

Harry Finestone, Track 3

[Track 2a]

- 00:00 JB: — Second to clear the first ten seconds or so. Now it should be fine. Continue.
- HF: They-they had people who-who passed political litmus tests, not academic tests and I remember so clearly the — There was one very bright, but non-suitable woman in the African Studies Department who used to give F's to all the white students who signed up for her courses and I remember coming down to Cleary's conference room and confronting her with this and bringing the records to show and showing that these students had done very well in other courses and, you know, what started out as her saying, "Well, you're right. I'll never do this again," and so on, but she kept doing it. I don't know why she left, but she's one of those people out of a lot of people, you know, who didn't stay. Uh... one of the major functions of a Pan-African Studies Department and a Chicano Studies Department and this is where the Chicanos have done so much better than the Blacks, in my opinion, is not educating Blacks about minority culture, but educating Whites. One of the things I kept saying to this woman, who was giving all the Whites who signed up for her courses F's, I said, "You're doing the exact opposite of — These-these young people who are coming into your courses because they're interested in the subject matter, the people who are going to grow up (cough)- going to grow up to be the voting citizens of the Valley or wherever they're going to — You're busy making enemies."
- JB: How did she respond?
- HF: Well, she didn't care about them. I mean, "get whitey" was her attitude, but that was a message I kept delivering as often as I could- that maybe the function of these departments was not to educate (cough) minority students (cough), but rather to educate- but rather to educate white students and that's why I was certainly was in favor of letting white students takes classes in the ethnic minority programs because it seemed to me that if you could find faculty who're willing to deal with white students fairly — I mean, her argument was, was a simple one- Have Black students have been dealt with fairly? I'm just giving them a taste of what Black students get and I said, "No, you're not doing the same thing at all." If anybody, any Black student came to me to say that a white teacher had behaved the way to him that you have behaved to these white students, the university would move rapidly to discipline that faculty member. No fa — No white faculty would have the gall to think that he could get away with it so openly as you have done. But, they've not been noted for being vigorous, particularly the Black Department. They are often easier than they ought to be, so that large numbers of white students who signed up for those classes drop them, eventually, because they- they are not interesting enough or vigorous enough or they take them because they're easy.

JB: Hm.

HF: Or will count for easy units that they don't need to worry about and how much this has to do with the history of the development of those classes, I don't know. Uh, but I tend to think that if the university had been more thoughtful in developing these two departments, we would have stronger departments than we now have.

5:00 JB: Was there any resisting the pressure at that time to establish the departments at that time from —

HF: Well, as I said, this-the — Oh, was there resistance in the university?

JB: No, was there-was there any resisting the on rush of pressure? It sounds as though the students got more than they anticipated (unintelligible).

HF: The faculty did resist it, but they were voted down.

JB: And they were voted down by other faculty who felt swept to create the departments then—it was a matter of pressing importance to establishment.

HF: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

JB: What am I-what am I not seeing? In other words, this is all so complex and you were so deeply involved in — And I have the feeling I may not ask all the questions or even the right questions. What would you add to the convolutions of these events to make the picture complete?

HF: I don't know. You know one of the things that happened to me in nineteen-seventy, when I joined the administration, I was told that I was going to be the Administrator responsible for the EOP (laugh) and I groaned and I said, "Okay." I don't remember who was running it then, it was one of the series of people who kept changing very rapidly and I s- I was responsible for-for two, three years that I-that I- I thought, cleverly, got it shifted to Student Affairs so that I could —

JB: (chuckle)

HF: I could stop going mad, but, uh... hiring the director of EOP was a political move. That it was often not a question of hiring the best person, but of hiring the politically right person.

JB: From the community?

HF: From the community. One of the-one of the people who left in disgrace was a- had been a student here.

JB: Did you feel that the politics that was involved for any of those departments in hiring the staff and in framing the EOP program exceeded the normal tenor of academic politics, which plays a role in-in RTP processes of a certain degree, otherwise, this sounds much more intensely political than a normal course of affairs, in a normal (unintelligible).

