education. Whereas the people up here—that tradition was not quite as strong. So the college students had activities that the local students wanted to attend, and you did have some rubs between those students. And it was a long time before you had the first marriage between local blacks and non-local blacks.

[01:32:59] SL: So female black enrollment at the university was nonexistent back then or . . .

GM: It was nonexistent until 1955 when just after the *Brown* decision you started admitting them. The first—at first there were three during my semester—first semester. And they lived together. The dean would not let them live in the dormitories. They had a separate house to live in on Garland [Avenue], I believe. And that's where they lived. And by this time the black enrollment was six—like, three girls and three guys. So it was very interesting that we socialized together very heavily, but none of us married. There was no marriage going on there because we all felt too much like sisters and brothers. So that was what was happening. But we didn't sweat the social activities all that—now, if they had dances we would go to the dances with the girls but not always. Sometimes they went by themselves and

sometimes we went by ourselves. But, it was not a great deal of hostility. In the old student union building where the snack bar was and all, they used to have joshing between, like, the Anglo football players and so forth and the blacks, but it was just friendly joshing back and forth—never any kind of "let's get violent" or anything like that.

[01:35:02] SL: So how long were you a student . . .

GM: I was a student . . .

SL: . . . at this point?

GM: . . . from [19]55 through the summer of [19]56.

SL: And with that degree you went back to Conway.

GM: I went back to Conway.

SL: And started your high school . . .

GM: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . teaching there.

GM: Mh-hmm, where I taught for three years.

SL: And then—well, and three years is a pretty good stint. And then you had the one—what you had called a disastrous . . .

GM: Year at Pine Bluff.

SL: . . . [unclear word] at Pine Bluff.

GM: Yeah.

SL: That prompted you to go to Washington State.

GM: Mh-hmm.

SL: And at Washington State you were there for another two years?

GM: Three years.

SL: Three years there. And at Washington State you gathered a doctorate in sociology.

GM: Sociology.

[01:35:51] SL: And is that—after that is when you came back?

GM: After Washington State I went to Africa—East Africa and spent a couple of years as a researching—research assistant on a project run by Teachers College, Columbia University [New York City, New York], and I stayed over there for a couple of years.

SL: Well, let's—we should talk about that a little bit. What was—where in Africa were you?

[01:36:23] GM: Oh, okay. I was based in Uganda at Makerere University College [Kampala, Uganda]—was a part of the—I've forgotten whether it was a part of [University of] Cambridge or [University of] London or whatever [Interviewee edit: It was most likely London.], but it was connected with one of the English colleges. It was the main college in all of east Africa. And ironically, again, its main enrollment was Asian, and you had one—I think you had two African teachers at that time on this college faculty [interviewee edit: One was William Senteza

Kajubi]. And we lived in the community with the Europeans and whatever—there were a few sort of upwardly mobile Africans that lived in this same community. And that was a good experience. Well, again, we found the—what it meant to be an American overseas. We tried, at least I tried, to learn the local languages and the regional languages and learn whatever I could about African culture. I got to be pretty okay in Swahili and a good knowledge—fairly good knowledge of the variety of African cultures. I did get a chance to travel as a part of my job throughout Uganda, Kenya, and Tanganyika. And I visited a part of the Sudan and Ethiopia, and—so I got a good understanding of that part of the world.

[01:38:19] SL: So didn't that—what did that do to you emotionally? I mean, now you were pretty immersed in what you'd have to consider the homeland—I mean, where your heritage started.

GM: It was a tremendous learning experience, and I guess what I've been telling my students over these many years, the experience for me changed the way I thought and think about these problems. One—it helped me to understand I needed to get a better explanation for why something is not going good than I am black. I needed to come with something stronger than that, and so I start giving up the "I am black" argument and—because

in Africa everybody is black, and then you can't use that as an excuse for not being everything that you can be. And so that helped me a great deal. And I said, "I get back to the US, I'm not using that argument anymore, that if I were white I would do so and so and so. That's a copout," I said. So that was a tremendous experience. But, really, to feel the difference and feel that you are just about like about everybody else—just about like everybody else in nearly all of the respects, and that's a tremendously liberating feeling. So I—the shackles—what few were left—were removed, and I said, "Hey, I don't need these shackles and so forth. I can function on my own." And Africa taught me that. I was learning it in service and other ways, but Africa really drove the nail in that "I am black" coffin because when you see millions of people all black, you need a better discussion than you hear in the United States.

[01:40:53] SL: Did that surprise you?

GM: Ah . . .

SL: I mean, did you—what did you—I mean, did you have any preconceived notions of what you would get from an African experience?

