

Willie Bogan 71'
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Black Lives
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Transcribed by Vachon Raye '24

RAYE: Hi, my name is Vachon Raye, class of 2024, Dartmouth College and I'm here with

BOGAN: Willie Bogan, Class of 1971

RAYE: I'm working with the Dartmouth Black Lives Oral History Program here at Dartmouth College. Today is Thursday October, 28, 2021, 8:35 pm. I am in Topliff Hall at Dartmouth College and Mr. Willie Bogan is

BOGAN: I'm in Oakland, California.

RAYE: I want to initially thank you personally for being here, and also on behalf of the Program.

BOGAN: My pleasure.

RAYE: Alright, so my first question is, where did you grow up? What was your childhood like?

BOGAN: I was born in Greenville, Alabama. My parents were farmers in Alabama and when I was about two years old, they moved to Michigan, where my dad was able to find a job in the factories. This was post-World War Two and there was a massive migration of black folks from the south to the north, and my parents and my family were part of that migration. So, we grew up in a little town in Michigan call Albion and I had six brothers, two sisters.

As I said, my dad worked in a factory and supporting or building parts for the cars that were assembled in Detroit. In Michigan the auto industry was the biggest industry so, we were all part of that. The beneficiaries of the auto industry in Michigan.

It was a very modest, my dad made a very modest income but thankfully, we were able to keep a roof over our heads and we had food. And from our standpoint, it was a great childhood. It was a little town, we had a lot of freedom. We essentially didn't have to come in until curfew, which was 10 o'clock at night. We played during the summer. We played baseball and that was our first sport and first love. And it was a very supportive town. Even when I was

playing Little League and Albion you would get your name in the paper for doing certain accomplishments like pitching a no hitter or getting so many hits and what I found is that that was very reinforcing. That it helped to build confidence. It was a community that was very nurturing and so I felt like I was even though it is a small town, I felt like I was somebody and it also was a place which fostered dreams.

And I envision myself playing sports at a higher level. I envision myself going to college. One significant thing about our hometown was that it was also a college town. So, we had a lot of professor kids that went to school with us and it elevated the level of competition in the classroom. So it was all in all, it was a very, very happy childhood.

RAYE: You mentioned sports being a very integral part of your childhood being like a centerpiece, something of value,

BOGAN: Yeah.

RAYE: How did sports lead you to college for the ones who don't know you? Yes, so my story is that I played football, basketball, and I ran track through high school. And football probably was my best sport in terms of team sports, although I was a very good track athlete. I ran the 400 meters as well as doing the 400 meter relay and some of the other relays, but football was in terms of team sports was the sport that was my better sport.

I was thinking about going to college, perhaps in the Midwest where we lived, because we were from a small town. I wasn't going to get interest from big schools like Michigan or Michigan state, so I was thinking about maybe the next level down. One day I got a call from Dartmouth. It was either a call or letter, I can't remember, but they were interested in meeting me at a recruiting event in Detroit. And the way that happened was that one of my football coaches responded to a questionnaire from Bob Blackman, who was the head coach at the time, became a legendary coach at Dartmouth.

Bob Blackman was scouring the country going a little bit deeper than schools like Michigan, Michigan State had to go just to find student athletes that might be able to compete at Dartmouth. And he had sent out a questionnaire across the country to high school coaches and I didn't even know, but my coach responded to one of the questionnaires. And indicated that, I was a person that could compete academically and athletically at a place like Dartmouth.

And so that's how it all began. It was because one of my coaches had enough faith in me, belief in me that he was willing to put my name down and be an advocate for me. One of the lessons I learned from that is that sometimes people around you and know you can envision things for your life that you don't necessarily envision for yourself and that had a tremendous impact on my trajectory.

RAYE: Could you mention that coach by name, do you remember his name?

BOGAN: I can't remember which one it would have been, but it would have either been. Coach Faust [F- a- u-s-t] or coach Mullencamp. I believe one of those two and I did get some you know some attention from other small schools and also from the Naval Academy. I was recruited by the Naval Academy, and I was admitted. I went through the whole process of getting a Congressional appointment and all of that, and it was very, very alluring. My parents could envision me in that naval uniform.

You may even know Lee Corso. He's still on Sports Center on Game Day on Saturdays. He actually came to my house, he was with Navy at the time. He was a young coach with Navy. This was a recruiting trip and he met me and my parents at our House and he really did a good selling job with them, and it really was a very tempting opportunity. But the bottom line was that this was a period of Vietnam War, and it was very likely that if I had gone to the naval Academy, I was going to have to go over to Vietnam and I really admired all the people who did that. But I did not. I couldn't see myself there because I didn't really know what that war was all about.

