

Dr. Jandel Allen-Davis '80
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Black Lives
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Transcribed by Will Cohen '27

COHEN: Hello! My name is Will Cohen. This interview is being conducted for the Dartmouth Black Lives Oral History Project. Today is February 12th, 2026, and I am at 51 Lebanon Street, right outside the campus of Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. Today, I am here with Dr. Jandel Allen-Davis. Thank you so much for agreeing to speak with me today, and could you please state your full name and spell it for the record, please?

ALLEN-DAVIS: I sure can. So it's Jandel. Allen-Davis, Dr. Jandel Allen-Davis, so it's J-A-N-D-E-L, last name A-L-L-E-N hyphen Davis, D-A-V-I-S.

COHEN: Thank you. A couple quick logistics. This interview is being recorded, so it can be preserved as part of The Dartmouth Black Lives Oral History Project, and a transcript will be created for the recording, and you'll have the chance to review it for accuracy. So—

ALLEN-DAVIS: Okay, thank you.

COHEN: To begin, where and when were you born?

ALLEN-DAVIS: I was born in Landsstuhl, L-A-N-D-S-T-U-H-L, Germany, actually, in 1958, on January 5th. So I just had my 68th birthday. No.

COHEN: So, where did you grow up? What was your childhood like?

ALLEN-DAVIS: So I grew up many places, so we didn't.

COHEN: Oh, and I'm sorry, happy late birthday.

ALLEN-DAVIS: Well, so, we didn't live in Germany long. I think my father's orders changed in March of 1958, so not too long. We moved to Spokane, Washington, so I was there until I was in first grade, on a military base there, Fairchild Air Force Base. And then we spent a little bit of time in Washington, D.C. with my

mom's family when my father's orders took him to Labrador. And then when he came back, we went to Texas. to Abilene, Texas, where I did third grade, then he got out after 20 years, so that was 1967. We moved back to D.C., Washington, D.C., and that's where, effectively, I guess I grew up, or finished out, before college, so from 4th grade to 12th grade in Washington, D.C., That's where I lived.

COHEN:

So, what was it like being a military child?

ALLEN-DAVIS:

It was, you know, it's a really kind of cool question, because there's two things, especially given how long ago that was. That was a tale of two worlds in some ways. So there was the world outside of a military base where our populations were still super segregated. You know, Black folks live where they live, white folks, you know, whoever, neighborhoods where there wasn't a lot of, interacting. But, you know, the military in the United States had a belief that soldiers are soldiers, and our Constitution and what we fight for from a defense perspective is universal, and so there was no separation. I'm sure there was racism. In fact, I know there was racism. But we lived on bases alongside white folk and Black folk and all sorts of people. And it was fun as a kid, because the kids don't see race anyway. But you're in this sort of secluded world where everybody that you're with are there for one mission. That is this whole idea of defense. And so the mission, the purpose, the goals are the same, even though, you know, obviously it's a lot of different people. And so it was—there was a kind of insular nature to growing up, for those—till fourth grade. On a military base as a kid, and I didn't have a sense. This goes back to, what, I was born in 58, so till 67, I didn't have a sense of difference that way. We were just kids, being kids, playing with each other, doing what the kids do, while the parents were doing whatever they do, so [Pause] And then it certainly changed in some big ways when we got out of, my father got out of the military, and we moved back to civilian—or moved to civilian life, because my dad went into the military when he was 18, right out of [Pause] High school in 1947, so a real different world when you think about how long ago that was. So—we then moved back to DC, which was a pretty much, in terms of my world, changed from this world that was

mixed in terms of races, but mostly white folk, to a world that was pretty much all Black, and had lots to learn at a time where—and also lots to, as a fourth grader, like this little kid, really try to [Pause] I've thought about this a lot, Trying to sort of understand or figure out, because it was clear that we were treated differently. I was treated differently or viewed differently by the few white folk that we saw than had ever been the case in those few years when we were in the military. [Pause] So I guess it was my first taste of real [Pause] Discrimination and, honestly, racism as a kid.

COHEN: So what messages did you receive about race and racism growing up, and [Pause]

ALLEN-DAVIS: Hmm. How do you mean different? I just remember, and I actually did this on a video recording many years ago, about where we were doing some work at Kaiser Permanente on race and diversity. I remember being this little kid, you can sense that they think you're different or bad in some way, just because of the color of your skin. And I remember wanting to say, "but I'm different, I'm not whatever you may be thinking." So there was that part of it that was very confusing. It was also interestingly confusing to go to an all-Black inner-city Catholic school, And be someone who talked like a white kid. And was smart, which seemed like it wasn't a good combination at the time, and so I was bullied. We're talking like a white kid. The other thing that I didn't know, and we didn't talk about this the other day, is I didn't have a sense of this thing called the color line in our community, you know, light-skinned versus dark-skinned. My father's background is mixed race. And, so he was light-skinned. I have a sister and a brother who are light-skinned, another brother and I who are dark-skinned, and one brother who's adopted. And that was the other thing I was trying to figure out how to understand. As you start to sort of—the boys and girls start looking at each other, it's like, oh, so dark skin was less valued, or viewed as uglier in some way, and I had a sister who was—was your complexion, frankly, Will, and so she was the pretty one, and I wasn't the pretty one, because I was dark-skinned. And, so, you know, there was lots, culturally, just to kind of navigate and get, I don't know, that comfortable with, but at least certainly to

understand, and over many, many, many years, just what I'd say come to terms with in terms of how our community viewed color, and hair texture, and all the things, so—that really do hit at your self-esteem, but I was a smart kid, and [Pause] Yeah, I think I was pretty easy to [Pause] Be with and work alongside, and wanted to be liked by everybody, including the teachers, so—strong sort of will, I suppose, or desire to please, and so lots of people opened doors, and [Pause] Despite not looking some way that I think we thought we were supposed to look. Lots of opportunities came through that, too.

COHEN:

We'll definitely get back to the color line and how you navigated that at Dartmouth, but just back to your younger years, when did medicine become a real goal for you? You talk about being a smart kid, and we briefly spoke about this on our call, but yeah.

ALLEN-DAVIS:

Yeah, so, you know, it's funny, I think that, the way I frame it now is I think I always wanted to be in healthcare. When I was a little kid, I loved helping. I used to even take little brown paper lunch sacks that we had, and I'd put cotton balls and stuff in it, and act like I had my little doctor bag, I guess. Or a nurse bag, because at the time, I thought I would be a nurse, because girls are nurses and boys are doctors. That was the stage. I was, you know, this was the 60s. And, so that's what I was going to be. And then, of course, the modern [Pause] I call it civil rights and women's rights movements of the late 60s and 70s came about, and I realized that there were way more options than I thought before, and I said, I really want to be a doctor, because I've been watching those you know, my role models, I didn't have anybody who looked like me as a role model, you know, when going into public health clinics or other places for care. But what I did know is what I saw on TV, and I loved watching all the shows about medicine, you know, whether it was The Bold Ones, or Hospital Center, or Marcus Welby, all things that certainly predate—way predate you. And those were my role models, and I really wanted to be a doctor. I wanted to be a cardiovascular surgeon, just based on those TV shows. And so, the blessing and the reality is I did get to do that.

COHEN: Well, thank you, you actually answered my next question about your early role models. I want to know what it was like, in DC during the Civil Rights Movement, kind of when you were growing up.

ALLEN-DAVIS: Wow. So, 1968 followed 1967, and we know what happened in 68. Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated, and I'll never forget it really—it's a painful story to tell, although I do remember telling it from a stage at Dartmouth. In the spring, I think it was, of 1979. And that is that, when we first moved back to Washington, D.C, after my father got out of the military, we lived with my grandmother and her twin sister until my father and mother bought a house a few months later. And I used to go upstairs after dinner and sit in my great-aunt's room, who we called Annie. I would sit with Annie, and we'd watch the game shows together, right? [Pause] There was a moment where the show, one of the shows, was interrupted to bring you this special news bulletin. And the bulletin was that Martin Luther King had been killed. And I went, hooray! And I went running down the stairs, and my mother and grandmother were in the kitchen, and I re [Pause] I leaned over the banisters of the steps, and I said. Mama, Grandma! Martin Luther King was killed! And they fell apart. And by the way, my aunt upstairs had fallen apart too, but I'm like this little kid, what the hell do I know? Sadly, I watch how they respond, and I realize, I have the story clearly wrong. And it told me something really, really important, and certainly [Pause] It changed the way we taught some history, but that—it's like, they never talked about this stuff in our house, about civil rights, race issues and those sorts of things, and so it was something to know in that instant, and it's something I processed by myself. Not processed in any big way, but I never told them, and they didn't go, "did you just cheer?" Or, "Why are you sounding happy?" Any of that. They were pretty quickly enmeshed in grief, and within the next 24 hours, I knew, oh, this is a different deal. So being a Black kid in Washington, D.C, living in one of the, Black areas of town at the time, dealing with—clearly, they're treating you differently and not really understanding at that young age what's going on because of what my life had been like up to that point. And then this King assassination happened. Then the next day at

the little Catholic school we went to, because my mom put us in Catholic school. The nuns had this way where they walked us to a different corner, depending on your way home route. And so we got walked to the corner, that's the end of our way home route, and then you walked to my grandmother's house. But, sister, we got—we got released early that day. And the nuns walked us— No, they didn't walk us to the corner. They said, we want you to get in line, and we want you to walk to where you're supposed to, and when you get to that light, we want you to run, children. They just said, run. But we ran, and as we're running, all we hear are fire engines, and police cars, and that kind of thing. And my grandmother lived at the corner of 13th and I Street Northeast. And when they talk about, if you go back and do any reading on the race riots, the H Street corridor was one of the corridors that got burnt down. So literally, I remember going up to the second floor of my grandmother's house, and I could look out the window, and we saw fire. You could see fires on the very next block where all these businesses were burning down. And people writing Soul Brother on their windows, hoping that it would keep people from destroying their property. And so it was [Pause] I mean, I have a lot of memories about that, because how could I— every now and then, and I remember saying this at Dartmouth, how did I get to that age and didn't know that Martin Luther King who he was, let me just say that simply. And it's a really important sort of lesson around what we talk about around kids, and more importantly, the influence of media, because that's what I think really was going on, is that you're seeing these these protests and these things on the television at night on the news as a kid, and somehow or other, in my psyche, I had translated it that whatever was going on, the person who was leading it, Martin Luther King, was a bad man. And that is some heavy, heavy stuff, and it's been an important lesson. for me, and I suspect for other families who may not have been talking about Black history in their homes. And that's when, actually, we began talking about it some in school. Of course, now we're trying to change all that, but that's a [Pause] Revisionist history thing that, try as you might, you're not going to be able to change.

COHEN: Do you think other children felt the same way, or had similar reactions, or do you think that was just you?

ALLEN-DAVIS: I have no idea. I don't know what people talked about in other homes, but I think some of that is, even if there was discussion going on, when your children, and unless there's some real focused intentionality around, we're going to talk about blah blah blah. Kids are just being kids, so some of it could have been that, but the deeper message for me was. If they weren't talking about it at all, that's one thing, but for you to think, and your reaction to hearing this news, to be, oh, a bad man has been killed. I realize how wrong that was, says something about, seriously, the power of the media to really play on the psyches and the subconscious of young people, that [Pause] You know, absent some way of correcting, they're going to carry for life, and it can—and it absolutely influences your beliefs about people.

COHEN: So, what was it like, kind of, in the 70s in DC, following the death of Martin Luther King. Protests that followed.

ALLEN-DAVIS: Yeah, it was something to see burnt-out buildings, and—you know, then there were police walking the streets, as I recall, the National Guard was called in. But there were some good things that came out of it. It was then that we started doing some work on teaching Black history in school. It was clear that at the time the politics and the culture in America was we have to do something different, so there was an opening up of opportunity. That's sort of, you know, when I think about affirmative action and equal employment opportunity and some of the things that grew out of that in terms of, allowing for Black people in particular to have—and then shortly thereafter, or frankly, in parallel with it, women, opportunities for women to have. You know, more opportunities to grow and do and be and realize their full potential, you know, sort of started. Colleges, I do believe, and schools and universities started looking at kids of color, as we maybe call it today, in some very different ways, which opened up doors and opportunity, is what I'd say. That's a [Pause] If there's ever a story that's, I don't think, ever going to be completely written, and this may be the closest I'll come to philosophizing tonight, is [Pause] humans' capacity for bias and for tribalism runs

incredibly deep. biologically. cognitively, neurologically, and I think that the only way that we really change it is through using that—our cerebrums, you know, that thing that most other animals don't have. Get out of our primitive brains and really see each other as fully human, and these other things as [Pause] It's more than cosmetics, but it's—it is. It's just—we look different. But we are all human at the core, and so there will always be this tendency for humans to want to other each other, as we say now.

