

1 Quirke: Hi, this is Carol Quirke. I am a professor in the American Studies  
2 Department at SUNY Old Westbury. I am interviewing Harris Wofford, the first  
3 president of SUNY Old Westbury. Today is December 19, 2011. I am wondering if  
4 you could tell us a little bit about your early life.

5 Wofford: Well, I have eight decades, four score and five years. Early life, very early,  
6 I became interested in politics and the presidents. My family then was living in  
7 Johnson City, Tennessee and my grandparents on my mother's side in New York  
8 City. We went back and forth. In the back and forth we very often stopped at  
9 Washington DC. My parents were very non-political Republicans, but they believed  
10 in all the monuments from Jefferson to Lee, to Washington, and above all Abraham  
11 Lincoln, the monuments, and the Capitol, and the Supreme Court.

12           When we moved —when I was seven years old from East Tennessee to  
13 Scarsdale, New York because of my father's job change— I'm told that the only thing  
14 I cared about was that my pictures of Abraham Lincoln, and Jefferson, and  
15 Washington, and the Declaration of Independence, would not be lost or broken so  
16 that they can go up on the wall. At age ten, in a Republican family I declared for  
17 Franklin D. Roosevelt and wouldn't ride to school in the family car the last few  
18 weeks —again I'm told— because it had a Landon Republican sunflower sticker on  
19 it and I either bicycled or walked to school, so a huge sacrifice. So I was a somewhat  
20 funny little boy.

21           My best educational experience along the line —shortening this— was a trip  
22 around the world when I was twelve with my grandmother, who had discovered she

23 could live on her husband's pension as a teacher or principal —who had died— if  
24 she went on cheap tramp trips. Which were in the thirties or early forties, very, very  
25 cheap. My grandmother persuaded my parents to pay for me to go and accompany  
26 her on a six-months trip around the world on the eve of World War II —1938.  
27 Heard Churchill thunder his warnings against Hitler. Literally, in the square heard  
28 Benito Mussolini go out on balcony in Piazza Benicia, and declare the Second Roman  
29 Empire, and take Italy out of the League of Nations, and celebrate their victory over  
30 Abyssinia/Ethiopia. And watched the fascist Torchlight Night Parade as tens of  
31 thousands marched through the streets with their torches. In Bombay saw  
32 Muhatma Ghandi.

33         In Shanghai, the Japanese had destroyed the inner-Chinese city, occupied it,  
34 no human beings were in it, and they sold looting permits. Cook's tour and  
35 American press, for five dollars —I think it was— took you to a former restaurant;  
36 none of the roofs were standing, hardly. Either a rich man's home or a restaurant, in  
37 our case it was a restaurant. You had an hour to loot. The other tourists came out  
38 with china, and silver and works of art and I came out with a four-foot stuffed  
39 ostrich. But I arrived home as a know-it-all foreign policy expert in the seventh  
40 grade.

41         I became an ardent interventionist to get into the war. I got a hundred —at  
42 least a hundred— Scarsdale students to go down to Madison Square Garden for the  
43 rally to get us into the war in the month before Pearl Harbor. Soon after Pearl  
44 Harbor I got interested in an idea of a Union Of Democracies as a way to win the war

45 and to be a nucleus of a world organizational power to keep the peace. We started  
46 the first high school chapter of the Federalist Movement in late '42. Before I went in  
47 to the Army Air Corps at age eighteen, eager —like most of the boys in my  
48 generation— to get into the war as fast as we could. We had over a hundred  
49 chapters, had a convention —our first convention— in Columbia University. Had a  
50 lot of publicity, young Paul Revere goes to the Middle West for a two-months  
51 speaking trip.

52         During which my wife-to-be Clare Lindgren escorted me through Wisconsin.  
53 On the train to Eau Claire, Wisconsin I fell in love with her at age seventeen. Her  
54 nickname was E.L. for Emmie Lou. I said, “Well, we could do better than that.” In  
55 the end she changed her last name and I gave her the name Clare for Eau Claire, we  
56 might say. So that takes you to coming out of the Army Air Corps. By then I had  
57 gotten persuaded by the argument for the Great Books, as a central part of  
58 education.

59 Quirke: What —like the University of Chicago...

60 Wofford: Whether at St. Johns College in the full four-year program or the shorter  
61 version of the Great Books at the Hutchins College —Robert Hutchins of the  
62 University of Chicago. Chicago was a tremendous experience for me. I chose the  
63 shorter version partly because the woman I was pursuing was in the University of  
64 Minnesota, a little nearer than St. John’s College. But I had in the process of deciding  
65 come to know the founding dean and architect of the Great Books program of St.  
66 John’s. I never had him in a class but we had various seminars and various

67 situations in the years that followed. He was sort of Socrates for me. And the idea  
68 that there is a great conversation in Western history and that each generation has  
69 the opportunity to carry on that conversation and take it in a direction of their  
70 choice, that you better therefore read the best literature of that conversation.

71           And of course this Chicago and St. John's doctrine are the main teachers —or  
72 the authors—and the teacher's main function is to facilitate an argument with the  
73 author —of questioning—they argue with each other. They have this extraordinary  
74 other quality at Chicago which is if you were reading the Brothers Karamozov,  
75 everyone in your class was reading the Brothers Karamozov that day, and at night  
76 declared each other Ivan or Alyosha or Dmitri. We had a common denominator and  
77 a sense of very intense intellectual community.

78           All of which I guess —one more jump, obviously leaving out a lot of things—  
79 The Peace Corp itself which I had helped Sargent Shriver start. I had been his  
80 deputy during the 1960 Kennedy Campaign, and coordinated the Civil Right's  
81 section, and was very much involved, I had been. Oh, I left out, my wife and I had a  
82 fellowship to India. In my case to pursue the trail of Gandhi; he died —was killed—  
83 before we got there. It was India that made me look back at America and see that a  
84 central problem on the soul of America was the discrimination, the utter prejudice  
85 against people of color.

86 Quirke: Actually, you are reminding me as you discuss when you are at the  
87 University of Chicago that is about the time that James Lawson, I believe, did one of

88 the first Freedom Rides, wasn't it? In Chicago, when they attempted to  
89 desegregate...

90 Wofford: I didn't know, I didn't know James —Jim Lawson ever very much. But I  
91 had great respect for what I had learned somewhere in the mid-50s about him. That  
92 he had been in India, and he had become a real Gandhi teacher and practitioner.  
93 Maybe more teacher than practitioner I don't know. He was crucial in the Nashville  
94 Sit-in and helping to train the Nashville College students for pure Gandhian non-  
95 violence, which was never practiced more dramatically or heroically than in the  
96 Freedom Ride. For some reason our trail never crossed significantly but he was an  
97 early person that King looked to and learned from.