Anyway, that was one of the other options I had but I took a recruiting trip to Dartmouth. It was one of those beautiful weekends at Dartmouth, where they had invited sister schools in for the weekend. At the time Vachon, it was all male so that was a really big, big thing, and you know I just had a really good time and decided that I couldn't pass up the opportunity to go to an Ivy league institution, because I knew, I knew how prestigious it was and what a difference it can make in my life.

RAYE: So I'm pretty sure your parents were pretty proud of you with you getting Ivy League attention. From my knowledge, I also know

about the Rhodes scholarship you received. Could you briefly tell me about that?

BOGAN:

Yes! So one of the things that Dartmouth did for me was it broadened my horizons. It made me feel that I could accomplish a lot more, and that many doors would open for me, because of the foundation I was getting at Dartmouth.

In my senior year. No I'm sorry I think it was my sophomore year. I read in the Dartmouth newspaper that, what is his name? He was this Treasury Secretary. [Henry Paulson '68]. Anyway, he had received a Rhodes scholarship and I didn't know necessarily at the time what that was all about. I did a little research and I found that it would give the winner opportunity to go to study at Oxford University. And that the qualifications were; being a great student excelling in academics, of course, having sports experience, and being a Community leader, and those are all things that was part of my experience at Dartmouth, and so I began to think of that, as a possibility for myself. And so I applied in my senior year. You can either apply in the state where you go to school, the state where you reside, where your residence is, and so I went back to Michigan and went through the process and was selected and ended up being one of thirty-two Rhodes scholars selected from the United States that year.

Interestingly, again this was a time when people were becoming aware of some of the inequities in education and in other areas of our lives in the United States. I think there was a special attention being given to trying to identify minority students who could qualify. In my year there were five black Rhodes scholars and I'm not sure we've ever had that many since then. We may have, but that was really an extraordinary number.

Five out of thirty-two. So that allowed me to study in Oxford for two years. And Vachon, I just like to mention one thing, because this is a story that I like to tell because it puts it in context again in terms of what was going on in our lives at that time.

And so part of the experience as a Rhodes scholar at that time was that you would [Pause] All right, so I just wanted to emphasize, you know there were five out of thirty-two blacks who were Rhodes scholars, an extraordinary number, and part of the Rhodes tradition, was that we would all meet in New York before our first year at Oxford. And we would get on this big boat at that time was the Queen Elizabeth the second, or they called it the QE2, and we would have a sailing party we would sail together over to Oxford.

When it was just kind of coincidental that when we were sailing, we gather with some other folks on the ship. We met Roy Wilkins, who was the president of the NAACP at that time, and when he learned that there were five black Rhodes scholars on that ship, he was overjoyed because he knew in his heart that it was the work that he and others had done which had laid the groundwork for that opportunity for us. So that's something that's always stuck in my head. How happy, how pleased and that he was to see that accomplishment.

RAYE: You spoke about one of the requirements for being a Rhodes scholar being a community leader. So could you talk about how you were a community leader at Dartmouth campus.

BOGAN: I wasn't into necessarily the political scene and all of that, but I think it was more of leadership by example. By being a committed student and a committed athlete and achieving at that level and that as a result, there were other people that in our community that look up to me. In fact, they will tell me now I didn't necessarily realize it so much, then, but what a role model I was for them, some of the underclassmen especially.

But you know I did get into a situation where we, as a group of black students at Dartmouth, we had a confrontation as a result of the College inviting William Shockley to the College. William Shockley believed in white superiority and he believed that blacks were inherently inferior and so we as a group, and I was part of that leadership group for that particular event, decided that we had to do something to make it clear that it was not acceptable for him to come on our campus, our home and talk about our inferiority. So, we basically clapped him down so that he couldn't speak. My only sort of mark on my record at Dartmouth was that I was put on probation, I think, as a result of that. In retrospect, if it had been a different time, I don't think that punishment would have been meted out because Dartmouth was allowing somebody to come into our home and to make us feel inferior. In some ways, I think, not only was that punishment inappropriate but that really the College owed us an apology for doing what they did.

RAYE: Yeah. I think I read up on that.

BOGAN: Yeah.

RAYE: And it was talking about the Judicial Advisory Committee.

