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Hugh Butler (November 10, 2021)

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Whittier College

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NARRATOR: Hugh Butler

INTERVIEWER: Jayson Smith

PROJECT: Black at Whittier Oral History Project

JS: Can I have your name and the year you graduated?

HB: Hugh Butler, Junior. Graduated in 1978.

JS: Where did you grow up? What was your hometown like?

HB: Grew up, um, it's a story. (laughs) I was born in Chicago, South Side of Chicago. Lived there until I was nine. Got some family background—family, parents, were divorced when I was two years old, and I have an older sister who is eleven years older than me. All three of them have passed, but they were instrumental in my life. My mom decided, after the divorce, decided to move out to LA for a better life. My father and my sister, she was grown and a teacher, stayed in Chicago. So, lived on southwest LA, Leimert Park, Baldwin Hills area, pretty much most of my young life. I went to 39th Street Elementary School. I think it's called Dublin Avenue now, I'm not sure, maybe even Tom Bradley Elementary School. Went to Audobon Junior High School, and then I went to Dorsey High School and graduated from Dorsey High School in 1974. So, it was pretty much my mom and I out here. A single mom, you know, trying to make it work here in Los Angeles. I can't say—you know, there was always food on the table and clothes; it wasn't that kind of situation. But every summer I would go back to Chicago and spend summer vacation—or most every summer—with my sister, who was older. She was a teacher and married and started having kids, and with my father. And my father was a cop, Chicago PD, most of his career. So, it was interesting, to cut it short. LA was kind of the single parent. Go to Chicago, it was the middle-class life. You know, my brother-in-

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law and my sister, and my father and my stepmom, who was like a second mom to me.

So, I had two lifestyles, really, when I grew up, you know? And everybody involved was instrumental in setting the framework of who I am. My mother, obviously, was the biggest single influence, no doubt.

JS: So, you actually answered that question, how do you think having three—not even three—like four or five adults in your life—

HB: Yeah.

JS: —how did that affect you growing up?

HB: Four or five adults. Three households, essentially.

JS: How did that affect your decision to go to college? Were all of them college educated?

HB: Good question. Oh, were all of them educated? My mom, no. My mom left high school in her junior year or something like that, and then got her high school education many years later. My father graduated and went to the Army and spent time in the Korean War. So, that was his education. No formal, post high school education. Now, the brains of the family was my sister and she was eleven years older than me. So, she finished, Chicago Teacher's College was the name of it at the time, at twenty years old, and had a classroom that same year on the South Side of Chicago. I think it was Yale Elementary School, so. And her focus was educating Black children with the current technology at the time and just enlightening minds. So, how did that affect me? My parents were focused on educating ourselves, but more importantly, improving yourself. Whether you educated yourself or not, you carry yourself in a certain way. But you definitely had to always be moving forward, improving yourself. And then my sister was the educator, so eleven years older, I think I may have been probably her training ground. So, how did

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that affect me? I think I had the benefit of having a teacher, a college-educated student and teacher in the house with me, or in my life, depending on the timing, which helped formulate my decision-making and who I am today. Without a doubt. Without a doubt. So, I was fortunate I had three households, and they were all positive. So, that's the bottom line.

JS: What made you choose Whittier? You could have gone back home, or you could have gone to Chicago.

HB: Well, you know, LA became home because I moved out here when I was nine. So, I mean, I love LA. But what made me choose Whittier? There was actually a—I played basketball. I didn't have professional prospects. In my senior year I was on the varsity; I was the fifth starter on the team. So, I had a good coach. John Highdale was the coach that year; he was new, African American, and he sat me down and said, "Look, all you guys want to go to the NBA, but there are a lot of mid major schools, which are smaller than the big schools, UCLA or USC." And UCLA was the dominant basketball school at the time. But smaller schools, and then these division III, NCAA division III small schools. And he said, "You would get a great education." I kind of rejected it at first. You know, you have a dream, right? But reality set in. So, there was a small level of interest in my skill, because the school I went to was a basketball powerhouse. But, you know, I didn't have the skills for the major schools, and so we talked through that with this coach. And then I talked it over with my sister. You know, she was the one in the family that had gone to college. And basically, you know, became you need to focus on getting into a school where you can get a good education. So, there was a connection from the athletic department to Dorsey High School, because I think it was Jack Smoot and Al Hardin

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were Dorsey alumni, and they were here and they did well here, so my coach had worked the connection and suggested, hey, come up here and have a discussion with the coach and look at the school, yeah. And there were other small colleges, about five, all across the country that were sending me letters asking me to come to their school. But with that connection—Smoot and Al Hardin, and I think there was one other at Dorsey, guy I can't remember—I decided to come here. It was good, it was local. I had a girlfriend at that time that's my wife today. So, that was an influence. My mom was here, and the weather is great. And I liked Coach Dave Jacobs and Rod Tatum, his assistant coach, and I liked the atmosphere, so I made the choice to come here rather than go to—you asked me about Chicago—rather than go to the cold weather.

