Michele Cooper, Track 3

Tape 2, side A

JB: We're back on tape.

MC: Okay. But I told her that I—I didn't appreciate her putting on that spot like that in class because of the weight she carries as professor and nat—naturally, students are going to sympathize with her, especially me being, again, the only black person in the class. And the only person who stood up for me was a Latino guy in the class who says, "I don't think," he's telling the faculty person, "I don't think you see her point. She's not saying what you're saying she's saying." And that was the whole point that we—I was making in the first place and he began to make with me that she didn't understand. So she—we had to go through two hours before she understood my position, and that as a faculty you cannot jump all over me in the classroom like that and put me in that position. So, of course, I didn't go back to the class for about a week because I just needed to chill out from that and relax from that or take a break from that and—and let the other students relax too. Well they eventually got over it, you know? And—and eventually after a couple of weeks, the students warmed up to me again because they actually found out who I was. Nobody knew who I was and they found out the things I had been doing, the people I had worked with. And then they started warming up to me—as a matter of fact, they were all hugging me, the ones that graduated with me at the end of the year. But if I had not been AS President, I think those students would not have liked me all the way to the end of the year. They would have thought I was a parochial black person who is very limited in her scope and view and experience because of the way I was placed—the position I was placed in. So I wouldn't mention the faculty's name because after we talked we worked it out and she understood, you know, and—and apologized and everything. But I just think that—and she was part-time, she wasn't a full-time tenured person. But I think that it was very important to me at that point to say that I think that faculty need to be required to take cultural sensitivity workshops. Even if it is just to teach them the impact that they have on students. I don't think they know. I really don't think they—I don't think they know how much they influence—and even me being an older student, I look up to faculty. I mean, I call you Dr. Broesamle, you say, "You can call me John." I mean it's going to take me time to get used to it, you know, because that's how much respect I have for faculty. And I don't think they understand the power that they wield and maybe that's why they get so defensive on things like a Discriminatory Harassment Policy and different things like that; I don't know.

JB: I think that's very—a very subtle perception and quite an accurate one. The faculty don't know how much power they wield. Um, I want to ask you two other questions, which—which you can address briefly because of the constraints of time. At least I hope they're questions that can be addressed briefly. I first heard you speak in a December teach-in on the Gulf War. You then had a brother in the armed forces and you spoke most eloquently. I wonder what reflections you had on the impact of that war on this campus.

Does anything strike you in retrospect about the way in which students responded to that conflict?

(00:03:44)

MC: I think that the response—the immediate response to the conflict was a very admirable response because the students were seeing friends who were just pulled out of school and shipped off to the Gulf. So I think it hit home and students were very supportive; they were anti-war initially. Once we got into the War, I thought it was nice to see a majority of students pro our country and supporting our president, even though they may not have initially agreed—and I was one of those students—with his entrance into this, exchange. I think that I was proud to see that most students did take the position of supporting the president, which we had to do. When I look back now in retrospect and I look at what's happening right now, I just we how easily we forget and how the war is over. Men died; men are back and men in the military are still considered second class citizens. They're still looked down upon. You go into the military as—if you can't do anything else in life and I just—I'm just disappointed in the way that the military is viewed by our—our citizens because and, you know, the students on the campus too I think because these people fight and die for us. You know, I had never experienced a war but it hit me that way. These people fight and die for us; they risk their lives, and if nothing else, I owe them respect for that. Even if they are—I mean, there isn't enough money in the world that the federal government can pay them to go over and die. So, you know, you they get paid for it? No. No one gets paid to die. And they get paid substandard wages, as far as I'm concerned. So I think in retrospect that there's still not enough appreciation for servicemen and the service that they do for this country. And there're so many things that they do that that people don't know about that aren't involved—when they're not involved in a major war. And they still have soldiers over there, and I think that not a lot of people don't even know that—that there are still soldiers over there working with the Kurdish situation and trying to get some control over that, you know? Um, as far as I—I know there are. And I just, you know, it just amazes me how people for—forget, you know? It's like oh, that was—it's kind of like our media has put us into a mode of being a hype society. So when something's in and it's really happening, like somebody told me about a year ago that black people were in, I thought that was funny. (JB sighs). Um, (MC laughs) very funny, actually was a guy I was dating and I broke up with him. It was, I was going out—I was in an interracial relationship. He's like, "Blacks are really in." I go, "Oh, is that why you're going out with me?" I mean I was kind of confused on why we're going out, but it's kind of like with this war and other things, you know, that—that it seems like when something's in, people are into it. People forget and—and I think that has to do with us moving from being a literate society to being a, uh, audio-visual society and so people just aren't in touch with themselves because they really—things aren't penetrating like they do when you read them and study them as you, as when you see it on a movie or on a documentary or hear it on the radio, so.

(00:07:34)

JB: One last question. We've talked a big deal about what you've done for this campus as Associated Students President. It's maybe a little early to reflect on this. And if I were to ask you this question ten years from now, you might reflect on it differently. But from the vantage point of June the 16th, 1991, what has the campus done for you?

MC: Well, an overhaul on my personhood when I came here, I think that I was, confused, nervous, slightly insecure, internally. On the surface, I was never any of those things. But internally I was, and I walk away confident, secure, visionary and not afraid. So I think that's the greatest impact and that's (MC laughs) a great impact. I mean it sounds—those are brief statements but sometimes there's a lot being said in very shor—in very short statement. So I think the university, it changed my life, you know? I came from a Midwestern, black-and-white type of town where the minority were the blacks, and the majority were whites. And—and that was life, you know? You went to school. You grew up. You got a job. You worked. You had your friends. Blacks stayed together; whites stayed together. Not in any way of animosity or dislike, but just separate. And I come here and I see the diversity I couldn't appreciate the diversity or even understand what was going on when I first moved to California. But after working living and working at CSUN I really learned to appreciate the difference of my u—of my experience now versus my upbringing and the value that all people have to offer this world and I really learned to appreciate myself because I remember when I was sixteen years old, I told my mother I didn't see myself as a color, black or white, and—and like I said, at that time, the only thing I knew was black and white and Chaldeans(??). And I said, "I see myself as Michelle." And after living in California, I mean not living in California, but go—attending Northridge, I went through a phase where it was like—especially when I went to this Black Awareness phase and dealing with some of the hostilities that the black community on the campus that was like, "Well, it is important to know who you are and people need to know that I'm African American, and I need to be identified as Black and I'm Black and I'm proud kind of thing. And, you know, it's all gone full-circle and I'm back to, at twenty-eight-years-old, I can say that I don't see myself as a color. I see myself as Michelle. And I don't think that that takes away from my Africanness; I don't think it takes away from my Americanness; I don't think it takes away from my womanness; I don't think it takes away from anything. And I just feel—I feel good; I feel full; I feel rich and I feel like there're great things in store for me to be challenged by and I feel like that I'm ready emotionally, and—and psychologically and intellectually, which is most important in terms of my experience at Northridge, to meet those challenges.

(00:11:11)

JB: Well on that I—I'm not sure that there's anything left that could be said, but is there anything more you'd like to say, on tape?

MC: Thanks for the interview.

JB: Oh, thank you for agreeing to it. It's been my pleasure

MC: Okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW]