

Michael Lewis '65  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Black Lives  
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Transcribed by Tamonie Brown '24

BROWN: Okay, my name is Tamonie Brown. I'm a junior at Dartmouth, and I'm currently on Dartmouth's campus in my dorm room, and I'm here with Michael Lewis. Mr. Lewis, can you introduce yourself and say where you're calling from?

LEWIS: Sure, I'm Michael Lewis, an alumnus of Dartmouth and I'm calling from my home office in Washington DC.

BROWN: Okay. So, my first question for you is, can you talk a little bit about where you grew up?

LEWIS: Sure. I grew up in Washington, first twelve and a half, I guess, years of my life, Washington D.C. My father was also born in Washington. And then we moved to India for four years, where he was in the Foreign Service. Came back to Washington for two years, last two years of high school and then Dartmouth.

BROWN: Did you enjoy living in India?

LEWIS: Yes, very much. Yeah, I've not been back since, but I did very much enjoy it, I was a teenager, it was all new and strange and it was fun.

BROWN: Before you got to Dartmouth, were you considering any other colleges?

LEWIS: It's hard to think about in today's world. What happened to me when I applied to Dartmouth was... it just wouldn't happen the same way nowadays. I mention that we spent four years in India, when we came home, my parents were concerned, actually before we came home, they were concerned that if I just came back from being in Indian schools for four years and came back to a D.C. public school, they were concerned about whether I'd get into a good college or not. So, I went to prep school in Western Massachusetts, I went to Deerfield Academy for two years. And when it came time, I thought at the time that I wanted to be an engineer. And when it came time to apply, there were three schools on my list: Dartmouth, Cornell, and Case Western Reserve, all of which had good engineering programs. But I really wanted to go to Dartmouth because lots of reasons. I had fallen in love with New England, two years in western Mass. And had the same colors, green and white [laughter] and more than that, at the time, Deerfield sent like ten or eleven people to Dartmouth every year. I mean, it was just a huge connection pipeline. I had a number of friends who were year ahead of me at Deerfield who were here. I came up there at some point and I don't know, I don't remember now whether, I

don't think it was it was any kind of a formal visit. Anyway, loved the place. I applied to these three School. I got into Cornell, I got an acceptance package from Cornell immediately with a big scholarship, and I needed a scholarship. I mean my family didn't have, even back in those days, didn't have the money. I was not freaked out, but I didn't want to go to Cornell, I wanted to go to Dartmouth. But I couldn't, I didn't see how I could turn down this money. I went to see the college counselor, the guy did college counseling at Deerfield, and he looked at me and he said, "You want to go to Dartmouth, right?" And I said, "Yep". And he said, "Well write Cornell and tell them no, thank you." And I left his office, just, I was freaked out then because he was telling me, when I hadn't heard from Dartmouth, right? He was telling me "It's okay, this big scholarship just say no." I just was totally freaked out. In fact, I didn't do it. Which was wrong of me, right? Because I was holding the scholarship, so it meant that they couldn't give it to someone else. I didn't do what he said right away just because I was so freaked out, I couldn't imagine, what If I didn't get into Dartmouth or what if I got into Dartmouth and they didn't give me a scholarship. But it all worked out, and no doubt I was very happy. Never looked back.

BROWN: That's great to hear. I'm glad that worked out for you. And you said that, you know, going in, you wanted to be an engineer. So, I'm assuming you majored in some kind of engineering, which one, specifically?

LEWIS: No, my freshman year when I took calculus and physics, I learned that maybe my aptitude for engineering wasn't as high as my interest in engineering. And in fact, they did these, whole bunch of different tests at the beginning of the school year, one of which tested your aptitude for various things. And my, what was it, language aptitude was really high, and my math/science scores weren't nearly as high. I should have taken that as a clue. But I didn't, it took me freshman year and almost flunking out to convince me that I wasn't going to be an engineer.

BROWN: When you realized that engineering wasn't for you, what did you change your major to or what did you intend on doing?