JS: Understand, yeah.

HB: (laughs) Kind of easy at that point.

JS: I get that. I kind of thought of applying to Chicago, but then I realized that I can't handle winter.

HB: Yeah, yeah, exactly. It's tough.

JS: So, then, what year did you attend Whittier?

HB: I attended 1974 through 1978.

JS: Oh, so straight out of high school?

HB: Straight out of high school in four years.

JS: What was your major while you were here?

HB: Business administration, sub in economics.

JS: Mm, what made you choose that major with that minor?

HB: Business?

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JS: Yeah.

HB: When I look back on it today, I guess—I'm going to give this one to my mom. Like I say, she wasn't formally educated, but she had a knack for business and numbers and money, and she could, like they said, make a dollar go a long way. You know what I mean? (laughs) So, I had a bank account at twelve, allowances and things like that. So, you know, that was a strong influence. So, when I got into high school I was starting to take business classes and, you know, I wasn't a math guy, but I could understand numbers and people's behavior related to numbers. So, when I got here to Whittier, I looked over the different curriculum and major opportunities and opted to go with what I thought would get me the job the fastest right out of high school. So, I thought about—I was leaning toward going into banking, yeah.

JS: You mentioned basketball.

HB: Yes.

JS: You played on the team from—?

HB: 1974 through 1978.

JS: All four years?

HB: Yeah, I was on the—they called it the junior—I think it was a freshman team or a junior varsity team at the time.

JS: Can you talk about your experience on the basketball team?

HB: Oh, it was outstanding. It was great. We had two great guys that were heading the program, basketball program: Dave Jacobs, we called him J, Coach J, and his assistant, Rod Tatum. Rod Tatum was African American, alumni of the school, and Coach Jacobs had hired him, and I liked him too. And our, uh, the program, we had some great

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experiences, and I met some great people, (laughs) and we had great fun and had great success.

JS: I know that you actually set a record on your last year. You had one of the highest scoring—you set a record for one of the highest scoring games.

HB: Wow, yeah. You did a little homework, huh?

JS: Yeah.

HB: Yeah, yeah, I did, yeah. I think I scored thirty-nine—I think? I know (laughs)—thirty-nine points, yeah, in a game, yeah.

JS: How did that feel?

HB: Ah, it was fine, it was great. Yeah, it was great, yeah. You know, while I was here I wasn't the big shooter. I was, you know, well, yeah, a defender one year and then the next year, you know, I was like the third player on the team, but I got hot and every shot started going in and they started feeding me the ball. So, it was good. It was a good feeling. It was fun, yeah.

JS: Other than basketball, did you participate in any society or clubs while you were here?

HB: Uh, no. I thought about it, different societies, but I always looked at it as my club and society or fraternities on other campuses was basketball. We were a pretty tight knit group in basketball because we had a lot of success. I mean, we won the district in my junior year and we went to the national tournament in Kansas City. We had a chance to go to China and represent, I think it was the—it was called the NAIA, the basketball body we were playing in. We weren't playing in the NCAA at that time. And we had a chance to go to Taiwan and play in a tournament for a week. We ended up taking third place, playing against Olympic teams. So, anyway, on the way back we stopped in Hawaii.

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(laughs) I mean, so the experience and all the people I met, you know, these are lifelong friends. My best friend that I met here, Marvin Mitchum, yeah, we're best friends today. We're like brothers; we do everything together. And he was on the freshman team, so the basketball experience was tremendous and I'm very proud of how successful we were and how we brought pride to the school. So, it was a very good time.

JS: You mentioned Marvin. Could you talk about maybe your relationship with other peers, both on the basketball team or maybe outside of the basketball team?

HB: Oh, okay. Well, okay, well Marvin's a best friend, we ended up roommates the last couple of years. I mean, we met here on the campus and personalities clicked, so, like I said, he's like a brother. Now, the other team members, we are pretty close. We don't see each other as much as I see Marvin, but family events we share together with some of the other team members; vacations. I just had a forty-first wedding anniversary; I invited those fellows that were in the wedding. Most of them are from the basketball team, were in the wedding. So, I know their children; they know my children, and we share this Whittier experience because we did a lot together. And we came from similar backgrounds, you know? But those aren't the only friends that I maintained from college. You know, there were some non-basketball friends that I've also maintained from the college, you know?

JS: How was your relationship with your non-basketball friends during your time?

