

Harry Finestone, Track 4

[Track 2b]

- 00:00 JB: Let's begin again. First of all, why was the process committee called the process committee? What was the origin of that term? Do you recall?
- HF: No, I don't. I don't know that I can tell you everybody on that committee anymore. There was Lid and myself and Barbona(??) and Mausorse(??) and a very interesting man from the School of Business who's not dead and whose name I've forgotten, maybe —
- JB: Not Rabe, was it?
- HF: Bill Rabe, yeah. Was there anybody else?
- JB: I think that in the immediate — As I understand it, in the group that also- they did the negotiating, you were the core of that, but I'm getting ahead of your story, really. I don't mean to lead you through this, but rather for you to lead me. Herb Carter came to this early on.
- HF: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
- JB: What roll did he play, and what sort of person was he?
- HF: Oh, he was a marvelous person and in the initial negotiations, which took place in that part of the Administration, which now makes up Cleary's office, there was a big classroom at that end of the building. That's where the initial negotiations started.
- JB: Of the Process Committee?
- HF: Uh, no. The whole of the Administration and both radical faculty and faculty government, that's where I was involved as Vice President of the faculty and the student groups, both the white and the minority students and people from the community. There were community people who came in and they — It became — And Del- Del was running that group and that became a kind of revolutionary tribunal.
- JB: (laugh) How many were there all together?
- HF: Oh, the room was jammed.
- JB: Anyone who wanted to walk in could walk in?

HF: Anyone who wanted to walk in could walk in. The room was jammed and nothing really was happening.

JB: How many meetings were held?

HF: Oh, I don't remember, John. Four or five, perhaps some way you'll get records, which will show that accurate — But, it became clear that the demand that Del commit hara-kiri, that would be the only thing that would satisfy his opponents. That movement was not leading anywhere and so the thing was shut down and as a result of shutting that down—and it was largely a forum for revolutionary ardor—a forum for attacks on faculty, attacks on administration for being racist and uncaring and so on. It became clear and I can't tell you because I don't remember how it became clear that there was a way to deal with this by negotiating with the Black and Chicano student leaders and Herb Carter was the person who was the one involved and there was a marvelous Black man here who worked for a couple of years named Bland and I can't remember his name- Bill Bland. He'd come in-He came in about this time to work with the administration in dealing with minorities and we started out meeting separately and writing things we could agree on.

JB: Let me clarify for just a moment, you were meeting at the same time that this larger forum is continuing?

HF: No, no. I think we began to meet when that forum was dissolved.

JB: I see.

5:00 HF: That's my memory of it. I could be wrong.

JB: I see.

HF: But I think not. I think this was the alternative. This was begun because the larger forum wasn't getting anywhere.

JB: I see and this is when the smaller group of yourselves and the student leadership began to meet. How often? Where?

HF: Well, we met at Bill Rabe's house. We met at a room in the Administration building. These meetings were secret.

JB: What days would you meet? Was there any pattern to it?

HF: No. No, we would meet and write something up about what we were willing to agree to. We would meet — I think we started to meet in order to respond to student demands and- or to student grievances, not-maybe not first demands, but grievances. And the

students would- the students — And I think, perhaps, it started with our meeting and writing a position paper that expressed our concern over what had happened and our willingness to negotiate some solution to it. Always with the knowledge that this would have to come before the faculty- a general meeting of faculty eventually for ratification and whatever we wrote- and I don't remember now which came first- the paper from the Black and Chicano students or a paper from us, but it doesn't matter cause Herb Carter would go between the two groups and the first couple of meetings seemed to lead nowhere and then, somehow, we began to find each other agreeing with certain things that we would push forward-we would agree to that they were pushing for. After several of these meetings, we then met together and we then hammered out some principles and some agreement for action that we could all agree to and we may have met together more than once.

JB: Where as previously you'd been meeting separately and responding to one another's requests, demands, papers by way of Herb Carter?

