Harry Finestone, Track 2

[Tape 1b]

00:00 HF: Devonshire Street was a two-lane road and we lived at the corner of Devonshire and Vanalden and Vanalden didn't go through, at all. And between Vanalden and Wilbur, the year we, for two years after we came, there was nothing but orange groves and on the other side of our farm there was a huge horse ranch, which went all the way back from Devonshire to the Nobel Junior High School. So, and then Tampa was two-lanes and where the mall is now, there was a walnut grove and where many of the houses now are, there were orange groves or walnut groves. Nordhoff was not a terribly busy street down below, so that what one now faces as terrible city traffic- one of the things that makes Northridge so unattractive of a place to live, is that it's the sort of place somebody that wants to retire wants to get out of, because it has none of the advantages of city life and all of the unpleasantness of, had a great deal of really rural charm. It was one movie theater just south of the corner of Devonshire and Reseda- the Fox Theater.

JB: By the early sixties efforts were being made to integrate students already into campus governance. Um, what has been the story of student involvement in campus governance, faculty governance here? Do you have any observations on the pattern, the pattern that has taken over the years since you have arrived?

HF: Well, I wasn't in the English Department any longer or not very long when that movement for democratic participation in departmental governments occurred, but, sometime soon after nineteen-seventy, the Educational Policies Committee voted to have student members. It voted first to have non-voting members and then, that seemed foolish- to have a non-voting member, then voted to have student members who could vote. In all the years I, I dealt with that committee the only really effective person, student, was a truly effective student, was Bill, a man who works in personnel now.

JB: I'll have to look it up.

HF: He was a president of Student Body- a brilliant black man. Do you know who he is? [ed. note: Dr. William Watkins]

JB: I do, but I'm blanking, too. (chuckle) I'm sure we'll both arrive with a name for him.

HF: Uh, and he came on, he came on EPC as a student member. He did his homework all of the time. He had sensible suggestions to make. He was very, he was very, a wonderful student. (unintelligible)

JB: This is one of how many, would you say?

HF: Well, over a period of, say, ten years, there may have — He was, he was outstanding. There may have been three or four others who were, who were satisfactory. But mo- most students — I mean, what would keep students from being effective members of
5:00 any kind of governing organization at Northridge? It's the same thing that keeps them from being effective members of a university community, that is Northridge is not their primary focus of, of interest.

JB: Is that because this is a commuter campus?

HF: This is, this is a commuter campus and commuter college has, for most of our students, only professional interest and students come, they work their schedules, come to class from eight to ten, and by ten they've gone on to their jobs. They're not around for anything else. They don't really care about most things. That doesn't say that there's not any students who don't care and who are not involved, but, for a commuting campus, you can't expect a large student body who'd be vitally interested in everything that goes on. The major emphasis in student participation was part of the social revolution of the late sixties and a year or two into the nineteen-seventies.

JB: Let's turn to that, if we may. Starting with the faculty, along what lines could you broadly generalize — Along what lines did our faculty divide in the nineteen-sixties? What split them apart? Was it the race issue? Was it the war?

HF: I'd guess it was both those issues- both the race and the war issue, but it was — It seems to me to be a much more complicated matter than people, than people tend to think of it as. Uh... we had what I would tend to regard in say the sixties as a largely liberal faculty. Although I guess that's not either(??) people from various schools and departments who were not particularly liberal at all, politically liberal, at all. But I don't, I guess it didn't, it didn't occur to me to understand that. I don't think I ever knew faculty people who were not politically liberal and when I came or soon after I came and the union was organized, I didn't know anybody who didn't join the union. Everybody joined the union because it seemed a sensible thing to do and, yet, as the union developed in power, the union served as a way to split faculty and I suddenly realized that I didn't want to continue to belong to the union because, although I had been pro-union ever since my childhood, I'd been used to thinking of unions in totally different ways from the way that the union at Northridge developed, that is union- thinking of the union as a, as a bread and butter. Pressure grew and what I think happened with the union at Northridge is that it became a group that wanted power... uh, and, and it ceased to care about, it ceased to care about bread and butter matters or when it cared about them, it cared about them in, in minor ways. It cared more about sharing power or getting power, and yet, that kind of faculty sharing of powers with the administration had already been accounted for, not in good ways, I think- in poor

10:00 ways, that is by, by the Faculty Senate. As it never seemed to me wise for the administration to be a part of the Faculty Senate. I thought that was an administration ploy that the faculty should never have agreed to.

JB: What was the process by which they did agree to it?