GM: Yes, yes, I had some preconceived notions that were brought about by other people. I had never seen an African American



that had actually been to Africa. I'd seen plenty of African students. And so most of them had not been either to the West Indies or to Africa—that is, my contemporaries. And so they could feed you the stereotypes. And there was one guy wrote me a letter and says, "Have you seen any Ubangis?" And that's the people that put the plates in their lips and stick them way out like that. "Have you seen some girl that had female infibulation, like circumcision?" "Do these people really shave off their hair?" You got all those kinds of things before you go—before you went. By this time, my father has passed, but my mother started crying. She said, "Don't take those kids over there. You'll get a disease. You'll get all kinds of problems. And they don't need to go over there, and you'll come back sick." I disregarded that advice and went ahead and carried three children over there.

SL: But still she sounds like a wonderful mother.

[01:42:35] GM: She was a wonderful mother. [*SL laughs*] But I wouldn't take anything—I grew up—I got a little breadth—I got a little breadth of understanding, and that has always been helpful. So I wouldn't take anything for that experience. I recommend it for everybody. I was back over there in 19—well, in [19]98, just to retrace some of the steps. But Africa's a great

experience. Don't—I tell people, "Don't fool with"—and I told Gary [Lunsford], "Don't fool with Africa because it gets in your blood. It's worse than drugs. You can't go once. You have to keep going." Something about that poor place with all the problems that it has, it humanizes you. I don't know how it does it, but we've seen nuns and nurses and all other kinda people see the different problems that they have. Some of 'em get hurt. And as quickly as things settle down, they're right back over there. It has a tremendous pull on folks for some reason.

[01:43:50] SL: I guess there's the argument it's where it all started.

GM: [*Laughs*] So it was from East Africa to Lincoln University in Missouri.

SL: Wow. I don't know anything about Lincoln University in Missouri. It—how—where is that?

GM: It is in the capital city, Jefferson City, Missouri—more or less in the center part of the state.

SL: And is that a private school?

GM: No, it's a state—it's a state land—it's a land-grant college—an old black college started about 1866 and became a state-supported college shortly thereafter. By the time I reached there in 1965, the enrollment was, like, 60 percent white. And I think it's gone off the black registry now, although they keep it

on there for formal reasons. But the enrollment is about 70 percent white now.

[01:44:58] SL: So how long were you in Africa?

GM: Two years.

SL: Two years. Okay, now wait a minute. So—now I'm having trouble. You were in—oh, you spent three years in Washington State.

GM: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

SL: Okay. Now I'm back. All right.

GM: Mh-hmm.

[01:45:13] SL: So what did you do in Lincoln—at Lincoln University?

GM: I taught sociology. We had only two people teaching, and so that meant you taught everything. I had six or eight courses that I had to teach.

SL: Right. That's hard work.

[01:45:27] GM: Well, you know, you—it was hard work, but I felt at home at Lincoln. I was buying a house. The kids were getting up a little bit of size, and I was getting accepted in the college and in the community, and I was promoted to associate professor. So I was on my way. That happened, and in 1968 it all came unglued with Martin Luther . . .

SL: Martin Luther . . .

GM: . . . King's death. And imagine me—the students got out of hand, and they were rocking white folks—stoning them as they came through the campus even though they knew many of them because they were on campus as students. And I was running around trying to hold football players and other big kids to dissuade them from throwing rocks at folks. But it was very emotional. And they burnt down the student union building, which was a new one. I don't know who burnt it down, but it was a million-and-a-half-dollar building then, and they never found who burnt it down. But at the same time, this thing was happening all over the country.

SL: Yeah.

[01:46:58] GM: And all the black students, after King, got restive and difficult to handle on the campus. So Dr. Stephan started calling me just after King's death, begging me to come to Fayetteville. And he knew me. I don't know—because he'd been one of my instructors years ago. So he asked me to come and, of course, I put him off for a year, and the next year I came—[19]69.

[01:47:38] SL: What did you leave behind at Lincoln?

GM: I left behind at Lincoln students that trusted me, first of all. They needed me. They came from the ghettos of St. Louis and Kansas City and Chicago [Illinois] and Detroit, and so on—a few

of them coming from the farms of southern—southeastern Missouri, I guess. I didn't have to lock my door. I didn't have to lock my car. Felt free. Moving through the campus was accepted by all the students of both races. I was doing very well.

SL: What on earth—what . . .

GM: And I didn't wanna come. I didn't want to come . . .

SL: So why . . .

GM: . . . here.

[01:48:24] SL: How did that happen? Why?

GM: So what happened, I had—that year—I don't know whether it was the year before or what, but I had two grants—one from the American College Testing Program [ACT] to study ghetto students in the big cities.

SL: Okay.