98 I also got involved because my wife and I had done a book on India called  
99 *India of Fire*: my part of it was the Gandhi pitch; my wife was the anti-Ghandian, let  
100 us say. When we came home with anemic dysentery —both of us each had a serious  
101 case— and the cure then was arsenic in your butt for three months once a week.  
102 Once when the doctor was injecting one of us he said, “you know, this is the most  
103 marvelous medicine, one ounce is going to cure you and ten ounces will kill.” And  
104 Clare said, “That's just what I think about civil disobedience.” And that spirit by the  
105 way she brought to Old Westbury. She hated the sit-in. I tended to find the sit-in in  
106 the first college, at the end of the first year —It's hard for some people to believe  
107 because it was very hard fought— but, I found it fascinating and I found the  
108 encounter fully challenging. Aspects of what went on at Old Westbury at that point  
109 were very discouraging from my point of view. But, the sit-in was not in a sense that

110 part of it; we had scheduled the last week of school to be a week of evaluating the  
111 first session. And we had engaged a couple of facilitators for the workshops to  
112 spend the week probing what we had learned and what worked and didn't work.

113           When we got to the Planting Field's domes, or Quonset huts, that we were in  
114 because the main mansion burned down a few days after Martin Luther King was  
115 killed. Nothing connected with King, a workman on the roof turned over a torch and  
116 it caught the roof and the fire went down right to the whole third floor with my own  
117 papers of a lifetime at that point got burned. That's another story we can talk about.

118 Quirke: That's horrible. I didn't know you had lost your papers.

119 Wofford (14:20): Coming back from India I connected with Martin Luther King. I  
120 became an unpaid but passionate advisor, or strategist with him.

121 Quirke: This is while you were working for the federal government when you were  
122 a lawyer for the Civil Right's Commission. Is that right?

123 Wofford: No, not at all. When I was a lawyer as council to Father Hesburgh of Notre  
124 Dam eon the Civil Rights Commission I couldn't do much publicly with King, I did a  
125 lot privately but this was soon after the boycott began. I had sent out a paper to a  
126 lot of people that I had done at a convocation at Hampton Institute, now Hampton  
127 University, on Gandhi the Civil Rights Lawyer. Other people had circulated it.

128           I got a very angry hand-written note from Thurgood Marshall, the head of the  
129 NAACP legal battle, a very heroic battle. He said, "This is the most dangerous  
130 doctrine you could turn loose. Because our whole strategy has been to make white

131 southerners —who think that segregation is the order of God, and to integrate  
132 would be to violate natural law, who believe that that’s the message of the Bible —  
133 we are trying to make them obey the Constitution even though they thought it was  
134 unconscionable to interpret it as equality for African-Americans.” So Thurgood  
135 Marshall said, “You turn this loose and you’ll undermine everything we’ve done.  
136 That you have to obey the law no matter how much you find it against your  
137 conscience.”

138 Quirke: And he continued to be critical of civil disobedience.

139 Wofford: It’s a very reasonable argument. But the law needed help it seemed to me  
140 that would come by the adding of the Gandhian dimension.

141 Quirke: Can I just ask what animated your interest in Civil Rights? That was an  
142 unusual interest in the mid 1950’s.

143 Wofford: My first —when I went back to Johnson City after we had moved to New  
144 York. A cousin —I won’t give his name now because his family’s alive but a distant,  
145 not a very close cousin— had this barbecue outside this little 20,000 at most town of  
146 Johnson City in Tennessee and said, “Little Harris Jr. are you still going to be  
147 president of the United States?” I don’t know whether I had learned prudence to  
148 deny that or not at that point. Then he said, “You’ve been up North a year, I suppose  
149 you come down here now, do you believe the Negroes and us are equals?” And I  
150 must have said, “Yes.” And he said, “Well, what about the monkeys and us?” And I  
151 had just been absorbed with Dr. Doolittle and apparently —this is something you  
152 know I know from the family telling me this happened I don’t really vividly

153 remember it, I do remember him bellowing something— I answered something  
154 about, “We need to communicate before we can really decide what the rights of  
155 animals are but Dr. Doolittle points the way.” And he bellowed out, “Little Harris Jr.  
156 has been up north one year and he believes that us and the Negroes and the  
157 monkeys are all equals.” I still remember the bellowing.

158           But I was fifteen months in Selma, Alabama waiting to see whether they  
159 would train the pilots and navigators who had been selected as volunteers and  
160 whether they would be needed in the Pacific War. They didn’t need us for the  
161 European War anymore in 1944. So we waited and waited. I often went into Selma  
162 town on regular pass. I occasionally went out to a farm family and rode horses in  
163 Dallas County. I never walked the four blocks off Broad Street, Main Street of Selma,  
164 to where the pavements ended and the black community began. I never realized  
165 that the county of Dallas was two-thirds black and only a handful, not more than ten  
166 had been registered to vote. To the extent I knew anything about it I was against  
167 discrimination.

168           I was a passionate crusader for a union of democracies. Like President  
169 Kennedy in most of his life, which was almost entirely focused on domestic issues —  
170 excuse me, just the opposite of that—who in his inaugural address had nothing on  
171 domestic, any domestic issue. Because the Civil Rights vote had been so large at the  
172 last minute two of us got to Ted Sorensen and they added the word, and the  
173 powerful paragraph, “We will fight any fight, bear any burden for defending human  
174 rights everywhere in the world,” they added, “At home and around the world.” It



175 was only later that I realized it wasn't just Civil Rights but that the whole inaugural  
176 address except for the Call to Service was, the whole of it, was on the relationship to  
177 the world.

178           That was something I shared until I went out to the world, to India and  
179 looked back at America. And despite all the racial discrimination in India and the  
180 caste system, America —it clearly looked like the great scandal of America. While I  
181 was at Covington and Burling Law firm in Washington, a big establishment firm —  
182 Dean Atchison the former secretary of state, one of their top partners.

183           I was an unofficial advisor to King. He joked; I was the only lawyer on his  
184 team that would help him go to jail instead of using all the tricks of the trade to keep  
185 him out. To finish this swing —I think finishing it for the moment— the experience  
186 of not just helping Shriver plan and craft the Peace Corps but then leaving the White  
187 House Civil Rights assistant to the President —Kennedy— I readily succumbed to  
188 Shriver's request that I go —his siren call— to go and be head of the Peace Corps in  
189 Africa, and director of the then largest Peace Corps Program in Ethiopia.

190           The experience —the two years in the Peace Corps for me, and my family,  
191 and 400 volunteers, who approximately doubled the number of secondary school  
192 teachers in the country at that time— I viewed the Peace Corps as a kind of  
193 University in dispersion. The learning about the problems of the world, and a world  
194 perspective, and first-hand knowledge of Ethiopia and Africa, the power of that  
195 educationally was something that very much spilled over my experience at Old  
196 Westbury.

197 Quirke: I think we should move to Old Westbury.

198 Wofford: You've had enough.

199 Quirke: It's just that you've had such an interesting life we could take many, many  
200 hours discussing it.

201 Wofford: Well I'm trying to make sense of my life. The book that I wrote on  
202 Kennedy and Martin Luther King subtitle was *Making Sense of the Sixties*. So now  
203 the book that I'm trying to finish is trying to make sense of quite a few decades.