- BOGAN: Yeah, right. That must have been a committee that put us on probation. The ones that they could identify and I was identifiable because I was at that time, a well-recognized football player.
- RAYE: So you were involved in the protest that was on Dartmouth campus. Are you familiar with George Wallace coming to campus?
- BOGAN: I am. Although, I think that happened the year before I arrived at Dartmouth. I think it may have been the spring before I arrived at Dartmouth. But you know of course I've heard a lot about that as well.
- RAYE: I understand that on the flip side there has been two people who are pro-black like Malcom X and Martin Luther King. Was there any like word around them? Or, things being said about them? Not even just things — feelings or like experiences involving them.
- BOGAN: Well you know I know that at the time, Martin Luther King had a broad following, even among people who were perhaps more militant than Martin Luther King advocated. There was a great respect for him. I know that that was the case at Dartmouth and across the country, and probably other colleges as well. I mean, he was such a powerful figure. I mean in terms of his ability as an orator. His ability to arouse people and to go to the heart of what is right and decent and convince people about what is right and decent. And he was just a brilliant man, so there was a lot of respect for him. But I also know that there was a more militant component among the black folks at Dartmouth, and Malcom X certainly had a lot of respect. Yeah, a lot of respect from those people, because I think a lot of folks believed that we needed to do more than march. It might be necessary to do more than just march in order to bring about equality.
- RAYE: Oh well, thank you.
- BOGAN: All and I would, I would say too. I remember vividly it was in 1968 I was just a sophomore. No, it was the winter of 68, so I think I was just a freshman, my freshman year. And he was assassinated, Martin Luther King was just assassinated. I remember how walking around the campus around the Green and I just heard the news. I felt alone. I felt like they had taken away hope from us, and it was a very somber moment for me, and I remember just feeling that, while I was at Dartmouth, it was a great sense of loss.

RAYE: Thank you for speaking on that. I also wanted to ask about some organizations like black organizations that, not if you were involved in like any of them, that you can name.

BOGAN: You know, other than the Afro Am [Afro-American Society] when I was on campus that was the only one that I was involved in. Then, obviously there were other organizations that were around at that time, like the Black Panthers. But I was not involved in any of those. And in part of it was there's only so much you can do as a student and I realized, my primary job was to be a good student and to prepare myself for the future. So I did not, I did not get distracted by some of those other organizations.

RAYE: Ok, could you tell me about your involvement and your experience with the Afro American Society?

BOGAN: Yeah so, from my vantage point the Afro Am [Afro-American Society] was also the organization that organized the protest against William Shockley, it would have probably been the group that organized a protest against George Wallace. So, it was very politically aware. And it also was the organization that would organize, I guess, there was a protest against Dartmouth administration itself. And I think I was away from campus doing one of my terms abroad or I had a term in Mississippi where I taught. So I don't think I was there for that, but the Afro AAM was very politically minded and was at the core of those protests.

But, more fundamentally, it was a social group. It was where we would go and we would hang out. We would just have a good time with one another. It was a support group for the blacks on campus: It was, sometimes we felt isolated, as a group and, and so it was a way of dealing with that isolation.

RAYE: So I know you guys protested and were involved in political things. Based on our research I seen that you guys made things such as the Black Arts festival, or like the black Praxis. Do you have any knowledge on that? Could you speak on that?

BOGAN: You know, again, I think, for me, other than you know what I've already spoken about. My involvement was pretty much limited to that. I know that we did some artsy things and: probably were involved in bringing certain people onto campus. Personally, I think

I've benefited from that in terms of some of the people that came onto campus. But I wasn't personally involved in bringing that about.

RAYE: Can you tell me about any black professors that you guys have on campus or any classes that you took? I know in 1969 you guys have like a revision you guys wanted for black major, black studies. Could you tell me about how you guys started influencing teachers and also your classes?

BOGAN: At that particular time my recollection is the only black Professor, was a professor named Errol Hill [E-r-r-o-l] I think it was. Errol Hill, and fortunately for us, he was very much interested in our having a good experience at Dartmouth. And so I remember him and inviting us over to his home in Hanover and just being a, you know, again being a support to us: But quite frankly I can't remember anyone else at the time that we had. I think certainly there was a lot of buzz about the need for black professors. And the Afro AAM would have been, again, at the center of that effort to make the administration aware, the importance of bringing black professors onto campus. But we didn't get to experience much of that. Again, I can only remember the one.

RAYE: Were you able to partake in any black-based courses? Like African American courses?

BOGAN: I didn't. But I remember some courses that allowed you to take a bent towards the African American perspective. One of them was just a history course and it was at Dartmouth, during those history courses that I became immersed in the study of slavery. And what a vicious institution it was in the United States. I remember one author describing it as the most, and I forget the exact term, but essentially the most vicious form of slavery in the world. It was through that that I began to understand our history and how that history continued to impact our lives.

I remember having a debate in one of the history courses. This one African American student was taking the position that we had overcome that slavery and that we were not essentially tied down by the institution going forward, as the institution of slavery. I remember, my point of my point of view was, it was so destructive as an institution that it was impossible for us to overcome it in such a short period of time. And indeed, I think it's one of those things that has manifestations in our history, I mean throughout our history, through this present day, you can trace back.

RAYE: Oh.

BOGAN: Let me see, I just lost here. [Pause]

BOGAN: Okay, I mean, I think you can trace back a lot of things. Some educational any qualities and prejudices that black people experience, you trace a lot of that back to slavery. And I remember another course, I think it was the literature course of some sort and again we were asked to write a play as part of our work and my play again it just focused on the black experience. It was about a young man, much like myself and his father, much like my dad, and how angry the young man was because his father, who is a great individual, but he wasn't angry about the things that he had. I should say he wasn't overtly angry. He never expressed anger about the things he had to experience in the south and as a boy, as a young man, where they still call him boy.

Even in Michigan where we grew up the things that he might have had to experience in the factory, where he worked, being relegated to certain jobs. And he never expressed anger about that. One of the things I remember about the play I wrote was that the young man said that he was angry, not just for himself, but he was angry for his father as well.

RAYE: For this play did you have to present or?

BOGAN: No, we didn't, it was just a written play.

RAYE: So you take this like your freshman year?

BOGAN: It would have been later on the freshmen courses were pretty mapped out so would have been you know, perhaps my junior year something like that.

RAYE: Okay.

BOGAN: Maybe, maybe even senior year but, but it was later on.

RAYE: What year was it that you and your football team went undefeated? Could you tell me about the year your team went undefeated?

BOGAN: Yeah so that was the 1970 football season. It followed the 1969 season, of course, but in the '69 season we had gone undefeated until the last game, which was against Princeton. And Princeton I must confess, they handled us pretty well and it left a very bitter taste in our mouths, when we realized how difficult it is to run the table, but we also realize when you get that close you don't want to lose the opportunity. so we committed ourselves during the offseason. Our rally cry was 'Beat Princeton', 'Remember Princeton', that sort of thing. I know personally as I trained in the summer that was on my mind. We got a second chance my senior year to try to run the table. Princeton was one of our earlier games, maybe let's see.

RAYE: And if you could, you can put in the camera.

BOGAN: So yeah so.

RAYE: Could you tell me what you have?

BOGAN: This is the trophy for the 1970 team, which was undefeated.

RAYE: Could you hold it up one more time, please.

BOGAN: Yeah, this is the trophy for our undefeated 1970 team and we beat Princeton the third game. We beat them 38 to nothing, let me see if I got that right. [Pause] Right, we beat Princeton 38 to nothing. We were such a dominant team that year, we scored 311 points against our opponents and we allowed 42 points. We had six shutouts that year, the last four games we played were shutouts. Including Yale and Cornell. Yale was, until we beat them, they were one of the highly touted teams, not only in the East, but in the country. And we beat Cornell, which had the runner up to the Heisman trophy. I believe it was his senior year, but he had built quite a legacy already by his junior year, the year we played him. He was running you know, he was rushing, for you know, a couple hundred yards sometimes a game and we held him to 60 yards. So it was a very dominant defense. We were committed, we were focused, and we had enough talent to pull it off.

Not only were we undefeated, but we won the Lambert trophy which at the time was for the team with the best record in the East, which was essentially, regarded as the best team in the East. One

of the stories in the Dartmouth lore is that Joe Paterno, the coach at Penn State, challenged our coach Bob Blackman to an offseason game, because he just couldn't believe that an Ivy league school could compete with the likes of a Penn state. Even though we had a superior record and what our Coach Blackman replied, and this is kind of legendary now, is that Coach Paterno knows that Dartmouth teams, Ivy league teams could not play postseason games as a team. But if we could we'd want to play a team with a better record than Penn State. We've all often recited that story, because it was so, so clever and it was such a great way to respond to a challenge, but we were also ranked 14th in the country that year, and that was ahead of big time schools like SEC.