HF: I don't — It was in, it was in place when I came and I was interested in faculty governments. I think in nineteen-sixty-eight I was elected. Was it sixty-seven or sixty-eight? I can't remember anymore. Vice president of the faculty- it may have been sixty-nine. It was the year of the Black revolution. Was that sixty-nine?

JB: Sixty-eight.

HF: Sixty-eight?

JB: Uh, I believe you're right.

HF: I was vice president of the faculty and I was interested in that, but I-I — even then it seemed to me to be a mistake for the administration to wield so much power in the Faculty Senate, but I-I think the union became a divisive power on campus and I know that I began to object to the union immensely as an administrator, I saw the union defending people who, in my mind, seemed indefensible and that became one of its major goals, that is, to-to — It — Not it seemed to me to defend faculty rights, but to defend people who had, in some way, had fucked up their jobs and- and there needed to be some way to get rid of them and where getting rid of them seemed to be the most obvious thing in the world, obvious need in the world, the union almost invariably stepped in to save those jobs.

JB: Did it generally succeed or fail?

HF: Well, I guess it succeeded all too often, although it had its failures, but there were, to my mind, too many successes.

JB: So, it became difficult to not give a person tenure, in effect?

HF: That's right.

JB: Whether or not the person would get tenure?

HF: That's right and I-I and I think, I think one of the things that tended to undermine, uh... the development of a vigorous, intellectually superior faculty at Northridge was the attitude, which slowly became identified with the union attitude- that once someone had been hired, that was tantamount to giving them tenure. That never seemed to me to be true and that has, that has over, I say, a twenty-year history, largely become true.

There are not many departments like philosophy, for example, where people have had to fight seriously to get tenure and even — I-I think in English that became a good example. To get rid of somebody in English became almost impossible. Somebody who clearly had no right, no legitimate right for tenure, one found it pretty hard to get rid of.

JB: And the consequences of this in the long haul for the general faculty have been?

HF: I think have been negative. That is, too many intellectually bright and interesting people have either left because they found the intellectual climate of the faculty not stimulating or they found themselves surrounded by mediocre colleagues, and I was talking about student apathy in light of lack of concern. I think that is mirrored in faculty apathy, as well. It was almost impossible to get faculty interested in events that take place on this campus.

JB: Yet, that wasn't always true?

HF: It seems to me that it wasn't always true. I may be, I may be remembering those early days incorrectly, but it seemed to me that in the early days when I was here, people
15:00 went to everything. Uh, you remember in seventy, in eighty-five and eighty-six when Jerry asked me to run a, to organize and run a Center for the Humanities. It was very rare that I can get faculty people to come to any of the programs that I worked so hard to get off the ground.

JB: I had the same difficulty at the same time with the series that I was coordinating. It was —

HF: But to get back to your question, I think the Vietnam War made an enormous difference and not because I knew a lot of people who were in favor of the- of our participation in the Vietnam War. There were people and I did know who they were, but most of the people I knew were not in favor of the United States' participation in Vietnam, but there was a difference. Most of them were not pu-pro Viet Cong, either. And-and that became a dividing line between members of the faculty.

JB: Between those that were opposed, but not pro-Viet Cong.

HF: Opposed. Yeah.

JB: And those who were opposed and pro-Viet Cong.

HF: And pro-Viet Cong.

JB: Yeah.

HF: And I- and I think that-that stance, that latter stance which typified the radical student movement, that is being primarily pro-Viet Cong divided faculty, as well. Divided students and divided faculty. And then, of course, the issue of race. Uh... when I was Chairman of English and I would say this was-this was say, would be nineteen-sixty-seven, I had a telephone call from Bill Burwell and Archie Chatman. Could they come to a meeting with the English Department to talk about courses in Black writers for the department of English? And I said, "Yes, by all means," and since in my own classes in American literature, I wouldn't say that I had taught a great many Black writers, but I certainly had taught several Black writers and-and had some familiarity with particularly with southern Black writers. I invited Bill and Archie to come to an English Department meeting. They, with the most incredible politeness, spoke to the faculty about the fact that there was not a single course in Black literature in the English Department and would it be possible for someone to organize such course and the faculty listened very politely. At the end of their presentation, I thanked them for coming and that was the end of it. Nobody did anything. I didn't do anything. No one else did anything. What — That's an interesting example of two people who later became violently involved with wanting to change things on campus, having gone in the way they knew that they were expected to go.

JB: And nothing happened?

HF: And-and having — Nothing happened. So —

JB: Why did nothing happen?

