

Edmund Peckham, Track 2

Tape 1, side B

(no audio for two minutes and six seconds)

JB: A number of our (pause) one-time student protesters in the late '60s and early '70s has either has left memoirs here, oral history interviews, or are person with whom I've spoken to of course in this project, and several of them have spoken of you as one of the reasonable administrators. One of the administrators whom they have felt, uh, to be responsive and even to be sympathetic. I wonder what approach you took to student protest and demonstration that might have led them to that conclusion. I wonder if that conclusion surprises you at all.

(long pause before Edmund responds)

EP: Well, no, I don't think that it really does surprise me, and it pleases me in a way that some of them think of me that way. I have tried to be consistent at least in this way throughout my years here. I very much have always loved the students on this campus, and I have tried to be close enough to them so that I could understand where they were coming from. I wouldn't always agree with everything, but at least I would feel free to talk about them and work through our differences. The very first EOP on our campus, Educational Opportunity Program, uh, had its origin in my office the very first year that I was here at Northridge. Uh, Stan Charnofsky and, uh, a number of other people, uh, worked with—we just had a handful of Black students in those days. Most of them were either athletes on the football team or ran track for us. They're just about as many Hispanic students on the campus as well, too, and they generally tended to be late afternoon, evening students, so we were virtually a lily-white campus and I must say that I have grown because of my relationships with students, and they have taught me a great deal. I came here and I thought that I really knew a good deal about college administration, but really, I did not. I knew a good deal about college administration in one particular kind of setting, but this setting at Northridge is so different from private schools where I had been, at Harvard, or Rice University or University of the Pacific. There is a diversity, a wealth of background of people here, and I learned that very early, uh, the very first, uh, friends that I had among the Black students tended to be people like, um, Archie Chatman for example. We had a number of people who are now commemorated by the Blacks as the founding fathers of the Pan-African Studies Department and our all of our wealth of Black student groups, and I came to meet them, and indeed to like them. Uh, I didn't always agree with everything, but, uh, it reached the point—indeed, I must say that my whole career here has been colored by this relationship, as well, John. I told you that at first, I was the Dean of Student Activities and Housing, and my first years, '67, '68, was really pretty uneventful, except in getting to know people, and to see the origins of this kind of a, of a minority movement, if you will. But then came 1968, which was a quite different, and without going into all the

details because I'm sure you have them on your tapes as well, I'm starting off on November 4, 1968. I was drawn into the midst of the maelstrom of the, of the minority movement at Northridge. I was, uh, I was the person, as a matter of fact, who first saw the large group of Black students coming across the campus with Glenn Arnett and Sam Winningham and a couple of the others, and I ran up the stairs and alerted the president, and vice president, to the imminence of the, what proved to be the takeover of the administration building. I was one of the few inside the office of Harold Spencer, who was our administrative vice president at the time we were held hostage, and saw things that, uh, for which a number of our students later went to, uh, jail. I was forced to testify against some of them, which is not an easy thing, as to the presence of guns, and the kicking of people and the intimidation, threats and the abuse that some people exerted. Remember now, we're talking about a time very different from now, and I think that a lot of us overreacted, I'm saying "us" in the administration, overreacted and didn't understand the very, very real issues that were involved. See, uh, at that time the issue seemed to be so tiny, whether or not one of our assistant football coaches had indeed roughed up a Black football player on the sidelines, that was the issue that led to the, what was the takeover of the administration building, and then of course the way in which the white radical group as well, uh, decided that it would take advantage of this as well by taking over the first and second floors of the administration building. I didn't get to see that because I was being held in the, in an office on the fifth floor, but, uh, out of that of course came, uh, the development of our, uh, minority studies departments. Out of that came the emergence (John coughs in the background) of our Black and Hispanic student groups. The EOP, I was administratively responsible for the EOP because about the same time, see they, a lot of people felt that they no longer wanted to be in administration. Bill, uh, let me see, the dean who had invited me to come here, Bill Thomas, uh, was not retained at the end of the first year and Earl Wallace, who had been a dean in one of our schools was asked to be Dean of Students, and Earl very quickly decided that this was not the kind of life that he wanted to have, and very far away from the academic side. He was not really in that sense a student related person and so I was asked on February 1, 1968, '69 to be the Dean of Students, and have been since, of course. So, uh, when the Blacks and uh, and — (pause) the other groups developed their studies programs, and the EOPs came to be, both of these EOPs were a part of Student Affairs, and when the federal government decided that it was no longer proper to have a Black EOP and, in effect, a Chicano EOP, we were ordered to, uh, to combine them, and I was given that task by President Cleary as the acting director of the EOPs, with the charge that in one year, I was to produce a unified EOP, and that of course was a very difficult time because neither the Blacks nor the Chicanos wanted to be under either the other, but that is the minority side, and of course we can get into, maybe you are going to want to the other side of the unrest that I had to live through, which was the one dealing with the events in the East, Vietnam.