GM: And I had a Ford [Foundation] grant that would supplement that. The basic prob—thing was I would've been out of the classroom for a solid year . . .

SL: Doing the grant work.

GM: . . . doing this grant work and running around through the big cities. And my people at Lincoln, thinking, you know, that they had a hold on you, didn't want to get a replacement for me for a

year. And the dean says, "If you want your job, you need to stay here and hold onto it." I said, "Well, Dean, but here's a school that's offering me a little bit more money and so forth, and lighter teaching load and so"—he didn't want to compromise. The school didn't want to compromise. And I said, "Well, I gotta go because Arkansas is asking me to come." And when I came to Arkansas, I had those two grants, which would've taken me out of the classroom for a year. So I talked with the dean, and the dean [Robin Anderson] was a very fatherly man and saw exactly what the needs were. And he said, "Well, Gordon, I know you want the grants and all and—but—and we want to help you and—but you've done a lot of this already. If you come to the university and don't teach for a year, aren't you worried about what people will say, that you'll be a token?"

SL: Hmm.

[01:50:30] GM: He says, "I think you probably would be happier," and now he said, "We would be happier if you hit the ground teaching a full round of courses," which is what I did. And that was . . .

SL: So you let the grants go?

GM: I didn't let the grants go. I kinda worked on 'em piecemeal and

produced this monograph called *A Ghetto College Student* [*A Descriptive Essay on College Youth from the Inner City*] from that research. And the dean said, "Well, we'll try to make up the—you know, the difference and give you some time and so on, so it won't be a total loss." But they helped me out. They also gave me free housing for practically a whole year—utilities—practically they moved me down here, and they gave me some other little perks. So evidently they wanted me to come.

[Laughs]

[01:51:29] SL: Well, and why wouldn't they? I mean. . .

GM: Mh-hmm. Well. . .

SL: . . . what you brought with . . .

GM: Well, they needed—they needed somebody. I was expected to kind of ride herd over the black students. That's what everybody thought. But they brought a young black dean at the same time to do that, so he was riding herd over the students, and I was kinda doing the classroom drill.

[01:51:56] SL: Well, so now were you the only black instructor on the campus?

GM: I was on the—they call it tenure track. I was—I came on tenure track and, of course, Margaret Clark was here at the same time, and she was kind of like a teaching assistant or something. She

had not gone on tenure track yet. So we came—in fact, Margaret was here a semester before me. Or some—a little while before, but she was like a teaching assistant. So I got credit for being the first tenure-track person. Interestingly, the next year they gave me tenure, so I didn't have to worry about tenure.

SL: So y'all . . .

[01:52:51] GM: But they didn't tell me I had tenure. So Daniel Ferritor was chance—chairman of the department [of sociology]—I don't know, must be ten, twelve, or fifteen years later, and he came and asked me—he said, "Gordon, do you have tenure?" I said, "I don't know. Nobody told me I had tenure." And he—they started searching the records and found a letter from [University of Arkansas] President [David W.] Mullins saying, "Gordon Morgan was granted tenure in 1970." Now this is at least twelve years later, and I didn't even know I had tenure because I had too much to do than to worry about who—whether I'm getting tenure. And I didn't even sweat it.

[01:53:46] SL: Well, I know—I don't know all there is to know about tenure, but I do know it's highly sought after.

GM: It is.

SL: It's like . . .

GM: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . once you have tenure . . .

GM: It's a permanent job.

SL: . . . you have pretty much—you have to really be awful to . . .

GM: Really foul up. Yeah. Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . to lose your job. Doesn't it usually mean some kind of raise in pay?

GM: Well, you get usually a raise every year.

SL: Mh-hmm. And so . . .

GM: So it was all right, but I didn't worry about it too much but—so we all joke about it. [*Laughs*]

SL: You were the last to know.

GM: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

[01:54:20] SL: Wow. Okay, so this idea of bringing you in to ride herd at a time—at a volatile time in American history—that—is that—was that common . . .

GM: I think it was very common.

SL: . . . across the United States? Was it . . .

GM: I think it was quite common because the black students had gotten difficult to handle and were demanding black faculty. And if they did that, they thought that we could stabilize these students a little bit. And that's what they intended to use you—

we had to do some of that, but that was not your job description. But it was not uncommon for that to happen throughout the main universities in the country.

[01:55:24] SL: Well, okay, so now you're at the University of Arkansas. They've made it as—very comfortable and attractive for you to come. You've left a very comfortable place. Tell me what your assessment was once you got here. I mean, did you—were—was there—there really wasn't that much confrontation happening here, was there?

GM: Not really. Nothing. The biggest thing that happened was in 19—was it [19]68 game?