HF: Mm-hm.

JB: That is, he was literally, physically an intermediary?

HF: Yes.

JB: And broker?

HF: Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes and, which is not to say that the rhetoric had disappeared. Archie, who was the most vigorous and uncompromising of all with students, never left one of those meetings without attacking all of us in some way or another. That is, his anger was so intense that he could not relax in the room with us, for example. I think his hatred was so inflamed, which was sad since I regarded him, I think- I had come to regard him over time as being perhaps the brightest of all of that group.

JB: Who else was involved in the part of the Blacks. Bill Burwell?

HF: Bill Burwell. Young Black student name Jerome [ed. note: Jerone] Walker. Couple of others whose names I don't remember anymore.

JB: Do you recall the Chicanos, who they were?

HF: He's -one of them works in the administration, right now, in Student Affairs.

JB: I think Humberto Ruiz (??) was involved in this group, wasn't he?

HF: Not in this group. Yeah. Well, he may have been. Yes, he may have been. Do you

10:00

know it's terrible that I- but this is part of my breaking down of my memory. Later on, I became fairly close with one of the Chicano leaders who's now practicing law in the Valley and I can't tell you his name today- I could've told you yesterday.

JB: Something I'm noticing is an absence of white radicals. They're not involved?

HF: They were not involved at all and that was the whole point of it.

JB: The Chicanos are meeting separate from the Blacks and those are conducting separate negotiations with you or —

HF: I'm not sure. I think they are meeting together.

JB: Okay, fine.

HF: But there were no-none of the white radicals were involved in this at all.

JB: So, this isolates the issue of race and the university- the issue of ethnicity and the university. Was there some reason behind this isolation of issues? That is, say you earlier differentiated between white radicals who wanted the university to have a foreign policy and ethnics who have a more circumscribed set of rules.

HF: Yes, I mean they, ethnics, had goals that one could and should deal with.

JB: These were something the university could do something about?

HF: That's right. That's right and the reason- their willingness to meet with us secretly, without the white radicals was an indication of their political smarts.

JB: (laugh) What did they think of the white radicals? Did they ever say?

HF: They- yes, they did not think a great deal of them and, as a matter of fact, the one of the things that I — My impression is that the white radicals were cashing in at every opportunity on the brilliant political maneuvers of these minority students.

JB: So, the whites really were riding along.

HF: They were riding along, yeah.

JB: You mentioned Archie Chatman being sternly upset at these meetings. What was the general tenor or nature of the one or two sessions you had with them directly? Was it anger? Did you find you could deal more easily than you expected? Was there some humor? Was there —

Unknown male: Hello.

JB: Hello.

UM: How are you doing?

JB: Fine. How are you?

UM: Just checking this room. We were supposed to paint it, but it's already been painted.

JB: No, it's been painted. It's fine. Thank you. Freshly painted for our project.

HF: Yeah. I'm sorry. Your question- I was going to ask you to explain your question.

JB: Sure. You had one, possibly two, meetings with the Hispanics and the Blacks. That is, your committee- your small committee and delegates- delegations of those two groups. What was the nature of those exchanges? Was it—was it angry? Was it bitter?

HF: Oh, I would say the nature of those meetings was polite hostility.

JB: Ah.

HF: And that's why I think- and that's why I singled out Archie. He was too angry to be polite and wanted us to know it. Those weren't the only times I met with Archie. I met Archie I think at least half a dozen other times, but that would have been privately and I didn't ever come to know Archie, as well as say, I came to know Bill Burwell who became a friend, in a way. Someone who I used to meet and talk with a great deal. But we also, several of us, also met- not this group, but would go — I think his name was Bill Bland. I wish I —

JB: I can track him down.

HF: Yeah. We'd go to his house. He lived in Pacoima and we would go to his house to talk. As a matter of fact, Jerry and Mort Auerbach and I were at Bland's house the night both the faculty and students were let out of jail after they had been arrested and they all came to Bland's when we were already there. It's not clear to me now as I talk about this how I got that involved quite apart from that process committee. My own personal involvement, probably through Mort.