JB: I think I have a feeling this whole discussion is going to lead to so many follow ups that we'll have a good many loose ends, uh, tied together, uh, on a future occasion. Why don't I go ahead, and we'll proceed through the questions that I, uh, that I led you to

anticipate, and then perhaps we can perhaps double back another day and get into some of these other aspects because I'm seeing(??) things of which I was unaware of before I frame the questions that we are now addressing and would like to follow up on them. (long pause) By the way, do you recall the year in which these EOPs were combined? (Unintelligible)

EP: Uh-huh. I say it was in '72 to '73, somewhere along that line.

JB: Sounds about right to me. I haven't pinned it down myself.

(00:08:44)

EP: I was only acting director for that one year, and it again, was a wonderful learning experience, because I was able to become acquainted with all the Pan-African and Chicano studies faculties, uh, the leaders in both groups who were in the staff, the students. At that time, there was a tremendous amount of concern from the community about the future of all of this. We were concerned, too, about whether or not there should not be a Native American component, and I tried to create that. We hired somebody to be a Native American recruiter. Interestingly enough, the Los Angeles is the largest area inside the country with a Native American population. Most people don't realize that, uh, they think of the Native Americans as being in the tribal areas, Arizona and New Mexico, but there is a huge concentration here in the Los Angeles area, relatively huge, and they are unschooled. They are not drawn toward colleges. Their dropout rate from high school is worse than any of the other minority groups, which is a tragedy, but, anyway, this is a time, anyway, that I became much more involved with, uh, the minorities. Let me tell you one more, since this is a timed incident, John, that just has come back to me, one of the most meaningful things in my life, actually. After the death of Martin Luther King, I was charged by our acting president, we had five acting presidents in one year, five presidents, they were not all acting, in one year, to be in charge of the memorial service for Martin Luther King on the campus. This is a time that our school, Northridge, was regarded by everybody as a bastion of white supremacy, uh, totally uncaring for the interests of the minority students, and of course the whole bitterness of the assassination of Martin Luther King just boiled over and we, uh, and this of course happened later on, too, in the Vietnam War. We were just caught right in the middle, we were being blamed for many things for which we were responsible, many things for which we were not. I thought that it would be important because we already had signed up a number of students to be a part of that Martin Luther King tribute, to have a Black minister who might perhaps be a more moderate voice than I knew would be the case of some of the other speakers. I tried and tried to get a Black minister to come to our campus. Not one was willing in those days. All the Black students that we had from, uh, all the Black students who went to college, there were very few, of course, then, who went anywhere, would go down the Highway 5 over to Cal State LA. They never would come across the valley to San Fernando. Strangely enough, I was finally given the name of a wonderful young man, by

the name Lawrence Smith, was a minister of just a struggling tiny little church, what became the first United Methodist Church in Pacoima. I went over to meet him, and the little church was on Van Nuys Boulevard. I asked him if he'd be willing to come; he said he would, uh, and he did, he was a very, very fine man. I later invited him to be at commencement, uh, minister to give the invocation and benediction, because in those days we were not so afraid of the influence of religion in the state as we are now. I, Dorry and I became members of the United Methodist Church in Pacoima. We were the only white members of that church for about twenty years. And so, and that's one reason, too, I think why the minority students, particularly Black students, on this campus, have always felt I was open to them because they knew that I knew of them. Strange enough, we first started to go to the church in Pacoima at the time that some of the trials for the students who were apprehended after the November 4 incident back in 1968, uh, were still being scheduled. And some of them were members of that church, or who had families who were members of the church, and it was a real learning experience for me to try, to try to develop the understanding for where they were coming from, and relate where the school was coming from as well. So, I have always felt very much at home with the minority students at Northridge.

(00:13:47)

JB: I see. There was changes through that era in the student discipline code, and those changes are very hard to track, uh, from outside. Do you recall what those changes were?

EP: Mm-hm.

JB: In the late '60s through the early to midseventies. In outline, anyway?

