Wesley C. Pugh ‘73
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Black Lives
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Transcribed by Katelyn Zeser ‘22

ZESER: My name is Katelyn Zeser, and I'm in Epsilon Kappa Theta in Hanover, New Hampshire. I'm doing a Zoom interview with Wesley [C.] Pugh, Dartmouth '73, who is in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Today is October 25, 2021, and this is an interview for the Dartmouth Black Lives Oral History Project.

Hello, Professor Pugh. Thank you so much for joining me today. So to start off, I would like to learn a little bit about your childhood. So, could you please state when and where you were born?

PUGH: Well, before I do that, may I just make a few preliminary comments? And that is, I just wanted to acknowledge and thank Black— Dartmouth Black Lives. The course professor, Professor Julia Rabig. And also, the other professor, Professor Bryan Winston. And I also want to congratulate you being involved in this project, Katelyn Zeser.

ZESER: Yeah.

PUGH: Zeser? Zeser.

ZESER: Right.

PUGH: And by the way, it's okay if I make verbal errors? Because it—

ZESER: Right.

PUGH: Okay, good. Okay. But no, I really want to thank you all for this project. I think it's very meaningful. I think it has tremendous implications for a wide range of issues related to Dartmouth. And hopefully, as we go through this conversation, that will be further illuminated. Now, to address your question. My name is, as we said, Wesley Collins Pugh. I was born in [February 19th] 1951. I'm 70 years old. I was born and raised in a small community in Baltimore, Maryland. Community known as Cherry Hill. And the community of Cherry Hill has an extraordinary history. And throughout this interview, I'll try to be more brief than very elaborate [laughter].

ZESER: We have plenty of time.

PUGH: But— okay. But, I do need to suggest to you and point out that Cherry Hill was a community, which I grew up in, that was really an ideal environment to raise children. It was an isolated community within Baltimore. It was an all-Black community. And it was at that time when— before integration, so that everyone that was in the community, they were doctors, lawyers, professionals. They could be considered public assistants, or they were— the classes were completely mixed. Because quite frankly, during that time, they weren't opportunities for Black professionals to move into upper-class neighborhoods and to integrate.

So we were all in the community together. And it was a very supportive and very interesting community. Particularly, in the sense that it was really established and carved out right after, I believe it was World War One, in which— and it might have been the Korean War. I'm not sure which one it was. Possibly, the Korean War. But it was a community that was carved out to provide housing for troops coming home from the war. And, matter of fact, I'm pretty sure it was the Korean War.

ZESER: Okay.

PUGH: But my father was in that war. And that's where— he and my mother

first moved into Cherry Hill from being in downtown Baltimore. Right. But that was a community that was carved out originally for whites returning back. And when there was a sense that the community also had, in a far region, a landfill, whites were not too interested in moving there. And they opened it up and accommodated African Americans. Which, again, when we talk about environmental racism, even back then it was—

ZESER: Right.

PUGH: There were signs and very overt acts related to that. And there was a lot of controversy relative to Blacks moving in, but after the housing was built, and we moved into the community— we've moved from various sections of the community, always to where they were newer homes or larger homes. Because I came from a family of seven kids. I'm the second oldest. I have a brother who's two years older than myself, and I have a sister, a year behind me, followed by another sister, two years behind her. And then after that, two years later, my mother had triplets. And at the time that was particularly— I think that was in the early 60s, probably early 50s— I believe 50s. And that was a very big deal. In fact,

newspapers wrote all about it. And there was— there is still in existence, a newspaper called The Afro, African American newspaper, in which every year that they would come to the house, and they would take pictures of the triplets. It was two girls and one boy. And in taking the pictures, you would— yearly, there would be the headlines, “Update on the Pugh Triplets.”

ZESER: [Laughter].

PUGH: And my father, who was a laborer and didn't have a professional background. I remember he worked in construction, and he would work— he would use the jackhammer. And he would come home still shaking from that. And he transitioned from that to actually driving a sanitation truck. And apparently, he must have drove it into very well-to-do neighborhoods because it was not unusual for him to have, for myself and my brother, an old baseball glove that was really in good condition, or basketballs, or bats, that individuals have put out. But my father went through life as a typical male, I think, to a great extent during that time, not— more or less being the breadwinner.

My mother came from a family that I think has, had a significant impact on our lives. Because my mother, or my mother's mother, who's my grandmother, was a white— a white, Polish woman. And she married her husband, my grandfather, Edward Bishop, who she married. They lived— they had, actually, two— four kids: two males and two females, my mother being the oldest of the females and the third oldest in the family. And my mother has, even to this day— she's ninety years old, and she lives outside of Baltimore. And I still have... because of the pandemic, I don't visit as often. But we, my current wife and I, we go down and see her. But the point I would make about being raised in Cherry Hill— and also, I do want to just finish the comment about being raised, my mother being raised in an interracial marriage, was a very traumatic experience, as she has explained to me for years. Particularly for her mother, my grandmother. And they managed to, of course, adapt to that, but it did cause a lot of trauma both within, within the family. But that experience, and experiences of my grandfather, I hope to highlight as we talk further because he was very influential. More so than probably any male that I've come in contact with.

But as I was raised in that community, it was a type of community in which you hear about how everyone leaves the door open and there was— all the neighbors would look out for you if you did something wrong. They would even reprimand you or get back to your mother. And it was called Cherry Hill for a reason. Because it

really was a wonderful environment that— in many ways, it was Dartmouth enlarged, in terms of all the hills and the trees. And as a kid, my fondest memories are of just running around, throughout the community. Up and down hills and exploring in the woods. Picking berries. Makes me sound somewhat like a Southern farm boy. Picking berries, we would go by the Patapsco River in Maryland, in Baltimore. And my brother and friends, we would go early in the morning, we'd go crabbing. We didn't do fishing too much because I found fishing to be rather boring. But it was a community in which— it was very supportive. So in my formative years, it was a kind of environment that made me feel very comfortable as to who I was. Particularly, there was no sense of understanding or misunderstanding whites.

Although, I must say that one of my earliest experiences in Baltimore, and in Cherry Hill, was when we went across the tracks. Once, we went across the tracks, and oftentimes, we'd go across the tracks, picking berries and climbing in trees and picking apples. And apparently, we had stumbled upon our neighbor's apple tree. And I remember being, all of us running back over the tracks. And on our side of the tracks and warehouses were— there was a group of white men with rifles and guns, who were making it clear that we weren't supposed to come over there, particularly in the white folks' properties. And we adjusted to that. The place was large enough that we didn't have to go into their area. But the idea of seeing individuals with rifles, threatening you in some way, was a, a... a circumstance that has always, and a situation that has always stayed with me.

But in growing up in Baltimore, particularly in Cherry Hill, what happened that prepared me in some way to be the person I am— I think it had a lot to do with the fact that when my mother and her aunt. My aunt, that is. My mother also watched over her younger sister, who had a child. And so she also was living with us for periods of time. So oftentime there were eight kids. And my oldest brother would be in charge of taking care of all the kids when they went out. And for whatever reason, I didn't appreciate him being in charge of me. So, I did not sit and follow his directions. And because of that, I think my mother and my aunt would oftentimes take me out with them. And when I was out with them, I would experience actually going to libraries, or art museums, traveling downtown. And actually, having, being exposed to a lot of cultural aspects of life. And I think it really, in so many ways, prepared me for the kinds of experiences that I would encounter later in life.

One aspect of my mother that stands out to me is that— I know my mother would oftentimes take me to the library with her. And back then, my mother would read, she would get, she would get ten books that had to be returned in two weeks. And I would— somehow I had a competitive nature back then, at the age of about ten, or eleven. I would get five books, and I would race to see if I could read my five books before my mother read her eight or ten books. And I never finished all five of my books before she finished all ten of hers. She usually had romance novels and other, all these other kinds of books that bothered me to read.

ZESER: [Laughter].

PUGH: But I would always read books about, mainly about athletes or African Americans, mostly biographies and gaining insight into lives of people. And of course, I then expanded on to my own reading a great deal about African American history and so forth. And in that context, I became very much the owner of my education. I know oftentimes, my mother talks about when one of the kids would, myself included, do something wrong, and she would punish us, she would say, “go to your room and read a book and don't come out until dinnertime.” Well, the other kids, even to this day, will say they would go to their room and they would just, they wouldn't do what she said. I did go to my room and I would read a book [laughter]. And I would read. And I think that encouraged me to always have a great appreciation for education.

And in fact, my family, our family, really did value education. My father had graduated high school, and I know he went into the service and went into the Korean War. My mother also had graduated high school. But it was more so my mother's father, who was a graduate of Coppin State Teachers College. And at the time, it was called the Colored Training School. And in 1924, he graduated from Coppin State, which is currently an HBCU [historically Black college or university] in Maryland. And I recall, he lived to be 103. And about, this was maybe 20 years ago, I had gone back to Baltimore as Coppin honored him for being their oldest alumni at the age of 100.

And it was the interactions, I think, with my grandfather— who, oftentimes, I can remember— on a weekly basis, he would come. And if there was anything in the house that was broke, he would start in the living room, he would adjust the TV. He'd go to the kitchen, he'd fix the toaster. He then fixed every light in the room that was broken. He would go room by room, and I would follow behind him, inquisitive. Unfortunately, I didn't have, I never picked

up those skills that he had, in that regard. My youngest brother is pretty good at those kinds of skills. But I did pick up a very strong sense of the importance of education. And my mother emphasized that. In fact, my brothers, my oldest brother, my youngest brother, we're the three that went to college. And we were all three athletes. And then, I have another sister who, likewise, went to college. The other three girls, and actually, the fourth one is— one became an actress and is still acting. And you often see her on commercials. And the other two females, they were dynamically attractive, and they did modeling and all kinds of things, and so forth. But I came from a family, even when— we were in a family environment that was very supportive. I have really nothing but the fondest memories of the childhood experiences of being raised in Cherry Hill. With just mixing and interacting with all Black people.

ZESER: Yeah.

PUGH: But always a circumstance of just positive reinforcement. In fact, I oftentimes think of a line from the rapper Tupac, when he's singing his song about “Dear Mama,” and he talks about thugs who show the young brother love. And it wasn't as if the guys in Cherry Hill and others were thugs, it was just— I think of that as, the older guys, they were very supportive, in terms of— even my athletic ability was enhanced because I always played ball with them. So, in terms of framing my early childhood experiences, I must compliment the notion of being in a very strong environment, in which Black people really were supportive of you.

ZESER: Mm-hmm. Okay, great. That's really... wow. Yeah, that was a fantastic delve into your childhood. Thank you. Just really quickly, for the record, is there any way— so, your grandfather was Edward Bishop, correct? Yes. Okay. Is there any way I could get the name of your grandmother, of your parents, and then of your siblings? Just list them off for the record.

PUGH: Oh, yeah. Because for privacy, I didn't want to [pause]. I mean, I didn't want to give too much, but—

ZESER: Okay. Whatever you're comfortable with.

PUGH: No, but we've often talked about— my wife has often talked about, “why don't you look into, and why don't we look into your lineage and your family history?” And I know my grandfather has identified with— his name is Edward Wesley Bishop.

ZESER: Okay.

