

JOHN BROESAMLE SUDDENLY A GIANT: A HISTORY OF CSUN COLLECTION

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH DR. HARRY FINESTONE

October 2, 1989

Unspecified location

Interviewer: John Broesamle

Transcribed by: Gabriela Lazo, Student Assistant

Edited by: Philip Walsh

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## PROVENANCE

This oral history of Dr. Harry Finestone was conducted by John Broesamle on October 2, 1989 in an unspecified location as source material for Broesamle's book *Suddenly a Giant: A History of California State University, Northridge* (Northridge: Santa Susana Press, 1993). The first transcription of this interview was completed by Gabriela Lazo.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Harry Finestone was born in Atlanta, Georgia. He earned his bachelor's degree in 1941, and a master's degree the next year. After serving in World War II, he earned his doctorate at the University of Chicago. After teaching at several universities in the east, he came to San Fernando Valley State College (SFVSC) and taught in the English department. He was chair of that department from 1966 to 1970, and served as dean of academic planning from 1970 to 1983. He oversaw the reform of general education at CSUN, and supervised the school's Institute for the Advancement of Training and Learning. He also helped resolve conflicts following the November 4<sup>th</sup>, 1968 protests, which resulted in the creation of departments of Pan-African Studies and Chicano Studies. Finestone retired in 1990.

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## HARRY FINESTONE ORAL HISTORY

### SUMMARY INDEX

#### TRACK #1a

- 0:00-5:00 Broesamle and Finestone discuss Finestone's impressions of SFVSC, how he came to SFVSC, the ratio of teaching to research expected of faculty, and the hopes that the institution would shift its focus from education to research.
- 5:01-10:00 Finestone discusses early plans for a Ph.D. program in English at SFVSC, and why those plans weren't carried out.
- 10:01-15:00 Finestone explains why SFVSC was attractive to faculty, and why they stayed when it did not meet their expectations. Using the Department of Psychology and the Department of Educational Psychology as examples, Finestone describes the tension between CSUN as a research institution and as one training students for professional careers.
- 15:01-20:00 Finestone continues his discussion of CSUN as a research institution, moving to the Department of Biology and the Department of Health Science as an example.

- 20:01-25:00 Finestone talks about of the size and scope of School of Business, and begins expressing his opinion of Del Oviatt's strengths and weaknesses.
- 25:01-30:00 Finestone talks further about Oviatt. He then begins describing the sense of collegiality at SFVSC in its early days, and the physical environment surrounding the campus.
- 30:00-32:16 Finestone speaks about the time before divisions between faculty emerged, and how fortunate he felt to be at CSUN at that time.

#### TRACK #1b

- 0:00-5:00 Finestone continues describing the physical environment of the San Fernando Valley, and how it has changed. He begins discussing the origins of student participation in the Educational Policies Committee. Broesamle and Finestone try to remember the name of one student member in particular.
- 5:01-10:00 Finestone explains the effect of CSUN being a commuter campus on the student body. He addresses the divisions among faculty created by their opinions of the issues of race and the Vietnam War. He talks about the faculty union, why he and others joined it, regardless of their politics, and why he became uncomfortable with the direction in which it was moving.
- 10:01-15:00 Finestone expresses his opinion of administration being part of Faculty Senate meetings. He discusses the growing power of the faculty union in regards to tenure, and the demoralizing effect that had on some faculty. He begins to talk about faculty apathy with regards to campus community activities.
- 15:01-20:00 Finestone continues his discussion of faculty apathy. He returns to his discussion of the Vietnam War and its effect on the campus. He recounts two students' attempts to have African-American literature incorporated into English department courses, and how faculty apathy towards their concerns may have fueled the events of November 4<sup>th</sup>, 1968.
- 20:01-25:00 Finestone discusses the complicated ethics of the November 4<sup>th</sup> protests, and the idea that everyone is racist to some extent. He gives his opinion regarding the administration's handling of the protests.
- 25:00-31:02 Finestone continues discussing his opinion of the administration's response to the November 4<sup>th</sup> protests, and begins speaking about the secret negotiations which were opened with Black and Chicano students when talks with Oviatt broke down.