HB: It's good. It was close for the first few years, where we would actually go out together and meet each other and go to each other's homes and things like that, or apartments at the time. And, you know, we just kind of began to go our separate ways. And then, alumni—what are they called? Homecoming! Couldn't think of the word. Homecomings

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we would see each other, if there was an event that would happen. Like one of the guys, his name's Roy Wallach, we called him Tarzan, he was a writer of exercise books and cycling books, and we would go to his home when he would have a book release or something like that, you know? So, we, sometimes, you know, every five years or so we'd get together and go to a baseball game, things like that. One guy, he's Dave van Winkle, he was an athlete here and we were all over here in this freshman dorm on the second floor, you know, (laughs) as freshman and we all became pretty close because we were a wild, fun bunch in Johnson Hall, second floor.

JS: How about your relationship with your professors?

HB: In what way?

JS: So, obviously inside the classroom, how did your professors treat you?

HB: Well, obviously I had—I forgot what they called them, the counselor, I guess, if you will—there was a different term, I can't remember what it was. I think his name was Dr. Overter(?) and he was that, yeah, economics class. So, he was my counselor. I can't think of the term. So, good relationship with him. It was interesting with him. There was Hugh Mendez, the baseball coach. He was African American, so he would give us some good counseling on how to maneuver life and maneuver life on this campus. Some of my business professors. I was not very—spent a lot of time with them, but there were a few of them that would pull me aside and give me, you know, some advice like, “A little less basketball, a little more studying,” type of, you know, discussions. But they were all good, favorable. I mean, it was supportive. For me, I mean, you know, it ended up being perfect for me because small class size, the ability to call up on those professors when you needed it, the individual encouragement and support, and at the time, I'll say it, I was

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not the best student. I was smart, but kind of lazy academically. So, that encouragement to put the effort in began to take hold my sophomore year. A little intimidated freshman year, because academically, hmmm, [makes growling sound] yeah. (laughs) I don't know if I could handle it, but I have to—I got to give the credit to the overall group of instructors that I had, and Dr. Overter(?) with the encouragement and basically saying, “Look, you can do this.” There was one tough professor; I can't remember his name. But he basically said, “I see your thought process. I see your idea. But you're not making it clear enough and you're not putting the actual facts behind your thought to influence the decision that you're trying—and outcome.” And he was the guy that told me, “A little less basketball, a little more focus on this and you'll be fine.” So, with that type of encouragement, you know, you either you accept it as real or you don't and you never improve. So, I accepted. So, I give credit to the professors, yeah. I had tutors, especially in math. The algebra I and II, you know, I struggled with, but I got a tutor and I worked through it. So, you don't have to be an academic genius to be successful, you just have to be very determined.

JS: This is true. And the tutors were definitely helpful?

HB: I'm sorry?

JS: The tutors were helpful? In helping you pass classes, the tutors helped you?

HB: Oh, the tutor? Oh, absolutely, absolutely. He was—I forgot his name, but he was a Chinese exchange student from China. So, that education alone (laughs)—

[recording paused]

JS: Okay, you were charging. Okay.

HB: You were talking about the tutor.

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JS: Yes. You mentioned that your tutor was a Chinese exchange student.

HB: Mm-hmm.

JS: And then, what was that like?

HB: It was challenging because we had to get to know each other, so it was culturally—language; you know, I had to adjust my communication to make it more clearer about the thoughts that I was—instead of using cliches or slang and things like that he hadn't heard. But as far as—so, that was fine and we actually ended up being, you know, for that period of time, enjoyed each other, working together. You know, working together we solved the problem that was contributed by math(?). (laughs) And it benefited me. I got out of Whittier College in four years. I shouldn't say "got out". I graduated, proudly, in four years.

JS: And then, how about the administration? I know that when I got here they kind of emphasized how everyone—or like a lot of students were close with the administration, specifically like the dean, the president. Did you feel that they tried that when you were here?

HB: Did I feel an exceptional closeness—

JS: Yes.

HB: —to the administration? Hmm, not really. It wasn't something I was looking for. If you—my closeness to the administration was through the basketball coach, who was the athletic director. So, if you characterize that as administration, yeah, I had a close relationship. If you characterize, like vice presidents of different departments and things like that, no, I didn't have a very close relationship. I had a close relationship, and my best friend Murray had a close relationship with Rich Cheatham, who ran the audiovisual

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department. But I don't know how to describe close. I knew some—I knew the financial aid guy and he was a challenge to deal with because he had his unique way of distributing the money (laughs). I didn't understand it and not many of us in our class understood it, and I mean all students. But, yeah, other than that I didn't have a close relationship. You know, I knew, over time I met them because obviously they would congratulate us for having a successful year in sports or something like that, but that was it.