PUGH: And I was named after his middle name. And I know that he was from North Carolina, I believe, or Rocky Mountain [NC]. Yeah, Rocky Mountain, North Carolina. And prior to that, I think, there's always, as most Black people will say, identification or determining that he had Native American background. And I was once told that his ancestors go back to being Seminole Indians from Florida in part. And then on my father's side— I know my mother has talked— my father's name was Adolphus Redding Pugh. And I know my mother has talked about how his mother— my father lost his father when he was young. And his mother, Lillian Pugh, was a very strong woman who had real estate properties and so forth. And one of my fondest memories of her is when she would visit us as kids. She'd always give us silver dollars, which, back then that was like—

ZESER: [Laughter] My grandma did the same thing.

PUGH: [Laughter] Yeah. And my father's— my grandfather's wife, my mother's mother. Her name was [pause] Gertrude Filipowicz, but she changed the Polish name. She shortened it to Gertrude Phillips. And I do recall how she had a twin sister, also. But her Polish family, as I told, abandoned her when she married a Black man. So again, you can see how the trauma that occurred with regards to that.

ZESER: Yeah.

PUGH: And then with that, as I said, my mother's youngest [pause]. My mother's younger sister, only sister, Betty. Betty Bishop, became later Betty Paige. And her daughter, Kim Brockington also was very much a part of the family. And then, as I said, my oldest brother was Philip Pugh, followed by myself, Wesley, my sister Candice Pugh. And then was Pamela. And then the triplets of Diane, David, and Deborah.

ZESER: Right.

PUGH: They all have the same, David Redding Pugh. DRPs, they were all named. And I should point out that I always have— and I really do, I will always have a tremendous amount of love, admiration, and respect for my mother as being just a brilliant individual. Because even back then, when the triplets came, she assigned one to each one of the older kids. So Phil had the oldest girl, Diane. I had the youngest girl, Deborah. And Candy, Candace, had the middle boy, David. And we literally, even to this day, as I'm 70, they're maybe 64, 65. We still identify as, Debbie's my baby and Diane is Phil's

baby. And except, in the case of Candy, David takes care of Candy instead of vice versa [laughter]. And my mother's name is Dorothy Pugh. And I should point out that when I talk about my grandfather, for back then, also in terms of my admiration for him— back then, also, his oldest son, Robert Bishop, who I, through the years, became very close with. And he lived in Hampstead [NH] for a period of time. And I would always spend, on my way up to Dartmouth, I always stopped at his house. And he had three kids. And I'd stay for about three or four days before going up to Dartmouth. And he was an MD. He was a highly successful MD. In fact, he was, at one point, up to become the chief physician for then-President Johnson, Lyndon Baines Johnson. And he worked at a naval hospital, he was in charge of that. And even to this day, I talked to him about a week ago. He's 95. Very brilliant, still. And that, again, which is important to me is that— that's the kind of males that I had in my life that serve to a great extent as role models but also just as individuals that inspired me.

ZESER: Right, right. Okay. Well, thank you very much. This is a great foundation. But now we're going to transition a little bit into— still childhood but a little older. So, if you wouldn't mind just telling me a little bit about your high school experience. How you started playing football. Anything like that.

PUGH: Okay. Well, let me— before I get into high school, I've often thought of, in terms of my education, significant events that have occurred. And I think, for me, when I was in elementary school, and elementary school was such that I remember always, we could walk to the school. And I would run home at lunchtime and have lunch while my mother was ironing and watching soap operas on TV. And then quickly, after I finished eating, I would then run back to school. It was about five minutes away.

But I remember in elementary school, proud, again, extraordinarily supportive African American teachers. And I can recall, particularly when I was in the third or fourth grade, when— because I was a little anxious and nervous about reading out loud, they would always go around and have you, “okay, you read this chap— this paragraph, you read this.” And of course, you read the paragraph or you can't. Okay, I'm in the fifth person. So, I'll read that paragraph and try to be prepared. And for whatever, because I was a little nervous about that, I remember being put into the third reading group. And it just bothered me so. And I had to work my way back into the first reading group.

But one of the very interesting stories that I appreciate about my elementary school experience, it was probably when I was in fifth grade or so. And we would take math. The math testing would be adding, subtraction, division, etc. And, as any kid, I would often say “I know I got 100 on this test,” and so forth. And I'd be bragging out loud. And one particular occasion, the teacher, as she was handing out the papers, and I was confident that I had 100, she handed back my paper said, “I don't know what happened on this, Wesley.” And sure enough, I had a 40. And all the students, after I had bragged, saw that 40. And oh, they laughed at me, and they pointed their finger. And it didn't hurt me what they were doing, it was just, I was so upset to see that I had gotten a 40. And it was an understandable mistake. When I got to where I was supposed to continue to add, I didn't bother to look at the sign, and so I subtracted and vice versa. And so I just did everything incorrectly, even though I knew all the answers. But what I did announce to the class, after they laughed at me and said— and I said to them, I said, “okay, from now on, for the next ten tests, I am going to get 100.” And sure enough, every test I would get 100, and I'd show it to them. And that was the beginning of making me feel like, “okay, I can— I have abilities here.”

And so when I went on to junior high school, which still was in the community, just actually a block away from the elementary school, one of my fondest memories of junior high school was that when I was graduating, I was on the stage to introduce this pro football player at the time. It was the Baltimore Colts who have since moved to Indianapolis, Indianapolis Colts, etc. But they had a tremendous— and he's a Hall of Fame tight end known as John Mackey.

ZESER: Okay.

PUGH: John Mackey had come to this graduation exercise to be the guest speaker. And I recall, another student was introducing our guest speaker and they called him, “our guest speaker is Wesley Pugh” And of course, when John Mackey got up, and he and I were sitting together, he said, “well, Wesley is there, and I'm John Mackey” and so forth. And he gave this really inspiring speech. And towards the end, with the principal, they announced who the school and the class valedictorian was. And, to my surprise, and I can still remember him saying, “with a grade point average of 92.8, it's Wesley Pugh.” And at the time, and I got from that, a $50 gift certificate, which my mother encouraged me to give it to her to do something with. But I resisted and instead I used it to buy what I

thought were some fancy clothes. And the clothes were too big for me, and I just wasted the $50. But I was, at that time, I mean, very proud to be the class valedictorian in junior high school.

And so, I went on from junior high school to high school. And when we were deciding on high school then, you had a choice of determining what high school you want to go to. And the counselors would always encourage, particularly those of us in Cherry Hill, to go right across the river to this school called Southern [High School], which at the time was a school that did not have high academic standards. And so, well, most of my classmates and I said, “okay, we're going to Southern.” When we went to the counselor to determine what school to make our final selection, we quietly, at least I quietly said, “no, I want to go to the school called Forest Park [High School],” which is, which was at least an hour away. My brother had already gone to— he was always two years ahead of me, and he had gone to a school called Baltimore City College, which was, and still is, a very prestigious, high school. And there, my brother was able to, he was all-state in high jump. He played on their championship basketball teams. And I was not interested in following in his steps in that environment. So, I quietly decided I'd go to this school called Forest Park, which was at the time listed as being integrated, and just very good academic standards. Not the most selective school, but it was a very good school. And to my surprise, when it was time to actually go to Forest Park, I found that at least 50% of the students that I knew from Cherry Hill Junior High School who said they were going to Southern, they actually had signed up to go to Forest Park also.

So, what we had every morning, at around 7:15, our Cherry Hill was the beginning of the bus stop. And we would all be on a bus for about 45 minutes riding to Forest Park High School. And for me, it was a great time. It was fun. Doing my homework, share homework. And it was just a tremendously important experience. But once at Forest Park, what was very interesting was that the year before we came to Forest Park, Forest Park was approximately, maybe 70% Jewish students and predominantly white. When we got to Forest Park, it had completely reversed. And there were maybe 98% African American, and just two or so white students. And so again, I was in an environment in which I was being educated among African American students. But unlike elementary and junior high school, I was in an environment where there were white teachers, and I always found them to be extraordinarily supportive. They supported us all. And of course, when you do your homework and you're active— and I just had a sense of always being very active in high school.

I know that I was always struck by the fact, when I was in high school, that there were a few older guys who were just like superb athletes. And they were excellent students. And I would look at the yearbook and one in particular, a guy named Miles [G.] Harrison, went on to become an MD, graduating from University of Pennsylvania, was a tremendous swimmer, outstanding quarterback in football. And I remember looking in the yearbook and seeing how he had something like thirteen different activities that he was in. And that's it. I want to do that because I know that'll help get me in college. Well, during that period of time in the late 60s, Ivy League schools were not really open to— and not only Ivy League schools, but predominantly white schools were not as easily accessible for African Americans. So, I observed how these guys, and even these young ladies, who were extremely smart, but they were always going to an HBCU, particularly Morgan State University in Baltimore, or other schools. But they weren't getting into, and I don't even know if they applied to predominantly white schools.

But in terms of my experiences in high school, as I tried to model myself after Miles Harrison, and to some extent— I found that by the time I was ready to graduate, while he had thirteen activities, I had sixteen. And in the course of my experiences in high school, I started out playing freshman football, and I then played freshman basketball. And I wanted to go to play baseball, also. But instead, a friend told me about a sport called lacrosse that I had never heard of. And he began to teach me some aspects of it. And I went out for the lacrosse team, and they let you play. But one thing that I did was, after practice, even on weekends, I would take my lacrosse stick and ball home. And I would just practice up on a private baseball field with the backstop and just practice lacrosse. And I developed a really highly successful lacrosse game.

But in high school, while I was active in sports, I also was very active in student government. I wanted— one of the things that I found recently is our old paper, a high school newspaper that's at least 50 years old. And on the last page of the paper, the back page, it's the sports section. And it's four different articles about sports. What happened in one sport, and so forth. And I was astonished to see that my name was listed as the author of every one of the articles [laughter]. So back then I was writing about sports, while even participating. And while in high school, I worked pretty hard. I mean, I study— for me, I don't know, it just— I thought when teachers give you homework, you're just supposed to go through your homework.

Of course, one of my most traumatic experiences when, if I didn't read, say, Macbeth, and I tried to use the Cliff Notes [CliffsNotes], the anxiety of trying to avoid the teacher asking me a question was such that I promised myself, I would never read the Cliff Notes again. I want to be able to answer the question intelligently. And so my high school experiences were such that I actually, I enjoyed high school quite a bit. I always was around— high school provided me with an opportunity, when there, to then meet other students, particularly, they were all African American students, who were from families in which they lived not too far from the school. And they were, their families were police officers, or doctors, or lawyers.

And by then, my mother, and us, we had moved up out of Cherry Hill because Cherry Hill had somewhat deteriorated in terms of its economics. And the fact is that by now, integration had begun. And so a lot of the professionals had moved out. And so we, my mother had moved to another location while in high school. And I refer to it as my mother moving because she tended to be the one who made these kinds of decisions for the family.