SL: The "Great Shootout."

GM: Yeah, was that [19]68 or [196]6—must've been [19]69—[19]69.

SL: Mh-hmm.

GM: That's the . . .

SL: That's when [President Richard M.] Nixon came . . .

GM: Mh-hmm, Nixon and old man [George H. W.] Bush came and other members of that entourage. And you had the shooting of the black student on campus—superficial wound but a shooting nevertheless. But that's the only real confrontation that they had. Somebody's making a movie about that, that they interviewed me for a few hours about a month ago or maybe

less.

SL: Mh-hmm. Is that a local production?

GM: No, it's some New York somebody. Yeah.

SL: There—I can remember something about—I was in high school at that time. I can also remember the controversy about the band playing "Dixie."

[01:57:11] GM: "Dixie" was a part of that whole thing.

SL: It seemed like that kind of accelerated things a little bit.

GM: Mh-hmm.

SL: But, you know, I don't remember—and it could be that I was just totally disengaged. I don't remember anybody getting shot.

GM: Yes, somebody got shot.

SL: Was it suppressed? Did it make the news? Did it . . .

GM: It made the news—"student shot just before the Texas/Arkansas game." The—I guess the equivalent—I guess you'd call 'em the necks—"rednecks" of the area tried to make some noise, and they—black students got all upset, and they all congregated in a house over there off Ozark [Avenue] behind our house, so I was over there interacting with them. And some of 'em had their shotguns and pistols and everything, and somehow that evening one of the students got shot, and nobody figured out who shot him. And we went to the hospital and we—to see about the

student, and we went up on Mount Sequoyah to see President Mullins to see if he would make some kind of television or, you know, radio statement, to "Everybody, cool it, and let's have some fun and get on with the game." The next day the black students had to be escorted to the game by the troops, and there was some throwing back and forth of oranges and apples. And some said that some of these Anglo people had these telescoping weapons that you would think they had an umbrella . . .

SL: Oh.

GM: . . . when it was really a telescoping rifle or something like it. But nothing happened. Texas won the game by fourteen to fifteen or something like that, and everybody went on back to what they were doing, and Monday the campus was back to normal. But that's—that was about all that happened then, but they tried to make a great big ol' deal out of it, so ten or—the student that got shot was named Darrell Anderson. Was it Darrell something? I've forgotten his name. It wasn't Anderson, it was Darrell something. [Editor's note: The student was Darrell Brown.] He practices law somewhere. But, anyway, his daughter has something to do with the administration of the athletic program now. And we asked her, "Who shot Darrell?"

We don't know today who shot Darrell. Darrell hasn't said. Nobody knows. And somebody concluded, "Darrell shot himself." [*Laughs*]

SL: [*Unclear words*]

[Tape stopped]

[02:00:24] SL: You know, when they brought this project to me I said, "You know, the worst thing that can happen with this video is that I try to make something pretty that isn't." But, at the same time, I don't want to make something ugly that isn't, either. So I think that there is kind of a—I think there is a parallel of what happens—what has happened in the past—what is happening now with this university and other universities across the country. Now I—I'd also sense that there has been a lack of real commitment to diversity on the campus or in supporting diversity. I don't know for sure 'cause I'm just now wading in this and I—again, I'm gonna tell you that I'm turning to you to educate . . .

GM: Well . . .

SL: . . . me on this stuff and—'cause I'm gonna take what I learn from you, and it's gonna shape all these other nine interviews that I'm gonna be doin' because I'll constantly be referencing you.

GM: Well, I'm sure that—don't reference me too much . . .

SL: Okay.

GM: . . . because they—you know, let—take—get their takes, and you put it all together. But don't use me, if it's okay, for any expertise on something. I'm just giving what has appeared to me. I did do something a while ago that didn't go anywhere. It was called "games students play." And about a week or so it dawned on me exactly what you said—"games administrators play." The students play games when they don't want to get their studies. "My mother passed" or "I'm not really here. My parents wanted me here, and I wanted to be somewhere else," and they have a whole bunch of excuses for not doing their work. And I said—well, lately—that administrators play games as well, and among the games is what you just said—one of 'em is "We don't have the money," and they won't say that "We don't have the commitment." [02:03:02] Some don't want diversity. I don't want diversity myself. I want integration. I want oneness. I don't want to be fragmented into a whole bunch of different universities, trying to make it appear that cultural diversity is the answer. But I may be in a minor position on that. So, yes, I know some of the games that the administrators play regarding this kind of a problem. Now at Washington State,



when I was back out there, they had what was called the diversity program, and each student body had its own union, and within the student union building they had the Asiatics, the Hispanics, the blacks, the whoever—Mormons or somebody. Everybody had their own—his own student union building in there. I said, "This is too much diversity for me. I've been struggling all these years for integration." Let me make one more stop and get . . .