JS: Did you live on campus the entire you went here?

HB: I lived on campus the entire time.

JS: So, what was that like?

HB: What was it like?

JS: Yeah, living four years on campus.

HB: Um, the first year was probably the most fun I had in my life. So, a bunch of us ended up on the second floor, Johnson Hall, and for whatever reason it just made (laughs)—the personalities clicked, and we had the time of our lives. It was just fun. A lot of characters, a lot of unique personalities, a lot of jokesters. After class, whatever extracurricular activities—for me it was basketball practice—after studying then we'd creep outside in the hallway in the common area about nine o'clock and let the fun begin. (laughs) It was just nonstop fun. So, a lot of those gentlemen I mentioned that were not on the basketball team, and a couple that were, we are still friends because we just had a great time.

JS: How about your sophomore, junior, senior year?

HB: Uh, sophomore, yeah, I stayed on campus. I began to get a little more serious, right, it wasn't the same type of fun. The novelty had worn off and it was, get down to work. But it was fine, you know? Sophomore and junior year I forgot which dorm I was in. The

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dorms were—the buildings were in bad shape. When it rained get the pans out, the buckets out, I'm sorry, and catch the water. Sometimes the water would be no water and that kind of crap, you know, so they were raggedy and not well maintained. But at that point, hey, who cares, you know? But we still had fun. I remember the lounges, playing pool, playing ping pong, meeting people, discussing life, politics, everything you could think of, so it was pretty interesting, yeah. And then the senior year we had signed up—this is a negative—Marv and I signed up for off-campus housing and actually thought we were awarded the housing. But then when we got to campus, we were told that we didn't have the housing. What happened? Well, we didn't declare that we were coming back to school. I think that's the story that we were told. And we were juniors, right? I'm firmly entrenched in the basketball program; he's firmly entrenched. He finished in four years, as well. But the story was you didn't commit to coming back to school, or whatever, maybe he didn't deposit—I don't know—but they ended up giving the housing to somebody else and we thought there was some favoritism going on. And so, we didn't get the house. So, we ended up staying in an empty wing of the women's dorm. (laughs) So, that was kind of weird, yeah. (inaudible)_____.

JS: You mentioned this challenge—what other challenges did you, maybe, face just in day-to-day life for you at the college?

HB: Well, primarily academically. That was the foremost challenge. I'll give you an example of what I'm talking about. First English class the professor asks a question about Shakespeare, "Who's read Shakespeare?" Almost all hands went up, but me. I hadn't read Shakespeare. I had heard of Shakespeare, but I hadn't read it. So, that was

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intimidating, you know? So, yeah, I had read other books, but more of stories—not from an old English—I think he was English, right—

JS: Yes.

HB: —an English guy—but more about the stories and what’s happening in America around basketball players. Same type of—in some instances, tragedies and trag—you know that weren’t the literary norm in my neighborhood. But I read about basketball players and they strived to improve themselves. Martin Luther King, Malcom X—those books and things like that. So, that type of adjustment in what literature you read versus what was being asked as almost a requirement in college was a little different. It was a challenge. And so, you can take that example and just manifest it across everything. So, it was a culture difference. You know, it’s the academic, but cultural shock too. But it was a shock, it was a challenge, but it was probably the strongest education that I got when I was here, over and above the academic by at least fifty percent, because my roommate was a teammate on the freshman basketball team, but he grew up—he was a white guy—and he grew up in the high desert area here and I’m coming from the city, and we came together and the actual learning each other—we became friends. But learning each other was the greatest education because he came from a completely different lifestyle. He had his troubles and I had mine. My parents were separated and he had his troubles with his family and we talked about them. So, then we began to bridge this gap of this cultural difference that, you know, we’re people, we’re people, we’re people, but you know you still have that cultural divide, so it was interesting. And that became the education of a lifetime. And then the experiences on that second floor of Johnson dorm where we had rich, not rich, people in between, people that were deeply religious, those that were

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atheists, those that lived on the beach, those lived in the city, those that lived in the country, those that lived in Iowa and other places. And you start learning all these different people that come from different walks of life. Now, it didn't take me long, because I can adapt to things pretty quickly. Within about six months I realized, hmm, yeah, this—what I thought was superior intellect, yeah, some, some not. (laughs) You begin to bridge that gap that, you know, you can handle this. So, I say all that to say confidence rose tremendously.

JS: You mentioned favoritism in that last question—

HB: Yeah.

JS: —how you felt that you and your friend Marvin maybe got kicked out of the dorm for something resulting in favoritism.

HB: Mm-hmm.