HF: Well, for the same reason that I think that — Well, it's an attitude that's common today. If you're teaching, if you're teaching English literature and you're limited in units, you surely have to spend time dealing only with the most important writers, so
20:00 (chuckle), so that — Who would, who would have time to deal with, say, Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, which I think is one of the most powerful documents in American literature. Do you know that?

JB: Yes, I do.

HF: Yeah. How can that be as important as one of the classical American novels? Or, since in those days, particularly, most people didn't think about teaching American literature, it was- it was terribly important, anyway. It was only English literature that was important. How-how could one-how could one take the time to study Black writers, let alone writers from other minority groups? Uh, so that — The other thing is I said... I would not want to say that everything the Black revolutionary leadership did on this campus was right. Obviously, they did things that were not right, but one of the things that divided the faculty was the willingness by some people to understand that what they did was-was natural and had-had reasonable causes and the feeling by other faculty members to feel what they did was wrong under any circumstances and they should never be

forgiven. And it was that issue that lost me a number of — What turned out to be conservative friends on campus, those people that felt I had gone soft about Blacks because I began to see the — I began to feel that the campus needed to do something.

JB: Were these people racist?

HF: Well, it's a ter — To ask if they were racist, I mean you ask that about Del — That's a very touchy term.

JB: It's a fighting term.

HF: It's a very touchy term because, in one sense, we are all racist in ways that we perhaps can't help. Even at the moment that we think we're being at our most enlightened, we're being racist and I don't know that Del, white people in this country can-can escape being racist. They can certainly try and I-I think I had tried to escape being racist, particularly for someone who-who was brought up in the south, but I, you know, John, I explained to you that as a child, my father taught me why, as a Jew living in the South, I could not be racist. Why I could not say "nigger," for example, and why Jews should not be racist, which is not to say that Jews aren't, it's just that my father wasn't. Uh, but no I'm not — I don't- I don't think all the people who were outraged over the takeover of the Administration building and the subsequent fire and holding people captive in offices, those were- those were not very defensible things for people to have done. It's just that they became understandable.

JB: And you understood them? You saw —

HF: I began to understand them and began to feel that and I- and I must say that that incident that I've just described of having Archie and Bill who were-who were two of the major leaders of this movement, having had them just a year before come and
25:00 address the English Department and ask politely for a course in Black literature and have that totally ignored, I, that suddenly played a part in my coming to understand why they had done what they done and, of course, the story of what led to- of what led to what they did is a complicated story.

JB: Let's move into it, if we may a bit. Um, as you perceived it — Uh, let me ask you first a couple questions about leadership. We went through four presidents, or acting presidents, in one year. That very bad year- nineteen-sixty-eight. Why did- why did Ralph Prator resign as president when he did? Do you have any insight into that? Why was Paul Blomgren chosen to replace him? Do you know that?

HF: No, I don't know the answer to either of those questions.

JB: Fine. Now, from your perspective, um, looking back on it, did the Administration respond well or badly to the November 4th incident? How would you- how would you

characterize, in the light of twenty years now, the way in which the Administration reacted to that?

HF: Immediately or eventually?

JB: Uh, why don't- why don't we put it in both contexts? Why don't we put it both ways?

HF: Well, I-I-I think that in certain ways the university responded very well to what happened. That is, it realized that it had a crisis on its hands and was willing to meet, willing to come to some kind of discussion with Black leadership. But of course, that was carefully colored by the presence of another element. Well, when I say Black leadership, I mean the Chicano leadership, as well. Except, it seems to me that the Blacks were the more powerful of those two groups in-in this whole movement- the more aggressive and more forceful, but there was this student radical left, as well. And so the university was having to respond not only to the demands of the minorities, but they were having to respond to the demands of the radical students and-and I think it became essential to separate those demands because the demands of the radical students, if they were going to be met, had to be met in different ways than the demands of the Black students.

JB: What were the radicals demanding as distinct from the Blacks? What lay behind that separation?

HF: Well, one of the things the radical students, radical white students were demanding — Is that what you mean?

JB: Yeah. I think that's what you're implying.

HF: Yeah. One of the things the radical white students were demanding was, uh, uh, a total student voice and university governance and a university foreign policy and those issues were much more complicated than the demands by the minority students for some kind of minority presence on this campus and a rule for minority culture on this campus and, uh, what eventually-what eventually, uh, occurred was that, uh,
30:00 when the negotiations with Del broke down, they were re-opened secretly. Not with the white radical left, but with the minority students.

JB: Now this brings into discussion the Process Committee, doesn't it?

HF: Yeah.

JB: Let's stop here and change tapes and get into that.

[END OF TRACK 2]