204 Quirke: Can you tell us, I know you spoke briefly with Professor Frisken, Mandy,  
205 about coming to Old Westbury? How is it you became connected to the college?  
206 Who spoke to you about it? What did you understand the College's mission would  
207 be when you were first encountering SUNY Old Westbury?

208 Wofford: Well, I never dreamed of being a college president. I'd never actually  
209 thought about being a college teacher until Hesburgh, Father Hesburgh enlisted me  
210 to teach in Notre Dame Law School. I stayed on their faculty for quite a few years,  
211 but only two years really taught there. One of those two years I was by then also in  
212 the Kennedy campaign and in the White House. He wanted to set up a Civil Rights  
213 institute at Notre Dame and I resisted joining Kennedy for the time being.

214 But I did have that academic moment for a few years. I got to know the  
215 president of the State University of New York because when I came back from  
216 Ethiopia in 1964 I became deputy —the associate director of the Peace Corps and  
217 dealing with the training programs in the Peace Corps was a major function. I had

218 dealt with the State University of New York on contracts or no contracts with the  
219 Peace Corps and gotten to know Sam Gould the president [ed: Chancellor]. He came  
220 to me one day out of the blue and he said, "I'm going to take you by surprise, but  
221 we're starting a new college on Long Island. It'll be the College at Old Westbury that  
222 we want to be an experimental college. We want to get ahead of the wave coming  
223 out of Berkeley of student protests and uprising." And then he read me the mandate  
224 of the College, that was in the state plan and he said, "It's a completely clean slate  
225 except for what we put in as the mandate."

226 Quirke: This would be in '65?

227 Wofford: This would be in the Spring of '66. —No excuse me— whatever season it  
228 would be before I left to go to Old Westbury in the fall of '66, probably the spring of  
229 '66. Let me, can I read just a few excerpts?

230 Quirke: That would be lovely.

231 Wofford: This is the first catalogue, that after an intense year and a half we  
232 launched as the first program. It's the basic document, the founding document that  
233 the State University approved. Here's what the State University '65-'66 report to the  
234 legislature said:

235 "It is for the student that intellectual power is being generated and the whole  
236 structure of the university is being built. It is true that the student of the day can no  
237 longer escape mass education. It is more than ever incumbent to make certain that  
238 he can no longer escape excellence in education as well. We are keenly conscious of

239 the necessity for providing education of relevance and meaning to such a huge  
240 student body. Not only is the University aware of the intellectual rights, it feels  
241 deeply it's obligation to come to grips with solving what has become a national  
242 dilemma. Cluster colleges and independent study seminars and the new residential  
243 arrangements are now variously being tried or under study. More basically still it is  
244 the function of the State University to bring to its students a sense of the action and  
245 passion of the time and give each of them the maturity to turn such action and  
246 passion towards positive and constructive ends. State University will establish in  
247 Nassau County a college that pays heed to the individual student and his concern  
248 with the modern world. Specifically the college will;

- 249 1. End the lock stead march where one semester follows another until  
250 four of youth's most energetic years have been consumed, etc, etc.
- 251 2. Admit students to full partnership in the academic world and grant  
252 them the right to determine in large measure their own areas of  
253 study and research.
- 254 3. Use mechanical devices to free faculty scholars from the academic  
255 drudgery of repeated lectures, etc, etc.

256 Since the campus is to be built literally from the ground up the president  
257 and the faculty members that the president recruits will have an almost  
258 unrestricted opportunity for innovation and creativity."

259 And he said, "How would you like to come up and be founding president of this  
260 college, and combine your belief in education and action out of the Peace Corps with

261 your love of the Hutchins College and the Great Books and create a mixing of those  
262 two forms of education. The sky is the limit. Will you come up to Albany and talk  
263 with us?"

264 That led to visits up in Albany and then they offered me the challenge me of  
265 doing that. I remember looking at the five hundred acres and the fields then where  
266 the now college buildings were built. I remember looking and saying, in the time  
267 when was just myself, saying, "Nobody's going to blow this except myself." So there  
268 was that little weight occasionally around me but mostly there was the intoxication  
269 of starting from scratch.

270 The Chancellor and the soon to be Provost Ernie Boyer were at every stage  
271 along the way, extraordinarily helpful and cooperative. The only thing they  
272 disagreed with, was the planning group that I had assembled —that soon began to  
273 include student planners that we hired that had just graduated from college— Oh I  
274 know! I was trying to think what they really disagreed with— they disagreed but  
275 they got persuaded to let us do it. We came to the conclusion that instead of for two  
276 and a half years plan and be ready for a thousand-student body opening in '70 or  
277 '71, we wanted permission to start at about the size of a hundred to test the  
278 curriculum in ways that we were thinking about it.

279 Quirke: So you planned for two years and then began the college?

280 Wofford: We did in the end plan for a year and a half. I began in the fall, October or  
281 November of '66 and really started assembling the planning group in the beginning  
282 of '67. By the end of '67 in fact we had the catalogue and we were starting the first

283 class in '68. They got persuaded to let us do it. It violated all kinds of University  
284 rules of how you start.

285           It had some funny repercussions such as when we had out first hundred  
286 students and they had arrived, one day at the president's house— I was in the big  
287 mansion —that hadn't burned down at that point, that was the administrative  
288 building— these two cars started coming up the long driveway from the entrance  
289 from the parkway. They came all the way up to the building and then they said,  
290 "Where is President Wofford?" And they found me and they said, "Here are the keys  
291 to your cars." And I said, "What do you mean?" They said, "Well, when you have any  
292 number of students from a hundred to a thousand you get two cars. And then you'll  
293 get two cars for every additional thousand." So we had two great big black cars.

294           In due course I go to Bryn Mawr who not only has no car for the president  
295 but the search committee, the Quaker leadership of the search committee didn't  
296 think that on Memorial Day weekend they needed an air conditioned car, that it was  
297 too expensive so they got jammed on the hottest part of Memorial Day in history on  
298 the bridge going from Staten Island and came absolutely withering because they  
299 didn't afford air conditioning. It was quite a change from Rockefeller's largesse at  
300 that time. Now his largesse ended of course and that's why I think the residential  
301 buildings are still, are they still more than a thousand?

302 Quirke: No they're about eight hundred actually. One of the things that I have a  
303 hard time understanding and you just said it now is that the school was a kind of  
304 attempt to get ahead of the wave with what was happening at Berkeley. But that

305 happened what in '65 the Free Speech Movement. I don't know that I've ever seen a  
306 bureaucracy move that fast. Did they have a master plan? Could you explain that a  
307 little bit?

308 Wofford: I'm pretty sure that is a pitch that Sam Gould made. But he, and later  
309 when he got Ernie Boyer, they were reformers themselves. I think he and I—a  
310 newcomer in that world— saw that the student uprising, in not only Berkeley but a  
311 number of other places, partly it was connected and deeply so in due course of the  
312 war but partly it was against the multiversity of bureaucracy and standardized  
313 conventional education. The leadership of the state university was in fact on their  
314 own merits promoting education reform. I think they used it, and probably I did too,  
315 rhetorically as a case to doubters on Long Island.