JS: How do you come to this—where do you think—

HB: I don't remember the exact circumstances, but I think there was some friend that—somebody's kid or something like that. Yeah, we called it favoritism. Some called it possibly racism. But I think it was a friend of a friend type of thing, and so it could be both—I don't know. But we didn't challenge it or pursue it. I mean, we were just like, hey, okay. We made our complaint, we didn't get the house, now what? We just wanted to get out of—at that point we changed—we developed just a little bit of—it was a negative stain, you know, and we just said, okay, we've got one more year, just put us somewhere, and we're going to figure it out and we're going to get our degree and move on.

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JS: Were there other possibly racial, or definitely racial, instances that happened to you on campus?

HB: Oh, on campus?

JS: On campus, around campus—

HB: Around campus, around campus. Yeah, definitely. When I first got here—I forgot who I was riding a bike with through town—cops pulled me over and ask you, “What are you doing?” That type of question. We’re riding our bikes (laughs), you know? But I had been pulled over by cops before, so I kind of—and my father was a cop, so—in Chicago—so, it didn’t scare me, it was just a situation I had to deal with cautiously. So, I said, “We’re Whittier College students and we’re riding our bikes.” I put the Whittier College student in, rather than not put it in and then create that confrontation. So, basically the message was, *calm down, dude*. And he said, “Well, where did you get the bikes?” So, at that point, okay, yeah, that’s raising the tension level, because what does it matter where you got the bikes? We’re riding bikes. So, you know, I just said, “They’re our bikes.” And at that point we were looking at each other eyeball to eyeball, just staring at each other. So, the lesson my father taught me is look at the badge, memorize the number out loud, and the name, and then start calling him by his name. So, I said—I don’t remember his name—“Officer Smith,” whatever his name was—“badge number da, da, da, what seems to be the problem.” And we had a little verbal jousting, but looking at him eyeball to eyeball, I don’t know what’s going to happen here, but we’ll see. (laughs) “Well, yeah, there had been some bikes stolen.” I said, “What does that have to do with us. We’re college students.” “Well, just be careful.” And then, the person I was with—because I was getting ready to respond to ‘be careful’—he just said, “Okay, sir.” So, that happened

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a couple of times. Um, you know, the routine things were, at the time—you know, it was a different demographic here in the city—so, you know you're walking down the street and you're going down to the drugstore or something to get you some tissue, some deodorant, and the clutching of the bag and the crossing the street, it was very obvious from the older ladies in the community. So, you know, yeah, whatever. Arguments about change, you know? But I mean, this was in the seventies, right, you know? Those were the minor ones. There was one big one we had. Over on the corner where the California Grill is it used to be a Bob's Big Boy. So, you go over there and you get you a cheeseburger or some chicken, whatever, you had somebody with you and you eat and come back. So, we did that one night and we're walking, so across the street at the light one of our teammates was in—what's the street here? Philadelphia—was in the left turn lane to go down Painter, and then there was a car in between and we're on the sidewalk. So, we're talking to him, "Hey, where are you going?" "I'm going home—ba, ba, ba, ba." So, there was a car in between and the window comes down and the guy says—his lady friend and him, and they were dressed up very nice—said, "Are you talking to us?" We said, "No, we're talking to our friend in the car next to you." He looks and he sees the guy, and then we said, "Just go on about your business." "What did you say?" So, he pulls to the side, he pulls around the corner. He's on the campus, right in front of what used to be the old administration building, and he gets out of the car and he confronts us while we're talking. So, unfortunately that confrontation—just to make this shorter—that confrontation went on for about five or ten minutes. Maybe we should have walked away, but at the time I'm young, strong, wasn't interested in hearing the crap, and it escalated. And the guy ended up on the ground and his head hit the ground and it looked like he

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might have been unconscious. We started to leave, then we said no. So, one of us went to go get the security. We knew the security guy real well. It was senior year, so everybody knew us on campus. So, security comes and before that, before we went to go get security we were getting ready to just leave him, and, you know, his wife had him in her lap. But we're looking at him and we're like, wow, this is pretty bad. And we were getting ready to leave and then we saw these people come running out of Bob's to aid this guy. So, I said, hmm, we better go back. So, when we went back we went and got campus security. I stayed there. So, campus security came and he knows us, "Hey, what happened here, Hugh? Da, da, da, da." I explained. So, he said, "Wow, okay. Why is he on the ground?" I said, "Well, you know, he started the situation. He kind of swung and we ducked and hit him and he fell on the ground." So, (laughs) the security guy—I don't mean to laugh about it; it was serious, but I was just thinking about the situation, the moment—so, the security guy asks the group, "What happened?" And this lady pipes up, "I saw these two Black guys try to rob this guy and try to take his money." (laughs) At that point we were like, "What?" So, our buddy was going ballistic, right? I said, "That's not true." He said, "Well, what happened?" I said, "Well, wait a minute, I already told you what happened." So, at that point I said, "Come on now, you know us." And then he said, "Okay." So, he lost confidence in us for a second and then he asked the wife and the wife said, "Well, they started talking, da, da, da, da", which wasn't true. The guy woke up; his wife drug him in the car, flopped him in the car, and then she took off—they took off. Well, we got a call from the coach at the time and I had to come in, I had to talk to the coach about what happened, talk to administration. Apparently, this guy was a Whittier PD, so I was told for—or we were told—for a month or so don't leave campus. Cops are upset. So,