But in high school, I always am amazed that there was a football coach, and he was athletic director also. And he played, I played football under him. as well as basketball. And then lacrosse was a different coach. But I was always amazed that he decided to— I was a wide receiver. And he decided one day to make me also a safety. And so instead of catching the ball now, I was also hitting people [pause]. And I took hitting people then catching the ball guy, though I— and actually, I became, I was extraordinarily good, quite frankly, as a safety catching the ball because I felt like I was a wide receiver. So when the ball was thrown, I felt like, “oh, you're throwing it to me.” And so interceptions were something that I would specialize in. And I had except— and I have exceptional hands. I still even to this day, at age 70, say, “just throw it, just throw it.” And my wife would be afraid to throw the remote or something, and then she finally does, and I'll just still catch it, just to show that I still have hands.

ZESER: [Laughter].

PUGH: But in high school, I did extremely well by being all-state in football, all-state in basketball, all-state in lacrosse. And I never understood how you see that, who voted for you. But I would always recall how a friend would always say, “hey, man, I saw your name in the paper.” And they would say you'd have to go to a certain place. And they would give you a patch that says all-MSA, all-Maryland

Scholastic Association. And I always found that to be one of my most significant accomplishments, that we had three of those patches, and representing it.

But also, a significant aspect of my high school experience was also being a scholar athlete. I was selected to represent the school at a special ceremony for scholar athletes throughout the city. And I, quite frankly, I remember, it was on my birthday, February 19. My father was seated next to me. My coach was next to me. And I had evaluated every other scholar athlete from every school and had determined that, oh, I had the best opportunity to win this. So, and I'm almost embarrassed to say this, but I will. I had even written out my speech and had it in my little sport coat, ready to talk about how this is my birthday, and so it's a wonderful gift. And sure enough, they didn't call my name [laughter]. And that was the first time and the only time I ever presumed that I was going to get an award. Because when you think you got it, you don't get it. But still, being the scholar athlete, representing my school was a tremendous honor. And as much as— you know, at Dartmouth, I've often heard alumni say, classmates, “you know, it's so hard to get into Dartmouth. I don't know if we could get in— I could get into Dartmouth now.” And I say, I look, and I think about it, and I say, “oh, I think I still could, I mean, I did enough things that—”

ZESER: I think you could get in, too.

PUGH: And my experiences that really led up to Dartmouth was such that even with as much as I did, at that time, in terms of activities— I had SAT scores that were good. They weren't off the charts, but they were still such that— and of course, now they're getting rid of the SAT, so. And we can talk about the biases inherent in SAT scoring and so forth. But the fact is, I had done a great deal to be prepared to go to a college or university.

But the telling point, in my judgment, was that there was a program called Upward Bound. And it's a typically— it seems to me in American society, it's typical of the fact that when there's a program that works extraordinarily well for people of color, it lasts for a period of time, but then it's not funded anymore. It's defunded. And that has happened with Upward Bound. But at the time, I was going to— I don't know— my coach referred myself and about three or four others to Upward Bound, and Upward Bound was mainly for those identified, quote, as “students who are from low-income backgrounds, who normally may not have opportunity to go to college.” There were a few others in Upward Bound that were not necessarily from low-income families. And I can always claim to be

low income because when you have seven kids, and your dad's a laborer or driving a sanitation truck, and your mother's not working at that time— I mean, your income is, with seven, eight kids— you're going to be identified as, quote, “low income.”

So in Upward Bound, it was actually a program that, you took classes, particularly during the summer. And even during the regular school year, you would take one or two classes on the weekends. And they would give you the classes math, and so forth. But it was at Johns Hopkins University, and I remember the gentleman who ran the programming, Earl Ball, who later became headmaster at Penn Charter School. And I don't know if you're familiar with the program, The Goldbergs, which is highly— it comes on TV. It's very popular, but they— it's filmed in Philadelphia, and they often talk about the experiences of the students there being at Penn Charter and even mentioned Earl Ball.

But Earl Ball, at that time, was in charge of the program at Hopkins. And myself and about five other classmates would go there, along with maybe about four or five students from about ten different high schools throughout the city. And the experience of being on Johns Hopkins University campus in the summer, being exposed to their athletic facilities. We would play football with then-Secretary of Defense McNamara's son [Robert Craig McNamara], I forget his name. Or there was the Secretary of the US Postal Service Kavanaugh's, his son. They were Hopkins students, and these white guys were just really— they tried hard to be great athletes and they would play, we played different— football, basketball. And that experience made me feel like I really [pause] I knew I was always going to college, but I thought Hopkins would be a place that I could consider.

But being in Upward Bound provided me with an opportunity, through the administrators, Earl Ball and others, to— they helped you with your college applications. And I can recall it, so when you get fee waivers you can apply all over the place. But in addition, while in high school, I remember my football coach asking me if I would be interested in Ohio State and talking to a scout from— a recruiter from Ohio State. And I told him no because I was a skinny kid. And to go to Ohio State, I would have had to lift weights. And I was not really interested in playing football, just football. So I turned that down, but I had, based on my application process, an opportunity to consider Penn [The University of Pennsylvania] and consider Yale [University], and Dartmouth [College]. And then there were the [inaudible]. There were just a lot of colleges that were

interested in me. I used to keep a little black book with about twenty different colleges, and I would narrow them down and so forth.

But for me, what was so telling, it was so interesting, was that when the Dartmouth football coach, Coach [Robert L.] Blackman. Clearly, I mean, I think the current coach, [Eugene F.] “Buddy” Teevans, he is the Coach Blackman, in doubt, coach. It's something I get, but—and may be considered, in history, one of the greatest coaches ever. But Blackman came, and he was recruiting a tremendous athlete and a lineman at one of the high schools. But he also asked to see about five or six other guys. And we all met with him. And I remember him talking about Dartmouth. Particularly, in light of it academically, is what appealed to me. And after the meeting with Blackman, I was still pretty much set on going to Hopkins, except Hopkins at the time was the national champions in lacrosse. And for me, it was a matter of, if I go to Hopkins, I'm going to be a lacrosse player. And I still had a lot to learn about lacrosse. Or if I go to Dartmouth, I could probably play football for them. Not knowing Dartmouth would, during that period of time, when I would be there, would be the winningest era of Dartmouth history.

ZESER: Right.

PUGH: So, I debated which school I would go to. I had narrowed it down. Though, Yale had been very interested in me. In fact, I often tell a story about how Yale had this great running back named Calvin Hill [NFL player], and his son, of course, is Grant Hill [NBA player]. But Calvin and another guy named Kurt Smoke, who had gone to Baltimore City College, he had gone to Yale. Kurt was a tremendous quarterback. But during that time, Black guys couldn't quarterback, so he was a defensive back at Yale. And they had come and visited me. But I wasn't home. And they sat and talked to my mother for hours about how Yale was a wonderful school to go to. And when I came home, the result was that my mother was telling me they were there. But she didn't want me to go there because those guys were so big, that if I went there and played football, she felt I would have gotten hurt [laughter].

ZESER: [Laughter].

PUGH: But I never really met with them to tell them that no, my preference was Dartmouth. But my preference became Dartmouth only after Hopkins had accepted me. And they had been, they hadn't given me any money for room and board. And when I asked about that, they said, “okay, well, we'll fix that.” Well, while they were fixing that, Dartmouth provided a wonderful opportunity, a scholarship.

And then, in the sense of, based on financial aid, but Dartmouth Alumni Association of Baltimore, at that time, had also given me an award for an outstanding Baltimorean attending Dartmouth. And it was something like a $5,000 a year scholarship, but back then, that was tremendous. So between the alumni and the Dartmouth award, I was provided with an opportunity that I could at least go to Dartmouth, and I didn't have to worry about finances to a great extent.

So in determining or deciding whether I wanted to go football or lacrosse, I decided that— clearly, I decided I would go football and attend Dartmouth. And also, it was the idea of, I didn't want to stay in the city. And so I decided I wanted to get away.

And we had a few individuals from Dartmouth who had come down, African American students, who talked to me about Dartmouth. One in particular, Stuart [O.] Simms ['72], who went to high school in Baltimore. He was, still, of course, is the first African American captain of a Dartmouth football team and still played at a school called Gilman Private School that— they won the championship every year. When we would play them, they would always beat us. Soon as Stu left, we beat them. And we won the championship, undefeated team, etc.

But the interesting aspect of that, attending Dartmouth, is that it was still at a time in the late 60s, Class of '69, when— it was so much going on in America. Particularly, I was struck at that time by the fact that— it had been a few years before, but— President [John F.] Kennedy was assassinated. President, I mean, Robert Kennedy, his brother, was assassinated. Malcolm X was assassinated.

And I can vividly recall being in a friend's basement playing pool or just playing around, a few of us, when we heard Martin Luther King was assassinated. And our immediate reaction at that time was that we wanted to go out in the street. And just, quite frankly, we had decided we would go to the liquor store, and break into the liquor store, burn it down, and take the liquor. But when you think about the rationale of, in honor of Martin Luther King, you're stealing liquor. And we discussed it, and we decided not to do that. And as in years later, I recall my father-in-law, who often talked about the struggle that African American males have, or African Americans in general, in terms of your actions— I mean, how do you protest? And, of course, during that time, the Vietnam War was a significant aspect of life.

ZESER: Right.

PUGH: And a lot of African Americans were being drafted. And it was interesting, because in that same basement, where we would all, about four or five of us friends, would be just hanging out. I remember, with regards to the Vietnam War, we had all made a pact. We said, when— because when you turn, I think, eighteen, you have to sign up for the draft.

And we had all made this pact that— well, look. We're going to say we're conscientious objectors because— look, they're sending us over there to kill people. And it's— the war is unjust. We still have all these issues here in America, particularly for people of color. So we're gonna all say— we're going to sign up as conscientious objectors. And when it came my time to fill out my papers, I made it clear I was a conscientious objector. And when I sent the papers, then they wrote me back saying, “well, you have to come in for an interview to discuss why you are a conscientious objector.” And they said, “but can you give us some insight?” and I would write on the paper, “because I object to the racial inequities and injustices that are occurring in America while also fighting a war that is unjust.” And so when I sent that in, maybe a few weeks later when I was with my friends, and I said to them, “okay, I sent mine in.” And they all looked at me and said, “you really did that?” [laughter]. I mean, they didn't do it.

ZESER: Wow.

PUGH: And I was just so like, “you all didn't do it?” But I said, “okay, well, I'll stand on that.” And just as I was scheduled to go in for my interview, the draft was such that it was a lottery. And everyone knew that if you got a number between one and say, 150, you were probably going to be drafted. You could get a college or university exemption. But if you got a number of let's say, between over 150 to 200, maybe not. Well, my birthday and my lottery number came out to be something like 330. So automatically, they just, they didn't want to interview me, they knew they weren't going to draft me. So, that was the end of that. Although I believe, back then, they kept a file on me. That was the first file of, “this guy could be trouble.”

ZESER: Right.

PUGH: And, quite frankly, even as far as the opportunity to go to Dartmouth during that time. It was also a period of time when the Watts civil unrest, what they call “riots,” were occurring. And there was so much racial protests, as well as Vietnam protests are

occurring. And I believe to this day that the Ivy Leagues at that time decided, “you know what? It might not be a bad idea to start admitting some highly qualified African Americans into this school.” And particularly, when they decided to admit us, it came on the tail end of the fact that, at Dartmouth, as I found out through interacting with older classmen, that there were maybe seventeen. In 1969, when my class was admitted, there were seventeen African American males on campus, because Dartmouth was, at that time, was all male.