#### TRACK #2a

- 0:00-5:00 Finestone talks about some hirings on campus as being politically motivated, and discusses a professor in the Pan-African Studies department who would give white students failing grades. He explains his ideas about the role of the Pan-African Studies and the Chicano Studies departments, and how the departments' lack of academic rigor has continued to the time of the interview.
- 5:01-10:00 Finestone speaks of faculty resistance to the formation of these departments, his being chosen as head of the Educational Opportunities Program, and how the administration may have given the students more than they had to, in terms of establishing departments.
- 10:01-15:00 Finestone speaks of the motivations for granting the demands of the protesters. He then addresses the matter of the General Education Program of 1971.
- 15:01-20:00 Finestone continues discussing the General Education Program, the destruction of which he saw as accommodations for the growing professional programs.
- 20:01-25:00 Finestone outlines plans in the 1960s to eliminate the general education requirement, and its replacement with a requirement that students have a minor which was not in the same field as their major. He discusses the problems of such a requirement. He talks about the origins of the Institute for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning.
- 25:01-30:00 Finestone continues to discuss the Institute. Broesamle and Finestone try to remember the name of a faculty member involved in the Institute. Finestone explains why the person picked to run it was ultimately a poor choice.
- 30:00-31:55 Finestone states that the university's problems have intensified in the past ten years.

#### TRACK #2b

- 0:00-5:00 Finestone begins explaining the origins and purpose the Process Committee, the intent of which was to consider the demands of the Black and Latino students. He talks about how negotiations break down.
- 5:01-10:00 Finestone discusses how he and others met with the Black and Latino students in secret to hear their grievances. He recalls the names of some of the members of the student groups.

- 10:01-15:00 Finestone touches on why white student radicals weren't involved in the secret negotiations. He discusses the origins of the polite hostility that permeated the meetings.
- 15:01-20:00 Finestone talks about his feelings of tension and exhilaration during the proceedings, and his discovery that the minority students would have settled for much less than the formation of the Pan-African Studies and Chicano Studies at SFVSC. He begins to discuss the problems their establishment created, to some extent still ongoing at the time of the interview, in part due to the conditions under which they were formed.
- 20:01-25:00 Finestone continues to explain the problems experienced by the Pan-African Studies and Chicano Studies departments, and the divide between the faculty members' hopes for their departments, and the students' plans for their careers at CSUN.
- 25:01-30:00 Finestone continues to explain how the manner in which the departments were formed created problems for the faculty and the students. He states that political orthodoxy was the main criterion for hiring in those departments.
- 30:00-31:55 Finestone touches on the academic qualifications for some of the faculty members in the Chicano Studies Department.

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#### INTERVIEW NOTE

Interviewer: John Broesamle, noted as JB

Interviewee: Dr. Harry Finestone, noted as HF

Unknown male, noted as UM

Date: October 2, 1989

Time: 2:05:19

Subject: CSUN History

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[Track 1a]

HF: I'm close enough to this. (clears throat)

JB: What was your reaction to this campus and to its setting when you first arrived at CSUN, then San Fernando Valley State?

HF: I would say it was a very positive reaction, having come from a college that – in North Carolina, a branch of the University of North Carolina in Greensboro, in which the faculty feeling was largely negative, interestingly enough. In light of what we were talking about earlier, it was a literal struggle between old and young and I realized that I needed to get out of there. And though I'd been offered a job in 1956 to come to Cal State LA and then come over to Northridge to help found the place and I had declined that job. When I realized I needed to get out, I wrote Charlie Kaplan and told him I was looking for a job.

JB: He was then Chair?

HF: He was head of the Division of Humanities, I think is what it was called, and he ran my application past a number of people and they said sure hire him and so I was, I was, I wrote this letter and got an answer within two weeks saying, "Yes, come. You're hired." And it was, it was an exciting, potentially exciting place. I think what nobody realized then was that the, some major decisions probably had already been taken without everybody knowing it, that would prohibit the CSU from ever developing in the ways that people expected it to develop at that time.