316         The Board, it was a Republican governor, however moderate and progressive  
317 Nelson Rockefeller was. It was a very establishment local board; they were dealing  
318 with the local republican county, I'm just guessing. To say, "we are going to get  
319 ahead of Berkeley so we don't have this type of trouble," was probably a politic  
320 thing. I don't want to minimize the fact that Sam Gould came and I was a strange  
321 person to offer the responsibility of the kind of experience I had lacked at that point.  
322 It was because they themselves wanted to do something that what was novel and  
323 good.

324 Quirke: And did they tell you anything more about their own interests beyond this?  
325 You've said they're reformers, what else inspired them? Even thinking about the  
326 multiversity—much of that—I have seen the language in your description and

327 other peoples' descriptions as well, and I think of that conflict coming slightly later  
328 '66, '67, '68 and on. They would have had to be planning this '64, '65. I'm assuming,  
329 I don't know if you know anything about before even they spoke to you.

330 Wofford: No, I don't. But the State University of New York itself was a social  
331 invention. I don't remember which year, what in the late fifties?

332 Quirke: Right when they bring the different teachers colleges together.

333 Wofford: I bought a book about the State University but I don't remember the  
334 details. Al Eurich who later became head of the Aspen Institute, was I think the first  
335 chancellor. I was very close to him although he wasn't involved with Sam Gould and  
336 the later connection. I had led Aspen seminars Great Book seminars —Great  
337 Conversation, Great Literature— seminars for business executives, for maybe ten or  
338 twelve times.

339         The first part of it was when Al Eurich had gone from being the first  
340 chancellor of the State University of New York to running the Aspen Institute. I  
341 don't know, but Nelson Rockefeller not only was bold about wanting to get five  
342 hundred acres to start a new college and pay for it, I don't know how much the deal  
343 was with F. Ambrose Clark. He was a bold, interesting, progressive guy.

344 Quirke: Can you tell me how you imagined the college fitting within the landscape of  
345 public education more generally? Because in effect it's being described almost in  
346 opposition to some of the tendencies within the university, but perhaps I'm



347 wondering if it's tendencies within public institutions more than perhaps private  
348 institutions.

349 Wofford: Well, I was also ambitious about what this could mean in American  
350 education. I'm a little embarrassed at how many speeches I gave during this time  
351 because we got very favorable, very, extraordinarily favorable publicity about the  
352 planning of the college and what it was. I had commencement talks, and  
353 convocations, and I have a collection of the speeches. Clearly I was sort of not  
354 declaring war on conventional education but was seeing this opportunity as a  
355 beachhead of a lot of colleges and universities and a broad range from Antioch of old  
356 which was very much the work-study combination, and the Quaker colleges and  
357 their own form of innovation and Hampshire College was being formed, and there  
358 were a score of —and Santa Cruz was the cluster college model— we saw ourselves,  
359 the group I had assembled, as in the forefront of an effort to change American higher  
360 education.

361 (39:10) To just jump quickly, that change didn't come about. It had a high  
362 watermark, like most of the stories of my life; such as the National Service Program  
363 has been a roller coaster ride. I can't quite have the same feeling I do about  
364 AmeriCorps because the first thing the 1994 congressional sweep of both the Senate  
365 and the House was to terminate AmeriCorps which I in the Senate had been with  
366 Ted Kennedy a chief champion of. And I got enlisted after I was defeated was to  
367 save AmeriCorps because the first thing the new House did was terminate  
368 AmeriCorps. Then we had this high point for example and others in between, but

369 Ted Kennedy's last bill—a bill with Republican Senator Hatch, with McCain and  
370 Obama co-sponsors— was to increase AmeriCorps to 250,000. Under my tenure we  
371 had gotten to 50,000. George Bush the second after 9/11 helped get it to 75,000.  
372 We had this in the first hundred days of Obama who had campaigned on doubling  
373 the Peace Corps and AmeriCorps to go to a quarter of a million, which was closer to  
374 what Clinton, originally—when he proposed national service— had in mind. That it  
375 would be an opportunity readily available to all Americans, Clinton said. We all had  
376—on the 100<sup>th</sup> day of Obama's administration and the Bill passing by a majority of  
377 Republicans in both houses and the ranking leaders of every Republican of the four  
378 committees of two houses supporting it— we thought now, the Red Sea has receded  
379 and we're going through to the Promised Land. The first action of the Tea Party  
380 Congress, if I can call it that, was to terminate AmeriCorps. We're in that battle right  
381 now. We're going to win the battle against termination. But the growth to 250,000  
382 isn't in the air.

383 Quirke: But you're describing Old Westbury, I know you're saying it's a  
384 rollercoaster, but Old Westbury was part of the larger thrust within both public and  
385 perhaps private education and experimentation.

386 Wofford: There is a joke about the different phases of Old Westbury. The faculty  
387 that stayed on after I left had a common joke when I would say, "What is the story  
388 about the New Old Westbury under John Maguire after Byron Youtz had left?" Their  
389 answer was, "Well old Westbury II is a rerun of the same up and down that we had  
390 in the years that I was there—Now I don't know if it's at all accurate— instead of

391 student partnership being the big issue John Maguire is passionately committed that  
392 women will be partners of the venture now all the spouses of faculty are permitted  
393 to sit in on the meetings.” Again, I don’t know, I have no idea if this is what...

394 Quirke: That’s what we’ve heard. I think that was the case.

395 Wofford: The two times I’ve been at Old Westbury I had this sense that it is very  
396 significantly vocational education, which we were radically not.

397 Quirke: We should talk more about this. It is and it isn’t. Yeah, because it’s both.

398 Wofford: I hope out of this I really learn about Old Westbury. I have a chapter in the  
399 book I’m trying to finish which is called *A Tale of Two Colleges*. Re-reading that  
400 catalogue made me realize how much I liked it. It was a very saddening experience  
401 cause I haven’t read it for quite a few years. I want to know what Old Westbury is.  
402 My answer to people, “You know, you were president of two colleges what would  
403 you really like?” A combination, I’d like to marry Bryn Mawr College and it’s  
404 excellence in the disciplines, and civility, and tradition of academic excellence with  
405 the free spirit and whatever you want to say about the Old Westbury of our dreams  
406 then.

407 Quirke: I think that’s what’s missing -the free spirit. We can talk about this at tea or  
408 your drink afterwards. There is certainly an education program, the business school  
409 but at least more than half of the students I believe are in liberal arts. So that’s still a  
410 very strong component of the college. Not as provocative perhaps as you all  
411 imagined it in ’67. But some of us I think are still fighting the fight.

412 Wofford: If you read that catalogue on which people and faculty were enlisted it  
413 was a real radical combination. Not left-right radical but radical in terms of where  
414 American higher education was and where it has gone. Now St. Johns College and  
415 the Hutchins College had much the same experience; Hutchins and St. Johns both  
416 saw themselves as the forerunners of not just being an isolated group and a little  
417 combination with an Arab Sea all around you. But we thought at the Hutchins  
418 College when I went to it, and right after the war that there was nothing like it and it  
419 would spread all over academia. Almost the opposite—

420 Quirke: My partner went to St. Johns, he graduated from St. Johns, and so I am  
421 pretty familiar with the unusual qualities.