ZESER: Yep.

PUGH: — When, when they protested— and it's interesting that Dartmouth guys

protested and also, they were— there's a lot of history behind this. But at least they didn't— I shouldn't say at least— but they didn't display rifles and guns, as they did at Cornell—

ZESER: Cornell, right.

PUGH: When they, when they protested. But Dartmouth worked with the administration, and the administration at that time decided that they were going to support these seventeen African American males, who were going out. And they did, they went out to high schools, recruiting and talking about Dartmouth. And so in 1969, that class was approximately 107, 110 African American males that were admitted to Dartmouth, the largest class, probably of all males, ever in the history of the school. And it was a shock for the College to see so many of us there.

But I do think that because of a lot of issues that were occurring in society, somewhat similar to now, that the Ivy Leagues decided to, at least temporarily, open the door, in terms of admission. Because at the various other schools, particularly various Ivy League schools, there was an increase in African American male students.

But what was very interesting is that, and I will point out that— I remember I visited Williams College with my high school classmate, who was also the quarterback on the team. And we were thinking about going to Williams. And I remember, when we sat and talked to the coach, the coach made it clear to my high school quarterback guy that, “well we don't play Blacks at quarterback.” And right after that— and so we knew that we weren't going there. And actually, the environment at Williams was not conducive for me, in the sense of not liking it. But I hadn't visited Dartmouth. But I knew about Dartmouth. In fact, I always think about, I think I may have been

about thirteen when I watched a football game on TV, and I remember falling asleep and waking up and it was Dartmouth, playing someone [laughter]. And I had never heard of Dartmouth.

ZESER: [Laughter].

PUGH: But it always stayed in my head. And so, arriving at Dartmouth, by way of the Upward Bound program, as well as based on issues in society— it was a journey that begun. And years later, and even to some extent now, there's always this view that well “you guys got in through, quote, affirmative action.” And there are some African Americans who will say, “yeah, that's true.” And “not everybody was qualified.” But one thing I feel very strongly about the Dartmouth admission process is that every African American male student to be admitted, in that time, we were all exceptionally qualified. I mean, I think everyone finished and graduated successfully, except for maybe about ten. And those who didn't, it was by choice. They actually decided to transfer. They decided that it wasn't the environment for them.

ZESER: Right.

PUGH: We always felt that, at Dartmouth, you, as a student of color, you worked so hard, and your grade would not match the effort. And it always made myself and others feel that, well, “hell, I could go to Morgan, or I can go to an HBCU and work hard like this. And be appreciated and be a straight-A student.” But in spite of that, we stayed.

And I would say that, similar to the notion, when I say well, they're excellent programs that exist in society and when they are helpful to African Americans or students of color, they seem to disappear. Dartmouth, at that time, had a wonderful program. It was called the Bridge Program. It was for students of color who just actually, just for us, by the way. I don't think it lasted more than after that year or two.

ZESER: Wow.

PUGH: But it was a summer program that, you come up to Dartmouth and you take an English class and a math class, get credit if you pass, and you get a sense of learning the campus and all, prior to fall semester beginning. So it was there that the seeds of so much occurred relative to lasting impact on myself and others. Because that program was an opportunity to come up there, not only to participate athletically with the facilities, to be able to take classes,

but we were assistants to upperclassmen who were tutoring other students. And those students were in what is known as the ABC program, A Better Chance.

ZESER: Yep.

PUGH: And I come to find out there are quite a few of my classmates, they're going through ABC, which is a program that takes African American students, predominantly students of color, and puts them with families outside of their own environment. That is, instead, if you lived in Virginia, you would come up to New Hampshire or— and usually we're going to one of the prep schools, Hanover [High School], or Andover [Proctor Academy], etc. Hanover, of course, isn't a prep school, but— Hanover High. But, the fact is that they had these students— these students often would maybe spend their last years of high school going to highly competitive prep schools in order to get into Dartmouth and others. So those were the kind of students that we were tutoring. And as incoming freshmen working with the upperclassmen, we worked on— we assisted them and helped those students. And I think that was part of me developing a sense of being able to give back. Because I saw these students working so diligently and supporting us.

So that provided me with an opportunity, I think, to really begin to appreciate my journey and break from high school now to Hanover. And Hanover was, and Dartmouth was a very interesting experience. For years, if someone in the past, if someone would have said to me, “oh, you went to Dartmouth? How did you like it?” And I would say “I didn't.”

ZESER: [Laughter].

PUGH: I mean, because, in spite of the recruitment, in which there was discussion about— you know, it's an all-male school, but [Mount] Holyoke [College] is right down the street or Smith College, you know.

ZESER: Right.

PUGH: And there are always parties. That didn't really materialize. And the dynamics of being at Dartmouth were very challenging.

ZESER: Right.

PUGH: And I'll be glad to talk about that later. But, for now, in terms of just my journey to Dartmouth via my high school and my education, I—

it was a lot of hard work and effort. But it was also, I believe, the societal forces that also helped shape the policies of wanting to take a chance and admit students of color.

ZESER: Right, right. Thank you so much. So, something that I was thinking about, as you were speaking is sort of this clear, demonstrated commitment, like you were saying, by Dartmouth to recruit and admit Black students. So, I guess, what I'm wondering is, once you got to Dartmouth and went through four years did— how did Dartmouth continue showing that commitment? Did they continue to show that commitment? How were you supported once you got to Dartmouth? Or not supported?

PUGH: Well when you talk about Dartmouth, you have to then determine that, well, Dartmouth is a structure.

ZESER: Right.

PUGH: But it's the people. And to the extent that Dartmouth supported you or had a commitment towards you, it wasn't per se, Dartmouth College. It was the students. And particularly, in this particular case, it was the African American students. I know, academically, Dartmouth was extremely supportive with the classes we took, etc.

But I was struck by the fact that I remember in the summer course, doing an English paper, writing a paper, and I had gone to one of the upperclassmen who [pause] a brilliant individual. What's his name? Larry [R.] Stephens ['70]. He became an executive attorney with Sony Industries, etc. And I see him from time to time on Zoom meetings. And I remember— he probably doesn't remember this story, but I had gone to him with my paper, my final paper. The attorney for the English class. And he reviewed it. And he just made sure everything was correct and all. Said, “oh, you got some very interesting ideas here.” And I turned it in. And I remember the English teacher at the time giving it back to me. And it was a D and a plus. And he circled the plus. And he wrote next to the plus, “this is for effort.”

And, when I looked at the paper, there was— he did not criticize the writing, the syntax, the grammar, or anything. He was upset with the fact that I had written about Black Liberation and the need for Black students to, or Black people, to recognize their responsibilities to the community to be revolutionaries. And I know, when— there were certain times in the paper, he would, in red ink, circle and say, “how can you say this?” Or “what do you mean, you will be willing to give your life for a cause?” And so it was very

obvious that, I mean, he graded me on his disagreement with my ideas. But that was my first introduction to Dartmouth academically.

And it continued because when freshman year began, and I was in English class, I got into another conflict with the English teacher because, when I was writing about something, and I was using the word— instead of African rights, I said Black people, and I capitalized “Black.” And he called me in and said, “you can't do this. you have to” and I told him, “I'm not going to use lowercase for Black people.” And he explained the grammar rules. And I explained to him the issue of Black pride, and the fact that— look, I'm referring to a people, a group. And it was such that he recommended that I be moved from his English class, and I was put into another English class. In fact, what was considered somewhat an academic support English class. Which actually worked out extremely well for me because it was a professor named Professor [John E.] Lincoln, who taught us as if we didn't know how to write. And so he would provide every strategy on writing effectively, etc.

And one of my greatest memories was, he would have us verbatim copy from a book that we have selected of someone who we consider to be a great writer. And I remember having selected Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man*. And so, I just felt that if I was going to model my writing after someone, I mean, I can't go wrong with that. But that experience, at least, that academic support that came from the professor, Lincoln, was critical. But at the same time, it gave me a sense of realizing the kinds of challenges I would have at Dartmouth, just being Black.

And I remember, probably, I think, the next year, I was taking public speaking, just to try to get my grade point average up. And, at the time, there was a lot of discussion about tracking Black people in the Census data. And I wanted to give a speech on why Black folks should boycott the Census. Just theoretical. And the professor told me I couldn't. And against his wishes, I gave the speech anyway. And instead of getting the A in the class, he gave me a C. And when I went to see him, he told me that I should have listened to him. Again, if I had to do it over, I would have done that.

And I do want to say that even, I think within the last year or two, the APA, American Psychological Association, and others who look at, who establish standards of writing and so forth. They have indicated that, yes, the B in Black should be capitalized. So, and I also suggest that you capitalize white, the W in white, another

thing. It's almost 55 years later, but I have been proven correct relative to that.

ZESER: [Laughter].

PUGH: But the academic aspects of Dartmouth were always very challenging. I remember, and I've heard other classmates talk about it. After first semester, I was put on academic probation for receiving something like a D and two C's. But you then— you gain your footing relative to, I mean— and even then, that was playing football but also being isolated.

ZESER: Right.

PUGH: Dartmouth was such a place where you were isolated, so much so. But, in any event, you start to understand how to— what classes to take, etc. One of my, even as a freshman, one of my best experiences with being— I had already known I wanted to be a sociology major.

And one of my greatest experiences was being in a sociology, an advanced sociology class with all juniors and seniors, and I was a freshman. And I remember on one of the exams, how I quoted from and cited a reference from a book that wasn't on the reading list. And it impressed the professor enough that I got one of the highest grades among all these other folks. And so, I started learning how to be successful at Dartmouth. But even with that, quite frankly, the weather, isolation—

ZESER: Right.

PUGH: Being in an environment where there were no females, other than— they would, back then, they would bus women in for parties and mixers. And it wasn't a real environment in terms of social interaction. And even when the African American Society— we fought at that time to establish our own place, which was then Cutter Hall and is now El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz Temple, after Malcolm X. We fought to get that. And even when we got that building, and we'd have parties there, and there would be Black females, similar to this the overall environment. Interacting in an environment where it's like, one female, and she knows there's like 20 guys waiting in line to ask her to dance. That's, that is—

ZESER: [Laughter].

PUGH: [Laughter] That is not what happens in real life.

ZESER: Yeah.

PUGH: So you had to go through that. And quite frankly, between the social aspect and also the idea of— this is in my first year of Dartmouth— the idea of trying to get my French requirement out the way. And I would go to class, and I just found— I had studied French in high school, but I was okay. So I decided, well, let me switch to Italian. I don't know why. And I would go to Italian class, and it would be myself and maybe seven other guys. It's just that the seven guys had— their family heritage was Italian. So, when I'm trying to struggle with basic grammar, they could speak it. And they were in the class just to get an A.

So that didn't work out, and I went back to French class, but I decided I wanted to go study in Bourges, France. And that was one of the most significant aspects of Dartmouth, in terms of giving you an opportunity to travel, to go places. And just as I was finished or was getting ready to apply to go to France, for the next semester, a friend of mine came and told me about something about Talladega College, that Dartmouth had an exchange program at Talladega College. Talladega College, then, as now, is a small HBCU. It had a sister relationship with Dartmouth. And Dartmouth students would go down and spend— it was comparable to two of our semesters. And so you would go and study, and it was just an opportunity to be at an HBCU. So, I signed up for the program instead of going to France.