15:00

JB: Mort Auerbach.

HF: Yeah.

JB: Was this a stressful series of experiences for you? Did you feel tension in it?

HF: Oh, I felt great tension, but also great exhilaration.

JB: What did you see at stake?

HF: And as it seemed to me that we were going to solve several problems at once— We were going to do something that needed doing. We were going to recognize the existence of Black people and Chicano people in the Valley by having them participate in university programs and we were solving a painful and difficult political situation— helping solve a painful and difficult political situation for the university. I haven't said anything about Mal, but Mal was a brilliant member of that group.

JB: Mal Sillars?.

HF: Mal Sillars.

JB: Mm-hm.

HF: He's somebody I was- I felt very close to, at that time anyway. I got to know him through Charlie Kaplan who he was close to and he was always smart and always knew when to stand firm and when to yield.

JB: Did he come in with any pre-existing notions as to what the outcome ought to be?

HF: No, I don't think any of us did and I think one of the great ironies of that whole process is the realization much later that the Blacks would settle for, much later, a lot much less than we gave them.

JB: How did you discover that?

HF: Well, I didn't discover it immediately. I only discovered it and I don't remember when I discovered it, but I came to understand, years later, that they were absolutely stunned by what we were willing to agree to.

JB: What did you give them? What would they have settled for?

HF: Well, there were two things in issue. One was an educational opportunities program that would be run by Blacks and Chicanos and which were separate. That later became impossible, legally impossible, but we had two separate educational opportunity programs, and we agreed to the introduction of Chicano Studies and Black Studies on campus. It was the — I think what they had not expected and what we agreed to was the establishment of two academic departments and, in hindsight, I think the establishment of those departments may have been a serious error. Not that such departments shouldn't exist, but they should not have been established in that kind of

political climate with the kind of total independence they had at the time because there's no doubt that for the first several years of the history of those departments, they were run almost just political entities rather than academic entities and, as Chairman of English, I have never forgiven myself for agreeing to establish writing programs in Chicano Studies and Black Studies when they were not prepared to give those programs and, to some extent, may not even be prepared to do so today. Years ago, when Barbara Rose was Chairman of the Pan-African Studies Department, I once said to her, "For God's sakes, you are not offering a decent course in writing and you don't have the faculty to do it. You don't have the people in your department, for the most part," This was long before Rosentene came, before some other people came, "people in your department aren't interested in it and you're having real problems with it. Give it up! There's no reason why you should continue to do it. You can exist without it." And she said, "We can't exist without it. That's our bread and butter." And, indeed, that was true. That is, by then nobody was taking- none of the Black students, well very few went, no, it's an exaggeration- I don't mean that. By the time I said that, very few Black students were taking this wealth of courses that they had established over a period of time.

JB: What had they expected when they created those course lists? How are the course lists created in the first place and what were they expected —

HF: Oh, the course lists were created on models of the courses we had.

JB: Black or Hispanic versions of the same courses?

HF: Yeah, in General Education. That is, what was important was the duplication of General Education.

JB: I see.

HF: For the Educational Opportunities Program. That was seen as the primary task of these two departments.

JB: The courses were framed very quickly, were they not?

HF: Yes.

JB: Who was involved in that?

HF: Oh, I don't know. I was.

JB: In helping them frame the courses?

HF: In helping them frame the courses.

JB: Dave Benson, do you recall him being there?

HF: Yes, I'm sure he was. Yeah.

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JB: The departments over time became service departments, in effect. Their bread and butter became teaching writing and the like. What had they expected when they launched those departments? What did you expect? What did the Blacks and the Chicanos expect?