HF: Well, I think what happened finally was that a lot of faculty simply gave up on-in their opposition to all of this because they were convinced that the Administration had bought it and were going to go ahead with it, but I'm not sure I believe that a lot of that opposition would have been very helpful.

JB: Why was that?

HF: Well, uh —

JB: (unintelligible)

HF: You-you used the word before. I-I-I question that what — It's a word that we always reduce to, that is- the racist belief that there's not much there and there is not- that it's not really an academic matter as though Leisure Studies, as we practice it in Northridge, is an academic matter.

(both chuckle)

JB: In the ways it's framed, I get the picture of white resistance substantially being overcome by other whites of better will. Would that be an accurate summation of the process?

HF: I don't know (unintelligible).

JB: I don't want to put words in your mouth.

HF: Uh, I don't know whether it was come by other whites, by the will of other whites who- who felt that political climate of the period simply demanded it. And-and that might have been a misperception as I told you a while ago, I learned much later that students were surprised of how much we were willing to give away.

JB: Did you feel stampeded?

HF: Yes.

JB: And what-what-what were the three or four, or whatever number of factors you

10:00

consider most important in leading to that — If you — Let me use kind of laden words—capitulation, that concession?

HF: Yeah. Well, guilt obviously.

JB: Guilt.

HF: Mmh, it was a great deal of Jewish and non-Jewish guilt (both laugh) involved in all this and a kind of idealism. That is, in those years, I think we—we were perhaps, overly optimistic about what the results would be and idealistic about the justice of those causes and the fact that here was an opportunity to do something and we should not be stingy and not be mean and do the right thing.

JB: Could we turn to contemporary, contemporaneous matter, the General Education Program of nineteen-seventy-one — What was the origin of that new program? Uh, do you recall much about it where it came from, why it came?

HF: Well, it largely came from me— that is the push for change in General Education largely came from me. Uh, as I read academic literature — This was—this was— this antedated the Harvard change, as I remember it.

JB: Yeah and maybe I'm—I'm being unclear in—in stating it because I'm thinking that first GE change, the one that predated the major reform of the mid and late seventies that created the task force and led to the program that we have today. Am I making myself clear in this? (unintelligible)

HF: That wasn't seventy-one. That was in the sixties, wasn't it?

JB: Was it? I think it was in seventy-one, but I could be wrong. I believe it went into effect in seventy-one.

HF: Or it may — Oh, I see. Yes.

JB: Yeah.

HF: Yes. Oh, that had nothing to do with me. (both laugh)

JB: I'm glad I could clarify because I rather suspected you didn't want it to. (laugh)

HF: Yeah. Yeah.

JB: Do you know what it—where it did come from?

HF: No, I don't know where it came from. It-it came-it came from, if anything, it came from a climate, which was reflected in-which was reflected in all the major universities and that is, General Education is not a very significant matter and the less attention anybody payed to it, the better off we all were and let's get on with the more important matter of students dealing with their majors. Now, that attitude still exists in many major research universities all ov— Uh, some of them you have made up of students to abandon(??) those attitudes did not-did not- all of them did not (unintelligible), but when I became the Dean of Academic Planning in nineteen-seventy— I thought that started earlier, but it's possible that it didn't. It took me about a couple of years to realize that I was not at all happy with the Gen Ed program, that it was that it offered very little to anybody and was largely, largely a political program or a political arrangement, which was what the change in General Education became- a political arrangement.

JB: That is the change of the seventies that ushered in the program of the eighties (unintelligible) our arrangement.

HF: Yeah.

JB: To what extent and in what ways would you say that's the case- that is to say to what extent was it-to what extent is the GE Program that we have enforced now a matter of pure pedagogy as distinct from pure politics?

15:00 HF: Oh, I don't think it's pedagogy, at all. I think it's all political.

JB: Right.