RAYE: So could you tell me about the atmosphere of the team? I'm familiar with your nickname killer B. The defense you could specify them but could you tell me about the atmosphere of the whole team?

BOGAN: Yeah, I can say that we were truly a team and when I look back now, those are the guys, offense and defense, that were the closest to me at Dartmouth. I didn't realize it at the time, but we spent so much time together, you know, being in the trenches together that we did form a real bond. And we were united by that singularly purpose of not letting the undefeated season get away from us again. so we were friends, as well as teammates.

If you listen to some of the guys on the team. They will tell you that it was a group that liked to have fun. It was sometimes an irreverent group, they did things that weren't just — c let me put this way, that might have been a little mischievous.

And so we yeah we had a lot of fun together.

Being on the defensive side, I can say that I had a great respect for the guys on the offensive side. I never had a doubt that they were going to do their job. And just having that confidence that everybody was pulling the oar together. It was really an extraordinary experience, to the point where we've just had our 50th reunion. Although I didn't attend personally, but we had a lot of zoom meetings and email exchanges and so on, about those years.

You can tell from those emails and and remembrances, how close knit the team was and that it was one of the most significant experiences in each of our lives.

RAYE: Well, thank you for touching on your experience at Dartmouth, if you have anything else that you would like to tell me about your favorite experience at Dartmouth and one your worst experiences also.

BOGAN: So, certainly, you know the football experience I would have to count as the favorite experience, especially that 1970 team. You have to remember too, Dartmouth at that time. You know Dartmouth, I mean it's isolated right? I mean, you're in the middle of New Hampshire and it's a small town and there's not a lot going on around there. Having something like football to hold on to you know, to allow me to get out and visit the other Ivy league schools and other schools that was really huge. I mean it added a whole new dimension to my experience at Dartmouth.

But one of the other great things about Dartmouth and I alluded to this earlier was that it had a wonderful study abroad program and I studied, as a Spanish major, I studied in San Jose Costa Rica at the university there for three months. And I studied at the University of Salamanca in Salamanca Spain for three months. So each of those was a term and then, as part of another program that Dartmouth had, I spent three months teaching at a school in Clarksdale, Mississippi. And it was those experiences that really increased my worldview. And made me a person that was more aware of the world around me. So that those three terms, those three terms were some of the greatest times and most significant times that I had at Dartmouth.

In terms of the low points, and you know Dartmouth was all male at the time and we were, you know as blacks we were not well represented there. And it just was a lonely place many, many times. I think that's why when Martin Luther King was assassinated, we took it very, and I took it very personally. And it was amplified being in a place where you already felt so alone. And so that was the biggest challenge about Dartmouth, the long winters, being in Hanover, and without a real social structure around you. Other than our brotherhood that we developed.

RAYE: And also wondering: I know you were there before Co-Ed [coeducation] but did you get a chance to experience the incoming of the first women on Dartmouth campus?

BOGAN: When my senior year they had started bringing in some women on sort of like an exchange program. So they may have finished their senior year at Dartmouth. I don't think they got Dartmouth degrees at that time, but there were women who were on campus my senior year. I can't remember how many it was. But let's say there were 100 among 800 guys, which was the typical class size at the time, 800 per class. That was a very small percentage, and so it even that didn't seem real. I must confess I don't think I, I may have interacted with a couple, but I really didn't know them, so it didn't affect my experience.

RAYE: Oh, if you have any closing remarks, anything. You have presented me a great interview. You talked a lot about a lot about things that you've experienced and kind of touched on some of the black outlook, or the look of black students, especially [being] a student athlete during your time, also an emphasis on being a student because I know you spent a lot of time studying in the library.

BOGAN: Yes.

RAYE: Any closing remarks, you could say them now.

BOGAN: I would just say that I still believe, you know we talked about how lonely it could be, and one of the things that most of us realized at the time, is that even so, having the opportunity to go to Dartmouth was a price we were willing to pay for. Because we knew that it was going to make a difference in our lives. So during those difficult times some of us might have thought about whether we would want to continue that challenges, but only for a moment, because we knew that quitting was not an option. That we needed to continue this journey in order to position ourselves for success, and so we always view Dartmouth as a foundation for that future success. And indeed it was.

RAYE:

Well also again. I want to thank you for presenting your time and experiences. That will conclude our interview. I'm just going to stop sharing.