[Tape stopped]

[02:04:20] SL: Got speed?

FE: Yeah, we're rolling.

SL: Okay. I am—but, you know, before we go back to that, I am intrigued about this oneness idea instead of diversity. Of course, what I'm hearing administratively is "We need more black students on campus. We need more Asian students. We need more non-whites coming to the campus. We need to make more accommodations for the Hispanic community—all the other populations." And I can see that, but you're right. There is a difference in a diversity initiative and trying to support those in almost segregated fashion, rather than immerse them together. This—for me this is a new idea. [02:05:22] So I like this. I'd like to work around that if you can say it . . .

GM: Well . . .

SL: . . . a few other ways. I mean, the way that you said it I can use pretty much exactly the way you said it.

GM: Well, this—I didn't come to this without some thought, and I have been playing with that idea for quite a number of years. Somewhere like—must've been the early—late [19]70s, they had something at the University of Maryland [College Park, Maryland] called the Black Think Tank—first Black Think Tank. I was invited to come there and give a speech, and I gave my speech, and it was called "Questioning Cultural Pluralism." I was suspicious of pluralism then because I knew it separated groups according to their ethnicities, and I gave my speech—you had wall-to-wall speeches, so starting at seven o'clock in the morning and didn't end till, like, one o'clock at night. [02:06:32] Well, my speech was at, like, twelve o'clock at night, and the audience was still full. So I gave my speech, and it polarized the audience, and they got into a great big ol' argument as to whether we should have pluralism or, let's say, assimilation. Well, I escaped that meeting, and later on had to give another speech somewhere else on the same topic, and it did the same thing in a different town to a different audience. It was a polarization of the concept of the value of ethnicity. So I knew



there was something to it, so I did this book—little book called *America Without Ethnicity*. [02:07:37] And I go back to my basic thesis about how ethnicity may be divisive instead of unifying, so I stand on the belief based upon some data that the whole proposition about diversity is not about unity but is about separation. And I'm not about separation. I think that we need to face the problems of unification. If it is goin' to be intermarriage, let's face up to it and deal with it. If it's gonna be something else, let's face up to it and deal with it 'cause under the prospect of diversity, your culture takes over and whatever you stress. As far as the African American culture is concerned, if there is a culture, it does not place any stress, that is, by the larger community, upon achievements by that group. So if a guy doesn't want to study it is because of his culture. If the Hispanics don't want to be become medical doctors it's because of their culture. So culture becomes the shibboleth—it comes the thing that drives everything else, and it keeps everything sort of in balance. So if the Anglo's up here, and everybody else has a different culture, being below is because of the culture, not because of structure and other opportunities that are not being given. Not to argue with the people in diversity, except philosophically I know we're probably on the same wavelength,

but procedurally I would like to see people say, "Let's find out what the differences are," not simply admit that there are differences. So I don't think that cultural pluralism or cultural diversity has as much promise as, let us say, unity.

FE: Sorry.

[02:10:25] SL: You know, so let's—I see the roots of this in your Korean and African experiences. I see that when you get a group of diverse cultures together, and they share a common [pause]—oh, what can I say, a—they're in a situation where their interdependence on each other is critical for their survival, that these differences can still be respected, but they don't necessarily have to be emphasized to make it work.

GM: That's right, I—yes.

SL: They can—you can understand them and you can see them.

GM: I can . . .

SL: And you don't have to constantly stress them . . .



[02:11:20] GM: Well, I think the differences that I would stress would be the trivial ones, like, let's say, if you're Irish and you want to observe St. Patrick's Day, get yourself a green tie and drink some green beer and so on, and just have fun out of it and pinch somebody, and that—nobody—that's trivial. And for blackness, you know, drink—eat some soul food and sing "We

Shall Overcome" and have a good time about it and go on about your business. I don't know what the Euros would do, but if they have something that they want to do, everybody can do everything that everybody else is doing. We're not trying to eradicate differences, but these differences will not have the significance so much so that careers and things will be dependent upon what your choice is. So I enjoy St. Patrick's Day. I enjoy the German holiday—whatever it's called.

SL: Oktoberfest.

[02:12:33] GM: Oktoberfest and all—I enjoy many of the holidays—Cinco de Mayo or whatever with the Hispanics. But these are not dominating ideas because you are kind of in America where there has long been a strain toward similarity—toward—and I don't know who's gonna give ground—whether you Afros are gonna give ground in their assimilation process or the Anglos or who's gonna give ground. But we cannot survive for very long, that is, with this division. No country has ever been able to do it as divided as they—on a divided basis. So I applaud what the diversity people are doing, but I don't want these divisions to be so great until you have no appreciation for anybody else or for any other group.