JB: What did they expect?

HF: Well they expected, they expected to happen here what has happened in a great many states in this country and that is to form either teacher's colleges or land grant colleges, which had not emphasized research as their original mission in the late forties and fifties and early sixties began to be transformed into research universities, still with large teaching missions, but where research funds would be easily available and where teaching load would be not too great, so that although the teaching load was twelve hours and everybody regarded that as excessive, there was always the hope that that was a really, a temporary matter and that that was going to be reduced and although there wasn't a great deal of money for research, everybody thought that, that was a matter that would be taken care of shortly, and, uh —

JB: This is as of the early sixties ?

HF: As of the, as of about... I came in sixty-two, so in that time the expectation that San Fernando State Valley would be transformed into a vigorous, new highly research-oriented college. That seemed a real expectation and it attracted the kind of people who wanted to do that.

JB: What proportion of the faculty of that era would you say came here with those expectations?

HF: Oh I-I think, uh... I think a good number. I don't, I don't know by percentage, but I — The year I came, for example, all of Oliver Evans and Ann Stanford came and they were both powerhouse publishers and expected, expected the kind of support for their efforts that, let's say like, um, Jim Woodress was head of admissions, and he was an active, busy scholar.

JB: When did it start to become clear that these expectations were not going to be realized?

HF: Probably not until-not until Jerry Brown's days.

JB: Mid-seventies?

HF: Mid, mid... well, no. Maybe sooner. It was maybe sooner than that. Probably by nineteen-seventy it was clear or maybe not because I went into the administration in 1970 and it seemed very hopeful and I may have told you this once before. In nineteen-sixty-eight, Bill Schaefer, who was Chairman of English at UCLA, later became head of Department of Language Association and then later Executive Vice Chancellor at UCLA. Bill Shaefer called me to a meeting to discuss a joint doctoral program with UCLA in English and he said, "I'm making this call very carefully because you're the only state university in this area we would want to work with and you have a number of first-rate people in your English department and we feel that we can work with you." And we had a number of meetings, one of them involving Young at UCLA AND Cleary. Fortunately, nothing ever came of that.

JB: Why do you say "fortunately?"

HF: Because, uh... that was, that was, that was just before the time that the market dropped out of people interested in going into Humanities and just before the big drop in the job market. It didn't proceed in large measure because I, I left the English Department and after I went into administration and the chairman who followed me was not particularly interested in pursuing it. And maybe by nineteen-seventy, it had become clear that this was probably not going to be a feasible program because they needed, there were already too many PhD's being put out in the United States. But that invitation from UCLA, I think, indicates the kind of regard our department was held in by UCLA and by, by others.

JB: What led to the thwarting of these expectations within a span of eight years, near arrival until about nineteen-seventy? Uh, these hopes and expectations (unintelligible). Was it the creation of the system, per say, or was it other factors that, that soured the prospects for the campus?

10:00

HF: I think it, I think the state realized it was not going to support two first-rate university systems. It didn't need to. That is if it wanted to support, if it wanted a really first-rate system, which it got in the UC, then it couldn't afford to have even a mildly first-rate system. That would cost too much money. I think the state decided against spending the money. And all that came at the same time when there was a drop in student enrollment and a major loss in jobs in humanities and social sciences.

JB: Why did people of your caliber of those you mention in your department, people who were heavy publishers, why'd they stay? Were they ultimately high and dry as the market receded? What led them to stay here once the prospects began to dim?

HF: Well, we've always benefitted from being where we are. That is a lot of people have stayed here because this is Los Angeles and there were other personal reasons. There have always been, for a lot of people I know, good jobs in places available that no one wants to live in- that is state universities in Indiana, Ohio, Kansas, you know other such places as that. Uh, where a lot of money is expended in, for publication, universities that have university presses. Was a time when I could've gotten a job easily, say, at the University of Georgia, which is my home state. Only it wouldn't have occurred to me want to go live in Athens, Georgia. Although University of Georgia has, at this point, a first-rate English department and an active Humanities press and has all the things that we would want to have if we could have it here, but don't have and Georgia is just an example. I mean, many of us just like that. Situated in places that people don't want to go there.