EP: Very well, because I helped to write them. Um, we had a group of lawyers down in the chancellor's office, in the Office of General Counsel, uh, but we found that our legal system, such as it was, was absolutely unworkable. The very first student discipline case that we tried to bring to bear, this was in early in 1969, against one of the instigators of what was still considered to be this riot—I'd known him before—and indeed, there are about as many different sides to each of these events as there are individuals who are concerned, but still there were some things that did take place that day that were wrong. There were. Whether they deserved felony convictions is something else again, but we were trying to bring some kind of a law and order to our campus at least. And we had at that time a student faculty judicial process, to guarantee that there was a due process given to the defendant, and I can still see this first case, uh, we had the student faculty panel, and they were absolutely were intimidated, because the defendant brought in not only his own advisors, but also I think every single Black student we had on the campus and from elsewhere. They ringed the entire room, uh, and they actually (slight laugh), the proceedings just a ground to halt after about a half hour, they just couldn't pursue. The atmosphere was such that it was impossible to have a, uh, fair hearing at all. So, out of that, anyway, came, uh, came our decision which was to work

with the legal staff down in the chancellor's office, particularly a man who now is a judge, a Norman Epstein, and we created a committee, a task force actually, a systemwide task force, I served on it, and out of that came our present student conduct code, with the idea that no longer were we going to bound to a student faculty judicial panel, but rather serve in the way of hearing officers, but at the same time guarantee in every way that we possibly could that all the protections of due process that have been ingrained in the older document (John coughs in the background) (unintelligible) would still pertain. So, under the defendant, the student defendant, would be able to have an advisor. You'll be able to have a lawyer if you wished, in that case the state would also have a lawyer present, but, uh, there has been fairly few people that have been really been able to argue that people have argue, that, people have argued it, but argued successfully that this system is anything but fair and it really is and I can say that with complete honesty that the system that we have does work to the benefit of both the school and student.

(00:17:23)

JB: I've seen the modern system at first hand because I have quote represented unquote students, and also served as witness for one. I don't know the old system, in that old system faculty and students will sit jointly as a panel –

EP: Uh-huh.

JB: As a review board. Uh, the new system established, um, a process whereby the student component of that broke out, and became a faculty, what, quasi-judicial process with a series of steps—

EP: Uh-huh.

JB: That could bring in attorneys at any point on both sides.

EP: There, there were two things that happened, and I don't want to forget that second one as well, because out of that came the break between the student discipline side and the student appeals side, that gets us into the academic area, but the student judicial side, the discipline side, uh, the faculty directly are represented by the fact that there is an administrative officer, and this officer, we tried and still do try, we have a panel of them now, uh, we try to make sure that these people have legal backgrounds. Many of them are lawyers. We have a number of lawyers on our campus, of course, primarily in the School of Business, business law and there are others as well in the School of Education. So, we really have not had difficulty finding a list of very good, uh, responsible administrative officers. If they don't work that way, we don't reappoint them, because I have the ability to appoint each year the members of this panel. And the, and also one other thing, too, a lot my Student Affairs colleagues have, um, have said that we were on the wrong track, but I think that we're not. I serve as the president's designee in all

student disciplinary matters, I'm in effect in this way the final authority on any disciplinary case that takes place on the campus, there is really no appeal beyond that in our system. And so, I work very carefully to try to read each case, and to make sure that if it's a case of anything, as I see it, on these, over the wall, which is the student, who is being suspended or expelled, uh, that I read it very carefully and I make sure that I jeop — that I feel the sanction is fair. I have a coordinator of student discipline, one of the assistant deans, who does all the research in these cases. But the problems is now, John, and this may be another story, that there is a resurgence of, um, discipline, and this is primarily in the area of not of student behavior, although we still have a number of cases like that, but rather of academic dishonesty, and these tend to be more difficult in a way, because the faculty who bring these charges against the students are always very angry, you know, that anybody, uh, even dared to breach the sanctity of the classroom, and the recommendation that comes from the faculty person, often seconded by the associate dean, or school dean, is that these students have cheat ought to be, uh, sent off, nevermore to return to the campus. And in many ways, these are very serious offenses, but we have tried to believe that, and live in this kind of a rule, that student discipline is a learning process, and unless the first offense is indeed a major, major offense, we would be much more likely to go along with the sanction that's not over the wall, one in effect that contains a probated sanction to it, uh, a suspended sanction, so that hopefully the student will learn from this, and not repeat the offense. Uh, let me just say, speak one more thing about the appeal side, too, uh, because one thing I found when I became Dean of Students was that our system, whenever there was a conflict of interest between a student and a faculty person, a dispute about a grade or conduct inside the classroom, or whatever it may happen to be, those cases came directly to the Deans of Students' office and those are the most thankless ones to try to mediate, because the student will have one point of view, the faculty person would have a view diametrically opposed to that, and there just was no way to come up with a harmonious answer, and so I hoped to create a system that still is in existence, which is a student faculty appeals board, in which we had a panel, we drew it up very carefully with four students, and four faculty, and one member who was a Student Affairs person, and they operate out of the faculty president's office now. So, whenever a student comes to my office, or a faculty person aggrieved about a classroom situation, I can just refer them to the dean, to the faculty president, who, uh, supervises that board. (long pause)