ZESER: Right.

PUGH: And it was really, to a great extent, life-changing in that I got a chance to see how African American teachers responded to my work ethic. I saw— there was, I remember, a Professor Emeritus, who was teaching some of the sociology classes. And he would always rely on me to bail him out in terms of his interactions with the other students. And I'm new to campus, and I didn't want to do that. But there were times when, if he said, "read the assignment," I was the only one raising my hand, explaining it, and so forth.

But at Talladega College, I really got a sense of feeling a great deal of social, emotional comfort. In fact, I met my first wife there and went on to marry her and, of course, had kids. And Talladega was a tremendous experience for me. But you had to be careful at Talladega. Because years before that, some of the students, African American students who had gone to Talladega, it was— they found it to be so much freedom in terms of partying and all,

and they came back with grades that— they had to repeat quite a few.

ZESER: Yeah.

PUGH: I avoided that, though the French class was equally as challenging. I found myself at Talladega in a French class with three students: two males and a female. The female hardly came to class. The two males were Fulbright Scholars ready to go to France to study. So needless to say, sitting in class, with the three of us speaking French, and they being so articulate— it was as if I was back at Dartmouth again. And I struggled, but I got through that class.

But I took a lot of my sociology courses there. And that was a wonderful experience. Because I found Dartmouth sociology classes, which I enjoyed, but they were very much of a quantitative aspect. We would always use, utilizing the computer. And I liked that. But at Talladega, it was also an opportunity to be very good at just interacting with your fellow students and discussing major issues that we all could identify with. More so than the environment at Dartmouth. But that was the beginning of my response to Dartmouth, as far as travel. Because after I was at Talladega, I debated whether I wanted to come back to Dartmouth.

ZESER: Right.

PUGH: I thought I wanted to just stay there and enjoy myself, as well as still get great grades. But I also was still playing football at Dartmouth. So I worked out and so, particularly my sophomore year. Or my year after my sophomore year, in my junior year, I came back to Dartmouth with the intent of playing football. And that was to a great extent what drew me back. But also, the opportunity to complete my degree at Dartmouth was very much a calling. So, I came back to Dartmouth to do that. And so I found myself spending time at Dartmouth in fall semester playing football.

And after that, for example, in my junior year, I ended up, I went to Sierra Leone, West Africa. And that was a, just a life-changing and tremendous experience because unlike some of my classmates, about fifteen of us went to Dartmouth. And you could choose where you wanted to stay. You could stay in the city, Freetown, and it was like staying in Philadelphia in New York or something. I mean, in terms of the urban environment.

ZESER: Right.

PUGH: So I didn't want to do that. And along with a couple of other guys, we chose to stay in what they call the upcountry. Stayed in a place called Magburaka Teacher's College. And it was removed from the city. And it was an environment that, again, provides you with a real sense of how people lived in that school, in that place. And I know I had a wonderful time doing research there. We still, even though we were in the upcountry, would come down on a weekly basis for seminars at Fourah Bay College in the city.

And at that time, just— I never knew how one could appreciate eating a hamburger, a little old, wrinkled hamburger that you would buy from one of the restaurants. But they were tremendous based on some of the other foods that we ate. But the experience in Africa and interacting with African students in that environment was just tremendous.

In fact, both going and coming back from Africa, Sierra Leone, was an opportunity to travel. We stopped in England for a while. We stayed in Spain a day or two. Coming back, classmates and I went to Nigeria. We had a tremendous experience. We went to Ghana, and we visited the slave castles. And to experience, I think it's called the Hall— the Path of No Return [Door of No Return]. It's a passageway where the enslaved Africans— before they were enslaved— would be pushed through before being taken to America. To just experience that just leaves an indelible mark in one's life.

And likewise, even to this day, I think I'm probably going to get over it. But I remember even in England, how we were there for a day. We were in Piccadilly Circus, Piccadilly, the low area there. And I remember an older white female looking at us and calling me a n******. And that experience, in fact, I often refer to it as related to the poem that Countee Cullen wrote called “Baltimore,” where— he's a Harlem Renaissance writer. And he talks about how he visited Baltimore and of all the things that happened that day, that stood out was the notion of a young kid who he smiled at. And the kid smiled at him, and then called him the same n-word. But those experiences did a lot to give me a worldview.

But even with that, coming back from Africa, instead of coming right back to Dartmouth, my classmates and I, we actually went to Compton, California, where we stayed in Compton. And Compton, of course, even today, was considered, as it is today, considered— it can be a very rough neighborhood. Although, I think Compton has done a lot in terms of its socioeconomic status. But we stayed there. And that was an opportunity to do student teaching for me

and my classmates. And I think that's where I really got a sense of deciding on my career because I— for a while, I thought I wanted to be an elementary, junior high, and high school teacher. And after I experienced the elementary students in Compton— and in general, elementary school kids. I realized I couldn't teach them. I just didn't have the patience, the skill set that so many others have. But I still enjoy education. So it was an opportunity for me to adjust my career goals with regards to wanting to go into education but realizing that teaching high school, elementary, and middle school students was a challenge that I just was not emotionally prepared to take on.

ZESER: Right, right. Okay. Thank you. There's so much there we could talk about. But something I'm really curious about— so I actually studied abroad for two quarters. And something that I was just wondering because those experiences really changed how I see Dartmouth.

So I guess what I'm wondering is how those experiences with Talladega and Sierra Leone going all over the place— how did those then change, once you came back, your perspectives of Dartmouth?

PUGH: Well, I think it was, they were all, they contributed to an extraordinarily positive perspective on Dartmouth, in that it made me realize that I don't know another college or university that I could go to and have the opportunities to travel and experience all the kinds of different environments and situations that I did at Dartmouth. So the value of that really contributed to my sense of understanding that Dartmouth is there to allow you to grow based on whatever you decide. So that was the key aspect.

From each one of the experiences, though I did come to get a better sense of my goals in life and my sense of what I wanted to do in life. But Dartmouth, if I can somewhat— it's a digression of sorts— talk about the athletic experience at Dartmouth—

ZESER: Right, right. Yeah.

PUGH: In that when I came to Dartmouth, I remember just as a freshman, and then freshmen had to play— they couldn't play varsity football. So we were all on the freshman team. And we were all going out. And to be with a group of about 125 guys. I mean, there were maybe about ten African Americans, myself included. But to be in that environment, and everyone would have credentials. I used to talk to my roommate about the fact that all

these guys are all-American or they're captains of their team. And my roommate, then, a friend of mine, Weymouth [T.] Crowell ['73], or T.W. He went on to become a tremendous pathologist and passed away recently. But he would often remind me of the fact that— he'd say, “well, damn, Wes. You know, you were all-state in three sports. So what do you think, how do you think they feel?”

ZESER: Yeah.

PUGH: And I say, “oh, yeah, I forgot about that.”

ZESER: [Laughter].

PUGH: But in the sense that, I mean, we were out there competing. And the experience of playing football with Dartmouth was really, it was really a wonderful opportunity that just made, quite frankly, excellence and winning, just a natural part of myself and so many others. Particularly, because I came— in my last year of high school at Forest Park, we went undefeated, even after over more than 100 years. We're the only team that ever went undefeated, untied. And so when I came to Dartmouth, as a freshman, we went undefeated, right,

ZESER: Yeah, that was 1970, right?

PUGH: Yeah, right. Yeah. Well, even as a freshman on the '69—

ZESER: Right. And then '70 was [the] Lambert [trophy].

PUGH: Yeah, the Dartmouth '69 varsity team, maybe lost a game. As freshmen, we were undefeated. And then we moved on to varsity in '70. And that's a team that, quite frankly, I mean, I don't think there's much argument for being the greatest team of all time in the Ivy League. And that was just a wonderful experience. Those guys, you may know, at this past homecoming game against Yale a few weeks ago, that group was there. Due to COVID, myself and quite a few others didn't attend, but that team and the interactions with the upperclassmen has stayed with us. Stayed with me throughout the years.

But again, what is very interesting is that when we couldn't, as a group, come up last year, we decided to do a series of emails where we talked every week about the upcoming game. And individuals would reflect on what occurred in the game. What led up to the practice sessions and so forth. And so we would all contribute to varying degrees. And I took it upon myself to write

about my experience as a freshman. And actually, I did play quite a bit. But the other guys were— they were so much bigger [laughter]. But they would beat the other team down so badly that when I got in, it was okay.

But as I talked about that in writing, we tried to, myself and others, other students of color, get the others, particularly the white teammates, to recognize that while we were doing this, winning football games, and so forth, society was in a tremendous— was just in tremendous turmoil. Not only the Vietnam War and racial issues and injustices but overall the relationship of the races. And when I would write about it, none of the white players really responded. They didn't want to engage in a discussion of that, only maybe one or two. And oftentimes, they would write me privately and say, “wow, I didn't know you guys, you Black guys, were thinking like that. Or that happened to you all.”

ZESER: Right.

PUGH: There was never a dialogue of trying to share and understand what was going on beyond football, because— one of the major incidents that occurred, and this was in our freshman year, was that a Nobel Prize scientist named [William B.] Shockley came to speak at Dartmouth.

ZESER: Right.

PUGH: Now, Shockley, his Nobel Prize was in something like electronics or—

ZESER: Physics or something.

PUGH: Right, right. But he came to speak on the inherent inferiority of African Americans. And so then, it was enough of us, the seventeen or so upperclassmen and 100 or so freshmen, that we decided to shout him down and not let him speak. And that was just one of the major incidents. And yet, many of the guys on the football team from that period, when I wrote about that, they didn't even know about it. They didn't even recall it. And yet, that was a major assault on who we were as people of color, when Shockley did that. To some extent, unfortunately, some of the Dartmouth students, African American students, we got letters of reprimand, and so forth, and put on probation. It just so happened that I and about five or six of us had come a little late. We sat way up at the top. And when it was time to walk out, we walked out with everyone else. But I don't think the Dartmouth administration took pictures of

us or saw us. So, we didn't get the letters. But it was still, it was typical of the fact that we, as students of color, experienced things very differently than our male counterparts at Dartmouth.

And as we, even now, 50 years later. Particularly, based as a result of George Floyd and other issues that have occurred currently in society. When we've tried to enlighten and even talk about social justice issues, it has not really worked out too well with our classmates. But that was one aspect of the Dartmouth experience in terms of football, in terms of playing the game and winning. We just had tremendous teams. I've talked to current students who were on the football team, and I would say to them that “it was just amazing to be on a team where everybody was like, really, really good.” I mean I just. And they will say, “I've never been on a team like that” [laughter].

ZESER: [Laughter].

PUGH: But at that point in time, we were, they had recruited, Coach Blackman and the others, outstanding individuals. But that also led to, in my judgment— and I think the judgment of nearly every African American student or scholar athlete that played— it led to problems because we found that Dartmouth at that time had a system in which if you were a senior you played, and if you're a junior or sophomore, you waited your turn until you became a senior.