HF: Well, I guess what they had expected would be that — Well, it seems to me that they well have expected two separate things. They might have expected a series of courses designed to politicize their students and to make them both aware of the community and able to move into the community as political workers, as activists in the community. They'd also expected to familiarize their students with the cultures of their communities and they expected them, in addition to that, to help their students get through college because until those programs were — I'm about to say something that's incorrect, I think I started saying 'til those programs were established, very few minority students got through college. I think the same thing in a manner of speaking can be said today. Many more minority students enter the university than graduate from the university. The percentage of failure of minority students in the university is shockingly high. What happened in those early years was a collect— The job of EOP was the collection of students, getting students to come here and I would say that only a small percentage of those students ever really finished the university. Most of them left, eventually. That is, once they got past the General Education Programs that those two departments offered them, they were not really equipped to deal with majors in other departments and they could major in their- in Black Studies, Pan-African Studies, or Chicano Studies, but very few of them wanted to. That is, most of the students who came eventually wanted to major in something and most of the minority students who came were very much like the white students who came- they came to college to get a piece of paper and some skills that would get them a job. Now we know that that's only one reason to come to college, but most of our students come for that reason and the minority students were very much like those students, so they were not about, in great numbers, to take the elaborate major curriculum that, say, Pan-African Studies developed or Chicano Studies.

JB: You mentioned a moment ago that you feel, if I understood you correctly, that it was a mistake to have established those department as departments in that atmosphere- very tense climate. A part of that, of the twelve point agreement that emerged from your discussions summarizes what you said in the terms of the creation of the departments and EOP. "It is the understanding that EOP will require new structures and courses and involve special staffing. That with these goals and definitions in mind, recruitment of a minimum of three-hundred and fifty Black and three-hundred and fifty Chicano students

be begun for Fall Nineteen-sixty-nine," so that implicit and indeed explicit in the twelve point agreement was that the departments would exist.

HF: Um, when I said that I didn't think those departments ought to be established in that climate, I didn't mean that they shouldn't have hired people to come teach those courses. I meant that some kind of more temporary structures should've been established that would accommodate the teaching of these students, the establishment of an institute, for example.

JB: With Chicano and Black associates.

HF: Yeah. Yeah. Rather than the establishment of regular academic departments, which the people who started them may not have been the best people to organize and it is true that political orthodoxy was the major requirement for hiring.

JB: Could you see that coming? Was there any inkling of that during the (unintelligible)?

HF: Yeah, there should of have been. Yeah, anybody with any sense would have seen that coming and I think that's one of the things that we didn't anticipate or if we did anticipate, we did not know how to deal with. The establishment of two institutes for Chicano Studies and Black Studies would've been a much more sensible way. Those institutes, eventually, to be converted into regular academic departments after a trial period.

JB: And their associates to be affiliated with regular departments?

HF: And their associated to be affiliated with — Well, even with just the institute, at first. But ideally to hire people affiliated with regular departments.

JB: So, the problem, in retrospect, was not the creation of the departments, but the creation of the departments immediately out of whole cloth.

HF: And in a hot, political climate. Mm-hm.

JB: You supported the establishment of the departments at the time, didn't you?

HF: I did. I strongly did.

JB: So, twenty years of retrospect have changed your perspective, not on the department's existence in the end, but on the department's creation at that time?

HF: Well, the two departments really can't be equated anymore. In one way or another, the Chicano Studies Department is the department that, I think, that has succeeded. I don't know that it's the strongest academic department that we have, but it's at the

same time certainly not the weakest and it has some very poor people and some very good people and it has some brilliant people. Margarita Nieto, for example or even someone as political as Rudy. Certainly, he would be somebody that any kind of such department would want to hire, even though Rudy and I have shouted at each other and did shout at each other in the past a great deal. There's something substantial about Rudy that, and I don't mean to speak condescendingly of it, you understand that. I think he's established himself as a person that any Chicano Studies Department would want to have, but they hired people without academic qualifications.

[END OF INTERVIEW]