LEWIS: I changed my major to government. I was quite happy with it, in fact. I didn't really know what I wanted to do after college. I was probably pretty unsophisticated that way, I didn't have a list of well, gee, I'll do this, or I'll do that. In fact, what I did was what my father did, I went into the Foreign Service. That's where that's what I did right when I left Dartmouth.

BROWN: Before we get into that, I want to talk a little more about your time at Dartmouth. What activities were you involved with on Campus?

LEWIS: Let's see. Well, I did a bunch actually, I did a bunch of things, I probably did too many things. I started working at the radio station and ended up being one of the directors my senior year. I got involved, I'm

not even sure how I got involved in student government, but I ended up on what was then called Palaeopitus [a senior society at Dartmouth], I don't even know if Palaeopitus still exists.

BROWN: It does actually.

LEWIS: I did Palaeopitus. I was involved in building every bonfire my freshman year there was. What else did I do? I did some cabin and trails stuff with the Outing club. I think that's about it. I played in a rock band for a couple of years. I think that's pretty much it. I mean, I joined a fraternity my sophomore year and was a Casque and Gauntlet [One of Dartmouth's oldest senior societies] my senior year. A bunch of different things. I stayed pretty active.

BROWN: Which fraternity did you join?

LEWIS: Well, it was then Delta Upsilon, we turned it into Foley house because the Delta Upsilon was—is an international fraternity and in 1960... this would have been what? 1962 when I joined, I guess, they had a blackball thing and didn't permit Blacks in the fraternities. I think it was my, that's right, it was the summer of my no, must have been the summer of the next year, a bunch of people from the fraternity, went to the International Convention, the annual convention, to try and get the constitution changed and they weren't able to, so we left that international thing and named ourselves after then very popular Professor Al Foley. So, it became Foley House.

BROWN: That's really interesting. So, was Al Foley significantly involved with the fraternity?

LEWIS: No. No, he just, he was this guy who taught a couple of very popular classes. They were popular enough that there would be a hundred, I don't know, a couple hundred people, I know the classroom was in Dartmouth Hall, big classroom, balconies, and there would be Al, holding forth on Greek and Roman writers, authors, and playwrights and things. He was quite irreverent. So, we named ourselves after him, but he wasn't involved in any way with the place. In fact, as far as I know, he never set foot in it, but my memory might be a little wonky on that.

BROWN: All right. I know you mentioned that there was not, there wasn't any agreement with the national level, how did people on campus kind of see the integration of Black people into the fraternity?

LEWIS: It was quite mixed, I think. I mean, I think there were some fraternities, I remember going to, during rush, going to one fraternity where I had some friends, and must have been people who were older than I, and one of them saying to me, "I wish we would tap you, but we won't." Basically, because I was Black. Never had any... First, there weren't that many Black students on campus, right? Black men, I mean, there

weren't any women students at all. There weren't very many Black men on campus, but there were, I mean, I'd never, except for that one place, and I can't even remember which one it was. It was another one of the national fraternities or internationals. DU was fine and there were a bunch of other places that were fine, and I never hesitated to go for a party to some place that I didn't belong to. It wasn't a big deal. There wasn't any general discussion on campus that I was aware of. Just, sort of, partially the time when we're talking about, you know, the early 1960s. It really wasn't an issue, and it probably would not have been an issue for the Dartmouth chapter if we hadn't made a deal of it. Because nobody was coming around checking to see who they had tapped or anything like that. But we just thought it was wrong.

BROWN: Thank you for that. My next question is, how was the idea of women being allowed to attend Dartmouth perceived by students during your time there?

LEWIS: There were, I'm trying to remember when the following—at some point, I think it was Vassar, was thinking of, before it went co-ed, it was thinking that maybe they should affiliate with some other place and there were rumors going around the Dartmouth campus that maybe Vassar was going to move across the river or something and we were going to... that never happened. I don't know if that was even ever seriously a possibility. I'm trying to think about when I was there when, oh yeah, Blythe Danner, the mother of Gwyneth Paltrow the, she's an actress or so. She actually spent a semester at Dartmouth, there was some program where a few women, I don't I don't remember exactly when that was. But anyway, frankly there wasn't, I don't remember much discussion about it. I certainly would have, I mean, I certainly thought we should have women there, but it's not as if I was walking around with a sign saying hey trustee, you should admit women, I just thought, you know, why not? And it turns out that at least, I don't know if this is true or not, that some people say that the impetus for Dartmouth to admit women was because there were all these Dartmouth alums who had daughters [laughter] they wanted them to be able to attend the place. They started making a fuss. I don't know if that's right or not.