(00:22:51)

JB: It's hard to shuttle back and forth between the late '60s and early '70s and today. It's a useful process to me, if you don't mind doing it. Um—(pause)

EP: I do hope that we'll spend some time talking about the early 70s, because they, it will take us a long time perhaps, because these are days that are very vivid in my mind, and I know that they are in yours, John, because we are both here, and we both played a role in those days. Not always working directly in the same vein. Those were, I think, were

formative years for our entire university, as well of course for higher education everywhere. (pause)

JB: I agree. (pause) I've uh, some time ago I read a paper by a student, who I had in class, though not in the class in which she wrote the paper, Jule Pippin(?). She interviewed you, this was years and years ago, and then just yesterday, I was reading an interview with President Cleary from The Sundial in 1970. Both of them raise the matter of police and when the Los Angeles police department was to be brought on campus, and the collaboration (pause) between the police and the administration, uh, over time, and I'd like to break all that into parts, if I may, uh, by asking, first of all, whether my understanding that there was a police command post within the administration building is accurate. Can you talk a little about that?

(00:24:43)

EP: Oh, there was indeed. There was a—we are talking about, to put it in its time frame, the late nineteen sixty-eights in December, but even more so, the month of January 1969, which is one that I certainly am never going to forget. And, uh, I was, as Dean of Students, I was seen as the first person to confront any student group or whatever it might happen to be. These were days that we had, uh, every day a large, large group that would congregate in the open forum area, down by the bookstore. Uh, they would try to foment anger in the crowd. The same leaders that were speaking in those open forums where generally the same ones who would appear at UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles] or would go up to the north and be at San Francisco State and Berkeley, because we were one of the four schools, the four activist schools, in the state. It was a horrendous period because the group, generally by about one, one-fifteen, or one-thirty, would be brought emotionally to a point where they would leave the open forum and do something. And that in doing something generally meant marching on the administration building, and my task was to single handedly go out and, uh, meet them, talk to them as reasonably as I could. I try to say that I understood exactly where they were coming from, because, of course, we were being blamed in the university (John coughs in the background) for this alleged complicity between higher education, and the administration of foreign policy by our government that of course the students were deploring in Vietnam. Uh, and in many ways, I sympathized with them, too, because I really felt there was a lot wrong. I was in the army for three and half years in World War Two, where we really had what I considered to be a legitimate cause, and I never quite felt that same way about the— about Vietnam. Never! But anyway, that would be my role, and for a little bit of time, too, during that period the, uh, university police reported to me, and it was sort of comforting to go out there, even though I was all by myself, and see some of the stalwart people in uniform or in plain clothes who were part of our staff, because at that very same time, oftentimes I would be just ringed around with a dozen, sometimes hundreds of people, uh, and many of them were members from my very own staff, and nearly all of the counseling center was just as activist as the students were in those days. And it was not easy, but trying to

persuade them, that really there wasn't any point in going into the administration building. They were just going to be breaking university rules, and could conceivably get themselves in trouble doing that. (pause) Uh, there was a mass, uh—well, two points since we've started on this. Uh, we did have that command post that you were talking about, John, and, uh, what happened was, you know, all I could think of in those days was that my life was nearly totally subsumed by coming to the campus, uh, early in the morning, and having nothing more than this kind of problem to face, none of the, uh, administrative tasks that I now do, none of the constructive things that's made life interesting for me. All of it dealing with how to confront this kind of campus dissent. It was, uh, it's one, a period that I certainly never want to go and live through again. I wouldn't, couldn't (John coughs) and we would be meeting with the president and the two vice presidents and myself, representatives of the LAPD [Los Angeles Police Department], uh, either in an anteroom off the president's area on the first floor (John coughs) or, uh, in a special room that the police had on the fifth floor of the administration building (John coughs), where they had a bird's eye view of everything that took place south of the administration building. The trees weren't as high as they are now and so from there you'd be able to see all the way over easily to the op—

[END OF TRACK 2]