COHEN: So, around what age did you kind of become more aware of your Blackness? Like, when did you become more, like, representative of your Blackness? You talked about moving from, like, an all-Catholic, predominantly Black school to a predominantly white school in high school.

ALLEN-DAVIS: Yeah. I would say it was shortly after arriving in DC in fourth grade. You could feel the difference. You could feel how white people were looking at you, and I could, anyway, and tell that there—and I think I'm some [Pause] I think I'm a little more, in tune, or, to the unspoken. But through body language and other things, I can sort of [Pause] I can sense those things. And so, it was early that I realized that there was difference. I didn't know what to do with it, obviously, and it wasn't anything we talked about in our house. And then that was also, I'll never forget the song, James Brown, Say It Loud, I'm Black and I'm proud, those sorts of things came along that—began to define that you are different and it's okay. Sorta. To the extent that you can make it okay.

COHEN: What did success mean in your household?

ALLEN-DAVIS: Now you're getting sick.

COHEN: What pressures did you feel?

ALLEN-DAVIS: I felt—sadly, I felt none. I didn't grow up in a healthy home, is what I'd say. There's quite a bit of dysfunction and alcoholism and [Pause]. I think we'd call it today: violence. I would call it violence, because that certainly wasn't how we raised our kids, with my parents fighting, and [Pause] Anyway. hot mess, is what I'd call it. And so obviously, our parents put us in Catholic school, because they wanted us to get a better

education than you'd ever get in the DC public school system. And my mother and all of their siblings had gone to Catholic school in grade school, and then high school, they went to the public schools growing up. But, What was clear is people knew that This sounds—that I was different. You know, I was the smart one. Got good grades. And had dreams that I talked about. My other siblings really didn't talk much about their dreams. As I recall, I also was the—oldest girl, so I had a lot of responsibility in our house, too, around cooking dinner every night, and a lot of cleaning, and girl things. But I was able—school was an escape for me, so going to school where there were people who saw in me what I couldn't see in myself, and were nuns who were—and other teachers who were supportive and encouraging. School became, like, it was the place where there was some normalcy and where there was the opportunity to, if this is an appropriate word, to be seen. As somebody who was whole and full of potential. So we didn't talk about success. In fact, the fact that I wanted to be a doctor, my father knew it, and I think he was proud about that, but, he died when I was in high school, so [Pause] He never got to see me graduate, or [Pause] Certainly. do the things that came after that, so—we didn't—we didn't talk about it. although I had a great aunt, not a great aunt, I had an aunt who was my godmother, my mother's sister, who was really my, I'd say, angel, savior. The person who encouraged, pushed, kept me focused on, if you're going to be a doctor, okay, you're going to be a doctor.

COHEN: What was her name?

ALLEN-DAVIS: Emily. Emily, Hill, and I called her,

COHEN: Do you mind spelling that for me?

ALLEN-DAVIS: E-M-I-L-Y, and then H-I-L-L.

COHEN: And she—she was.

ALLEN-DAVIS: the—her nickname was Doll, D-O-L-L, so she was Aunt Doll, and then—and many, many years later, she became Auntie to me, and our kids. Our kids and I called her Auntie. And that was really after Auntie M in The Wizard of Oz, so she was

Auntie M, is what we called her, yeah. She's amazing. She died at 97 just a few years ago.

COHEN: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.

ALLEN-DAVIS: Yeah, she lived a great life. She was an amazing woman—she was a Black woman who I always said that if born in my day and time, she'd have been running something. She worked as an analyst at the National Security Agency, so imagine that, a Black woman who was [Pause] So, and she retired from NSA probably in the [Pause] I bet the early 80s, mid-80s, so she was in—after many, many years, so she was doing that kind of work in a place where there probably weren't many women that looked like her. And she was tough as nails, and was such a great role model for me around what independent women could be.

COHEN: Did you call that your main role model growing up? Yep, full stop. Yeah. So, how was your path to Dartmouth? How did you get there? Why did you choose Dartmouth? You know, it sounds like, with the home you've come from, it doesn't sound like, like, many children would find themselves, like, get themselves to a place like Dartmouth. How did you get there?

ALLEN-DAVIS: Well, so it started with the high school that I chose, and so the process in DC for Catholic schools around how, in Catholic school, there were just two. There wasn't a middle school. There was first through eighth grade, and then there was ninth through twelfth grade. At the time, and you had to choose what Catholic school you wanted to go to rank the top 3. And then the archdiocese, based on grades and other things, told you where you were going to go to school. And so I put my card in in 8th grade for And it was interesting, because the smart girls went to Notre Dame, and the not-so-smart went to St. Cecilia's, and anyway. So I had Notre Dame as my first choice, and I don't remember all the other choices, but did that. But I'd had a chance, probably in 6th grade or 5th grade, to go up to this school called Immaculata Prep. And it was this very exclusive, super white, very, wealthy, school, Catholic school, That was an hour by bus from where I live. And our English teacher went there in high school, so she was an English teacher in our little inner-city school, and I went to Mrs.

Hayes at the last minute, this little Tim [Pause] I think about this story every now and then, you're like this little kid, and you go [Pause] I said, Mrs. Hayes, I think I want to go to Immaculata. And she said, okay, and we switched my card and put Immaculata first. I had to—go, I had to tell my mom I was going to [Pause] I wanted to try to get in there, and she had to drive me clear across town for an interview with Sister Mary Claire, and she was so pissed that she had to do it during rush hour traffic after school. And she sat in the car, and I went in, and I met with Sister Mary Claire, and I ended up getting into this high school. And I went there on work study, so I had to go and work and answer the phones at the—at the convent on weekends to help offset the cost of the tuition. And, And the cool thing, in addition to just really amazing exposure to lots of different worlds, in particular, that world of wealth, right, and privilege, is what I call it today. Knowing that that was not—that was [Pause] I had a totally different world than I came from.

COHEN:

Were there other Black kids there?

ALLEN-DAVIS:

There were a few. In my class, there were eight of us. Two were Black elite, I would call them, and the others of us were just regular, smart, I guess, Black girls. But I—so there weren't many of us that were there, and But what was really, in addition to a great education, lots more experience and exposure than you'd have if I'd gone a different route. We had great college counseling, and that makes all the difference, if you have a great college counselor—and the college counselor there was so good. She was so good. She was also a great counselor, just in general, especially given all the chaos that went on in my house growing up. But anyway, So I pulled Barron's [Pause] I don't even know if y'all use Barron's on the online or anything, but it was this big, thick book, and it had every college in America ranked and stuff, so you—you know, every night, look, or not every night, that's probably dramatic, but—looking through and trying to figure out the schools, and I ended up choosing 4 schools that I wanted to look at. I looked at the University of Pennsylvania, Dartmouth. Goucher. And Mount Holyoke. Those were the four schools that I looked at. And I got into all of them. I got good

scholarship support for—from all of them. But then here's the crazy way I made my decision. Sight unseen, because I hadn't seen Dartmouth. We didn't do those college trips, like. Y'all do these days. We did, for our kids. I said, well, I've been in a city, so that—took Penn out. I've done the girls' schools, so Goucher and Holyoke were all girls' schools. I don't want to do that, so I guess I'm going to Dartmouth. And that's how I—that's how I made my choice to go to Dartmouth. So I sent in my yes, and [Pause] And then after. So that would have been [Pause] I guess it was sometime in high school, it was—it was probably spring of my senior year. I did, get on the train from Union Station in DC up to White River Junction. And I remember getting all—it was in April, it was probably March or April, and getting out of a cab on the green, and going, holy cow, the green in March or April, as you know, is anything but pretty, you know?

COHEN: Listen.

ALLEN-DAVIS: muddy, gray day, as I recall. I didn't go, oh my god, what did I do? But that was my first—that's my earliest image of Dartmouth, standing there, looking at the green, and going, oh gosh, this is—ick. [Pause]

COHEN: What did you expect it to be like before?

ALLEN-DAVIS: I don't think I had any expectations. I was just excited I think. I was going to go away to college and do the do.

COHEN: So what were those first weeks like for you? And did you do a first-year trip?

ALLEN-DAVIS: No, so I actually started at Dartmouth this summer, so I was at Dartmouth in July, I think? they had something called the Summer Bridge Program, and I don't know if they still have Bridge, but they had Bridge for we who were the poor Black kids who they thought were going to need all this extra remedial stuff, and you're going to love this story because of where I'd gone to high school. So, it's an interesting story about assumptions. They're Black. They're poor, or middle class, whatever, they're going to need Bridge. Bridge was pretty much a Black program. But I'd gone to Immaculata Prep, so I actually tested out of English 5. I didn't have to do

English 5, because my English skills were strong enough coming out of that summer. That's a class that I didn't have to sit through. I don't know if it's still a requirement, but I didn't have to do it. And then, it was fun. I think I told you the story the other night, that's when I learned all about the Afro-American society, and met some upper-class people who were doing their summer term, and—the whole bit. And there were hard parts in college, as there always are, as you're growing and learning, but I actually loved college. I loved pretty much every moment of it. I took advantage of all the things that I could. I wasn't the grandest and the best student, I was hardly an A student, mostly because I was having too much fun doing other things. But I did okay. I think I graduated with a B average, some B something—it wasn't B+, but somewhere in there, 3-point-something average. They were interesting times, though, is what I would say, being on this super elite, privileged, completely—unaware. Group of privileged white kids. And being a Black kid on a campus like that. And the socioeconomics of the Black community were diverse, too. I mean, they ran the spectrum, so [Pause] It was a thing, yeah.

COHEN: We'll get into the Black community in my next planned segment, but before we get into that, I want to know, where did you live during your time at Dartmouth? You told me the other night, but just for the record.

ALLEN-DAVIS: Yeah, I started—the Summer Bridge program that summer, I lived down in the river cluster. And then, I got lucky and got a dorm room at Topliff. And so I always had a single my whole time there, so I had my own little room. I can remember I had a cool carpet, and I had curtains, and I had all the things, anyway. Yeah, so I lived in Topliff the whole four years that I was there. And what's really funny. My husband, who's an '82, as you may know, Anthony Davis, he lived in Topliff, too, but he was there in the dorm. And our daughter graduated from Dartmouth in 2009, and she lived in Topliff. Yeah.

COHEN: Was it easy to make friends when you first got there? And where did—what crowd did you find yourself going into immediately.

ALLEN-DAVIS: I thought it was easy, and a lot of it is because [Pause] I think that was one of the positives of the Bridge program, is that you had a cohort of kids who were there with a stated purpose, who, you know, so you got pretty quickly integrated. Of course, all of us were awkward as hell, because every 18-year-old on the planet is awkward as hell when you—you go into a thing, or am I going to be liked? Am I considered pretty? You know, all the things, and [Pause] So that was easy, but the crowd that I actually ended up hanging with were a group of girls who were in the class of 78, so I hung out with girls who are a couple years ahead of me. I didn't have many friends in my own class. I had lots of people I hung out with, or people in the dorm I knew. But [Pause] I glummed on to a couple of folks. There were actually 3 girls, Shawn, Lesa, and [Pause] her name just went right out of my head. Oh, anyway, it went right out of my head. I saw her for a minute, and then she went. But anyway, that was a—it was these three girls, and I looked up to them. They were like big sisters in some ways. I thought they were really cool, and [Pause] They took me under their wing, and—yeah.

COHEN: I'm sorry, I'm going to have to ask you to spell out Shawn and Lesa again, and I'm very curious.

ALLEN-DAVIS: Shwan, and then Lesa. And, I just saw the name—I can see the other person, but I can't think of her name, yeah.

COHEN: What did social life look like with them? Was it like, you know, did you have to grow up fast a little bit, being an 18-year-old, hanging out with two girls.