HF: Uh... The-the only way-the only way to have achieved real reform in General Education — Well, let-let me interrupt a moment. It occurs to me to go back and say something about that GE Program that you and I were objecting to that came in in the late sixties, maybe in the early seventies.

JB: Mm-hmm.

HF: That was an accommodation for the burgeoning professional programs, that is, it offered the least amount of resistance to the development of professional- to the number of professional courses and I'm sure that was one of the reasons for its easy passage and it seemed to me as I thought about General Education in the seventies that the-that the only way to-to deal with-with the professionalization of CSUN was to create a large body of courses in General Education that all students would have to take to ensure some basic cultural awareness in the student body and as I think about it, I joined the task force that we both worked so hard at-attempted to do that. It attempted to be non-departmental and so far as that was possible and it attempted to-to be serious about General Education. Now the-that program was totally unacceptable to the

professional schools and they set about destroying it and I think they set about destroying it by enlisting the help of the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences, which settled for a General Education Program in which everybody would get a little of something.

JB: That is, the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences settled for that deal?

HF: That is that they agreed to change—they agreed to a General Education Program, which certainly a number of them didn't approve of, but simply because the professional schools had agreed we would have a program big enough, so that every department in Social and Behavioral Sciences would get its share.

JB: Ah.

HF: Ah, so, those idealistic interdisciplinary courses, which would not accrue to any given department were doomed, in large measure to failure.

JB: I recall those courses painfully and well.

HF: Uh, in—in the years since I left Administration, I have—I attempted a couple of times to suggest another approach to the whole matter, which I thought would be appealing to faculty, but, and—and to departments, and would be better than what we have. Then I made this recommendation a couple of times and it died each time. That is to cut the General Education Program that we now have to its legal minimum— whatever that is. I can't tell you right now, but we are far in excess of the legal minimum, of the system legal minimum by some nine units—would be to cut the current General Education Program to its legal CSU minimum and then require a minor of upper-division courses for all graduating students at Northridge so that — And it would be a minor that would not be made up of a branch of a major, that is, you couldn't — If you were in Business and Marketing, you couldn't take an accounting minor, that sort of thing, but it would be a minor that would be in a different—in a different field.

JB: And a relatively limited unit total?

HF: And a minor. I thought of about fifteen units.

JB: Mm-hm. But it hasn't gone anywhere?

HF: It hasn't gone anywhere. And—and I know why. One of the reasons it hasn't gone anywhere is that it doesn't guarantee anybody anything and it has its dangers, that is, easy minors might attract more students than they—than they're worth. But not — There are some departments that might not get anything out of that program.

JB: So, they would be threatened?

HF: So, they would be threatened. Yeah.

JB: Let me ask you this. I am, perhaps I'm perceiving the past through my own set of rose-colored glasses and perhaps it's not accidental that I'm perceiving the past in a way that's congruent with my own sense of what I was doing as Associate Dean when I was doing it, but it seems to me that that notwithstanding, it might be said that the nineteen-seventies were kind of a Golden Age for quicker innovation and for teaching on this campus. I don't mean necessarily to conjoin the two, but do you think that that perception holds any water at all with your longer view of the history of the campus?

HF: Well, we did things in the seventies that we hadn't done before and I certainly don't want to overestimate my participation in that, but I did have something to do with it. That is, we started — (unintelligible) was very active in this. We started those big twelve-unit courses. That woman in Sociology- Bluth —

JB: Bluth- B.J. Bluth.

HF: B.J. Bluth was a very active participant in this program. This was before she became a committed Futurist.

JB: (laughs)

HF: But, those two large courses called "The Search for Identity" and "The Search for Community"- an enormous amount of effort was expended in putting those things together, and in developing a curriculum, fiddling with resources, so that they would pay for themselves and then that big Humanities grant we had, which enabled us to develop new courses in Humanities. All that happened in the seventies. So, there were things going on at that time. In Interdisciplinary Studies that did not go on before and did not go on since then. We missed the boat somewhere in not pushing ahead with those programs.