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you know. There had been some other incidents on the campus at the time, involving Whittier College athletes, where an undercover cop didn't identify himself with the athlete, and was on duty. So, it was like, what are you doing here, you know? So, those are instances. Luckily nothing happened to me and I don't know what happened to the cop, and I think the school worked it out and basically, I don't know how, you know? But we were fine and we went on. We laid low for about three weeks and then everything was fine.

JS: That is a—I don't even—

HB: You didn't expect that?

JS: I did not.

HB: That's true, that's what happened.

JS: No, that's an important story.

HB: Yeah, it happened, but, you know, it didn't—once I explained the story, and I did most of the explaining, I never heard any repercussions from it, nothing directly affected me, you know, because we had a reputation; we were good guys. I think the college had to work something out with the police department about changing relations or something. I don't know.

JS: It must have been pretty upsetting though, you know? That one second when the security officer kind of doubted you.

HB: Um, only for a second. But I knew him, but, you know, it was fine. He was a good guy. He just had a split second of doubt and then after that he was fine. We were fine after that and we were friendly and chummy like we had been before. So, look, you know, at the time we couldn't afford to get overly sensitive about minor stuff, because it was it was,

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right? It was 1977, 1978, so not too long after civil rights, so things were changing, so there were certain things you dealt with. But, you know, in retrospect we should have walked away, but we dealt with it with the equal force that was intended for us, so I'll put it like that.

JS: Then, you actually mentioned *we should have*—do you think that you should have walked away from the situation?

HB: I don't regret. It was a reaction—I was a young man—it was a reaction and it was—there were a lot of racial words being flung back and forth, all the negative stuff that we hear, and it hit a button. So, I don't regret that, but from a maturity standpoint, yeah, I could have walked away. But we got caught up in the moment, and so.

JS: Were there other instances on campus between peers or faculty where there might have been—?

HB: Nah, nothing. I mean, nothing compared to that, no. (laughs) No. Everything else was tolerable. Look, I mean, you know, it was 1974 when I got here. Integration was new to the country, right? College—African Americans on college campuses in larger numbers—
—and not huge numbers, but larger numbers than had previous been—was new. It was different. So, yeah.

JS: What do you feel like the demographics were while you were at school? You mentioned that—

HB: What do you mean—at the school?

JS: Yeah, you mentioned that integration was new.

HB: I don't know, twenty, twenty-five Black people, maybe. I don't know. Is that what you're asking me, how many Black people on campus?

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JS: Yeah.

HB: I mean, I can't tell you the breakdown of all the other cultures, but it's nowhere near like it is now, and administration is completely different, so the culture's different.

JS: Do you feel like there was a sense of camaraderie between the Black people that were on campus, since there were so few of you?

HB: Uh, yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. And we had a Black Student Union, yeah. And Marvin was in charge of the Black Student Union for years. So, yeah, we had camaraderie, card parties, parties, (inaudible)_____, you know, all that kind of stuff, yeah.

JS: You mentioned that the faculty wasn't as diverse as it is now; did you still have, maybe, someone you felt—

HB: Hugh Mendez.

JS: Could you maybe talk about your relationship with him?

HB: Mine wasn't—and one other guy, the assistant coach, Rod Tatum. So, Hugh Mendez was the baseball coach and football coach. He was very instrumental in providing guidance on how to deal with campus and what was going on on the campus and things like that, that he can talk about. And for the basketball team it was Rod Tatum. He was assistant coach and so he was our guy and we talked to him. Those were the ones that were personally for me. There were a couple other African Americans, I just don't remember. I might have just never really had a relationship with them of any substance.

JS: You mention Rod Tatum a lot; it sounds like he was probably one of the most influential people at this college for you.