But we could observe that there were exceptions to that when there was a Black guy who was a senior. And then, in my particular case, as a safety, I always felt, particularly in, I think, my junior year, when, even though I wasn't a senior, I had won games. There were times when I could look at statistics, and I was listed as a safety, number six in the country with interceptions. And yet, I wasn't starting. And the coach would wait until it was a crucial time. And he'd say, “Pugh, go in.” And I did that for a while. But then, quite frankly, it got to the first time Yale ever visited Dartmouth, I think it was Yale. Yeah, the Yale game.

And an incident occurred in which the coach put me in, and a guy caught a pass, and it wasn't even a person I was supposed to be covering. But the coach pulled me out and said, “how did you let him catch that?” A little five-yard pass. And he hollered and screamed at me. And I looked at him and I said to him— this was in the middle of the game— I said, “my, my parents don't scream at me like that.” And I took off my helmet, threw it down, walked out, and quit the team. And there were a few individuals who saw that

and later talked to me about it. But there were a lot of issues at Dartmouth relative, during our period of time, relative to African Americans playing.

I remember, I talked about, to the other guys, once I wrote about how one of the greatest experiences I've had at Dartmouth was when we were playing a game at Brown [University]. I mean, here at Memorial Field, we're playing Brown. And we were beating them real badly, and the coaches put on defense, put myself and everyone in. And we had like eight Black guys on the field at one time. And we were running all— I mean, the fans were having a great time seeing us. But that was the only time we had an opportunity to play based on talent. Because it was understood that during that period of time, you don't want too many, don't want to show too many Black guys out there.

And even personally, the coaches would come to me and say, “look, we'll let you start at defensive back.” And I said, “wait a minute, I'm not a defensive back.” I can't— I mean, I could play it, but T.W., Vence Lewis ['73], they had defensive backs. And so, you know. So I had that issue. And a few players, during that period of time, had quit based on similar reasons as myself. But they would come back. And I refused to come back during that season. And I can remember them sending— I say they, the head coach, it wasn't Blackman, by the way. But the coaches, a coach would come over to the dorm and get me out of my room. And we'd talk in the hallway, and he'd try to convince me to come back. And I wasn't willing to. But they would even— and I say this for a reason, in terms of— they would promise me that, “look, we can get you a tryout with the Dallas Cowboys or the Cincinnati [Bengals]. I mean, if you'll come back.” To some people, that would have been motivation.

But as my career, or my time at Dartmouth, moved on, I came to see two competing aspects when I was ready to leave Dartmouth: that I want to go try out with Dallas or Cincinnati, or I felt like I was being recruited by— the University of Chicago flew me out there to go to their graduate school. Harvard had accepted me. Penn had accepted me. And so it was like, do I want to go into an academic pursuit?

ZESER: Right.

PUGH: A graduate school? Or did I want to expose my body [laughter] to football and that physical aspect? And [pause] I have no regrets as to the choice I made. But I did come back and play football for

Dartmouth and was part of, again, winning championship games, winning the championship. Even the year I left, we lost one game. And I will admit that, at least in my mind, that because they were throwing passes that— I would intercept those passes. But it hurt. It was tremendously difficult not to go back and continue to play.

But I actually recall giving a speech to my African American teammates, as we talked about the issues that were going on with Dartmouth Football at the time. And they were also going on throughout the Ivy League. Because there was even discussion at that point about, potentially, all Ivy League Black players leaving the team. Because coaches had not come to understand how to effectively deal with students of color, particularly those who were talented athletes. And I remember when I was talking to my African American teammates, I described to them how I just felt like it was like being on a slave plantation where the coaches tell you what to do, and so forth. And you don't have any say. And I just wasn't willing to come back and play under those circumstances.

But one aspect that I have always admired about Dartmouth students, particularly my African American brothers and sisters, and others, is that I've always appreciated that all students, all of us, we have our own sense of being, our philosophy. So that I wasn't trying to convince them to do as I did. But they respected my individual choices. And likewise, I always respected the fact that each one of these guys, they have their own makeup.

And then that— I guess it boils down to, I saw all of us as leaders, and then we could as leaders all band together, but we were not going to be convinced to follow anyone. And I think that was part of what may make Dartmouth students so dynamic, in the sense that you do develop your own sense of being. And you decide— you make your decisions and do not allow others to influence it. But the football experience, as difficult as it was and emotionally trying as it was, and disappointing at times, when I look back at the fact that— I've never, I mean, we lost one game, and we tied one game.

And I can vividly remember, as a senior, after we had won the championship again, and was during maybe the winter term or something. And I was in the gym playing basketball and all, and the Athletic Director for Dartmouth walked past, and he called me off the basketball court. And he showed me that I had been selected as all-Ivy safety and punt return.

ZESER: Wow.

PUGH: And at the time, I looked at him and said, “oh, okay.” I thought nothing of it. I went back to playing basketball. But in the years that followed, it came to mean so much because it's an honor that not everyone is able to achieve, and there was even, quite frankly, a listing of the greatest football players in the history of Dartmouth College since football began.

And I was listed as the third-best safety in the history of the school. And I said, “oh, okay.” And to think if I had played the season that I quit. And with interceptions, I think I could have gotten to number two. Number one is Willie [William] Bogan ['71], who was there at the time I played. And Willie was a Rhodes scholar. He was just superb. And, in fact, I often tell the story about how, when I was a sophomore and Willie was a senior, I would purposely line up, like two people from him, and then we would run the races at the end of practice.

ZESER: [Laughter].

PUGH: And he didn't know I was always trying to beat him. And I never could [laughter]. And even towards the end, Willie would have back problems. And when he would even be in pain, I think I would run so hard to try to beat him to the finish line. And the most I did was tie him. But as I said to him, “but after you'd left, I became the fastest guy around” [laughter].

ZESER: Right.

PUGH: So that was that was part of the idea, I think, of recognizing the excellence at Dartmouth. Because that is what I think Dartmouth meant so much to me relative to— I just found that excellence was a given. Everyone was extreme. I mean, I just found that every student was extremely smart. Every student, if you played athletics, was exceptional. And I do want to just add one aspect that has often been very important to me, as far as athletics at Dartmouth that went beyond football.

And that is that I remember the fraternities would always win intramural basketball tournaments and at everything. And in '69— I guess it was '71. When we were there, I and a few of us, the African American students, we played the intramural basketball. And we actually beat— won the championship for intramurals. And it upset the fraternity structures so badly. And there even is a little teeny trophy that I remember them giving me for being an outstanding player. And I didn't want it at the time, and I put it in

Cutter Hall in one of the windows or something. I don't know whatever happened to it.

But, to me, that meant so much, that as African Americans our time there was a— we were able to, in some way, bring down some barriers that existed, even in the intramural sports area.

ZESER: Yeah. So there were the intramural sports. But what were your other experiences like with Greek life?

PUGH: Well, yeah. That's a very interesting point. Because when I talk about the football experience, for example, I never held or— I don't think any of the white players and Black players had issues. These were issues that related to coaches and coaches' decisions and errors.

ZESER: Right.

PUGH: So we were all pretty close. But we still, Black students mainly stayed at Cutter or did things and white students had, white male students had their interactions. But they would always, the white students and particularly the teammates, would always invite us to come to the fraternities and ask if we were interested in joining. I and quite a few others, we went to fraternity parties, but quite frankly, they were a little too wild for me [laughter]—

ZESER: [Laughter].

PUGH: And for many of us. But we had access to it. But we didn't, really, at least I didn't. And many of us didn't go in for the fraternities. I do know that there was, as my senior year, when I was tapped to be a part of Casque and Gauntlet Society. And I didn't know much about it. And it's a very interesting group. And I'm glad to see that finally, it taps females and so forth, and it's so well-integrated. But at the time, I didn't want to even have anything to do with it. And I do know, my roommate, T.W. and a few others would say, “oh, man, it's good for you to be able to just feel part of this.”

And so I did go through the process and the induction. And both the friendships that you've developed from that and also, it's friendships that you develop from your teammates. They stay with you, but there was not, from a point of view of social outlet, social interactions, a great deal that occurred.

But I can speak on the fact that it was difficult. And a lot of my classmates, African American classmates particularly, talked, still

talk about how it was very difficult being an African American student with so few females. I mean, particularly, Black females, females of color. And just females only being bused in and that environment. And, to some extent, I've had classmates say, Well I regret that I didn't get to know more of the right guys that were at the school. But I have found that there is a connection that everyone [pause] well, many who graduate Dartmouth, has, that there's a connection that we have that is really very valuable and very— it's honored.

I've had classmates, white classmates, write me, email me and say, “my daughter's going to Harvard. Is it okay if she calls you or talks to you?” And, of course. Or I've had individuals who needed positions or interviews, and if I know of classmates who are in that area, I let them know. And they've been extremely supportive. So, that has developed.

But I've always felt that not having women and females in class and not having females on campus on a regular basis— when I graduated in '73, that was the first year, '72 or '73, when they admitted females, but it was only a few and many of them were exchange students. Well, we used to have a few exchange students. And I used to really enjoy being in class where the intellect of females would be expressed. I mean, because that's in society. And I always felt a void or a sense of not being able to get as much out of Dartmouth because of that.

But I would digress to point out that it's very interesting that when my classmates sometimes talk about how they would change things, relative to Dartmouth, and particularly, the idea of being more communicative with white students, I'm reminded of particularly the fact that Dartmouth inadvertently exposed me, I think, to, in terms of my sense of male-female relationships, to a very interesting circumstance.

Because when I was a freshman and a sophomore, I used to really want to meet this one female, and she was at Mount Holyoke. And I've never built up enough nerve to ask her to go out. But it was interesting because years later, I found out that she was the daughter of, she is the daughter of the first African American borough president of Manhattan, Percy [E.] Sutton. And I said, “oh, wow, look who I was trying to get to know.”

And yet, when I went to Talladega, this African American female that I married, at the time, her father, even though I was from Baltimore, she was from Philadelphia. Her father was a city

councilperson, and he became the first African American city council president. And so I ended up being greatly involved with politics based on him.

And after about 35 years or so, and we divorced and I remarried, the woman I married [Aracelly “Ary” Chavez], her ancestors are Mayan, and her parents are from El Salvador. She was born and raised in Italy. She speaks seven different languages. And her father was a Judge. He was a special assistant to the President of El Salvador. And I often feel that my Dartmouth credentials, my Dartmouth, sort of, experiences, put me in circumstances where I could enjoy the opportunity to be with females that are just fascinating. And my current wife is just wonderful— oh, my previous wife was too until we had issues. But it's really been a wonderful experience, relative to how Dartmouth has, in some ways, molded me or shaped me to view and interact with women.

ZESER: Yeah.

PUGH: And I think in a very healthy way, in my particular case. And I do want to point out that even— well, I guess I can come back to it if— well, while I think about it, I should say that with my first wife of 35 years, I had two kids, two boys. And one currently, Julian [J. Pugh], is actually an administrator at Harvard's Graduate School of Education where I went to school.

ZESER: Wow.