BROWN: That's really interesting though. I have a follow-up question, I heard that a lot, during this time, a lot of Dartmouth students would essentially kind of bus in women from other colleges nearby. Do you have any memory of that?

LEWIS: Oh absolutely. The buses would roll in for, you know, big weekends. These buses would come from all over. I think, probably, they came from at least as far away as Boston. Yeah, and they would come for the weekend. Yes, that was that was a regular, that was a regular occurrence.

- BROWN: Okay, thank you. My next question is, was there any significant connection between any Black faculty members and Black students?
- LEWIS: I don't remember. I didn't have any connection and if there were Black faculty on campus, I certainly never took a course from a Black faculty member. And frankly I'm not aware that they were on campus, but they may well have been, but sure, as heck they weren't very many of them.
- BROWN: Yeah. Can you reflect a little bit about the connection within the Black community in general, just between students?
- LEWIS: There was a member of the class of '64 I think, Stan Roman, who I met at the German club, actually that was this something that I did that I didn't mention, I'd forgotten. There was a German club and Stan was involved in that and I met Stan there and he, I think over the years, not only then, but later, continued to try and nurture the Black community at Dartmouth. Partially because of your questions, and I knew I was gonna do this, I mean talk to you today, I was gonna get my freshman, I can't remember what we called it, Facebook. Anyway, there was a freshman book with everybody in it, to make sure I remembered all, the few, the handful of Black students that were in my class. I mean, two I remember clearly there were a couple more than that, but I mean literally, if there were five, I think. And then there were a couple of African students here also, but that's a tiny, I mean, out of 810 or something like that when we started, I think there were fewer than 10 all totaled. I knew Drew not all that well, actually. It just seemed like we were all over the place, of course, we weren't in a particular location. I didn't feel any special community there. I think the first class with lots of Black, once again, still just men, was '68 and I don't know what the percentage went up to, but I was back on campus around that time. And it was strikingly different, even though the percentage was still small, but it was strikingly different like, oh my goodness.
- BROWN: Yeah. So, going to school, going to a school like Dartmouth specifically, during the Civil Rights era, did that have any significant impact on your time on campus?
- LEWIS: So, yes and no. Martin Luther King came and spoke, and it was one of my later years, I don't remember whether it was my senior year or junior year. He came and spoke, I had Dartmouth friends who went down to Mississippi, at least a couple of them, the summer of '63, I guess it was, or maybe '64. Anyway, the SNCC singers [SNCC was the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, a group that focused on student participation in the Civil Rights Movement] came up. There was some of that activity for sure, but there we were in Rural New Hampshire, it wasn't exactly that we were burning the place down.
- BROWN: Going a little bit further past Dartmouth, you mentioned that you were in the Special Forces—Foreign Service after graduation, what

influenced you to join, and what was that experience like?

LEWIS: What influenced me is that it was what my daddy did, so that's what I knew, you know, it's like people who live in rural West Virginia, you go in the coal mines because that's, you know. So, I mean that's a simplistic way of putting it. But, you know, I enjoyed traveling. I enjoyed learning new languages, being in new cultures, and so it seemed like a natural thing for me to try and do. And I passed the exam, so there I was.

BROWN: Can you reflect about what the experience was like?

LEWIS: In the Foreign Service?

BROWN: Yeah.