SL: Or for the commonality.

GM: For the commonality. We got more in common than we have different.

SL: How can we argue—how can anyone argue against that?

GM: I don't see.

SL: I mean, we are a human race.

GM: Exactly. Mh-hmm. That is true.

[02:14:00] SL: So after that it does seem relatively—I mean, there is a lesser degree of separation, I think after that.

GM: So if you like the Hispanic thing, go eat some tacos and have a big plate of tacos and do some flamenco dances or whatever you want to do. That's all right.

SL: Learn the language.

GM: Well, that's—yeah. That's trivial . . .

SL: Travel the [unclear words].

GM: . . . ?trivial?—that's right. That is okay. But—so I'm not trying to eradicate these cultural things but not to use these as an excuse to keep from associating with others.

[02:14:49] SL: I think that's a good, fresh thing to inject here. I see a place for that. Well, do we want to talk—can we talk a little bit about the University of Arkansas and where it has come from, where it is now, and what you see happening?

GM: Well, I've tried to give a little bit of a perspective on how it

started. As you know, they don't like to talk about the origins—the founding of the university. I—as long as I've been associated with it, they don't talk about who founded the university. And in my day, you had a founders' day program, and you got up, and you patted the founders on the back. You don't have that at the University of Arkansas. And in doing *Edge of Campus*, I became suspicious because, as you know, Joseph C. Corbin was a black man who was head of the education department. He was the superintendent of education in the state of Arkansas during the Republican administration, which had a lot to do with the establishment of the University of Arkansas. So we did—we don't stress that too much—not saying that we have to get Joseph C. Corbin as the founder, but he was very close to it. [02:16:39] And I think it has—it could've done a lot more—I'm not gonna score the University of Arkansas for not having done more. A lot depends upon the leadership. It's my understanding that the state of Arkansas has always given the University of Arkansas plenty of leeway. They have respected this as a mainstay university, and those people could do practically whatever they wanted. During the time of Governor [Orval] Faubus, he left the university to do what it wanted. "You guys are in charge of that. Do what you wanna

do, and I'll sign." And so they could've done—they could've integrated the school in 1930 if they had wanted to, if you had the leadership that had the forethought and the courage to do it because the state would not say anything because of the unique role that the university has in the state. So I'm saying if we don't make progress, it is because not that the state is re—limiting you, but the shortsightedness of administrators. We can take this school as far as we want to go in—not just in diversity, but in practically any area. So if you have lagging leadership, you're in big trouble, big trouble. Now when [University of Arkansas President] Lewis Webster . . .

SL: Jones.

[02:18:35] GM: . . . Jones decided that he thought Silas Hunt should be here, that was a pivotal moment because there were some others thought differently. He lost the battle, but he didn't lose the war. Now I'm saying you may use administrative positions to go where you want—that's why I say that [Chancellor] John White is unique because so many other presidents or chancellors would not have taken the steps that he's taken. I've—in my writings about the University of Arkansas sports program— [Athletic Director] Frank Broyles—and I'm not one of his great fans, but I—he needs to be honored for the step that he took.

The man had some guts when he hired [Men's Basketball Head Coach] Nolan Richardson because some of the people would not have thought that the right thing to do. But you have to be able to stand on your own two feet. So I give Broyles ten out of ten for hiring Richardson. And Broyles told me that he had to get on his own feet before he could make any moves, that he wanted to have an integrated team from the very beginning, which he had somewhat at [the University of] Missouri [Columbia, Missouri]. But he came to Arkansas, and Arkansas was so kind of traditional, if he had tried to do something, so he says, before 1968, he could be at risk. But he waited until his feet were on the ground. Now I don't know that that was the real reason or not. But I know that cannot be overlooked. Some of the administrators would do more if they felt more comfortable doing more.

SL: It's that guts.

[02:21:02] GM: Mh-hmm. Gotta have the guts. Lewis Webster Jones had guts. He could've said, "Well, it's not time to bring Silas Hunt aboard." Broyles can say, "It's not time to bring John Richardson aboard." I got a Ph.D. in 1963, and I needed a job.  Three little kids. I sent my resume back to my old school, and I was told, "It is not time. This—the time is not right." So six

years later, when King got wasted, or whatever time it was, the time was right. I say the time is right when you have the guts to do right. So that's my take on time. [*Laughs*]

SL: And I don't see any argument there. That's—I'd say that's the high ground, myself.