ALLEN-DAVIS: No, because—you know, it's a funny thing, when you look back on it, at least as I look back at it on this age, you actually do grow from freshman to sophomore, junior, and senior, but that's—you're pretty much emotionally all about the same age, because we don't—now I'm going to be a scientist for a minute. You actually don't—develop the ability to think abstractly in general until you're about 21. So we're still all just young people, sort of being in our middle adolescence phase. From a developmental perspective, so I didn't have to, and they were just fun, and we, you know, we—go to parties together at the AM, or we talk, or [Pause] Hang out in each

other's rooms, laugh, we were just silly girls, is what I'd say. And Lesa [Pause] Lesa was the cool one. Lesa [Pause] Lesa Walden, W-A-L-D, and she was just—oh, we—she had this kind of elusive—kind of a quality about her, that she was, like, cool, and we all thought, Lesa's cool. So—And she was and is. I haven't talked to her in a few years, but she is still just as amazing as I remembered her back then.

COHEN: That's amazing. So, you talked about parties at the AM, AM meaning the Afro-American Society, obviously.

ALLEN-DAVIS: Cutter Hall, yup.

COHEN: Oh, got it. And, you know, obviously you probably spent a lot of time there, anything from meetings to parties. What spaces did you avoid? Like, where did you

ALLEN-DAVIS: I didn't go up to the rooms where the dorms were, the floors were the dorms. It was the basement, and then it was the second floor where the community room is that had those beautiful, and has those beautiful murals that are in it. Yeah. I mean, we used it as the social place. It was the social places, didn't—didn't really [Pause] There—there was no reason to be upstairs on the floors where the [Pause] Oh, sorry.

COHEN: What did you avoid on the general campus?

ALLEN-DAVIS: Just the frats. stayed away from frat row.

COHEN: Why is that?

ALLEN-DAVIS: A ton of drinking. I think the words I'd used today was overly masculine. I think it just wasn't my jam, and it was also overly—it was—it was totally white, right? So these are white men, white boys, not men, white boys. And it just wasn't a thing. We weren't necessarily welcome there. You sort of knew it, because the AM, you had to—if you're walking from, like, where Parkhurst and along where, you know, the admin row is, and you're walking down to the AM, you literally walked across that street where all the frats were. And also, they just look junky and messy. It just wasn't my jam, so I never set foot in a frat.

COHEN: Your whole time there, not once.

- ALLEN-DAVIS: Never once, no thank you. As far as I remember, no.
- COHEN: What were the parties at the Am like?
- ALLEN-DAVIS: Oh, they were fun. Just good, loud music, and lots of dancing. I, you know, I assume there was, but honestly can't remember. Was there—you know, alcohol, I assume there was, you know, but nothing, nothing ridiculous in terms of quantity. I just like to dance. In fact, one of the things that got me in some trouble with the girls in my class [Pause] See, I roll my eyes as I say it, even though it's 68, was [Pause] I love—and my family knows I love to dance. I'm not the best dancer in the world, they love also telling me that, but I love to wiggle, as we say now. But, I could go in, and if the music is good, I'm going to dance and never stop, and I will be sweaty as hell by the time it's over. And that—if it's really good, I can even still do that now, but But they thought she never stops dancing, so she must be on drugs, and there was this little [Pause] I remember someone telling me that, like, what are you [Pause] I'm not taking any drugs, I just like to dance. Silly story, I remember. So it was—they were just fun, just hanging and dancing with, you know, the boys, the guys in the place, yeah.
- COHEN: Amazing. What type of music were we listening to?
- ALLEN-DAVIS: Oh my gosh, earth, wind, and fire. You know, all the guys that [Pause] Oh. Gosh, why do you ask me this question? I can see all these groups now, but [Pause] A lot of earth, wind, and fire, commodores [Pause] Yeah.
- COHEN: So, we're going to kind of shift into talking about the Black community at Dartmouth. You know, your Dartmouth years obviously overlap with many people described as, like, that post-civil rights era that we briefly touched on earlier. You know, a period of new pressures, Black students being admitted in elite universities, a lot of economic change, a lot of shifting social programs, changing public attitudes about race. We briefly touched about, you know, Black history being taught in school, as well as, Police presence, and kind of the increase of mass incarceration, as well as a greater surveillance state. in the United States, so [Pause] My question to you to start us off is—when we think about the broader Black community, like, at Dartmouth at the time, like—

what issues felt most urgent? What did we talk about inside the AM? That, reach beyond Dartmouth.

ALLEN-DAVIS:

Wow, you're really taking me back. You know, I don't recall [Pause] Or it certainly wasn't in the circles of people who were sitting around talking about the great issues of the day. Now, I think, and this may be minimizing, I hope it's not, or trivializing, I'm not doing either, is that when it really comes down to it, we were kids. We were smart kids, Black kids on a college campus. Doing what kids do on a college campus, learning how to live independently, learning how to, live with each other. Learning social norms, dating, doing all the things that parents probably didn't want us to be doing. So I don't—I don't know that there was a lot of that. What brought—but what we—but what we all knew. Is that there was safety and staying connected to each other through the Afro-American Society. that that was still a foreign world out there, the white world. And as I talked about the other night, it also was—you would be, labeled. If you didn't. completely socialize and stay within the Black community. And then even within that community, there [Pause] I said this earlier, we spanned the socioeconomic strata. There were Black doctors' kids there, or lawyers' kids there, but most of us were either middle class or even, you know, sort of Brilliant kids from rural, or [Pause] Or inner-city areas that didn't come from money. And there was struggle. We knew the kids—you kind of knew, you'd gossip about the kids who were struggling, and then one day you'd look and they were gone, because they hadn't been able to make it at Dartmouth. Not that they died, but they flunked out, basically. Flunked out of school. And not because they [Pause] I am convinced, and I think there's been data and studies and evaluations of this done since then, not because they couldn't do it, but because this experiment of just plopping kids from very different contexts all over this country into a secluded, let's start there, rural Very white, an elite college environment, and thinking, okay, you've got the brains, go at it, we're going to make it. And what they provided that summer with Summer Bridge was simply making sure you could do some math in English, was not enough in terms of what wraparound services and wraparound support, we call it today, that was lacking and that some kids needed, but not all.

But I say all that because for the most part, you know, we weren't sitting around having the big discussions at the AM around the issues of the day. They might have come up in class. We certainly [Pause] You know, we talked about who hangs and who doesn't hang, as we call it. But for the most part, we were just learning how to grow up like everybody else, I think, in some ways. like I tell my daughter, I used to tell my daughter, who's 38 now, I'd say, trying on hats and figuring out which ones we look good in, is what I say.

COHEN: I want you to, like, think back, go back to the lens of, you know. Before you were a doctor, you know, you're 19, 20 at Dartmouth. And you see a Black peer of yours who doesn't hang, you know, he goes to the white frats, as you described it, maybe he's in a white frat, How did you look at that guy? Or girl? How did your peers look at them?

ALLEN-DAVIS: We knew who they were. And we [Pause] They avoided us, and we avoided them.

COHEN: No eye contact, you knew you were going to walk by them, they weren't going to say hello.

ALLEN-DAVIS: I think my sense of them was that there [Pause] I can remember one boy in particular who was an Exeter (Phillips Exeter Academy). I remember that learning he was a Phillips Exeter Academy kid, and he was also very cute, but that's a whole other thing. And just sort of feeling kind of sad, then [Pause] or feeling like I was somehow either less than. Because he literally ignored us. Me. I'll personalize this. He would walk right by and not even look at me. I don't think it engendered real anger, but [Pause] I mean, you're asking me to go back a ton of years to sort of really tap into it, but what I do remember mostly just was just feeling kind of [Pause] Discounted, sad, less than. The guys who did that. didn't feel superior because I did hang, and he didn't. I just [Pause] It was just a thing, it was a weird thing to experience Black people. Some, you know, one word that comes to mind while you're making me think about it, was some confusion, like, how can you do that? Like, how can you—how can you just ignore your Blackness like that?

COHEN: Could you do both? Could you be, you know—

ALLEN-DAVIS: In and out, yeah.

COHEN: Right.

ALLEN-DAVIS: You could. There were people [Pause] I mean, the thing about the football boys, in particular, people who played sports, who had friends on [Pause] And I'm sure that there were some of the players who would go to frats, or they had friends that way. You certainly had interactions with kids in class. But I'm telling you, Will. It was pretty segregated. Even if there was a little bit of that, you, you know, you didn't—and you go to the, dining hall there, you go to Thayer, and there'd be the Black section, and the white section, there'd be the Native American section, Asian section, I mean, it was starkly segregated. Along color lines, and ethnic and racial lines. And yet, what's weird about it is, it didn't feel weird. It was the times that we were in. There was [Pause] There was security in staying within your own group in some way, as we were, as a country, walking through this big experiment.

COHEN: Did you have any white friends? Did other non-athlete Black kids have white friends, or was that really not.

ALLEN-DAVIS: I had some, but none very close, and—and this is more personal than anything else. I think there was this part of me that was surprised that they liked me, so [Pause] I know that sounds so silly at this age, saying it that way, but I had some, and then they respected me, because I was a leader on campus, and I think that's something that I didn't fully realize. I mean, outside of the Black community. That in some ways, people [Pause] I've said it so many times, I actually started the day saying that today, There are people who can see things in me that I have trouble seeing in myself. And that's based out of insecurities of all sorts that we all grow up with. Some get resolved, and some are old football injuries that—bother you from time to time, so—or lacrosse injuries. Okay. Yeah.

COHEN: Oh, you know [Pause] I would have to imagine, being a Black woman at the school at that time, like, there must have been—this [Pause] a lot of feeling of, like, this imposter syndrome that people talk about. Can you get into that a little bit for me? This feeling that, like, maybe I don't belong here, maybe I'm not here.

ALLEN-DAVIS: You know, I didn't. I didn't—interestingly, I didn't feel that. I think the biggest thing I felt And I know you want to get into this at some point. was, just not good enough, not cool enough, not rich enough, not something within the Black community, not, you know, those sorts of things. And that was [Pause] I think that's mostly, I can say this. As somebody who's done a few years of therapy, I think that was really sort of more my own walk, not necessarily a Dartmouth thing, but I didn't [Pause] I mean, I didn't feel like I didn't belong. There were teachers who could make you feel that way if you weren't doing well in a class. I had one experience with that in a biology class. because I knew, I went to Dartmouth knowing I was going to be a doctor. It was pre-med, right from the beginning. And didn't do well in a biology class. And a teacher tried to [Pause] I had to go see this biology professor in his office. And he started talking about maybe—maybe medicine isn't for you, and it's like—and it's like, no, that's not the answer. The answer is I need to sit my ass down and study. It's not that complicated. But I was so [Pause] You know, I vaguely remember that interaction and my discomfort at this guy telling me, find something else to do, basically. Saying, that's not it. And, I've been, I think, through certainly those early years, and I'd say even through my residency, and could even be said, as I think about it, even through some of the earlier years when I went into more full-time administration, is I live with a little bit of an edge that says, I'll show you. So—Yeah, I'll show you.

COHEN: Voice. So that—that makes me get into, like, another, like, set of questions about the Black community at the time. were faculty there to help? And, you know, what—how much pushback did student [Pause] Black students receive from faculty like that biology professor you were talking about? How common [Pause]

ALLEN-DAVIS: Yeah. Yeah, I don't think many talked about it, or we certainly didn't talk about it with each other, because who's going to tell somebody you're not doing well in a class? So it wasn't something that people talked about, at least not in my circles. But, I think there were teachers there who were excited that we were starting to have Black kids, and there were, you

know, white professors in different departments who were absolutely there for us. And the Black professors the word I think I'd use today acted like surrogate parents in a lot of ways for us, you know? They were the ones whose shoulders upon which we got to stand. I mean, these are Black professors at Dartmouth College. And so, they [Pause] I could make up that they felt the weight and the responsibility to make sure that we were getting the support we needed. they were—and in many ways, they were also, you know, this is the [Pause] I was a sociology major at Dartmouth. I did my sciences, but in many ways, they were also part of the community that was othered, right? There are very few Black professors on that campus, and a very white community who grew up and came of age at a time where There was Jim Crow, and there was lots of racism, and they were the ones who made it, and ended up with these amazing jobs in a place that, you know, their parents and they probably never dreamed could happen. And so they were also part of this soup of we Black folks in this very white world. And in that, we're also there for our protectors and our supporters in some interesting ways, too, while trying to also kick our butts and make sure we were learning the things we needed to do and being encouraged, yeah.

COHEN: So they looked out for you, really.

ALLEN-DAVIS: I think they'd—and they were [Pause] They were—yeah, they were family, is how I think I'd put it today.