JB: Somehow they didn't get firm placement, lodgment, nor did the Institute for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning, which was one of the great experiments of that day.

HF: That's right. That's right. Well, the success of the Institute for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning, I think, was a personal matter. That is, you had a workaholic in charge, Dan Sedey, who was willing to work day and night in a number of different fashions to put together —

JB: An instituter?

25:00

HF: I don't know whether I ever told you this. That proposal to start an Institute for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning was something that came about from a committee assignment that Earl Wallis and I had. The Chancellor's office called a meeting and they said, "Do you have some money to have a-some kind of program for the advancement or for the improvement of teaching?" And Earl and I went to the Chancellor's office to that meeting and we were told that we would have a- that there was going to be a competitive program and that we can submit grants and Earl and I got to help one of the — Oh, I can't remember his name. He's in secondary ed— He's an environmentalist in secondary ed— What a bright man. Do you have a catalog?

JB: Yeah.

HF: Uh?

JB: I just recently remembered the idea of having a phone directory (unintelligible) arbitrarily listed.

HF: Oh, was the faculty phone directory listed? Faculty in the Yellow Pages? Or we don't?

JB: Just departments. Faculty are all in the Blank Pages.

HF: Who else was there? Somebody in Science. Somebody in —This guy, this is an environmentalist in secondary ed—

JB: The person I think of in this connection is Don Cochrane, I believe. Cochrane- I don't believe is your man.

HF: Hm. Don Cochrane in Education, you mean?

JB: Yeah.

HF: He may have been in that committee. Yeah.

JB: I'm still in touch with him.

HF: You are? I know all about him. Yes, I've forgotten about him. He may have been a member, but he's not the one I meant. He was in Social and Philosophic —

JB: Right.

HF: And we wrote this grant and we got the- we won the grant. We were one of six winners of the grant and then came — We were faced with having to pick somebody to run it and we were unfortunate to pick Sedey because after Sedey's departure, the institute

just collapsed. Nobody was willing to spend the-expend the kind of energy that such an enterprise requires.

JB: Was there an intent to make it permanent?

HF: Well, I think if he'd been as successful, there would've been an intent to make it permanent. I certainly wanted it to be permanent and at one point, I think I had convinced Dave that it should be.

JB: Dave Benson?

HF: Yeah, but we couldn't get a — The old formula for running it seemed to have- to be outdated and we needed a new idea and we couldn't get anybody to come forward for a new justification and explanation of what such an institute would be and why it would be useful and so it was shelved and then abandoned.

JB: You've been very patient in answering questions that are diffuse and diverse and I think probably hard to contemplate over the span of two hours. If you indulge me just a little longer, I'd like to ask you, first of all, whether there is any event-incident- any perhaps favorite story that you have about our institution seems to capture some large part of the- in an anecdote perhaps- a human interest story- anything that might epitomize us, what we do?

HF: I might be able to think of such a thing if I have time to do so.

JB: Yeah.

HF: I can't — Nothing comes to mind at this moment.

JB: Then let me ask you, with our tape running out, and we could always put another one in you'd like to- whether there's a question or imperative questions that I haven't asked, but which you would've expected me to or which you like to be asked, so that you can answer them.

HF: Well I-there is a pattern of questions which I think you should ask and I'm not sure that I'm the person to answer them, but there are others who can- others who have been more familiar with the history of the university in recent years. When is this history to end?

JB: We can go all the way to the present, and I expect it will, a very close run on(??) the present.

HF: Well, it seems to me that if you are able to get close to the idea of what has happened in the university to shift the emphasis almost entirely away from the academic

enterprise, what complicated set of causes or what people have been mostly involved in. That that would remain a sad, but necessary part of this history because I do think that in the last ten years the university has not improved and its problems have become intensified and there seems to be no really — There seems to be no serious, sensible —

[END OF TRACK 3]