JB: The original intent here as this campus was founded in its early years, your general intent was to be a liberal arts campus and, along the line, became a campus with powerful professional schools. What happened? How did that process occur? Did you see it occurring as you arrived? Were you party to it?

HF: No, I don't think I was aware of it when I arrived and I wasn't aware of it until I went into Central Administration and I became knowledgeable about the reasons for that happening and I'll give you an example and that can be multiplied in many ways. I'll give you two examples. The psychology department was not remotely interested in offering a degree program in some form of clinical psychology in, let's say, in the sixties. That would have been useful for people who wanted to get certificates in marriage and family counseling. Although, the Department of Psychology would've been the likely place to find such a degree program. What happened is that the Department of Ed-Psych, which was organized to train psychologists for the schools, became, filled that need and they began to devote their energies to training people not for the schools at all, but for all those people who wanted certificates as advisors in marriage and family counseling. So that in a real sense, over a period of years, the

15:00



Department of Ed-Psych began to move away from its mission in the schools towards this professional program and they did it—it's understandable why they wanted to do it is because they needed doing, and psychology, which was largely an experimental department in those days, was not remotely interested in it. And, just to continue with that same business, psychology did have, a school psychologist program, still does have a school psychology program, but it was only willing to expand a certain amount of its resources for that program, but what does the School of Education and then immediately begins another school psychologist program, which is, in many ways, and has continued to be in many ways a cheaper program and a lot of people— we find ourselves offering two professional programs because the need is so great that instead of someday encouraging psychology, to expand its efforts in that field—instead of that happening, then the administration lets the School of Education move into that field and the same thing is true of Biology. All of the professional programs, which in most state universities are, are satisfied by programs in the Department of Biology will put off into a Department of Health Science because Biology refused to have anything to do for many years, with any kind of professional program. It was beneath their dignity. It was not a pure science and so what we had for many years was a department and still have a Department of Health Science. It was very different from other departments in the CSU. That is, the Health Science program at Northridge became stronger, much more rapidly because it had bright people who understood that there was a need for certain programs that could be met, programs in health science and biologists said, “Go ahead. Go ahead and do it.”

JB: So, in these two instances, it was the insistence on disciplinary purity in the classical revisionary disciplines that in effect, spun leverage, power, and size outside and into other professional programs?

HF: Uh... and then, of course, the major problem was the fact that in the seventies, the desire of students to major in business began to expand so rapidly that there was almost no way, there was almost no way to keep students out of that field. I tried urging a way of dealing with it that was not acceptable to the School of Business and that is to say that we didn't need a business program of the scope and magnitude of the one we have. The number of units in the business major kept growing year by year and as-as the people in business saw what various needs were, they kept adding units. My argument always was in the years in which I was involved in that is that no professional program and this was true, this was true of all the health science programs, as well as the business programs, no professional program of that sort needed to train everybody to do everything that they might ever do professionally. In the seventies, UC Santa Barbara began to offer, under the disguise of economics, they began to offer a business program and students flock to that in droves. What was the size of it? It was forty-five quarter hours, which translates to only a small portion of Northridge's business program and I, you know, I find it hard to believe for students with that major from UC Santa Barbara would not, would have greater difficulty getting jobs than students from, graduating from Northridge with a program two or three times

that size. So that the professional programs grew because people wanted to meet every conceivable need. There was a huge push in the seventies for programs in, to train in the university, travel agents. And I remember repeated fights against permitting, the Department of Recreation used to come, every year practically, with a new degree program to train travel agents. Well, the community colleges have a program that trains travel agents and there are all kinds of six month or nine month programs that train travel agents. There was, there was, and fortunately, we never bought that, but that's by some accident that we never bought that program to train travel agents as part of a regular degree program that, you know, I just mentioned Health Science and Education, but that was largely, that was true in the proliferation of programs in the Department of Recreation, as well.