422 Wofford: I'm worse than that, when I first met Scott Buchanan, the great teacher in  
423 my life, the founder of St. Johns, the author of the first catalogue at St. Johns and  
424 Hutchins' chief mentor. When I first met him at St. Johns for a Student Federalists  
425 Seminar on the Federalists' Papers I gushed to him. I just come out of the Army Air  
426 Corps and I had read about St. Johns. I had a friend Steve Benedict who had gone  
427 there and devoutly wished that I would go. I gushed that this sounds like the best  
428 educational program I've ever read about. He looked at me and said, "You're not the  
429 sort of fellow that would say that and then not have the courage to come here, are  
430 you? Ha, ha, ha." And in a sense that was true, I gave as the excuse the woman I was  
431 pursuing successfully. I was also a little scared, turned off by the preciousness of the  
432 small—

433 Wofford: I was undoubtedly lacking probably —part of the choosing the lesser  
434 academic program— probably the full measure of the much greater number of the  
435 good or the great books you read in seminar. But also the very intense laboratories  
436 and science, and the languages you learned. So it may have been all kinds of lack of  
437 courage that I chose the other place. The funny thing is, Hutchins who I had gotten  
438 to know ‘cause he was a world Federalist and when he met me and he knew I was  
439 trying to decide whether to go to Chicago or St. Johns he said, “You should go to St.  
440 Johns and get the full dose. Stay as close to Scott Buchanan and Stringfellow Barr as  
441 you can, that’s my educational advice for you.” And he —basically when he left—  
442 after being the longest college president felt he had lost the battle of the liberal arts  
443 college.

444 Chicago insists that that spirit is still alive at Chicago. And it is to some  
445 extent, I was a resident there for about three or four days in a little program they  
446 had when I was in the Senate. But it isn’t the radical version. The other thing is, if  
447 you think that St. Johns is something that ought to be a part of everybody’s learning  
448 you don’t go there. You may be more likely to really know that you don’t know—  
449 which is what Socrates found as the source of wisdom—you may have a little bit  
450 more of the wisdom that you didn’t do the full course. It helps you know how far  
451 short you are of what you need to know including to know what you don’t know. I  
452 tease my St. Johns people saying, “I may have more of the Socratic spirit than you do  
453 because I know I didn’t do it.” Those St. John-ees who read all those books and do all  
454 of that may be a bit complacent.

455 Quirke: They don't write much, which is interesting. Can I ask you about the  
456 planning document a little bit more and the planning process a little bit more  
457 because just by reading about it seems somewhat opaque. I'm curious if you could  
458 describe who the student planners were? Who the other planners were? What  
459 some of your arguments were, or discussions were in coming up with this plan?

460 Wofford: You haven't read this, is that right?

461 Quirke: I have read an awful lot in the last few weeks. I read pieces of it but perhaps  
462 not all of it.

463 Wofford: Well, this is the document. This is what we lived and died over. It's what  
464 students signed on for when they came. It is what any new faculty that wasn't in the  
465 original faculty— So I would really urge this be, in terms of just those four years,  
466 this be the central document. I've written articles that are chapters and books about  
467 Old Westbury.

468 Quirke: Yeah, I've read the UNESCO piece that you did.

469 Wofford: I don't remember UNESCO, that's fascinating.

470 Quirke: It's a forty-page article. I read it this weekend. A speech you gave at an  
471 UNESCO group that you gave on Old Westbury in 1970.

472 Wofford: I showed you some of the ones that I did read but it may be the same one  
473 under...

474 Quirke: Who was involved? Can you tell us more about the complexity of the  
475 planning process? Who was involved? What were some of the issues you fought out  
476 before the college actually began but when you were still wrestling with what it  
477 should look like? Because you were saying...

478 Wofford: (51:33) I had imagined that the —I think there was a general agreement of  
479 everyone that started planning that there should be an Education in Action  
480 component. Now what that should be, was something that was argued about. St.  
481 Johns College for example, some of the people connected with that world thought  
482 that the idea of a semester out and semester back was too fast and it's not a really  
483 wise thing to do. The thing that was a surprise to me is coming out of the Peace  
484 Corps and that sort of world with a new generation of students who were interested  
485 in the inner city, and domestic issues, and racial prejudice, and poverty.  
486 Overwhelmingly our student advisors that we hired —they were a wonderful group  
487 in retrospect there was a caveat to that— but overwhelmingly they wanted  
488 Education in Action to be in the inner city, in New York or Long Island.

489 Quirke: Instead of abroad?

490 Wofford: Instead of abroad.

491 Quirke: Which is before anti-colonial discourse, which is interesting.

492 Wofford: We slipped in an overseas experience when the fire came and we didn't  
493 have facility for the full hundred —I think I'm right on the numbers—and my wife  
494 had been part of a religious inter-religious national group of twenty who worked on

495 a Kibbutz in Israel. I thought why not try an opening semester in Israel on a  
496 Kibbutz. Something like twenty-five —I'm not sure of my numbers here—went  
497 with, I think Phil Kompaneovski sort of led the group over there. They had a  
498 tremendous experience.

499         The thought was maybe that's the sort of thing that ought to happen after  
500 high school, before an intense educational —after twelve years of classroom  
501 education maybe that's a time for a semester or year of actual work in the world in a  
502 demanding or challenging way. So we got a little island of that. The agreements  
503 soon came. I had basically no choice on that. It was clearly what the signal they  
504 were giving was. Of course, my own experience with Civil Rights made it hard for  
505 me to be saying they should be overseas and not in the inner city. So how you shape  
506 that kind of program, a lot of time was spent on it. We had people from the Peace  
507 Corps and various other programs.

508 Quirke: So Fran Koster was one of those people?

509 Wofford: Yeah, and Ralph and his wife; a whole group of people, not all of whom I'd  
510 remember the names of. How do you shape an education and an educational  
511 program? The evaluation that the students had at the end of the year that got  
512 foreshortened by the sit-in, was that the faculty hadn't lived up, in the measure of  
513 the students, to the plan that's in there that the faculty will follow the students out  
514 like wandering Socrateses asking them what they're up to and holding evening  
515 sessions and seminars. Now they did a certain measure of it, but I was surprised  
516 that when the returns came in at the end of the first year that there was criticism of



517 the faculty. Some of the most ardent of people who wanted the students to go into  
518 the inner city; they weren't ready to do that, they were more academic. We violated  
519 David Riesman's thesis, his advice. He was this sociologist, one of the great teachers  
520 at Harvard, *Lonely Crowd*, one of his big books. He was very intimately involved on  
521 occasion, time after time with shaping this.