COHEN: So, do any Black professors come to mind when you say that? I know, I showed you a picture on our call the other day of Professor Ashley.

ALLEN-DAVIS: Yeah, it was an art—in the art department, but, you know, he was a—he was a storyteller, amazing storyteller, wrote children's books, and really, I have a couple of his books down in our basement, and our kids' Children's book collection, but There was Bill Cole. I was trying to think again of [Pause]

COHEN: Mind spelling that for me, please?

ALLEN-DAVIS: C-O-L-E, Bill, B-I-L-L, Bill Cole. there was Dr. Cook, and even this morning, I was trying to remember what was his first

name, but there was Dr. Cook. There was Barbara Smith, who was first doing counseling in psychology when I first got to the campus, and then went on to do other things. Barbara Smith. There weren't any that I can remember in the sciences. And then there, of course, there was my—sociology thesis professor, Ray Hall, Raymond Hall, Ray Hall. So there's Ray, who was beloved by a lot of us. Bill was in the music department, Bill, Cole. And then there could have been a few others in other places, but I wasn't in those classes, so I didn't know, but there were very few, precious few, who were.

COHEN: on the campus. Did they come to AM meetings?

ALLEN-DAVIS: No.

COHEN: So, where would you interact with them?

ALLEN-DAVIS: in the classroom. Sometimes whatever might have been a social gathering. I was in the gospel choir, I forgot that part of things, and so, you know, at the concerts and that sort of thing, you'd see them. If they had students at their homes, I wasn't one of them.

COHEN: Did you have any relationships with white professors? Like, the more welcoming ones you talked about. Did other students?

ALLEN-DAVIS: None in the sciences. Gosh, you are really making me dust off some cobwebs. I seem to recall [Pause] And I can't remember if this guy was in the sociology department or somewhere else. A professor who did have us to his house once, and the us are not being Black folks, it was kids in a class. We had his class, but none that sort of did it. There was one Professor, a physician, who—so this is now beyond Dartmouth. the undergrad, but I stayed there for med school, and George Margolis took us all under his wing. He was—he was—he's a pathologist, and he—he was very much focused on making sure that the Black kids in the medical school, the Black students, had the kinds of support that they needed. And we'd—we'd go out to his house, and [Pause] We'd spend the night, and—his wife would cook for us, and he just sort of took care of us in some really cool ways. And you could always go by George's office, and Dr. George, as we called him, and—

he was there for us, but nobody was like that that I recall in undergrad. My—my [Pause] biggest undergrad experience in terms of really getting close to a family was Ray Hall's, because I became the babysitter for their kids, through medical school even, so [Pause] After doing the honors thesis with him, so [Pause] And really became [Pause] I just adored his wife. She was a role model in so many ways for what good mothering looked like, and Good friends, so, yeah.

COHEN: Did you stay in touch with him after college?

ALLEN-DAVIS: A little, a little, yeah. a little bit more with Terry, but, you know, there's this phrase that we walk alongside each other on, you know? In terms of what life is and what friendship is, as David White said. You know, the most important thing that we do is bear witness and walk alongside each other and be there with people on a journey that's impossible to accomplish alone. So, we do it for a time, and then [Pause] People go the ways that they go, yeah.

COHEN: Yeah, I want to kind of transition to the M. you know, what was it like being the leader? How did you get that position?

ALLEN-DAVIS: Wow. I don't know, I mean [Pause] I don't know what possessed me to run for president, but I did. It's probably [Pause] I mean, it's been the—in some ways, it's been the story of my life, is that I'm an accidental leader, I think. You sort of stumble into roles, you don't say, I must, or anything like that So I decided to run for president, and I got the job, and because you had to—it was a vote, I mean, it was that kind of—it's like a real campaign kind of thing, as I recall, but I had a desire to do One thing, for sure, in addition to the typical things we did, you know. Running the meetings once a month, and [Pause] Whatever were the [Pause] Social things that we might have done in the house with—the kids and with each other. But in the spring of 79, I was in [Pause] I was doing an off-campus community service term through the Tucker Foundation in Jersey City. And Winter Carnival came along, and all the places do what they do with their snow sculptures out—or ice sculptures outside their dorms, or their, yeah, their dorms. And then, of course, there's the massive snow sculpture that's in the middle of the green. And, that was the

time where there was a lot of protest on campus at Dartmouth, for sure, as well as other colleges. Really asking or demanding that colleges divest their, divest from South Africa because of apartheid. And all that apartheid was doing to that part of Africa. And so the—the Afro-American Society students chose to do a—basically, they called it a shanty town, and there were even, like, boards that were in the ground that were supposed to be, headstones for graves.

COHEN: Hmm.

ALLEN-DAVIS: And buildings and grounds thought it was just a bunch—the quote was, there's just a bunch of sticks and boards, and so they took them up, they pulled them up and out of the ground.

COHEN: Hmm.

ALLEN-DAVIS: You know, there was a lot of anger around that. It was clear that it was not that. [Pause] because it wasn't there the day before, so who would have put stick [Pause] I mean, it was—it was the AMS, Carnival—installation, and it was a protest installation, for sure. So in reaction to that. the Black students went out, and by the point—by the time that this thing happened. as I recall, looking at the pictures in the—the [Pause] the D, wasn't that the name of the newspaper, the D?

COHEN: *The Dartmouth, yes.*

ALLEN-DAVIS: *The Dartmouth.* It was kind of melted. It didn't even look like whatever it was, which I can't remember anymore what it was. And they spray-painted it and defaced it. And that, you know, the white students went up in arms, how could you? You know, there's drama, drama was in the newspaper. And then when I came back on campus in the spring, I was thinking about this, you know, subsequent to our talk the other night, but when I—came back, they—they did have a day where there were no classes on campus, and we had a day where we had a chance to talk about race, and I remember giving a speech. It feels like it was in Webster Hall, but I don't remember being one of the students had a chance to talk about race and separatism and [Pause] what we thought needed to happen, and I don't even know how I learned that there were White professors who really wanted to see those

murals in the air. And so when I got that, became the president, I thought. in keeping with this work of healing, I guess that's what you call it back in the spring, that it would be—really cool to think about inviting, and keep the conversation going, inviting these professors to the AM, hosting what I call faculty teas, we call them faculty teas, and we talk about race relations. We drink some punch and some stale cookies, as it tasted like. And we would talk about race relations up in that community room on the second floor, invite professors in, and so we worked our—the plan was to work our way through the entire through every department, and invite them to come and talk with Black students about the experience of being Black on that campus, or just being Black, period, in America. In the late 70s. Well, there were Black students who lost their minds. You're going to do what? No, I mean, that's how separate, as I said earlier, how segregated we were, how [Pause] [Pause] we learned through the grapevine that there was a group of students who were going to call for a vote of no confidence and kick me out of office, like, dang. I was so freaked out over that one. I actually managed to stress myself. I was not a very [Pause] I was pretty skinny to begin with, but I stressed myself down to under 110 pounds, not eating and fretting and worrying over this thing. Well, my then-boyfriend, who is my now-husband. was one of the football players I'm very much respected and loved on campus. He's a class of 82, so a couple years behind me. You know, he knew of this, and the guys knew of this, and they were kind of my little big brothers, I guess. And so they all came, and they didn't—and he didn't typically go to AM meetings, as I think about it. I'll have to ask him, but I don't think he went to AM meetings. It was not his jam. But he and all those guys came into that meeting that night and stood in the back of the room. With their, you know, arms crossed, looking like big football player guys. And, Bill Cole, who I'd mentioned, the music professor who was very much revered, respected, and loved, and By the students, And I was his work-study student, so the whole time I was there, I was, you know, I was there on some scholarship, a lot of loans, and I did work-study. And so Bill certainly knew what was going on, and was pissed about it, and Bill came to the meeting.

COHEN: And he did in that way that only Bill Cole can do, where you mostly, when he's talking, you're not quite sure what he's really talking, what he's quite saying all the time.

ALLEN-DAVIS: But he basically lectured, laid them people out, as we used to say. Laid them out, lectured them, and—and didn't say anything directly, as I recall, about me, or what they were going to do, but just talked about the fact that, basically, I think if I were going to net it out now. was, he used to use this phrase, you're acting like ex-slaves. Which I never quite understood, but he called of ex-slaves, and—went on about, you know, how in whatever way you said it, that this was inappropriate. I was mostly sitting there just, like, nervous as hell, sitting in front of the room. And I went on and hosted the meeting, held the meeting, conducted the meeting. There never was a vote of no confidence called. And we went on that year, and we did have those teas. And I think there were some good conversations that happened, and a number—in fact, there was always lots of students who came for them every—they were [Pause] I think we hosted them [Pause] I don't know that we did them most Fridays, but they were always on a Friday afternoon late, and we—we, We did it, and we had them, and faculty got to hear from us, and there were—you know, it wasn't always—there were heated discussions from time to time. I think it was an interesting time, also, because as we think about this idea of how we're trying to figure out how to navigate these race relations. There was a lot of—you know, there's a lot of emotion, and people felt bad. I'm sure some of them white folk felt real bad to hear how—what the student—the Black experience was like on that campus. But we did it, and it's something I'm, to this day. proud of, and I'm still grateful that the guys came and stood in the back of the room, and [Pause] Bill Cole did what only Bill Cole could do in terms of really making the students act like young adults. And think about the fact that the world was changing, and [Pause] And needed to change, and that we needed to be part of that.

COHEN: When you speak as to why they were so upset, you keep saying to me, you know, it was so different back then, but [Pause] Can you speak as to why the students were so upset that you were trying to, you know, just help the general

community by bringing in the white professors and white students in for these conversations?

ALLEN-DAVIS: Yeah, I can. I'd say my generation, probably more than many others, as the first gen to [Pause] Do what we did. There is, at our core, rage. And anger, and a seething at not being seen as whole, and capable, and worthy, and good. [Pause] White people did that. I mean, that's been our story. That's been the story—that's the story. We were not even seen as human. We were seen as subhuman, as well, you know, if human at all. If you look historically at the whole history of slavery. It was letting the enemy into a sacred place.

COHEN: Hmm.

ALLEN-DAVIS: They were pissed about. I think—and I mean, you'd have to talk to, and I certainly don't remember who they all were, but what was the beef with that? It's like, no, they white—this is our house. It's one of the few things that we can call ours. And no, they can't come in. No, they can't have it. No, they can't. They don't get the privilege of being able to see those murals, that they'd heard so much about. [Pause] I don't want to talk about race. I just want to get done and get out. I mean, I'm making up. you know, I'm speculating because we never talked about it. As I said, it was just, I got the gossip that they're going to kick you out because you're doing something that we ain't about. And I do believe that a lot of it was [Pause]. that was a—that's why it was, like, so shocking to come back on that campus. in 09, or, you know, when our daughter was there, and then I was there, I can't remember what year, After that. Oh, I think it was when I was on the advisory board for the medical school, so that's super relatively recently, probably, like, 19 or something like that, and I really wanted to go in, and I have pictures, and get pictures of those murals, and [Pause] And so it was a different place. First of all, you couldn't just walk in, somebody had to let you in. Everything's locked on the campuses now, but someone did let [Pause] I told them who I was, and one of the students let me in, and I—it was something being back in that room, and seeing those murals, and [Pause] And when you're a kid, it felt really big, but standing there, you know, this many years later, it's like, it's actually a really small room, relatively

speaking. But I took pictures of all the murals, and [Pause] But it was ours. It wasn't theirs, and it was a place to call our own, and there was something that was viewed. I can [Pause] I'm making up a lot of [Pause] I'm giving it a lot more poetic. Sort of language, but it was—it was—it was sacred. It was our messy [Pause] party in place, and it was where people slept. And, they didn't belong there.

COHEN: That makes me want to segue to one of your articles that you wrote for *The Dartmouth*, actually. I sent you a lot of your articles, I'm not sure if you read them, but [Pause]

ALLEN-DAVIS: I can't get into them, by the way, because it's—it needs a—some sort of Google permission it needed, so you can [Pause] I don't know if you got an email about it or whatever, but some way of being able to get into them, or send them a different way, so [Pause]

COHEN: Okay, well, I'll try to jog your memory a little bit. You spoke about—you just spoke about this idea of separatism. You actually wrote an article called Realities of Separatism, and in this article, you're responding to how Black students, like, like, their spaces were being interpreted by white students. You're saying that people see, like. This natural separatism is divisive, but that isn't what it—like, that isn't the reality. Instead, you kind of frame it as, like, necessary spaces where, you know, because Dartmouth was a very white place. You kind of frame separatism as being about safety, solidarity, identity, and having a place to, like, you know, breathe, where you could be a minority, and, you know, you weren't constantly the minority.