HB: Yeah, he was assistant coach, yeah, absolutely. And he was the communicator and he became really good friends, and we are friends to this day. As a matter of fact, Rod was

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the conduit for me getting into the line of business I ended up working in, aerospace, because he left campus and went to work at Lockheed Martin Corporation in Burbank and through another Whittier College graduate, Fred Lakey, got Rod hired. And then, when I graduated Rod said, “Hey, get your application in.” And then, I ended up having another friend from the college campus, ended up working in aerospace. So, yeah, Rod is truly—he’s so influential because he got me my first professional job. You know, I had other offers, but I give credit to Rod. Now, my mother said, “How’s Rod? You better talk to Rod. Remember, Rod gave you your first job.,” every time I’d go visit her. (laughs) So, yeah, he was extremely influential.

JS: So, he was kind of like, maybe, your mentor on campus?

HB: Uh, yeah, yeah, about certain things, about certain things, yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, you know, I don’t believe that a mentor is—one person does all things. For certain things he was and mentoring for some of the academic stuff was Dr. Overter(?). And then I mentioned Rich Cheatham in the audiovisual department, and he was a good mentor. So, we had different mentors. The coach, Dave Jacobs; he was a mentor.

JS: And these four or five people, you feel like they may have helped you, not only just—

HB: Not they *may*; they *did*.

JS: They helped you graduate college, get to where you are now.

HB: Yeah. I mean, you can call them mentors, you can call them counselors, coaches, (inaudible)_____, friend. All of those things, yeah. Like I said, one person cannot be a mentor to you for every aspect of your life. That’s just not a reasonable expectation to put on one person. So, a lot of different people (pause), as well as my friends, because we bonded together, and which was a common goal, to enjoy ourselves here on campus.

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Because, you know, there were a lot of African Americans that didn't stay from our freshman class, so, those of us that stayed, we had this common bond and we'd help each other. I mean, there was a guy on the basketball team, George Hightower, he came here to be a doctor and he ended up being a doctor. He was this brilliant dude. I saw him at our reunion for our induction in the hall of fame for our basketball team and, I mean, he was the kind of doctor where he was headed—I think he was headed to Idaho to set up the medical facilities for drilling up in the (inaudible)_____, uh, I forgot what it's called, where they did oil drilling in South Dakota or North Dakota—I can't remember exactly. He's that kind of dude, that kind of success. He was the superstar athlete on the academic side, plus a really good athlete. But the athletics, it was clear for him, was just recreation, because he loved to play. But he was a superstar academic athlete. We had that bond, all of us. We wanted to see George graduate and be a doctor. There was no envy; it was dude, you should be, you know?

JS: What made you want to stay at Whittier? You mentioned that some people left. What made you stay throughout the four years?

HB: Well, I had extracurricular activities that I was successful at, I met some incredibly great people in that freshman dorm and on the basketball team, then the basketball. All the things that we just kind of talked about. You know, the coaching staff, the few professors, Dr. Overter(?) who was like my—I forgot what they called them—mentors—and then just campus life. And then, you know, I was beginning to thrive; confidence level was rising—I could feel it even though it's not tangible; experience. So, all these things I just described is the experience and the experience was positive; it wasn't negative.

JS: In terms of achievements, other than you being the superstar basketball player—

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HB: I was not the superstar basketball player.

JS: —that I think that you are.

HB: There were other superstars.

JS: Okay, being the superstar basketball player that *I* think that you are—

HB: (laughs) Okay, thank you.

JS: —from reading what you did in the past—what other accomplishments do you think you had at Whittier.

HB: What do you mean?

JS: Academic—

HB: Academic, I graduated in four years.

JS: That's an accomplishment.

HB: Mm-hmm.

JS: That, itself, is an accomplishment.

HB: Hey, this is it, man. (laughs) Second to that—or maybe more importantly, I don't know, maybe it's equal—I met lifelong friends, great people. Great people—vice presidents; they own their own businesses; principals; athletic directors; several own their own businesses; coaches; aerospace—that was me and others in aerospace. Incredible people.

JS: During your time at—

HB: I mean, you know, these incredible people that endured all this stuff that I just talked about. And then, there were the alumni before us that would come up and talk to us. I mentioned Smoot and Al Hardin—incredible people.

JS: During your time at the college, several things in the outside world were happening: the Vietnam War was happening—

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HB: Mm-hmm.

JS: You mentioned—

HB: Yeah, I had to register, so I was registered for the war, for the lottery, yeah.

JS: What was that like?

HB: Hmm?

JS: What was that like?

HB: It was scary, but I got a good number. I had, like, in the three hundreds, yeah, because it was by day, you know, your birthday, and then they pick your day. So, if you're February 26th, you were number one and you're going to go into the military. So, and they were ending the draft about that time. I had the timing off a little bit, but I did have to register, and I had a lottery day. But at that point nobody wanted that war to continue.

JS: Could you maybe talk about other historical events? I know that you mentioned something about Hank Aaron beating Babe Ruth's record.