GM: Hmm. Well, thank you. [*Laughs*]

[02:22:21] SL: Well, I'm appreciative. So if you had something to say to this audience that's at the Silas Hunt Legacy dinner, and you're one of ten awardees that will have a few minutes at the podium—that if you had some—if you could say something just off the top of your head now, what would you say to this gathering of folks—keep in mind that I guess there will probably be three or four hundred people out there in the audience that were—it sounds like we're gonna have to really hold down the amount of people that want to come. We're already struggling with that. We don't know—we're hoping this is gonna be an annual thing. We don't even know that yet. I mean, we're just on new ground here.

GM: Okay.

[02:23:18] SL: As—in this what we're consider an inaugural event, what message would you send to the here and now—to the—to this group of folks because I think the intentions are good. I

think people are thinking that it's time . . .

GM: Well, I would be . . .

SL: . . . to do right.

GM: . . . I'd be appreciative of their making the effort to make this recognition. I would—I probably would be a little sociologically negative, as I've been toward just entering school or just entering teaching in a school. I'll go back to Little Rock. The Little Rock crisis of 1957, where they made these nine young people into sort of mini-martyrs as they made Rosa Parks into a martyr—I say how—into a great person. How can you be great when the—when your achievement was to sit down in a bus? How is that great? I mean, people sit in a bus all the time. There's no biggie about where—about sitting in a bus. That can't be outstanding. And as far as Silas Hunt is concerned, yeah, you're entering a university not to make any discovery, not to make any invention, not to write a book, not to publish a poem or write a—paint a picture—cannot in itself, just your entry cannot be a monumental, historical event, nor can the hiring of a partic—any professor—one of now a thousand or more at the University of Arkansas—how can that be a signal—an outstanding event? It cannot be. [02:25:13] Now we may raise any event to outstanding status that we want, and I'm not

trying to take anything away, but I think it is—it shows something more about other people than it shows about Hunt if you're gonna say "A student entered the University of Arkansas and was thereby given a building, a day, and all kinds of honors for doing that which should be done, because it is symbolic."

That therein lies the value of it—the symbolism that attempts are being made to right wrongs that have been recognized for a



long time. Now as far as the African Americans or black students and faculty members are concerned, and the black community of Arkansas, I would say, "Do not lose confidence. Do not flag. This is your university. This is your university, and you have as much claim to it as anybody else. You try to work and make it all that it can be, all that it can be. You put your shoulder to the wheel like everybody else. No matter, as we say, come hell or high water, we will be here—not, you know, individually but as a group. We're not going anywhere, so get used to our being here in all kinds of positions because this is our holy ground as well as it is holy ground for anybody else. So we are ready to contest it and to make it all that it can be, which includes giving to its support as well." [02:27:21] So I'll be—if they call me I'd be able to try to say something to both sides. It looks very hopeful to me, and I would—for the people

that are coming, I would hope that they expect more of them than they did of, say, Silas Hunt or any of the rest of 'em that came. I would say that they didn't even expect anything of me. "Just come, spend your time, teach your classes, stay outta trouble, and you'll do all right." But I want now for the school to see a kid and see potential and work to see that potential realized. So University of Arkansas is my school, and I tell all the newcomers, "Get yourselves some Razorback hats and go yell for the pigs and have fun and be all that you can be and make this school live up to its reputation and promise for doing something." So those are my charges. [*Laughs*]

[02:28:42] SL: Okay, that's good. [*GM laughs*] I think we—I think we've got the dinner side of this deal going. But I tell you one thing that we haven't talked about, and we don't need to spend a whole lotta time, but we haven't talked about your wife, your co-author . . .

GM: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . of *Edge of Campus*.

GM: Mh-hmm.

SL: And we haven't really talked much about your family.

GM: Mhh.

SL: These are major parts [*laughs*] of your life.

[02:29:14] GM: Well, let me start with my family first. Our senior daughter [Marsha Morgan] lives with us and has a minimum job. She's not academic, but she does all right. And so it looks like that's gonna continue for a while. She's always had trouble with the books, and so that's—it's not an issue as far as we're concerned. The second son [Bryan Morgan] finished a military career after graduating from University of Arkansas, and he finished—finished up as a major in the [United States] Air Force. And my daughter [Marian Morgan] is some sort of big hospital room technician at Mayo Clinic. And that's the family, aside from the one we lost. And as far as my wife [Izola Morgan] is concerned, she got out of college—she did teach, oh, a little bit, maybe a year or so and off and on. But she got her master's degree [in Social Welfare] from here about twenty-five years ago, and then she got her doctoral—Ed.D. from here, and decided she would stick it out here with me, so she never went on the job market except for some consulting things in Washington, DC. But, yeah, she is trained. And whenever I'm out of town, she stands in for me in classes and all that kind of thing, so . . .