ALLEN-DAVIS: Yeah. I was hoping—as you were talking, I said, I wonder if he's going to say that I talked about it through the lens of protectionism. It's a protection issue.

COHEN: Exactly. It was a security mechanism, which is kind of your point.

ALLEN-DAVIS: It's a place to come in from out of the rain, yeah.

COHEN: My questions to you would be, what was happening on campus that made you feel that way? What were relations like with white students at the time?

ALLEN-DAVIS: I'd say, for the most part, they were non-existent. I mean, what—you know, when I think back to that time. From, you know, where we are now to where we were then. And we still have miles to go before we sleep, but, when I think back to that time. What a crazy thing to do. I mean, we just—if you think that in the 40s and the 50s and the 30s, and even into the early 60s, we still had Jim Crow shit on books, right? That's how—that [Pause] that was not—that was forced segregation. I mean, you couldn't even drink out of the same water fountain. Or you couldn't, you know, you had to sit in the back of the bus, or, you know, these sorts of things, to suddenly say, okay, you can be here. And knowing that not all those white people wanted us there. Pure and simple, they didn't. And I don't [Pause] I'm not—aware enough of the history? Was any of this caught up in regulation and statute and federal funding that would come to the school if they did these things? I don't—I don't know. So were they reluctantly doing this? They, being the administration and the board of that college? Were the white folks thinking—were the white kids and the white folks thinking, hold on one second, hold on. Can you hear that behind me?

COHEN: No.

ALLEN-DAVIS: Okay, cool, I'll keep talking. Hold on one second. Sorry about that. I'm sorry about that. There's the notion of separatism because I don't want to have anything to do with you, and I don't think that's what it is. And then there's the notion of separatism because there's a safe space that it's a place where I can totally be myself and not feel as if I'm being judged, and that every eyeball in the world is looking at me in some way. that I'm different, or I'm less than, or that I'm other. And that was, and that's why the commu—and [Pause] and it was brand new. I mean, this was a—this was a huge experiment to think—and I do [Pause] I keep calling it an experiment, because it was. Let's see what can happen if we actually do start to say that there are Black kids with mad potential who have performed well in their schools. And they

should have a shot at coming to Dartmouth, or I have to give them a shot. As I said, I don't know the sort of—it's interesting, I never thought about what the history of integrating these schools was about. Was it as ugly on some level as you know, what happened in, Louisiana when—you know, with the Little Rock—or Arkansas, I'm sorry, in Arkansas with the Little Rock school integration, So There was safety there, and you were seen, and you weren't seen as odd or weird, or ugly, or different or however were all the awful words that, over a millennia, were thrown at Black folk.

COHEN:

So—how did you guys, like, with the AM, with any Black student groups. how did you look for institutional change and pushback? I was reading an article in the AM, actually. Sorry, not in the AM, I was reading an article that you wrote, actually. about—it was titled, sorry, let me pull up the title, Afro-Am Concerned with Black Life at Dartmouth, where you kind of described how—you felt that, and you and the Black community felt that, you know, non-Black student programs received better, you know, better support from school, better funding, better faculty support, better recognition. So how did you fight for, like, institutional change? Because obviously, you know, you were part of this, as you spoke about, such an important generation of this first, like. Sort of, you know, integrated college classes.

ALLEN-DAVIS:

We did exactly what you just said. We wrote about it. You know, we—we, We never—to my mind, I'm trying to think, did we—we never had sit-ins at Parkhurst. I think mostly it was through the written expression, and again, the thing we did when I was a senior at the college is one for sure, I remember. And I do think that there was some important breakthroughs that happened with that whole incident in the winter of 79, around the recognition that there were some things that did need to change. I also think it's because the students did that. I do believe it gave the professors a voice, the Black professors a voice in a way that they hadn't necessarily had before. I could imagine that If students can do this, what are we doing? There wasn't a Black advocacy group that was going to the president and the administration and saying, here's what we need around change. And the reality is, it's

true even now. The underfunded programs on these campuses are things like Afro African American Studies, or Native American studies, Women's studies, and that's all still born out of the fact that some of the same biases that plagued us then continue to plague us now. And all of that stuff is looked at as less than. Math, or sciences, or even, you know, history, or social studies and other sorts of things. Even those that sit within those disciplines are still viewed as less than, and as we all know, now they're trying to pull back funding from campuses who continue to support and have those kinds of programs. So we're really turning the clock back, and [Pause] In my view, dangerous ways. Not just sad and serious ways, but dangerous ways as a country.

COHEN:

So, what was it like being a Black woman in STEM at the time? You talked briefly about it..

ALLEN-DAVIS:

Man, I'll tell ya, yeah, there weren't many of us. I love science. I love science. As I said, I wasn't the straight A student, like, I'm just going to sit in my room and study [Laughs]. I mean, I think I knew intuitively, without ever saying it, that college was about way more than that. And I—as I've aged, and even watching my own kids go to college, I said, you know, I think college is where we learn to live in community, and we sort of find our—the first of our voices, and [Pause] And you can't do that sitting in your room studying. It's part of it, but the social life and connecting to folks and figuring out how to live with people without parents telling you stuff, that's all part of it. It's growing up, right? So, I was actually comfortable with it, because I was going to be a doctor. There was never a doubt in my mind that's what I was going to do. So, what I chose to do, though, interestingly, because I loved sociology, I sort of stumbled into it as one of the, you know, the classes you have to take. I forget the—you gotta take some from this or that. And I decided I wasn't going to be a science major, I was just going to do the prereqs I needed to go to medical school, because I thought I was going to be a biology major. I mean, that's what everybody did. You're going to go to med school, you've got to be a bio major. But I did the classes I had to, and didn't fret beyond that. And I'm saying it like I—I'm saying it now. As if I was intentional about that then. I—I wasn't

intentional about it. The most—the clearest I ever have been in my life about what I was going to do. is I was going to be a doctor, and I wanted to be a mom. And then the husband thing was part of it, too. But those—so I—so you do what you have to do to have those things happen, and then you let the chips fall where they may. And, you know, and the others, and it's—sound like now I'm [Pause] I'm not [Pause] I'm talking about how I think now, my philosophy now, but looking back on it, it's [Pause] I think it's how I've lived my life, is—you know, there's so much uncertainty. I grew up with such disruption and dysfunction that agility and resilience were just such an important part of who I was and who I am, and so [Pause] There were plenty of girls and women who were in the sciences. It wasn't about that. I always did feel dumber than everybody else, which is stupid. And by everybody else, I mean the men, the boys. the white boys in particular, and I even struggled with that in medical school, thinking I wasn't a very good student, or wasn't very smart, which—neither of which was true, and as I've said a couple times. If I were just one of those people who had the discipline to sit down and focus and study, I would have been a straight-A student without a doubt. But that wasn't where my priorities were, And I think intuitively, I knew that Those things weren't [Pause] Those things weren't what made good doctors.

ALLEN-DAVIS: They—they were the tools you needed. You needed to develop the study habits, which I had, so I'm acting some way, but

ALLEN-DAVIS: But the art of medicine is as important as the science of medicine, and I think I knew that without knowing it, so it wasn't—it was I wouldn't say it was intimidating, I didn't feel singled out, except that one biology professor when I was struggling in that one class, which I wasn't really struggling, I just needed to study. Yeah. I don't know if that's very a helpful answer, but [Pause]

COHEN: Yeah, that's great. What, what other subjects did students—did Black students major in at the time?

ALLEN-DAVIS: I think we were a lot of them—a lot of us were history majors. I mean, we did, I think, tend to gravitate to the social sciences and English.

ALLEN-DAVIS: there were, you know, there were a few, probably more than a few, who were interested in science, and a lot of us became doctors, in my class, anyway. A lot of us did. Quite a few, as I think about it. And actually, I had this cool thing happen. Dartmouth used to have something called an Early Assurance Program. And what you did is you applied to medical school, at the end of your sophomore year, to Dartmouth Med School, at the end of your sophomore year. And if you got in, you had to say that's where you were going to go to school. And so I chose to do early assurance. So, I got into medical school at the end of my sophomore year at Dartmouth. And, I hadn't taken the MCATs, I hadn't [Pause] Finished all my sciences. And it really made for a good last two years, and in that, I was able to do what I needed to do. in terms of the sciences and the MCATs and those sorts of things, but without this sort of sense, like, oh my god, if I don't do this, if I don't do well, I'm not going to get in, because I was already in school. And it enabled me to really lean into my major of sociology, and [Pause] You know, do the—do some of the stuff on campus that you've clearly read about. But I just thought, well, I'd love to stay here, and gosh, if I got in early, I could just do the sciences I needed to without the stress of needing to get. Ridiculously high grades that—aren't as meaningful as one would think, which is another way of saying meaningless in some ways. In terms of how we think about education in this country that way. Then that was cool! So that's—so I actually—had my [Pause] My plan was set 2 years into college where I was going to go to med school, and that I was going to go to med school.

COHEN: Nice. Okay, I want to shift a little bit. I want to talk about—specifically—gender roles, gender dynamics in, Black student life. So, like, starting off. What was the relationship like between Black men and Black women on campus during that time? How would you describe it? Did you feel supported by Black men?

ALLEN-DAVIS:

Yeah, so I think I'll answer it through two lenses. One, I'll answer through, sort of, the biology lens, and then through the—psychology and sociology, or social lens. The biology lens is we were kids who were doing the same, you know, sort of doing the experimentation and the checking each other out that is just part of—human nature, right? Human biology, that—so [Pause] there was dating, and, you know, the ins and outs, and the drama around all of that that was going on. There was tension. And it's a well-documented and defined tension, I know, between Black men and Black women that was born out of sexism, frankly. And there was—there's a fair amount of sexism in the Black community, too. Between Black men and Black women. So that certainly played out. So the relationships—the [Pause] sort of the relationships, I'd say. Put the dating aside, just as friendships and, you know, sort of Yeah, friendships, I think that's probably the best way to put it. We're strained in all the ways that they can be when you're [Pause]

ALLEN-DAVIS:

did Black men think that—remember, Dartmouth was—Dartmouth didn't go co-ed until 1972. And there were Black men on that campus before. How many of them wanted women there any more than the white guys wanted women there? So, you know, there was some of that, sort of, that overhang. Or that shadow that was out there as well. And there's always been this weird tension Between Black men and Black women, and my belief is that a lot of it is—is historically because Black men have been so, minimized and dehumanized, and it still is the case in this country by whites, that there was a sense that in the community, I can throw around my bravado more, and have someone who I can feel superior to. God, I can't believe I said that, but I think there's some truth to it. I know there's some truth to it, so [Pause] So they were, they were strained at times, in some circumstances. But what I think we all understood Either—probably intuitively, is that both as women, but also as a community, that we were Black first and everything else second. So, we always said Black first, female second. Right? As men would say, in terms of who we're going to fight for, and where our true home is. It's going to be in the Black community, it's not going to be in the women's community.

[Pause] and in that regard, back to this, don't let those folks in the AM, the men and women, or the boys and girls that they took care of each other as best they could. I mean, we were friends and did the things, But I did this thesis, I don't know if you were able to find it, but I was real interested in self-perceptions of Black women. And how they played out differently. on Black versus white campuses, and—some real interesting findings that came out of that, and one of them is that the relationships between Black men and women were better on Black campuses. than they were—the same tensions didn't exist on Black campuses as they did—that did exist on white—predominantly white campuses between Black men and Black women.

ALLEN-DAVIS: Oh, did I lose?

COHEN: Sorry, yeah, I lost you for a second. Do you mind repeating some of this?

ALLEN-DAVIS: I don't know, where did you lose me? At the thesis? Did you hear?

COHEN: Yeah, I lost you a long time ago, I lost you when you were talking about, like, you saying Black men kind of [Pause] Wanted someone, you know, a place to, like, feel superior.