HB: Oh, yeah, from a sports standpoint—I think it was around that time, late seventies, early seventies—yeah, he became the homerun leader, 715 homeruns. So, that was a major cultural event, you know, African American milestone achievement in sports and a sense of pride. But again, you know, you play through the sixties and then the seventies, the culture at the time did not want him to be the greatest baseball player. The folklore was—I mean, no, the factor was Babe Ruth. So, here comes Hank Aaron from Atlanta, the South, so it was a big deal. But besides that, the Vietnam War, oil embargo, *Roots*, yeah, it was a big deal. (laughs) Big deal. Sitting down watching *Roots*, man. The country was riveted. It was the greatest single program from a viewing perspective ever, I think, at the time. Yeah, so.

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JS: How did these things, maybe, affect your time at college if they happened while you were there in college. All these historical events that were happening, how did they—

HB: Um, you know, there's your day-to-day in life and obviously it didn't affect that, but it affects your positive mental outlook about what can be achieved in America, if you're African American—Black—before African American, I was Black, right? So, what you can achieve, right? A sense of pride. The Hank Aaron thing, okay. You know, if the legend was, is that he had to hit these home runs where pitchers wouldn't throw him a ball to hit. Is it true or not? I don't know. So, in your mind he had to overcome these extraordinary odds, you know? Alex Haley wrote the book *Roots* and just laid out what was not in history books. I mean there was an African American history class here; I didn't take it, because I was focused on what I was going to do for a job. I didn't see that as benefiting me in a job. But, you know, *Roots* was monumental. But everything else that was going on, you know, music changing, culture changing, movies are changing. I could go on and on. (laughs)

JS: Is there anything else you'd like to say to the students who may be watching this.

HB: Uh, just the students, or—

JS: Students, faculty, anyone who is watching.

HB: Well, you know, what you're hearing from me was somebody—you know, this is forty-five years ago, okay? So, we tend to focus on a negative and I think we're focusing on a negative too much now. That's everybody, if we're talking all students. If we talk to just African American students, we tend to focus on a negative instead of a positive to make our point and say, you know, and I believe it's more positive. And I'll give you an example of what I'm talking about without elaborating on my whole philosophy about

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life. A narrative is that the Black unemployment rate is too high, right? What is it, ten percent? Okay. And it's always compared to other groups. That's fine, okay. And then that becomes the argument. Well, you know, I look at things like this: yeah, ten percent are not working, but ninety percent are. That's a pretty high number. Is it high enough compared to? No. But it's ninety percent working, ten percent not. I'm just going by the numbers that we count. I understand there are people that aren't recorded and all that crap—not crap, but you know. But it's just your perspective, right? And I think—I mean keep fighting and keep asking for fair share, but yeah, the president of the university—or school—that's big progress. So, let that inspire you, because you guys have a lot of opportunity and a lot of information at your hands to be successful, so be confident, be determined. I wasn't the smartest guy, but I did okay. I've got two kids, a nice family, living in a nice house, driving nice cars, and I'm retired. I don't have to worry about working anymore. A C student, but you've got to be confident and determined. So, don't focus on the negative, focus on the positive. There's a lot of positive. Anything else.

JS: I think—

HB: I mean, that's for anybody. Look, (pause) just so you know the perspective I'm coming from, again—and I'm not trying to brag, but just so you understand—I was in aerospace for thirty-something years, okay? An extremely conservative, republican environment, obviously, right? It's a business of the Defense Department. So, I managed over 250 people at one time, so that same message is what I used to give to my staff: *Stay positive, don't focus on the negative, stay positive*. So, that applies to—and the only reason I'm saying what I did is so that there's inspiration about the positive, okay? We get fed the negative all the time, but all these wonderful people I've talked to you about, these are

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positive people. I'm a C student. You know, I went to high school, I gave you the background, I gave you the whole thing, and I ended up managing 250 people that managed almost three quarters of a billion dollars of defense dollars for a business unit in the Northrop Grumman Corporation. So, I'm not saying that to brag because I don't care, you know, who knows? I'm only saying it as the inspiration, okay, of the positive. You've got to work with the negative, obviously, but focus on the positive. So, that's this whole story.

JS: You're right; the positive is what is important. Thank you so much.

HB: Okay, you're welcome.

JS: I think you've answered all my questions.

HB: It was a pleasure; this is a pleasure. I'm glad to do it and, yeah, I hope it can inspire the next generation to reach higher ground and higher levels, because you will; you will. There's nothing to stop you but yourself, and don't let that happen.

JS: Thank you so much.

HB: How did we do on time?

JS: We did really well. We still have thirteen minutes.

HB: Oh, okay, good.

END OF INTERVIEW