PUGH: And so I just find that fascinating. And then my youngest son, actually, he's married, has two girls, two boys. And he's a Muslim. He left this country and went to Egypt and other places, but he lives in the Sudan, which just today I see that Sudan is having another coup. But he lives there. And in some ways, his life is such that, from my Dartmouth experiences, I often thought if I never married or something, I would probably leave America and go to another country. And he has done that.

And on my current wife's side, she has four girls. And I always wanted to have a girl. But after I had two boys, and they would drive me insane, I was afraid that if we tried to have another child, and it was a boy, I could have it. But I wanted a girl. But again, I was always and became a very involved father. Since my own father was not like that, I realized I should be like— I should be much more expressive. And I still have expression issues, but the fact is, is that my wife's four kids— one, Janine [Sloane], is an exceptional educator in Connecticut. The second daughter is a

highly successful screenwriter. In fact, the screen director, photography director, who just accidentally shot was someone that she knew very much so and wrote with. And then our third daughter, Daniela [Sloane]— the second one is Francesca [Sloane]. The third is Daniela. She's a Dartmouth grad.

ZESER: Oh, wow.

PUGH: And when I was dating my wife, my current wife, I would sometimes be talking, I'd call her and she'd say, “well, I'm up here at Hopkins Center with Daniela visiting.” And that immediately was a connection when we were dating.

And then our fourth daughter [Kyra Sloane], she was only something like eight or nine. And so she became my daughter, the daughter I didn't have. And she's highly— well, she's in her third year of medical school, finishing up at Temple. And well, she's not quite finishing up, but she's doing well. But it's been a tremendous opportunity for me to look at myself and my kids and my interactions in terms of my marital status, and understand and appreciate that in some measure, Dartmouth had an impact on that.

ZESER: Right.

PUGH: Sometimes, particularly when I was there, and the guys and us, when we talked about when we were there, it was very difficult being in that environment without females. But I think most of us, many of us, we've gone on and we've been very happy with the mate that we've selected.

ZESER: That's so lovely to hear, yeah. So were you a junior when coeducation was just getting started? Did you see that happen?

PUGH: No, I was— well it amazed me, the opposition to coed.

ZESER: Yeah, right.

PUGH: I couldn't understand it. I'm saying, “wow, I can't believe, why not?” [laughter]. But no, it actually, it began in my senior year. So that would've been '72, '73, I believe. And as I said, there were a number of exchange students from various colleges on campus. So, when coeducation started, I remember, we finally had female cheerleaders in my senior year. And that was really great. And I enjoyed that. I really enjoyed having female friends at Dartmouth. Though it was short-lived. But it was an experience that I could appreciate. Although, I sometimes do reflect on the fact that if they

were there from the beginning, would I have been as focused academically and athletically? I don't know the answer. Hopefully, I would.

ZESER: Right, right. So, just one more thing. I feel like we've really gotten an amazing, comprehensive look at your Dartmouth career. But just one thing is, you mentioned the Afro-American Society once. And so I was just wondering if maybe you could elaborate on how you were involved in Afro-American Society? Did you live in Cutter Hall? What was that like?

PUGH: Yeah. I think, during our period of time at Dartmouth, you almost automatically as a student of color were going to be involved with the African American Society. And for a period of time, there were those of us, particularly as freshmen, we would just go and observe and listen to the upperclassmen espousing very intellectual perspectives on everything [laughter].

ZESER: [Laughter].

PUGH: And sometimes we would choose to go to the movies instead of the meetings, but it was always an opportunity just to be together and have a sense of closeness. But I didn't choose to live in Cutter, so I lived in various places around campus. In fact, my last year, along with two other classmates, we lived at Three South Street, which is right across from the movie house and all. And when I was up there—

ZESER: Right.

PUGH: Up there now, I think it's a big hardware store or something. They've taken over that—

ZESER: Yeah, it's all businesses now.

PUGH: Yeah, they've taken over our place. But the involvement in African American Society was more so just going to the meetings. And I never chose, and along with my classmates, so many of my friends, we never chose to take leadership roles in the African American Society. But we were very vehement about our expressing the desire to have the university, the College, do much more for providing us with certain kinds of opportunities that the fraternities maybe had that we didn't have.

But with regards to the African American Society in general, I think what has happened is, as we've gotten older, we actually have a

close sense of camaraderie. Many of those who were there during that period of time, participate in maybe a once a month Zoom, meetings in which we talk about our journey to Dartmouth. We've got maybe five or six MDs who will give insights into the pandemic. And it's fascinating because these MDs are like, highly qualified. I mean, I once said to them, it's like listening to CNN, where they're bringing in experts to talk. But we have a, very much, a closeness that developed from that experience, and it has made a major difference.

I think there's, in addition to emphasizing excellence, I think, Dartmouth, beginning when I was in the Bridge Program, Dartmouth showed me what it meant to, when you talk about paying it forward. Those African American male students were very close to us, and I often say it wasn't as if they were role models, but they were models of excellence. And when they were willing to help you in so many ways, that instilled in, I think, many of us, myself especially, a sense of being able to have a life in which you seek to make sure that altruism is so much a part of it.

And I think if I can just go into the fact that the impact that Dartmouth had on me when I left Dartmouth, and then did a year at Harvard, and I did two years at Penn, getting my PhD, and then I had to stop. And I was working. And then I went back and finished two years later, my degree.

But when I came out of Dartmouth, and I finished my graduate studies at Harvard, and I was here at Philadelphia, Penn, I was working for, again, an organization that— I could never understand why there wasn't more government support. Why there wasn't more, just, public support for a program called the American Foundation for Negro Affairs. It was called AFNA. A-F-N-A. New access routes to professional careers. And it was a program that was started by a very prominent African American political figure here, named Sam [L.] Evans. And actually, he was at one point known as the godfather of Black politics in Philadelphia. And I worked for him and— he and I, I was maybe 27. And he was 77 [laughter].

ZESER: Yeah.

PUGH: And when he became 100, he was still there, and I went to see him. But he and I had left on very difficult terms, because when I worked at that organization, it was about ensuring that, similar to Upward Bound— and I was a director of the program— I was ensuring that high school students who were interested in law, medicine or

business, we would help them to get into prestigious colleges. And then we'd help them get into law school, etc. Provide them with summer experiences, internships, etc. And I did that.

But while I was doing that, the executive director or the president, Sam Evans, he looked at me as if to tell me that I could be so much more in life. He was willing to support me to become a congressman and a senator. And that those were not areas that I wanted to pursue. But through him, I did travel to DC. I would testify and give presentations before select Senate committees, and so forth, in terms of trying to get funding support for the program. But Sam and I had disagreements over my career goals.

And I actually ended up leaving the AFNA program, and I went on to become a researcher with the School District of Philadelphia, public education. And I worked at the central office, which was always very interesting because it was where decisions were really made about everything else.

ZESER: Right.

PUGH: And so when it got down to, while I wasn't in a classroom with teachers, I was always able to evaluate programs or make suggestions, etc. But what developed from that experience is that, first of all, I found that Dartmouth had equipped me with a work ethic, a sense of excellence, that— quite frankly, when I was at the school district, reports that people took two months to write, I would do in maybe a week.

ZESER: Yeah.

PUGH: And I'd have to figure out, “what am I going to do?” In fact, at one point, there was a, what they call a pedagogical library, they had all these books, and I actually would spend my lunchtime and other hours, just reading the great books of the Western world. I mean, all the while, I would just do that because I had finished my work.

But in so doing that, working there, I just came across so many inequities, and I fought and tried to address them with colleagues, and at one point, even, there was a group of African American researchers in the school district, the research office. We were ready to actually have a major walkout in protest of the policies there and the inequities. It's just that the superintendent at the time was a woman of color, and we didn't want that to reflect on her.

ZESER: Right.

PUGH: But what I took from Dartmouth in terms of that excellence and that work ethic allowed me to be very successful. But I was also very much one who protested and spoke out. And I don't think it ever really got me in trouble. And by the way, I would say that I think inherently I had this sense of protesting because even my grandfather, just to go back to Edward Wesley Bishop, I remember my mother would tell me how he was a supervisor, he was a teacher, he was a supervisor at Bethlehem Steel Company. And some of the darker guys even talk about how their dads used to work at Bethlehem Steel. But my grandfather even worked with the government to try to root out spies that worked during one of the world wars.

But I remember him telling me how he went to one of the Baltimore Orioles baseball games. And he was sitting close to the field. And he was told that those seats were not for Black people. And he refused to get up. They asked him to leave, and he refused to get up. And he actually— they had to bring police to escort him. I often call him the Rosa Parks of Major League Baseball, because soon after that, Baltimore did allow for Black people to sit wherever they wanted—

ZESER: Wow.

PUGH: At the park. And so, I think, inherently in some ways, I had a lot of that in me in terms of protesting and trying to bring about equity at the School District of Philadelphia. But I'm quick to add that I spent, I think, nineteen years with the School District of Philadelphia in those various positions of research, and so forth. But I found that fighting racism takes a tremendous emotional and physical toll.

And I actually did develop, not necessarily due to that, but I developed an aneurysm and could have died if I hadn't accidentally— the doctors caught it. But it was abdominal pains. But that experience with the school district, first leaving AFNA, an all-Black organization it was, and then going to the school district, I had a real, from my Dartmouth experience, a real comfort level of being in that environment, being amongst mostly whites. And I have to say, I felt that when I left Dartmouth, Harvard looked at me as if to say, “okay, you did Dartmouth, so you must be okay.”

ZESER: [Laughter].

PUGH: And it left me, “what do you want to study?” And so I could make and define my own curriculum. And I focused on leadership at

research while at Dartmouth. And then, when I went on to Penn— Penn, at that time, had a reputation for making it very difficult for students of color in the Graduate School [of Education]. And yet, because I had gone to Dartmouth, and now Harvard, they didn't pressure me. I mean, they never raised— I knew classmates at Penn who would say, “professors said I can't write.” Well, they didn't say that about me.

I mean, there was an incident where I had a hard time passing the statistics course. Then, I found out, almost 30, 40 years later that, “oh, that professor used to say that no Blacks passed his course.” So I mean, I guess I should say, “well at least I passed it,” even though I got a C.

But Dartmouth made that kind of foundation to allow me to be, I think, both successful at Harvard, successful at Penn. And to be able to really interact and legitimately raise issues of inequity, relative to what was occurring at the School District of Philadelphia. But at the same time, it took a toll on me physically.

ZESER: Right.

PUGH: And when I got an opportunity to go into higher education, particularly at an HBCU, Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, it just opened up a whole new world for me. Because even when I was at the School District of Philadelphia, I would be an adjunct professor at the University of Pennsylvania.

ZESER: Right.

PUGH: And I'd teach courses in the African American Studies Department. I would teach at other colleges and so forth. But becoming a professor at Cheney was such that when I first was hired, I fought with them about— they hired me as an assistant professor, and I thought I should have been an associate professor. But there were various criteria that one has to meet in order to get promoted from associate to—

ZESER: Yeah.

PUGH: From assistant to associate, and so forth. You know, community service, scholarship, as well as teaching. And the experience at Dartmouth had given me a sense of being able to set goals and accomplishments and accomplish them. So, when I was in a situation of becoming a tenured professor and being promoted through the ranks from assistant to associate to full professor, I

would look at the criteria and say, “okay, this is what I have to do.” And I would go about doing everything. And, I would say, in typical Dartmouth fashion, exceeding the requirements.