ALLEN-DAVIS: Oh, yeah—so I think, I think just because of what, how historically Black men have been characterized in this country, It was in our own community where we have—they have the ability to sort of have some macho or bravado. And so there's always been tension between men and women, because Black women also have had more opportunity given to them in different ways. The other thing I mentioned is that you may remember before 72, that campus was all male, and there were Black men on that campus, too. So there's nothing that says that they were excited about having girls on the campus either, any more than white folks—white boys were. So, when they, when the campuses became, co-ed, So, what I had said is I started talking about [Pause] I, you know, I did a [Pause] I chose to do a thesis in my senior year, and I looked at self-perceptions of Black female undergraduates on Black and white campuses, and did a comparative analysis, and there were some interesting findings that came out of that. Both in

terms of career aspirations, which was, you know, not relevant to the question you just asked, but also the relationships between Black men and women on the campuses, or boys and girls. And they were far stronger and healthier on Black campuses than they were on white campuses. And it makes me wonder if we view ourselves in competition with each other. Or did—or [Pause] and did that play out? Did the dominant group—through [Pause] preferences shown to women because of the historical tensions that is—and the perception of Black men, the way they've been characterized through the centuries on this campus, did that create a tension that we—that was not of our making? It was outside of our—our making in some way. That made it even extra difficult to trust and—and connect, so that there was more competition between Black men and women on white campuses than you saw on Black campuses, where again, this is us, this is our hood, we're good, so [Pause]

COHEN: Did you, you know, did you as a leader. being a Black woman, like, did that change how you were treated? Did you feel anything different within the Black community? Did you feel the same, like, sort of pressures, the sort of competition that you talked about as a leader?

ALLEN-DAVIS: You know, I'll tell you something funny, and I—because I don't know how to interpret it, but my experience of Being a leader on the campus, left me—feeling, in my own community and leading in my own community, let alone whatever I might have done and can't remember outside of the Black community. And again, this is—incredibly personal, but I think it's important to share and be vulnerable. I didn't feel liked. I always wondered if they really liked me in the Black community. Obviously they voted me in. And they didn't vote me out that one night. I had lots of good friends, but there was this one group of Black girls who I always felt like didn't know what to do with me, it's what I'd say now. And that's my—closest to coming to saying, just really bluntly, that I didn't [Pause] I wasn't cool. I wasn't one of the pretty girls, you know, all those sorts of things. And I get—every now and then, over the years, there's an opportunity where we've connected, and they just—talk about how great they thought. It's like, I didn't

feel that way from you when I was there. And it may have been jealousy, who knows? You know, we were kids, we were growing up and finding ourselves, too, so [Pause] Yeah, I don't [Pause] I know I can't even remember the question. I'm sorry, it's getting late, and I'm sure you're tired, too. It's almost 10 o'clock where you are, yeah.

COHEN: Yeah, don't—yeah, sorry, sorry that we had to do this so late.

ALLEN-DAVIS: Oh, no, thank you for doing it late.

COHEN: Oh—[Pause] You know, we can, if you want—if you're getting tired—do more of the interview later on. That is definitely an option if you're getting tired.

ALLEN-DAVIS: How much—how much more do you have? Well, and you must be getting tired, too.

COHEN: I'm used to coming home late, and then, you know, having to do a lot of work, so I'm pretty fine right now. But I have a decent amount of more questions, so if you need to [Pause]

ALLEN-DAVIS: What if—yeah—what if, because it's almost 8 here, and we haven't had dinner. Let me ask Joy tomorrow—or if you'll send her a note and say we need another hour.

COHEN: Yeah, that would be good. Around another hour.

ALLEN-DAVIS: I'll find an hour. I don't know what this weekend looks like, but maybe we can even do it then. Actually, let's not. Let's do it one weeknight this coming week. Find a night, okay?

COHEN: Sounds good.

ALLEN-DAVIS: Alright, I hope what I've given has been helpful, and we'll continue.

Dr. Jandel Allen-Davis '80
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Black Lives
February 26, 2026
Transcribed by Will Cohen '27
SESSION 2 (begins below)

COHEN: Hello! My name is Will Cohen, and this is the second part of our interview being conducted for The Dartmouth Black Lives

Oral History Project. Today is February 26, 2026, and I am on 51 Lebanon Street in New Hampshire, right outside the college campus of Dartmouth College. I'm here today with Dr. Jandel Allen Davis. Thank you again so much for agreeing to speak with me today, and for coming back. So, quick logistics. This interview is being recorded, so it can be preserved as part of The Dartmouth Black Lives Oral History Project, and a transcript may be created for the recording, and you'll have the chance to review it for accuracy. As we talk, I may ask you to spell names, clarify acronyms, or define terms, just so the historical record is clear. To start off, I want to know, do you remember the first time you became aware of AIDS, and what were people calling it early on? What was it like on campus? What was it like in the Black community on campus?

ALLEN-DAVIS:

Well, so by the time I became aware of AIDS, it was 1980, 81. By then, I'd graduated from college, so I was actually at the medical school there on campus. And, there was some discussion about it, as this new immune disease was killing people. I was a first-year medical student, so I wasn't on any wards, which we called them back then. That is, I wasn't actually in the hospital working and learning. There was some talk about it, but we didn't talk much about it in those first couple years, 80, 81. In fact, I would say where I became, the most aware was, during my fourth year of medical school, which was 1984. The winter of 1984, I did a, An externship, it's called, at Washington Hospital Center in Washington, D.C, on the Internal Medicine Service. And I took care of— and you know, it's funny, Will, that you mention this, because every now and then I think about that lovely man. African-American man, gay man, who I cared for. And the thing that was interesting about it, is that They gave me, the residents, this person who had AIDS, nobody really truly understood what was going on. He was admitted with the pneumonia, pneumocystis carinii pneumonia. And, they were treating the pneumonia. And he was my patient for the whole 4 weeks that I was doing this rotation. And I might be, because, you know, that's the problem with going back that many decades. I might be, doing a little bit of revisionist history, but I don't think so. My recall is that I was the only one who went in and took care

of him. I mean, the nurses did. And, but the residents didn't. I think we were all. I don't ever remember being afraid of it, but there was such fear about what this thing was, but I'm just not wired that way, and he was such a lovely man. Just a sweet, nice, scared, sick as snot, , Black man with this disease. I can't remember the conversations, but there were a lot of tender moments, is what I'd say today, where we, like, just talked about things. I think the only reflection I would have about my experience of it is that I think gay men, I mean, the gay community, for sure, was scared, but they also carried a lot of shame, because in a weird way. AIDS outed men who weren't out. Right? You're that sick, you have to go to the hospital, and then it's diagnosed that you've got this new virus that we know very little about, except that it's, you know, those first few papers that were written about this new viral disease. I think I called it immune, but this, This viral disease that was wreaking havoc on the gay community. A gay community that back in those years was still pretty underground. People talked about it, for sure, there weren't many people, to use the phrase, who are out of the closet, but I never really thought about how AIDS actually outed people who weren't out. And he was still there when I finished my four-week rotation, but I've thought about him from time to time over the years, because I am pretty certain, given that particular part of the sort of story of AIDS and HIV, I'm pretty certain he likely went on to die at some point, if not even during that hospital stay.

COHEN: How old was he?

ALLEN-DAVIS: He was probably in his 30s. Yeah, 30s. You know, I do remember one, you know, he clearly carried some shame around it, because he carried himself very properly. And then, there's one of the drugs that they used to treat the pneumonia caused, what's called hypoglycemia, where your blood sugar gets super low. And he had an episode where his blood sugar really plummeted, and he became floridly, I would say, psychotic. And it all cleared when we gave him glucose and his sugar came back up. But when he was in that space. He was what we would call, through the sort of stereotypes of how we think about how gay men talk, and their, you know,

mannerisms, he was himself. And then as soon as we got his glucose up, he not only calmed down in terms of this sort of, let's call it almost pseudopsychosis. The low blood sugar presented itself, but I'd say he hid again.

COHEN: So, at Dartmouth, how did AIDS enter the conversation? Were people, like, openly talking about it? Did people avoid talking about it? Were they joking about it? Who drove the conversation? How did the school respond to it? Were there health center messages, certain panels, pamphlets, dorm programming?

ALLEN-DAVIS: You're way ahead of your years in this one. We were first of all, I remember I'd left college life by that point.

COHEN: Where were you living during med school?

ALLEN-DAVIS: I had my own apartment, yeah.

COHEN: Where was it?

ALLEN-DAVIS: It was in West Lab, as I recall. left town, that one road where the medical school, if you kept driving, you'd be at the med school, but, you know, down that road, and before you know it, you'd be in West Lebanon. So I was just outside of town, on that side of town. But, in terms of placing this disease in space and time. At the time I was on the campus, 80 to 84, we were just figuring, I mean, science was just figuring out what this thing was. Healthcare was. The scientists, you know, the virologists, the internists, so it was too early to be thinking about what you're talking about. At the time, it had been labeled a gay disease. And I think a lot of the conversation, given that a lot of people were and, this is just the sociology major in me coming out, if there was conversation from a public health prevention perspective going on at all, and I do mean at all, it was happening deeply and quietly in the gay community, because we were still trying to figure out what the thing was. What I'll tell you, and this is a story that has little to do with Dartmouth and everything to do with my residency, because I started my residency in Philadelphia in 1984. And

it's kind of wild, because at the time, this was a crazy story, I'm sure that there are people who would go, you did what? But there wasn't anything called universal precautions, which is what we call making sure you mask, and you glove, and you use these kinds of face shields to keep yourself from getting exposed to bodily fluids. We weren't at all careful about needle sticks or getting cut by a scalpel in the OR. And I'm, as you know, an OBGYN, and I delivered a ton of babies, and there's a way that we do it, and we know with obstetrics, it's very bloody. And I just kept, as a second-year resident, I remember I had a few pairs of, Believe it or not, just open flip-flops, open-toed shoes, imagine. And because they were rubber, and you could wash them off, and go to the next delivery, we didn't wear shoe covers, we were doing nothing around universal precautions. And it was the AIDS epidemic. That, actually ushered in all of the terms that I just talked about, where we started thinking about, not we're just gonna glove and gown, you know, based on Is she a drug addict, and we weren't testing. We weren't even screening universally for HIV at the time. But then this whole thing, like, you don't know who has what, there are silent ways, whether it's hepatitis or HIV or other infections that can be spread. The field of healthcare moved to this thing called universal precautions, and that cultural change in those processes within healthcare took a few years to become kind of the routine. But, you know, I think back now that you literally went in and did deliveries, and you'd be standing with your feet bloody. in these shoes, and then you'd go to the locker room and wash your feet, rinse off those shoes, and put on another pair of shoes. We didn't know, is what I would say. It's not like we were, you know, you can be critical of it, but it just goes to show how healthcare has advanced, in the last, maybe, 40, 30, 30-ish years, I'd say, yeah. But in terms of what was being taught, no one was talking about prevention, because it wasn't viewed as a heterosexual disease. It was a gay disease. And, we know, of course, that's not how the rest of the story unfolded, or has unfolded.

COHEN:

So before I kind of lead into, like, more questions specifically about the Black community at Dartmouth and AIDS, when you

were a med student, were you still, like, involved, really, with the Black community like you were in high school? I mean, in undergrad? No.

ALLEN-DAVIS: Not at all.

COHEN: Not at all?

ALLEN-DAVIS: I'm gone.

COHEN: And were there other, like, Black students who were in the med school with you?

ALLEN-DAVIS: Yeah, in my class, we didn't. I'm gonna give myself 5 seconds to think. It's been a while. There were maybe six of us, I think? 6 or 7? 6 of us, and we were women. There were 6 Black women in my class, yeah. And, you know it's a point in your career, maybe you know or don't know, where you're really focused on learning. I mean, I was in medical school. I needed to focus on science, and on my studies, and on what I was there to learn, so there wasn't any focus on the social aspects of either medicine or healthcare or social life. It was just about studying and learning how to care for patients, and making decisions about what was going to be your area of study once you specialize in that sort of thing. So, no, no involvement at all. In fact, I'll, Embarrassingly admit that the only time in my entire adult life that I didn't vote, even with absentee ballots. This is the 80s. There wasn't any technology. The only time I missed an election was when I was in medical school. And it's, again, something crazy that I remember. It's like, oh, I didn't vote. I don't remember, did I not request an absentee ballot, which was one of the things you'd have to do, or did I, I probably just didn't request one, thinking about the time that we were in, yeah. It's nothing like it is today. For all the ways we may think that the world has taken many steps backwards, and there's, from a social and a socioeconomic perspective, there's some merit, and [Pause] In terms of thinking that way. That was not the case back then. It was a simpler time.

COHEN: So how did race show up in your medical training? Did the issues of health disparities come up? I know you were an

OBGYN, people often talk about disparities with Black women giving birth as opposed to other races.