522 Quirke: Through discussion with you, or how?

523 Wofford: At the college, he was one of our key advisors. David said, "Beware of the  
524 utopian faculty and the utopian student body. You want regular representative  
525 American students here. You don't want all yeast and no leaven. You talk about  
526 liberal education that something that breaks the conventional grip and opens  
527 worlds to you. Don't just get a group of students who have already had the  
528 conventional grip broken and who are thinking all over the world at the moment.  
529 Don't have faculties that don't have some conventional people. We had a group of—  
530 every one of the people we hired had thought about what an ideal college would be.  
531 So the differences were passionately held even though you might say they weren't  
532 so big.

533         Then we had, there was one guy who got hired. His picture is prominently in  
534 the catalogue. He was very bulky. —A couple of my key advisors like Jerry Ziegler  
535 who is a wonderful man of the adult education world, he had a high post, whatever  
536 his title was, and he stayed after I left, a couple anyway —he in interviewing people  
537 for the Urban Problems College got this guy who was a specialist who academically  
538 sounded terrific. He was a somewhat jolly and very, very bulky. My friend said,

539 “Clearly someone that big is going to be sort of like oil, make things go smoothly.”  
540 He was the most factional person we hired. He was just ready for the kind of battles  
541 he had had in another state university.

542 Quirke: A SUNY school?

543 Wofford: No, not in the State University of New York, another state. When I met the  
544 president or the dean of that school --where he had been a notable professor-- who  
545 had given me a warm recommendation for him— I go to a Bryn Mawr Alumni  
546 dinner, and —his wife was from Bryn Mawr— he said, “Oh I’m so glad to meet you.  
547 Do you know that every Christmas someone has a toast up to Harris Wofford  
548 because you took him off our campus.” Afterwards, after I left, he came to me and he  
549 said, “I’m absolutely devastated you don’t understand. We like fighting with you.  
550 We don’t want you to go. We just love fighting with you!” Anyway, we had a motley,  
551 fascinating crew.

552           Just to give you the tone of Old Westbury. We had one person who was a  
553 star of the Yale English Literature Department and done a number of other academic  
554 things. His last year before that had been as Esalen. I hope he’s still alive. We got  
555 him basically not because of the Esalen encounter group and all that but because his  
556 standing was so good in Humanities. But the Esalen thing wasn’t bad. It was a big  
557 thing then and we were sort of proud we had someone from Esalen. He kept saying,  
558 “Oh, I really want to get to know your soul.”

559           At one point he persuaded the planning group to hire Mr. Schutz, who wrote  
560 a book *Joy*, on how encounter group could be great liberating experience of your life.

561 We decided to let him have this — in the great ballroom of Ambrose Clark where  
562 Edward VII to be, the Prince of Wales danced all night in the twenties to the song, “I  
563 danced with a man, who danced with a girl, who danced with the Prince of Wales”  
564 (It was a popular song).

565 We all sat around on the floor of this great mansion on a nice soft rug. Mr.  
566 Schutz for example said, “Now everyone in this circle go around the room and tell  
567 the person next to you what you don’t like about them.” So everybody went and did  
568 that. I won’t give you some of the vivid statements of people who may have been  
569 fragile and hurt by it. It was sort of a withering experience. That night, we had  
570 everybody to dinner at the so-called president’s house.

571 My wife said, “Mr. Schutz does this really accomplish —all those bad things  
572 that everyone said about everyone else?” And he said, “Oh, yes. You don’t  
573 understand they got it all out of their system. Tonight Harris is not going to have  
574 anymore problem with them because they are just going to tear each other  
575 themselves apart.” And she said, “That brings joy.” He said, “Well, the biggest  
576 tension here is between Harris and —not the Esalen guy but the deconstructionist  
577 from...

578 Quirke: From Yale?

579 Wofford: From wherever it was. Philosopher. A very brilliant guy, but all of this  
580 Great Books and stuff was...

581 Quirke: Larry Resnick?

582 Wofford: Oh, sounds familiar. I hope he's alive too. Is he?

583 Quirke: I don't know.

584 Wofford: Better find out. Mr. Schutz concluded that the biggest tension here is  
585 between Harris and Larry Resnick. And he said, "Would you both stand up?" Now,  
586 I'm telling you a story where I come out on top.

587 Quirke: We'll talk to him too.

588 Wofford: I may confess that I'm doing that but it is an accurate version. He said, "  
589 There is so much tension is between Larry and Harris against the Great Books. Now  
590 I want you to do Indian wrestling—I forget how you do Indian wrestling—but he  
591 threw me down on the ground, Larry. I got up, I did it again, and he threw me down  
592 again. I did it again and he threw on the ground. I was about running out of  
593 readiness to fall on ground. And Mr. Shutz said, "Now I'd like the two of you to do  
594 another experiment. I want Harris, you to stand in front of Larry. Open your arms  
595 and fall back, and he will catch you." So I opened my arms. I fell back. He caught me.  
596 He said, "Do it again." So I did it again, it wasn't any huge—it didn't occur to me that  
597 he'd let me fall to the ground. Then he said, "Alright Larry stand in front of Harry."  
598 He [Larry] kept saying, "Harris doesn't trust us." He said, "Put your hands out.  
599 Now fall back." Larry crumbled on the ground. He couldn't lean backwards. And  
600 afterwards he said, "Damnit, I should have let Harris fall."

601 Anyway, to get you in further spirit of the time; another faculty member kept saying,  
602 the Esalen man kept saying, "I really want to get to know your soul." So one night I

603 walked down to the barn where the faculty housing had been built. My wife and  
604 kids were away. I thought, “Oh, I’ll go down and he’s been asking to have a  
605 conversation.” So I knocked on his door and he opened the door stark naked and he  
606 said, “Oh I’m so sorry. You picked the wrong night. I’m entertaining!” Now this  
607 makes us sound —Mainly our arguments were academic and intellectual. But there  
608 is a wildness that my wife didn’t like at all.

609 Quirke: (1:06:25) Can you tell us more about some of the special advisors you’ve  
610 mentioned David Riesman, Jerry Ziegler —either people outside the college—

611 Wofford: Byron Youtz was a central—

612 Quirke: What was the name, I’m sorry?

613 Wofford: He was the vice—he was provost and he became acting president when I  
614 left. Y-O-U-T-Z. He was a distinguished physicist. Sister Jacqueline Grennan had  
615 come to highly admire— she was a protégé of the MIT New Learning of Physics and  
616 Mathematics at MIT. I forget a famous scientist, mathematician. She was president  
617 of Webster College became Webster University and I had been on her board for a  
618 while out of the Peace Corps experience while she secularized it and became  
619 independent of the church. Then sometime after Old Westbury she secularized  
620 herself and got relieved of her—and married a Jewish widower and headed the  
621 National Council of Christians and Jews. A great flaming intellect, an amazing  
622 woman, and she was a full time consultant for many weeks off and on from Webster  
623 College. She had recommended Byron Youtz to be the Chief Academician on high  
624 quality science, mathematics but any of the fields. So he left Reed College where he

625 had been considered for the presidency. He later became president after Old  
626 Westbury he became president of Evergreen College. Byron was a great force for  
627 stability, and high academic standards, and accountability, and very much involved  
628 in the selection of people. He was my chief advisor. I really vthought he would—

629         One reason I accepted the call to Bryn Mawr was that in a self-serving sort of  
630 way I didn't like the role of being constantly a conservative. I decided I rather be a  
631 sort of radical in a conservative place than being seen as someone trying to stop  
632 things. That the degree to which the students had absorbed—that the students we  
633 enlisted were prone to the— it ought to ideally be a governing body of the college  
634 where every vote counted and every student and every faculty equally. But we'll be  
635 generous and give the faculty and administration half the vote but the student body  
636 should have the other half. A few things like that which were demands about a third  
637 of the students. In the sit-in — initially the African-American students were a part  
638 of the sit-in; they occupied the switchboard dome. Another set of students occupied  
639 my office.