So it was a wonderful opportunity. That is, to be at Cheney. But it allowed me to realize, too, that I had an opportunity, and I took advantage of it to have a positive impact on the lives of so many students of color as well as others. Because I just have had and have this sense of wanting to pay it forward. Because there were so many times.

And let me, as I go through this, sort of point out that there were so many times in life, particularly in one's daily life, that I didn't know, well, how do I end up financing this? Or how do I end up doing this? And, and I would have to say to you that miracles do happen [laughter]. I mean, I could, if I wanted, I could tell you, this happened to me. I don't know how it happened, it had to be a miracle. This happened. And so, there is this sense of a spiritual understanding that one has, one develops. And I think, being in that environment at Dartmouth, that environment in which you do have a tremendous amount of time to be reflective, a tremendous amount of time, to go in inward, to understand what you want to do with life, to understand or to seek to have conversations with yourself or others about the meaning of life. Dartmouth contributed to that and provided that.

And I think being able to eventually spend nineteen years as a professor in higher education and contribute to the lives of others— and quite frankly, when individuals would, you know— I had always wanted to put all my degrees on the wall and impress everyone. And I never did. I mean, I was always— before I knew it, when I first started at Cheyney University Graduate School, they asked me if I wanted to be chair of the Department of Education. I thought that was an honor. Well, that was so much work, I said, “I understand. Nobody wanted to be chair.”

ZESER: [Laughter].

PUGH: [Laughter]. But then, before I knew it, while I was chair, I was asked to serve as the Interim Dean of the Graduate School of Education in undergraduate studies. And I did that. I was supposed to do it for a year. I did it for two years. And based on politics, when I interviewed for the position, the President didn't care for me. He had two people to select. He selected someone else. And that was the greatest, one of the best decisions he ever made. Because it allowed me to become just a professor, although I always did a lot

in terms of the overall administration, running planning committees and so forth.

And for a while, I had thought to become a president of a university and Cheney and even some of the faculty had asked me at one point to consider becoming President of Cheney. And I had looked into that and looked at the politics of it. But I felt that education as a professor was more important.

And I recall, consistent with that, when I was coming out of Dartmouth as a senior, I was interviewed for a fellowship, a graduate fellowship. And I remember the committee, Dartmouth professors, asking me, “where did I see myself ten years from now?” And I was very confident to say, “well, I see myself being a school superintendent, doing this.” And I described everything. And that was my aspiration, school superintendent until I came to see the politics of it all. And that's not consistent— when I was at AFNA, and the president of the organization wanted me to become a politician, I didn't. That was not my choice.

And likewise, in that sense of wanting to be a superintendent or wanting to become a university president, I just felt that there were too many politics involved, that it wasn't something that I wanted to do. And I've enjoyed being a university professor, and I recently retired. Thankfully, just before the pandemic because this whole process of teaching during the pandemic is something that I could do, I know. But I would not like it.

ZESER: Right.

PUGH: And I look at what has occurred through the years, my experiences, and I see, today's young people, myself included— I have a great deal of admiration for how you all have to cope with so much and so many of these aspects of life. And so, for me, I have enjoyed, as I've moved into retirement, a better sense of being able to reflect on the Dartmouth experience.

ZESER: Yeah.

PUGH: And see that it is something that when someone asks, “would you change anything about it?” I would say “no.” I sometimes think that I do have, quite frankly, one regret relative to my career. And that is, I always felt that I was a prolific writer. And I never— in my judgment, I should have these two books, two textbooks on educational leadership. I should have at least one book on doing research. I should have another book on urban education. And I

never wrote those books. And I have, actually, notes and transcripts and manuscripts related to those areas. But I didn't accomplish that. But, as my friend, my college roommate, T.W. would say to me again, he'd say, “well, Wes you've been to the mountaintop in terms of education.”

ZESER: Right.

PUGH: And when I look at it, and I see what I've done, I've said, “well,” similar to what he said, “oh, you're all-state in three sports, what are you talking about?” I look at it and I had the same view of “yeah, I guess you're right.” I mean, I have. I still have that yearning to want to write prolifically.

But we're in a society now, we're in a time now when everybody writes. In fact, someone just talked about— he wrote a book a few years ago that was very interesting, and you can get it on Amazon for $2.95. Well, I don't want to write a book that's worth $2.95.

ZESER: [Laughter].

PUGH: [Laughter] but at the same time, I do want to just comment on the fact that I think what Dartmouth has led me to be able to further understand and see is that the model of “Vox Clamantis in Deserto,” a voice crying out in the wilderness, that really has been something that typified and represented what so many of us students, African American students, particularly from the Class of '69 and then graduating '73, we've been a voice crying out in the wilderness about [pause] equity, racism, issues of addressing white privilege.

And seeking to have Dartmouth and even the aspects of society understand the need to come to grips with racism and, particularly, institutional racism. And I think, quite frankly, I've come to see myself as what we call an OG, original gangster.

ZESER: Yeah [laughter].

PUGH: You know, my time is, to a great extent, is more or less done. I think [pause] I can try and continue to try to make contributions to the lives of individuals, particularly my children and grandchildren in that regard. But at 70 years old there was a time when you'd look at a person who was 50 and say, “they're old.” And then, I'm 70? Good Lord. But now folks are living until they're 80, 90, etc.

But at 70, I think it really is time for others to take up a mantle of being more vocal and more action-oriented. We live in, I believe, a society now in which both America— and the world to a great extent— is at a very critical point in which, if we are not successful at addressing white supremacy, election distortions, etc., America's democracy will be really called into question. And if democracy is called into question, the issues of race relations, and the aspects of human society and us realizing that we are all one humanity, I think that was called into question.

But I would say that, in addition to all this I may talk about, that there is a sense of recognizing a very much spiritual aspect to life. And I think I've always appreciated the Dartmouth brothers from my time that— you would never imagine it, and all of a sudden, so many of them are preachers or ministers and so forth. Well, when we meet, and they say, “let's just have a prayer.” And they just say they just pray so profoundly. I mean, I think the spiritual connection is what allows myself and so many others to be able to feel a level of comfort in the life we are currently living.

But I do return to saying that Dartmouth has provided just a model of excellence, just in every way. And I'm not sure, I mean, perhaps that could occur at other places. But what I know is so closely related to that model of excellence is the friendships and the closeness that has developed within all of us who were there during that time, that period of time. And even the older guys who are from Class of '58, or '69, or '68, what they represented— and they were tremendous, they are tremendous trailblazers at Dartmouth. And to just be a part of that has been really gratifying. And is gratifying.

And I really sincerely look upon this Dartmouth Black Lives course and work that you all are doing, as a way of further solidifying the notion that we, as students of color, we benefited from Dartmouth. It was surely a tremendous challenge. Every one of our stories is unique. But there is a thread of recognizing that we came to Dartmouth as highly qualified and very much focused individuals. And as such, I think we can say that we've achieved, that we are successful. And now, I would add that one thing that astonished me about my high school experience. I wasn't in school that day. And when I came back the next day, I saw that the class, the students, the student body had listed me in the yearbook and selected me as most likely to succeed. And I never knew why [laughter].

ZESER: [Laughter].

PUGH: I mean, but then I say, “well, okay, they didn't make a bad choice.” Yeah, you know.

ZESER: Yeah.

PUGH: But I wasn't there to advocate for, “can I be that guy?” Anything like that, I mean. And that meant and means a lot to me. And the experience at Dartmouth, going to Dartmouth, has always been something very special because I've often even heard classmates say, “I didn't like Dartmouth,” or “I don't give to Dartmouth.”

And as the years have gone on, I think we come to understand that the Dartmouth experience is and was what you made it. And I return to, not just the excellence, but the sense of paying it forward.

ZESER: Right.

PUGH: Being able to help others if and when you're successful. Dartmouth has instilled that in us. And it's something that, quite frankly, I appreciate Dartmouth for that.

ZESER: Yeah, yeah, that's so powerful. I think it's been such a privilege to hear about your ongoing legacy. We're still so excited to see what you do. But it's so important for this— memory at Dartmouth is so generational. And so I think it's really powerful that we're trying to get this down, to keep the ball rolling, you know? Because we are really at a critical point. And it's these stories that are going to make such a big difference. And so I'm just so glad that I was able to talk to you.

I'm at the end of my list of questions, but I was just wondering if you have anything that you would want to add?

PUGH: Actually, I think in my head, I have, actually, there was one point that I did have.

ZESER: Okay.

PUGH: And it was relative to the notion that— something that stands out, when you're dealing with interviews of this sort, particularly for a person of color, I'm always reminded of a poem by Nikki Giovanni. And it's called “Nikki-Rosa.” And can I just— I don't want to, I just have it written, part of it.

ZESER: No, go for it.

PUGH: She says, “childhood remembrances are always a drag if you're Black. And I really hope no white person ever has cause to write about me.” I would add, present company and Professor Rabig, [pause] you all are an exception to that. But “I really hope no white person has cause to write about me because they never understand. Black love is Black wealth. They will probably talk about my hard childhood. And never understand that all the while, I was quite happy.”

And I really look at my background of growing up in Cherry Hill. And just what was instilled in me then, and the path that I traveled. And I recognize, there are miracles throughout. And there's a spiritual aspect to it. And, quite frankly, something I often tell students is that “when you see [pause] Michael Jordan, Kobe Bryant, and all these other great athletes, or even when you see Nobel Peace Prize winners or so forth, they work, they work hard for it.”

The rapper, Jadakiss, talks about, “there are MJs in the hood.” And what he's really referring to is what I say, there are so many talented people of color who don't get the opportunity. And for those of us who had the experience of being able to achieve, we do have an obligation and an inherent sense that I think Dartmouth has instilled in us. To be able to reach back, give back. And that has been, really, a defining aspect of the lives of so many of us from that generation.

ZESER: Right. And I think I think that's the power of oral history is that I'm not just a white person writing about you, like, I'm capturing this story of resilience and of talent and of success. And it's your words. It's not mine. And I think that there's such power in that because to a certain extent, I can only read so much. I can only go to Rauner [Special Collections Library] so many times. I'll never truly understand the Black experience at Dartmouth.

But by trying to understand these stories, I'm one step closer, you know? But I can only do my best. And that just has to be good enough. We can only do our best, right? But yeah, is there anything else you'd like to add?

PUGH: No, I just want to say I really appreciate your patience and professionalism in conducting this and putting up with me [laughter].

ZESER: [Laughter] No, not at all. It's been lovely.

PUGH: It's been wonderful. It's been wonderful to meet you. And I just wish that, you know, it wasn't a pandemic, and I would have been up at Dartmouth to be able to say hi.

ZESER: Right, right. Come back around. I mean, I'll be back. I'm a senior, but I'll be back. You'll be back. Yeah, the project is going to keep going. This is the first year of many, so I'm just so excited for the future.

But I just want to thank you for working on this with me, Professor. This has been a really amazing couple of hours. I really appreciate you taking the time. And yeah, thank you so much. I'm going to stop the recording.