ALLEN-DAVIS: Let me answer the first question. How did race show up in medical school? there was so much othering, so much othering. Clearly I was in medical school because of some affirmative action things. Surely I wasn't smart enough to actually be there.

COHEN: Hmm.

ALLEN-DAVIS: There were two big things. I mean, this was 1980, which may seem like, oh, modern times, but when I think about the arc of just sort of history and a lot of social movements, the social movement that I was the first generation to receive the benefits of civil rights and women's rights. It's my generation, right? So this is 80, that was the, you know, the 60s and 70s. And, medical school and healthcare was still pretty much a white man's field. As I said, I think the last time, I really wanted to be a cardiovascular surgeon. That's what I wanted to do. The sexism, oh my gosh, was rampant, as was the racism. I remember being in an operating room in a hospital in Connecticut, because we used to be able to do our surgery rotations down there. And I remember one of the operating room techs handing me the Foley bag, which is the bag that you're in, that, you know, when people are anesthetized, they put that into your bladder. They handed me the Foley bag to empty, thinking I was the person there to clean the room. And I'd say I'm a medical student, I don't know what to do with it. And I remember talking to one, there was one Black surgeon who was doing his fellowship, he wasn't a resident, he was doing a cardiovascular fellowship. And I must have mentioned something. I didn't see many Black folk doing anything, so when you saw them, you went. And I don't think we had a huge conversation, but he says, I've been handed the mop and the broom in operating rooms to scrub the floors. That people didn't realize that he wasn't on the environmental services team. He was actually one of the physicians. So, it was a very different time, and there was the sense that we weren't smart enough, we weren't good enough, and I can

remember a few docs, it wasn't many, who you could just I mean, the reality is, we know this as African Americans, you can feel it. When you can feel racism. You can see it. Some people are overtly all about it, but even when it's not that, it's body language, it's eyes averted, it's, literally the difference between how you treated a white male medical student versus a Black female medical student at the time. So, alive and well, and it was something to kind of navigate, is what I'd say. You also asked, and you may want to come back and ask more questions about that, but let me quickly answer the one on disparity. That wasn't a word then. That wasn't a concept back then, healthcare disparities. People weren't talking about the Black maternal mortality rate. We just didn't. It wasn't talked about. That's a late 90s, early aughts discussion. There was the Landmark Institute of Medicine report that I think came out in 99, and I'm not going to remember the name of it, but it feels like GAP was somewhere in there. I think it was called Unequal Treatment. But you could look that up if you wanted. And that landmark study where they were able to show, through clear data and excellent scholarship, that health outcomes varied based on race. And on Jupiter, but in particular, in this particular case, it was about race, yeah. I think it was called Unequal treatment. And that's what put this whole idea that we were treating people differently based on the color of their skin. Regardless, even controlling for socioeconomic status. Including controlling for insurance status. Even when you controlled for those, there were still differences in healthcare outcomes, both in terms of the care experience, let alone literally the outcomes, and how you were treated. But at that time, it wasn't talked about at all. What you did know, or what I did know. Is there a difference between the engagement? I'd use this language now, being in it with your patient. It was different if you were Black and poor. Or Hispanic and poor, but mostly because I did my residency in Philadelphia. Everyone was Black and poor, there was definitely a difference between how people were treated. But it wasn't talked about.

COHEN:

So you kind of talk about the subtle or overt racism in these clinical spaces. So, it kind of begs a question. How did you

and other Black students feel that pressure as students? How did you compartmentalize? In modern days, we talk about this idea of code switching. This idea of alternating your language dialects or behavioral mannerisms to kind of fit within the context that you're in. Did you ever find yourself doing that to be taken more seriously?.

ALLEN-DAVIS:

You know, I think we walk this world with that level of cultural versatility. Often in an unconscious way, you know, so code switching doesn't have to be something, oh, I'm here, it is time to talk this way. And when I'm with my girls, I talk a very different way. and you don't necessarily even talk a different way when you're with your girls, but you know it's a place where it's safe to sort of show your bilingual nature, I suppose. But, you just knew you best. I mean, it's interesting, one of the things, even this goes back to the more modern ways that, as we've really looked at the, you know, the sociology, the social psychology, you name it, of how Blacks and other minorities, experience our healthcare system, one thing that Black folks know, and I do it to this day, I have done it forever, is you do not go to the doctor not dressed right. Right? You do everything you can to ensure that you're going to have a better shot. I mean, when you know you're going to the physician, it's a very different thing when you're going to an ER, and you're dressed the way you are, and life is what it is. But when you have an appointment, you don't show up looking some way, because you have concern, either spoken or unspoken, that you're not going to get the same level of care that you would if you show up in a suit or you show up well-dressed. And the reality is there's some truth to that, sadly. If this was a survey online, I'd have a whole lot of not applicables, because it wasn't even anything that was discussed or thought about in healthcare. I mean, we adjust. I don't know if it's healthcare's defense, I suppose it is. You know, John Windberg's work, who started the Family Medicine Department, I think the first one. I think, the first one in the United States, where we were just then beginning to even think about clinician-patient communication, or, you know, the interplay between where you live. And who you are, and its impacts on health were things that we didn't talk about. Being present at the creation,

where we began to think about clinicians, like how students learn to talk to patients, those sorts of things. It was all so new then. No, we weren't talking about those things. And I don't say any of this with any guilt or shame. It's the times in which I was born, and the context in which I found myself. It was an amazing thing to just be in medical school and to be able to, you know, sort of have the sacred privilege and honor of being people's lives this way. We, you know, we were out there to learn. learn our craft and go out and do us on behalf of the, I hope, the patients and communities we serve.

COHEN:

So, how did that kind of change the way you navigated med school and the healthcare world as a whole? When you were treating patients, did you think differently in ways that your white counterparts really couldn't?

ALLEN-DAVIS:

Yeah, we call that today: privilege. I didn't have the privilege of not being judged as a woman or a Black person. So your stuff had to be tight, is what I would say. And the interesting thing is, when I started my residency in Philadelphia in 1984, it didn't matter who was laying in the bed, Black young woman, white woman. And the phones at the time were still rotary phones that you held up to, you know, you had to plug into the wall, the whole bit. I'd walk in to round on a patient, or say, or do whatever with a patient, and Invariably. Invariably. If they were on the phone, they'd say, oh, the nurse just came in, I gotta go. So, you know, and whether they were Black, it didn't matter, because girls—I mean, at that time, the field was still so white male, regardless of the specialty, that if a woman walked in, you must be the nurse. And so then I'd have to say, I'm Dr. Allen-Davis. Oh, you're the doctor. And then the other funny thing, this is, like, hilarious, well, it's Dr. Allen, my internship, and then I got married at the end of my internship, and then I became Dr. Allen-Davis. But, when I became Dr. Allen-Davis, in the early days, because I don't even think many people hyphenate their names, women hyphenate their names nearly as much as we used to. And because my birth last name, or whatever it is, is Allen. They expected when there was an appointment that was made, and I'm going to see a Dr. Allen-Davis, they were always surprised, not always,

but there were frequently women who were surprised that I walked in, because they were thinking some guy named Allen-Davis. It was going to be very tough. So yeah, those were the days.

COHEN:

So, if you could go back and teach a required lesson about race and medicine. Based on what you've lived and what you've learned, what would you do? What would you teach other students at the time? What would you make sure that they learn right now?

ALLEN-DAVIS:

So, going back, what I would say is that, The world is gonna tell you you can't. And I'm not even going to talk to the world for sure, I will do it, but in healthcare, you will be told you can't do it. And you'll either be told that directly, or there will be what another modern-day term, that, people younger than me, I suppose. Have described and made up and written about. You're gonna have the hell microaggressions down here, so just be ready for it. You'll either get attending physicians, and so those are the doctors who are there to teach you, whether they're faculty at the schools, or they're docs who have private patients. Also, you know, since in some settings you're taking care of private patients and patients who may be Medicaid or uninsured, because that's who residents largely take care of, therefore learn how to be doctors on the backs of poor people. But they may pimp you. You're gonna get pimped more. You can feel, as I said earlier, when this issue of color or sex, color or gender comes up, and you have to, somehow or other. Figure out how to stay centered in yourself. Because I spent a lot of those years feeling very inferior and good enough. And I was fine. I was a great doctor. I was a great resident. I mean, I was the chief resident. In my residency, I got an award my first year, my first year residency in Philadelphia, an award that typically went to either junior, third or fourth year residents in OB-GYN. But when you're going through it, and you feel yourself being judged unfairly, it can eat at your soul, and don't let it. Don't let it. You will be fine. Despite how people like to think about affirmative action, ugh. there wasn't, I'll say in a funny way, there weren't. It wasn't a yard sale on medical school placements, and you paid the right price and got it.

You're there because you deserve to be. And that said, you gotta work hard, and we all know this. We used to say this all the time. You gotta work twice as hard. You know, you are gonna have to work harder than any white person that you run into, because you're not gonna get the breaks that privilege brings, because you're not privileged. And what I would say, and what I think we need to teach more today. I was thinking about this last week, because I did a talk that's on Legacy, actually. And, one of the folks who were at this pretty intimate discussion asked me. you know, thinking about your life, and the places you've been, and, you know, going to Dartmouth in the 70s, family dynamics that weren't pretty in my life. You know, you've had a lot of experiences. But being a Black woman, and now a Black woman who's a CEO of a hospital. Which, you can count us on a few hands, and you're done. So well less than 1% of hospitals are led by Black women. But I remember thinking, what we are by necessity, is culturally versatile. We have to be. And I said to this group that there's one Black woman. In this audience of about 20 folk, something like that. Yeah, I think it was 20 folk. I said, I'm gonna say something, and, I said, I can tell you at 2:30 in the morning, when I wake up, I'll be just as unapologetic about it. It's time for you all to develop some cultural versatility. So that's the other thing I would say in terms of what both medical school and law school and you name the school, needs to be teaching and really lifting up, is that if we really want to call ourselves a multicultural society. That goes both ways, and we've had to work much harder at figuring out how to fit in. As the old folks used to say. We had to go along to get along, right? How about y'all do some going along to get along, right? Just to be included, to be seen, and to have opportunity, the stuff we've had to stuff down. I won't say we, I have had to stuff down. Over a lifetime. Far less than my, you know, the generation before me, for sure. But, yeah, that's what I would teach, because the patients, back to healthcare and back to the patient experience, nobody wakes up in the morning unless there's something psychologically at issue here and says, I think I want to be a patient. No one wakes up and says, yeah, I think I want to be a patient today. You're vulnerable as hell already. So then add any of the things that, enable or

enable the opportunity or the possibility of being othered. And then you're, like, even more vulnerable, because you know you're not going to be taken seriously. We know, as you referenced, before we jumped on this. into this conversation that our pain as Black women isn't taken as seriously, because you think we're going to all end up addicts. That's not true. If you look at the use of psychotropic medications, Black women are far more likely to end up on psychotropic medications than white women, just because of how we express our emotions and our anxiety, or our fear, in ways that people think something must be wrong with them, let's drug them. Nobody wants to be a patient, and I think if there's something that I would be teaching a lot more in clinician-patient communication, I would change the title to Clinician-Patient Connection. It's the most vulnerable feeling in the world to be on the other side of that encounter. And most of us at some point in our life will be, or have been. And how do you want to be treated? And how does that then inform how you show up in the exam room? That has nothing to do with what we're talking about, or everything to do with what we're talking about. I mean, it probably has everything to do, because it could be when you go to the bank. It could be when you find yourself in court in front of a judge. It could be in that classroom as an undergraduate at Dartmouth. Whereas, I think I told you the last time, that biology teacher went on. All I need to do is sit my butt down and study. And stop being such a social butterfly. But no, she must be getting bad grades, because she really doesn't belong here, and she's one of those, and so she should choose something. She should find something else to do, but she's not going to med school. Yeah.

COHEN:

Thank you, that was very well said. That was great. So kind of shifting gears here. We're gonna talk about the apartheid a little bit, and kind of the AMS involvement with it while you were there, and, you know, the protests. I know we briefly talked about when you were in Jersey City for your internship, was it?

ALLEN-DAVIS: The Tucker Foundation, I don't know if Tucker Foundation is still there, but they did these off campus things, so I was just doing it off campus.

COHEN: New Jersey City doing?

ALLEN-DAVIS: Community service, yeah.

COHEN: And that was when, could you explain what happened with the sculpture?