LEWIS: Yes, well, I worked, my only overseas assignment was in Thailand for close to three years in the late 1960s. I left actually in November of '70. The experience was exciting, interesting. I did well enough that I was getting a promotion a year while I was there, so that was nice. And it was interesting because the Foreign Service was also wrestling with trying to have a more diverse pool of Foreign Service officers. I guess this must have been the summer of 1970 when I was working in Bangkok, we had a group of interns, they were summer interns Foreign Service interns, that came from the States over for the summer to do different things in the embassy. And I hosted them at my house, and it was really fabulous seeing this multicolored, you know, just rainbow people who didn't look very much like the traditional Foreign Service and I thought, "This is pretty neat. This is pretty reflective of the country and it's great to see now the service trying to gather a diverse pool of Foreign Service officers." So, I basically had a good experience, I left the Foreign Service shortly after that, after I came back, and then went to law school.

BROWN: And why did you decide to go to law school?

LEWIS: Oh, I think in the end, I decided to go to law school because I decided that a BA in government didn't equip me to do very much. And if I wanted to make my way in the world, I'd better figure out how I was going to do it, and law degrees, at least then, were viewed as, you could do lots of things with a law degree, you didn't just have to practice law. You could be a policy advisor for someone, or you could do all sorts of things. So, it seemed flexible, and it wasn't, at that time, it wasn't as expensive as it is now. So, you know, I didn't end up with a hundred thousand dollars in debt or two hundred thousand dollars in debt. I had some debt, but it was much more manageable than the debt is for kids now, for students now.

BROWN: Right. And I saw that you went to Georgetown for law school. Why did you choose Georgetown specifically?

LEWIS: Because I was back in Washington, Georgetown then, I think still is, the best law school in town, and I wasn't particularly eager to uproot myself and go to New York or Boston or LA. I was sort of enjoying being back in Washington.

BROWN: Yeah. So, with your career within the law field in general, not just as a lawyer, what would you say is your biggest accomplishment in your opinion?

LEWIS: Although I'm a lawyer, I have spent most of my time as a lawyer acting as a neutral, as a mediator and as an arbitrator. And so, two things about that. The first is, it turns out that when I first started getting interested in mediation and arbitration, I did it while I was working at a nonprofit organization that was interested in those two things. And I was sort of at the forefront of changing the legal world, being part of a smallish group of people who were saying, "Well, gee, we shouldn't rely on courts for everything, and we should try this new stuff and see whether it has any legs." And so, I'm proud of being at the forefront of that. And then there are particular cases that I'm proud of having been involved with and probably the one that has the greatest significance was a big case involving Black Farmers suing the Department of Agriculture. I was the mediator in that case and that was pretty important. The federal government actually paid out about 2 billion dollars to Black Farmers for past acts of discrimination, so that's a big deal.

BROWN: Yeah, that's very impressive. Thank you for sharing that. So, my next question, you mentioned that you got involved with a non-profit when doing the mediation. Was that JAMS [organization originally called Judicial Arbitration and Mediation Services founded in 1979] or a different organization?

LEWIS: Different organization. Let me talk about the nonprofit and then I'll talk about JAMS. The nonprofit, when I started working for it, was called Injustice and we did a lot of work in prisons, and one of the things that we did in prisons was to try to help the prison systems and prisoners develop what we call grievance procedures, essentially a process to solve problems inside the institution. That was interesting and valuable work and it led to legislation both in California, where we did a lot of the work, and then the federal government passed a piece of legislation later that was sort of based on the work that we did. But as mediation and arbitration became more familiar and more user-friendly, if you will, and as more lawyers became accustomed to thinking about using them, all of the folks who were working at the center began to do more, sort of more, I guess, commercial work. And so, for a while, I guess about 10 years, we had a nonprofit organization and a for-profit organization. We sort of kept them separately, and through the for-

profit, we would do our commercial work and then we'd do our world changing work through the not-for-profit. And at some point, JAMS kept, JAMS every now and then would see if we wanted to join them. And every time until the last time I'd say, "No, I didn't want to go work for some company and we're perfectly, you know, we don't need them. We're small but mighty, and we've got enough business." But the problem was that I had to run, didn't have to run, but my responsibility was running the small for-profit organization. And it turns out running a small business is a pain in the you-know-what. And at some point, JAMS, one of their periodic, they called, and a person came and said to me, "JAMS just called again." And I said, "Why don't we talk to them?" She said, "What?" I said, "Why don't we talk to them." "You sure?" I said, "I'm tired of running this place, right?" I would just want to go out and mediate and arbitrate, I don't want to run, because that's not very much fun. And so anyway, so, that's how we negotiated with them over few months and struck a deal and joined them.