640         The —Where was I going on this one? — I'll just tell you another thing that  
641 gives you the spirit of the moment. The head of the search committee at Bryn Mawr  
642 College out of the blue called and switchboard answered saying “ the revolutionary  
643 student committee of Old Westbury College.” She said, “I'm trying to find President  
644 Wofford.” I think if I'm getting my stories mixed up, they said, “We're occupying his  
645 office.” I guess the switchboard was in that, I don't know but any case they

646 answered, "We're in his office right now. We don't know where he is but here's his  
647 number."

648           They called and my wife answered and she said, "Mrs. Wofford the search  
649 committee"— oddly enough having read a speech on civil disobedience I had done  
650 for the American Bar Association— had gotten interested in me. They wanted to  
651 know if they could meet with me and with her to see if we'd be open to going to  
652 Bryn Mawr College. It never occurred to me to go somewhere else. My wife said,  
653 "Mrs. Thatcher, if my husband should decide he wants to get another job I just hope  
654 it's not at any college but maybe running a country grocery store like my  
655 grandfather did in Marine on the St. Croix." And Mrs. Thatcher said to her, "Mrs.  
656 Wofford Bryn Mawr is not any college." That was her introduction to Bryn Mawr.  
657 And that was the search committee's introduction to me that we were in the midst  
658 of a six or seven day sit-in.

659 Quirke: They called you. Do you think they called you in part because of your  
660 involvement in Old Westbury?

661 Wofford: Oh yeah, sure. One of the alumni of Bryn Mawr was a member of the local  
662 council, a wonderful woman and very supportive there. They talked to her at great  
663 length to understand what was happening at Old Westbury. It's quite amazing to me  
664 with Old Westbury sort of blowing up in the sit-in, that they would have gone ahead  
665 and invited me to go there. And then right away at Bryn Mawr I had immediately a  
666 different version of some of the battles at Old Westbury.

667           Although Bryn Mawr was an island of civility, and respect, and good dialogue  
668 we planned a little Aspen Institute of alumni to get a flavor of the great books  
669 approach. Bill Moyers was in it and it was quite a little seminar. In deciding it, the  
670 woman dean before the great Pat McPherson who I picked who became my  
671 successor at Bryn Mawr— who could run general motors, a wonderful friend. The  
672 then acting president, the dean of many years said, “You know Mr. Wofford” —I am  
673 now president of Bryn Mawr by then it was--, “Harris, you’ve got to realize we had a  
674 committee that looked on academic reform and the committee unanimously  
675 rejected the idea of Great Books at St. Johns College. We don’t want to let the  
676 camel’s nose come under our tent.” And I said, “Well, you’ve got a problem because  
677 I’m inside the tent.” They prevailed on this except that we did have a 1976 study  
678 that was Aspen-like and some other things. There they relished the idea of trying to  
679 make it “a college of the world,” and getting a very high proportion of foreign  
680 students, and overseas service, and such things.

681   Quirke: Let me use this as an opportunity to return. The planning process identified  
682 its issues, the education in action, the desire to read great books—

683   Wofford: The common seminar, where we settled the dispute about Great Books —  
684 it wasn’t just Great Books it was that there would be a common curriculum that  
685 everybody had. There came to be, I think a unanimous agreement that there should  
686 be what other places might call a core curriculum, but in this case it was to be a  
687 common seminar. Half would be essentially selected by the faculty from the books  
688 of great literature and the material. Every seminar would have the ability, and half



689 the readings to pick other readings than the ones the faculty had picked. The  
690 common seminar would have the St. Johns principle of two faculty members co-  
691 leading it. So no one became a lecturer and they could check the other if they were  
692 doing too much of the talking.

693 Quirke: Small classes?

694 Wofford: What?

695 Quirke: Was there a desire for smaller classes and greater intimacy?

696 Wofford: I don't know what the —I think the St. Johns idea that there should be one  
697 lecture a week and no other lectures. All the rest of the teaching would be by  
698 seminar. In the seminar the point was not to pass facts from the teacher, but that  
699 the seminar leader be the one who connects you with the authors who are the real  
700 teachers. That was agreeable to the students. Probably Larry Resnick was dubious  
701 about that— though I'm not sure, in fairness.

702 Quirke: So the core curricula, dual teachers in courses, education in action, any other  
703 pieces of the sort of the planning—

704 Wofford: Language, we had offering intensely —Spanish the first time— the  
705 catalogue says by 1970 there would be a number of language alternatives but we  
706 offered only one in the beginning. Language is part of the curriculum. We had to fit  
707 it into the credit system. You should look at the chart of independent study, core  
708 curriculum and academic workshop sort of five credits each or something like that.  
709 We successfully with the State University turned the curricular proposals into

710 credits for this first program. But the central agreement initially which led to the  
711 sharpest division, real division --in some of the nonsense of one person one vote--  
712 was that it would be a college of colleges. And the cluster colleges would not be sort  
713 of by residence but the residence arrangement was open to variations. But what we  
714 meant by a college was a college program.

715 The first one we agreed would be an urban studies, urban action curriculum. The  
716 second we agreed would be a regular academic discipline curriculum with its quite  
717 conventional courses as an option beyond the common seminar. But would include  
718 —I don't know if it included work in the cities I have to reread that. And then the  
719 third was a subject of dispute and it hadn't been agreed to. I was peddling a Scott  
720 Buchanan idea that if he were doing St. Johns over he would start with law,  
721 medicine, and theology, the three ancient professions. Not as a vocational pre-law  
722 or pre-medicine. But as that within each of those three great professions there was  
723 learning that a citizen ought to have.

724         We got some wonderful planners. For law we had someone who became a  
725 Court of Appeals distinguished judge and had been my deputy in Ethiopia, Bill  
726 Canby. Who is still sitting— in retirement now —but he's a senior judge in the  
727 Ninth Circuit. He worked with a remarkable legal committee with what the  
728 literature and what the approach should be beyond the common seminar. The same  
729 thing, the head of the medical school at Stony Brook who became the head of  
730 Catholic University —I'm forgetting his name right now-- quite an extraordinary guy  
731 who came to my attention because I heard him tell how when he met his former

732 students they said to him the greatest thing that happened in their medical  
733 education was that he the dean said, “That every week as I come to you as a resident  
734 you have to talk to me about some non-medical literature that was important to you  
735 that you read that week.” He was amazing. There was a tendency towards the  
736 psychiatric side of medicine. But we were exploring all three professions as a liberal  
737 learning.