ALLEN-DAVIS: Yeah, so it was the winter of 1979, and I was off campus. in Jersey City, teaching first grade in the day. And, or teaching, I should say, in a first grade classroom in the day. And then, staining microscopic slides in a lab at the hospital there, the Margaret Haig Hospital in Jersey City, at night. And that term, as part of the whole winter carnival thing, where each of the dorms makes a decision about what they want to do for their own statue. Ice sculpture, I guess we call them. The AM chose to, in protest to all that was going on with apartheid, and the fact that the college hadn't divested, which was what was going on at that time, you know, that colleges should divest, Those, particular parts of their, investment portfolio that, were, the money was made on the backs of Black people in South Africa. So Nestle was a big one, I remember, that there's a lot of talk about, but anyway. They chose to, because we know what apartheid was doing to Blacks in South Africa in terms of mortality rates, either through violence or harm by those in power, or just death from chronic disease and other things that weren't being treated. They chose to do, like, a graveyard, so there were wooden, sort of, tombstones. Instead of, actually, a real ice sculpture, those tombstones, as I recall, and buildings and grounds. allegedly thought that they were just a bunch of things. In fact, I remember the quote in the Daily D, something like, well, we thought they were just a bunch of sticks and boards. And so they pulled him up. And actually removed them. Now, whether that was the truth or not doesn't matter, because the impact on the students was that there was a lot of anger. And a lot of anger, and a lot of it, I'm sure, was pent-up anger. wasn't just about this incident, but pent-up anger, and a

group of students went out, and by then, I mean, this was, like. I mean, when is Winter Carnival? Sometime in January? I forget now. I mean, this was February into March. The thing, you know, by then, you know what the ice sculpture looks like in the green. There comes a point where the thing just looks like a ginormous chunk of ice or chunk of snow. And I remember images in the D of people actually up on it, spray painting it, so they defaced the ice sculpture, and white students lost their mind. There was anger, but it marked a really important moment in Dartmouth's history. So, I came back on campus in the spring. It must have been that I was close to the end of that term. When this happened, they had a day where there was a moratorium on classes, and we spent the day talking about race relations on campus. I remember giving a speech about perceptions or perspectives on what had gone on. And not even about what had gone on, but what it meant, and what, what was the work ahead. So that was that, yeah. Hmm. But in terms of, as you said, what were we doing around apartheid? It's an interesting story, and it might surprise you, it might not. But the folks who were fighting and protesting about apartheid actually weren't the Black students. It was white students. And there weren't that many. There weren't that many. There were always a few out front of Parkhurst with signs, rather. And I remember there was this one, young man. older than me at the time, in fact, older than most of the students at the time. The story, I think, goes that he didn't finish Dartmouth. He started at Dartmouth, but didn't finish. But hung around town, and he was the leader of this whole divestiture thing. You know, someone who you saw out there day after day. Interestingly, and I have to own this, you know, and again, it makes no sense to either have regrets or harbor guilt, but, I'm not even sure I fully understood what was going on, in part because it was such a small group of students. It never was, you know, it was nothing like what happened with the Israeli-Israel-Gaza thing. Nothing, nothing close to that. There wasn't any occupation of Parkhurst or that kind of thing.

COHEN:

So Black students weren't as involved?

ALLEN-DAVIS: We weren't, we weren't. We weren't.

COHEN: Why is that?

ALLEN-DAVIS: Well, I think I'm gonna go back to what I said. What I might have said the last time we talked. But remember, we were the first generation. of Black kids. to benefit from this thing called the Modern Civil Rights Movement. And we find ourselves in this odd campus, in this odd place, and we pretty much stuck together. Right, wrong, in between. It's about as values-neutral an observation as I can make. And so we weren't super engaged in social movements on the campus. There were Black professors, they didn't talk about it with us. You know, I mean, it could have been, looking back on it, it should have been conversation and sociology major's classes, right? Or history majors classes. It was almost as if it was going on Hidden in plain sight. So, we did it. And I don't think, for me, it wasn't born out of, oh, I better not do that, who knows what's gonna happen. It wasn't anything that I even knew that I should hitch my wagon to, right? To do some work. We were dealing with, I don't know, and this is just, I don't even think I gave it this kind of voice. But what I would say, looking back on it, is that we were dealing with being Black at Dartmouth. apartheid happening a continent away, hundreds of thousands of miles away. In some way, I don't know if it's that many, but hundreds of miles, thousands of miles away, for sure. I mean, for sure, there were some very informed and wonderfully enlightened white kids who saw how horrible this was. And I don't, you know, looking back on it, if I were to think about it, I'm not even sure I knew how many of the few that were out there protesting Dartmouth's divestiture. I mean, investment policies were actually Dartmouth students, or community members, or who knows. But all I remember through this Very, very gauzy look back in history. is that we didn't participate, and there weren't a lot of people who participated. You know, there weren't huge rallies about it. But it's really cool to think that. So that's my thinking about it arriving on that campus in 76. But there's something really enlightening that 3 years later, we were talking about it, clearly, because our snow sculpture was totally speaking to this. So, there's an awakening that

comes at the right time, or when the world or the community is ready to receive it.

COHEN: So, how did the Black community feel about these white kids that decided, you know, we're gonna protest this thing? Like, did you kind of look at them like, oh, that's great, or differently?

ALLEN-DAVIS: I think we thought that I can't speak, and I won't speak for other Black kids, but I think we thought, especially this one guy who just sort of hung around. There was something strange about it, something off about it, and we didn't get it. And I'm trying to answer this question respectfully. And trying not to harbor any shame, but I think we thought they were strange, that they were not crazy, but there was something not quite, mentally. I mean, that young man was not mentally healthy. Who was out there every day, and disheveled, and I got to know him a little bit. He would come to my dorm room every now and then and talk, because I'm one of those people who never met a stranger and always wanted to be available to whomever, and that's followed me my whole career, and my whole life. And so, since I'm that way, people talk to me about all kinds of things, and he was no different. I never quite understood what he was talking about, but I wanted to be kind and wanted to be there, but he he was not healthy. He was not mentally healthy. And yet, the cause for which he was fighting was one worth fighting for. Is what I'd say, but we weren't engaged. We weren't. And I'd say the universal we. Were there, maybe, I didn't pay much attention to it, were there some Black kids that may have been out there over time, maybe? It seems to me that I saw more of it in my freshman and sophomore year, and then it kind of petered off. So, interesting that then Black folks took up the cause, perhaps.

COHEN: So, you kind of talked about having to give a speech, the day with no classes, was it?

ALLEN-DAVIS: Right?

COHEN: I'm very curious about, kind of like. the school communities, not just the Black students, but also, like. you know, the white

students, how was your speech received from both, and how was, like, how did the community kind of react to this chaos?

ALLEN-DAVIS: I think, I can tell you for sure it shocked the administration. We can start there. I think it opened up some good dialogue. What I remember doing, now you're making me kind of go back and think about what I said. But I do believe last time I was here, I told you the story about my initial reaction in fourth grade to Martin Luther King's assassination.

COHEN: Yes.

ALLEN-DAVIS: So I mean, I think about it now, what a courageous step, but I told that story. From the stage, in an audience full of Black and white folk. And I remember saying. Something like, may it never be again that there is a child who is that uninformed About our history. We have to change that. Yeah, it's still, every now and then, I think about it and think, well, my parents didn't talk about it, you know, there's enough dysfunction and chaos in my own house, maybe that's why. TV, there's something then, you know, I think I mentioned this, there's something very subconsciously that's at play in the minds of kids. based on what they are seeing on television, that somehow or other, because nobody talked about Martin Luther King in my house. Or my grandmother's house. But somehow I walked away thinking there's something bad about this man, right? The antidote to that is that we have to make sure that our children and our, and we as adults, especially in today's world, are exposed to credible fact-checkable information, and we know with the misandristic disinformation that's going on, that's only become more difficult. But that's what I talked about from that stage, is that we cannot have another kid who doesn't understand their history. The Black history. I don't care what color they are. And I do remember my sociology professor, who was my thesis major, went on to become my thesis major. He was just so proud of me after I said what I said.

COHEN: What type of things did he say to you?

ALLEN-DAVIS: Oh, he just said it was a great speech. I don't remember all I said, but he used to call me Allen. He doesn't call me Jandel, he'd call me Allen. He said, Allen, that was great. Yeah.

COHEN: Alright, that was great. I'm gonna go ahead and end the recording.

ALLEN-DAVIS: Oh, okay.

COHEN: Do you have any last thoughts? Anything you want to say before we do that?

ALLEN-DAVIS: It's, you know, what's wonderful. You know, I have a few things I'd wonder about. I don't know how this all comes together to tell the story through the decades, or whatever sort of periods that you all are looking at through this particular Not just class, but this really cool way of documenting a time where no one's ever asked these kinds of questions. I think one thing that I hope comes out of this His, A deep, Respect and appreciation for the fact that all of our experiences are different. Right? So I could be saying all this stuff, and you may talk to them, oh yeah, there were a million Black kids out there with signs doing a part-time, right? Or, yeah, we didn't talk about AIDS, I mean, you know, or we did, or we didn't. I think it's super important that as you all look at the arc of history, is to make sure. I hope people really appreciate the context. And that the ways that we experience it, especially as old as I am, I mean, that was 50 years ago, right? When I think about 76, yeah, I mean, that was a long time ago when I, or maybe 48 years ago, we can say, when I started this, and so, time has this way of making Revisions of history a thing, mostly out of forgetfulness. But also, I've been told that with the way the brain works and memories, every time you talk about a memory, it changes a little bit, you know, especially over time. But I hope that comes out of it as some opportunities as people actually, you know, for the real social scientists who might find this really a fascinating kind of thing to think about. Just to take a step back and sort of say, isn't it fascinating how all of our stories are different, and all the ways in which our stories are the same, you know, those themes,

the commonalities. And remember that all of it's born out of a life's walk, because there could be kids who, and I know there were, at the time I was there, who came from higher socioeconomic status, a higher socioeconomic status than I did. who I'm sure had a very different sort of experience at Dartmouth. And poorer kids, because we were, we were Black middle class, we weren't poor, but poor kids who may have a different one, and your origin stories of how you were treated and how people did talk about the Black experience, what they heard from their elders, their mothers or fathers or grandmothers, also might influence this. So, you know, it's this part that it would just be interesting to see the different voices, and how the same experience was experienced differently by different ones of us. And the reason why I think that's kind of a really important thing to lift up is because there is a way, when we other, to use the phrase, that all we're doing is stereotyping and lumping, and you and I, Will, are not viewed for our individual gifts, or our individual weaknesses, or our individual thoughts or perspectives. We're just Black people. And however somebody chooses to say that's how Black people are, that's how they choose to say they are. So the beauty of this is it adds dimension. And texture, depth, and width. To people. It gives all those things to people who are not one dimension, by any means. And I hope that there's some real appreciation that comes from it. I think the other thing that I would hope from it, hope for you, as I think about your age and stage. I was your age and stage at some point. I didn't play lacrosse. I've been playing sports, honestly, but That's a whole other story of, sort of, the struggle for women in terms of sports and athletics, but That you're gonna be this age someday, and it would be so cool if we keep making sure we're telling the story of how life has evolved on these campuses. crosswalked against how perhaps the leadership on these campuses is thinking differently about what support of students who are different, who are not mainstream, who are not rich, who are not privileged, who are not white, who are not male, you name it, who are not, who are not. What it is that they need to be as successful and realize their potential, as others. And I just think it's damn cool that somebody's telling this story, because that was a crazy time. It was crazy, I

started the first year they graduated women. There weren't that many Black folk on that campus. Wow. We all hung together, and the thing I said the last time we talked, that if you didn't hang, you were viewed as some Oreo, which is the word we used at the time, or whatever you said. And we ostracized those people, thought that they were somehow, they're not as good as the rest. And for those of us who dared step outside of the race. or outside of our community and dared say, let's have an opportunity in an ongoing fashion following the 79 winter carnival. thing. Let's create opportunities for us all to come together and continue to talk things through. Which, by the way, is a very African, a very Zulu, I think it's a Zulu, concept of sitting under trees and talking things through. Mbizo, it's called. Because that's how we figure out a lot of our commonality. But I am talking too much! You need to go to bed.

COHEN:

No, I mean, this has been so great. Anything else?

ALLEN-DAVIS:

I think I've said enough. And I'm always available and here for you. Anything I can do for you.