BROWN: Was it—when you say you joined them, do you mean that JAMS kind of merged with the for-profit or did you have someone else take over the for-profit?

LEWIS: Yeah, the for-profit essentially was bought by JAMS.

BROWN: And as for the not-for-profit, that was separate from the for-profits so I'm assuming it didn't join JAMS, right?

LEWIS: That didn't join JAMS and it kept running for a while, it finally closed its doors about five years ago. Yeah, about five years ago.

BROWN: And how do you view the work that you do and that you've done with JAMS in comparison to the work that you did for the other organizations?

LEWIS: So, that's a difficult—that's kind of a difficult question for me to answer but let me try. So, JAMS does a lot of just commercial work, and that has a value, but it sometimes doesn't light my fire. I don't think, "Oh, this is a great thing. I'm helping company A and company B solve this particular problem." It's useful to the companies and maybe a tiny bit useful to the greater society but not all that much right, who cares. But I also do, I'm doing a very, very interesting mediation right now, involving a Native American school and whether the kids are getting the proper education and it's fascinating and important. Maybe important to just a small community, but it is really important to that community. So, I do a mix of things and partially because I live in Washington, and there are lots of, well, lots of government agencies here and the government is involved in everything. Every now and then I get to do a really interesting case, because I live in Washington, and I'm known as a good mediator and there's an interesting thing to do. And I do less of the working in prison kind of work now, but I still get to do some interesting things and JAMS funds a foundation and I'm current chair of

the foundation board. So, I get to be involved in giving money away for good projects and that's neat.

BROWN: That does sound very great. So, what kind of work goes into preparing for your mediations?

LEWIS: Well, usually what I do is I talk to the folks who are going to come, usually they're the lawyers, maybe not their clients beforehand, and tell them, we sort of talk about how we're going to work whenever we're getting together and whether it's virtual or are we going to get together in person. I ask them to write me something about whatever it is that we're mediating, and I read those and sometimes I have questions and I call people back before we get together. That's pretty much the extent of the preparation, it usually doesn't take very long to prepare. I mean, that's if everyone does what they're supposed to do. It's amazing how many lawyers come up with excuses about, "Well, I know I was supposed to give this to you yesterday, but is it okay if I give it to you on Monday?" And you know, what am I going to say? No? That means I don't get it at all. But there's—that's not the predominant thing that happens. But it happens often enough that I notice, right? The dog ate my homework sort of fits exactly what the word is, right?

BROWN: So, my last question for you today is kind of going back to Dartmouth, how has your perception of Dartmouth changed since you were a student?

LEWIS: Well for sure I think it's a better place than it used to be. You're there, right? And that took longer than it should have. So, I think it's a better place, I don't come up that often so I don't have a really good sense of the campus, but you know, I mentioned I was a member of Casque and Gauntlet and they've undergone some changes, and one of the reasons they have is that they, some group of students who were there, said they were having a harder and harder enough time getting people to come join because of political issues. And I thought, "Wow, that's too bad. People are not even willing to talk to each other, I guess or something." I don't know. Anyway, my assumption is that the campus has got some of the same divisions that we see in the larger society and that's sort of too bad. But I think it's a better place than the place that I attended, and I liked it a lot. That suggests to me that it's doing okay.

BROWN: Absolutely. Thank you so much for your time. Oh, sorry, go ahead.

LEWIS: No, no. I was just saying you're welcome, you're entirely welcome. What happens—I don't really know Dartmouth Black Lives and what you're just doing these oral histories and what happens next?

BROWN: So, we have a few students who do oral history projects, who do these oral history projects, and we pretty much compile them together into a database that also includes archival research from Dartmouth in the

60s, and 70s. A lot of focus on co-education and interactions within race, so it's essentially like a whole database.

LEWIS: Yeah, yeah, okay,

BROWN: Yeah. It's a pretty great project but thank you so much for being a part of it. And I'll stop the recording here.