[02:31:01] SL: How—tell me how you met her.

GM: We were at Pine Bluff. She didn't live on the campus—not as

active as I was on the campus. And in those days you had to go by a common bulletin board and see what was going on on the campus, who was on the honor roll, who was on the delinquent list, and what activities were going on on campus. So I was near the bulletin board one day, and I saw this kinda scared young woman there, and I asked [*laughs*]*—I say—*I don't know what the jargon was at the time, but we used some kind of jargon we used to talk to the girls. [02:31:46] And I asked her if she would be interested in going to the sock hop. Now the sock hop was a dance in the administration building that had the only smooth floor on the campus. And so you went in this—in the hall of this administration building. You had to take your shoes off, and you danced around in your socks, and we called it a sock hop. I think it cost ten or fifteen cents to go, and she denied me. [*SL laughs*] I told her—I said, "How can you do this? Here I am, big man on campus, most likely to succeed, member of the choir, Omega Psi Phi, the yearbook—all these kinds of things—a campus personality, and you're gonna deny me to go to the sock hop?" I said, "Forget you." So either she kicked me to the curb, or I kicked her to the curb, one. But in—I went on to Korea and came back, and then that's when—came to the university, and the guy that was courting her sister bet

me that I could not date her, and I did. Won the bet and got a wife. But that's . . .

SL: How . . .

GM: . . . that's the story there.

[02:33:11] SL: Well, how did you ask her to marry you—what . . .

GM: I don't know. We . . .

SL: When I used to wedding videos, and I'd always . . .

GM: We hit it off. The—after I went down and met her and recalled old times and met the family, and I don't know what they saw in me—probably not much. But I guess I measured up okay as far as the family, but after about two months, she had gotten a ring from me, although not a very expensive one. But it was a respectable wedding—I mean, a engagement ring. And so that's about what that happened.

SL: Was that over dinner or . . .

GM: It wasn't over any dinner 'cause—I think it was at a drive-in hamburger joint or something. By that time I had bought myself a 1953 Kaiser.

SL: Kaiser?

GM: A Kaiser. The thing had a half—what do you call it—automatic drive to it, so you had to shift into two gears—one or two gears, and the third gear—maybe the third and fourth gear it was

automatic. So part automatic transmission.

SL: Did it have a clutch?

GM: Had a clutch, yeah, so you had to work both sides. [*SL laughs*]  
I said, "God!" [*Laughter*] So in this Kaiser I think I carried her  
to, like, a hamburger joint in North Little Rock or something and  
gave her the ring. And so we got married in [19]57 in Little  
Rock. And it was a double wedding 'cause this guy that was up  
here with us was marrying the other sister, so we had a double  
wedding. It was the first time the preacher had ever done  
double wedding.

[02:35:16] SL: Wow. Is this the same guy that you made the bet  
with?

GM: Yeah. [*SL laughs*] So we got—and I borrowed one of my  
students' white coat to—so I'd have a white coat and dark pants  
and so forth. Well, this student, former high school student of  
mine, had a—later a son who came to the University of Arkansas  
and played football and played for a while in the pros. I've  
forgotten his—Greg Lasker is his name.

SL: Yeah.

GM: So every time I see Vernon Lasker, his daddy, he say, "Hey,  
Gordon, have you got a white coat now?" [*Laughter*] But,  
anyway, back to this preacher giving this double-wedding

ceremony. He got down, and he says, "Do you, James Wise and Gordon Morgan, take these women" [*laughter*]"to"—[*laughter*] well, that was so funny—the—oh, man, I don't think . . .

SL: Said, "Y'all may kiss the brides."

[02:36:29] GM: "Y'all may kiss the brides," or something like that.

[*Laughter*] And he was so confused he didn't know [*laughs*] what to do. That was . . .

SL: That's funny. [*GM laughs*] That's funny.

GM: So we kidded ourselves. Both of those are gone now, but we kidded ourselves up to the bitter end as to which one had access to which of the several. [*Laughter*]

SL: That's a great story. [*GM laughs*] A great story. Well, Gordon, is there anything else that we should get on tape today? Now, you know, I know I've beat you to death here.

GM: That's all right.

SL: And we've been here for five hours.

GM: That's—that is a spell.

SL: And I know how . . .

GM: That's a spell.

SL: And if we need more we can always come . . .

GM: You can do it.

SL: . . . back.

GM: Do it.

SL: But is there anything that I have missed?

GM: I can't think of anything. I think you have turned over all the stones. I'm telling you. I can't think of anything that has not been looked at.

SL: If you think of something . . .

GM: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . please call me, and I'll come running.

[02:37:34 End of Interview]

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