JB: Just turn back, just a bit. Stay with the period that we have initially framed. We're sitting in Oviatt Library right now. What sort of man was Del Oviatt?

HF: He was a very complicated man. Uh, he — Let me see if I can state it fairly. He was very likable and very warm and always made one feel that he was interested in one. He was, however, not a well-educated man and his interests in creating a university at Northridge were narrow and it often became a question of, of his, not out of, not out of any evil intent I think, but out of an inability to distinguish between what might be valuable liberal arts programs and what were often, to my mind, unnecessary professional programs. All programs to Del were valuable once we had them and he believed in absolute fairness to everybody in the extent that it didn't make any difference whether we were teaching something that was marginally academic or something that was basically academic if we had that program, we had to have a commitment to it and I think that he meant that in all sincerity and that was, that was part of his strength and goodness, in a sense, that he was committed to everything, but it was also, ironically, part of his weakness that he simply didn't understand, at times, when one needed to understand the difference between first-rate, the need for first-rate academic programs and the need to cut off a marginal professional programs. And although Del came off very badly in the civil rights rebellions that took place in the late sixties, uh, one never had the sense that he disliked anybody or hated groups. I mean, he was not that kind of person.

25:00 JB: Often accused of being in the heat of it —

HF: Yes.

JB: But he genuinely was not?

HF: I don't think so.

JB: I want to move to that.

HF: Well, I would think that there was a lack of sensitivity on his part, but that lack of sensitivity, and probably an inability to learn quickly, that lack of sensitivity was not confined to Del. It was common throughout the whole institution.

JB: So, he wasn't racially biased?

HF: Well, I didn't know him well enough to know whether he was personally (chuckle) racially biased, but I never saw him do or say anything that would lead me to believe that, in actions involving the university, he was racially biased.

JB: For all the accusations heard of that sort, but his sensitivity was limited, you say to upwelling groups?

HF: But that was a common failing.

JB: That was a difficult time. Let me ask you about this campus on the eve of it, say in the period between nineteen-sixty-two when you arrived and nineteen-sixty-eight when things went haywire. Um, we're not talking about the very founding period, but we're talking about an early period in the history of this campus and I wonder if you can think back to the way things were in that era- what they were like as you arrived. In terms of the relations between the faculty, was there collegiality? Was there sense of academic community? What did you encounter when you arrive?

HF: There was a great deal of collegiality and a great sense of academic community when we arrived. We happened to, we happened to be lucky when we arrived, finding our place to rent at a very reasonable price. On a pheasant farm on what's now Vanalden and Devonshire. Run by a man named Bailey, it was a seven-acre pheasant farm and we rented the original farmhouse, which was built before the Second World War and it had huge lawns and orange groves and it was a perfect, perfect place to have a party and we were asked a couple of times to give division parties at our house because it was a good party house and it was amazing. The warm friendships that existed between, say, people in English and Speech and English and Theatre and Foreign Language and all these other departments. That is, there was one knew everybody in those departments. There was a wonderful man, whose name I can't remember because he died a couple years after I came- Jim. I'm sorry, I can't remember his name now- Jim somebody, who was a professor of theatre and absolutely brilliant. Knew everything about the drama and he used to give big parties and invite people outside his department. He used to invite people in English and to talk to him about plays or about going to the theater was a really exciting experience. What later developed as factions in English, for example, didn't seem to me to exist, when I, when we came, that is everybody, so everybody in those early years.

30:00

JB: Was in the departments and between departments is when —

HF: Yeah, uh-huh. But I mean, just between the English Department, for example, what turned out to be, what turned out to be hostile factions in later years existed with, didn't exist when I came in sixty-two.

JB: Was there a good deal of (unintelligible), would you say?

HF: Yes, I think so. A lot of, uh— Even I, even I looked around about two or three months after we came and we said to ourselves how lucky we are to be here, how fortunate we are and why didn't we come in nineteen-fifty-six (chuckle). When we were asked it was the kind of feeling one had about the place and of course The Valley, itself, was totally  
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[END OF TRACK 1]