738 Quirke: You said theology, was there anyone specifically who was linked to that?

739 Wofford: Yeah, we had —I’m trying to think who the people are we had working on  
740 that— Buchanan himself was one of our advisors —his picture is sitting on the lawn  
741 with students in the first year. He viewed that as a better way to philosophy than  
742 philosophy —on the periphery, which would be theology. The disciplines involved,  
743 you know, wouldn’t be teaching anyone religion but would be theology. That  
744 became a source of student opposition because it sounded medieval.

745 Part II audio begins.

746 Quirke: I want to switch gears just slightly only because I don’t want to miss out on  
747 this. Mandy actually was able to get funding to do this project partly in part to deal  
748 with the question of diversity. The College, when people talk about the school they  
749 often talk about Old Westbury I, and Old Westbury II. As if Old Westbury I was  
750 mostly white and Old Westbury II had a very different commitment. It seems very  
751 clear to me from reading the amount that I’ve read that Old Westbury I had a pretty  
752 strong commitment to racial diversity at a time when universities were still pretty  
753 white. So I’m wondering if you could talk a little bit about your own sort of

754 commitment to racial justice and the ways in which that might have been inflected  
755 in the first SUNY Old Westbury

756 Wofford: The principle we had, the goal we had was to have a very diverse student  
757 body: racially, intellectually. Now the argument that the first college should have  
758 outstanding students because so much would stand or fall on whether it succeeded,  
759 oddly enough it could be that that was one of the mistakes that we made— if we had  
760 taken David Riesman’s advice from the beginning and tried to have a diverse body in  
761 terms of intellectual achievement. But certainly Jane Campbell, who was head of  
762 admissions, was passionately interested in finding minority student applicants who  
763 would come to Old Westbury.

764           One of the prides of the Admissions Department was that in the sit-in,  
765 initially the minority members were supporting the sit-in, most of them were —  
766 They were sitting-in one of the so called domes — and they broke because the  
767 concluded that the middle class white radical students —whose spirit was “do your  
768 thing” and whose great banner of the sit-in was “Paranoia is true perception”— That  
769 these white middle class radicals were seeking a degree of “G.G.” . The non-whites  
770 had a manifesto a —very interesting one— that somebody ought to have the full text  
771 of —In which they said we can not afford to come out of Old Westbury with a degree  
772 in “G.G.: Groovin’ in the Grass.” We have to come out with harder academic  
773 credentials than white people need. We know we’ve got to be better prepared than  
774 others to be equal. I cant remember how they put it but the number one thing was  
775 —and some of them were very prone toward Michael Novak and the high standard

776 teaching rather than the “Groovin’ in the Grass.” They separated themselves from  
777 the dominant leaders in the sit-in.

778 Quirke: Can I ask is it fair to divide or to see the white students as primarily middle  
779 class. I was surprised at the number of working class students, when we went to  
780 Planting Fields. I was surprised at the number of white student who seemed to be  
781 from working class. Who probably—

782 Wofford: When did you go?

783 Quirke: In June.

784 Wofford: When I went to Old Westbury many years ago about ten years in after I  
785 had left. I would say that my sense of students that I had met were that they were  
786 much more typical students in vocational education programs. We were radically  
787 not vocational. It seemed to me when I went back that it was an overwhelmingly  
788 vocational school.

789 Quirke: Yes and no.

790 Wofford: When I went I was told that the day students were largely white women  
791 wanting degrees that would get them into teaching or get them jobs.

792 Quirke: I don’t know that that actually portrays—

793 Wofford: How many non-residential students are there?

794 Quirke: The bulk of the student body is non-resident

795 Wofford: And it's not predominately older?

796 Quirke: No, there's a proportion probably higher than in an average small liberal  
797 arts college. No, I was just asking because I think we tend to see white as middle  
798 class but I don't actually think white is always middle class. I heard your  
799 encapsulation from many people and every sort of political persuasion. I was  
800 surprised to find that when we did the Planting Fields interviews that at least two to  
801 three of seven or eight that I spent time talking to by no means could be considered  
802 middle class, their parents hadn't gone to college and they came from  
803 neighborhoods basically either in the city or outside the city. So I'm just pushing at  
804 it a little bit because I'm curious about the social geography of Old Westbury at that  
805 time. There's an African-American, and Latino student body that's defining itself in  
806 one way. There clearly is a kind of more —and I'm going to put this in quotes —  
807 "hippy contingent" that does want to do it's own thing and is alienated as fighting  
808 against what seems to be the button down tradition. But there also seems to be  
809 white radicals that don't fit within that category. So I just was pushing a little bit at  
810 that.

811 Wofford: Well, Frank Miata has he been involved with any of this?

812 Quirke: We interviewed him at Planting Fields. A brief interview it was half an hour  
813 so it wasn't a deep interview.

814 Wofford: In reading my own articles I see things that I didn't carry as a sharp  
815 memory. The Students for a Democratic Society —I assumed that SDS were initials  
816 that people understood — I'd almost forgotten, now I know that the radical leaders

817 of the Students for a Democratic Society, I know the editor of the Michigan Daily  
818 Newspaper that followed the launching of the Peace Corps in the middle of the night  
819 by John Kennedy. He won a great award for covering the birth of the Peace Corps  
820 was one of the president or the top of Students for a Democratic Society. It split into  
821 sort of the violent half and the non-violent. It mentioned quite a few, some  
822 proportion of something I wrote of who had been a part of SDS. I didn't remember it  
823 but I've seen it one of the articles I wrote or chapters I wrote. David Riesman of  
824 course said, "Do you realize that the Gallup polls and other polls the majority of  
825 those under twenty five who voted, voted for Nixon in the United States. You are  
826 assuming that the student population is Berkeley or Yale." He felt very much that  
827 we had erred in seeking outstanding students. That we had leaned towards taking  
828 idealistic activists far more than we should have for the opening class. That the real  
829 test of our curriculum was not if it was going to be right for students like that but if  
830 it would be right for "regulars," as some of the politicians like to speak of—

831 Quirke: Everyone wants replication, right?

832 Wofford: The thing is they had a lot of applicants to choose from.

833 Quirke: You all did the first year. I was surprised, that's changed radically. You took  
834 what one of ten of your applicants, something like that?

835 Wofford: Did I mention the Chris Harte story and Michael Novak?

836 Quirke: No.

837 Wofford: Michael Novak we hired to come to Old Westbury partly on the fact that he  
838 had —I think— twice had been elected by the Stanford student body as the teacher  
839 that had influenced them the most. He was the leader of the Anti-Vietnam War  
840 faction at Stanford. When he left Stanford to come to Old Westbury he made the  
841 decision, the editor of the Stanford Daily newspaper Chris Harte did an editorial that  
842 said “What does Old Westbury Have that Stanford Lacks?” It said, “Why would our  
843 best teacher be drawn to Old Westbury?” Then he ended the editorial —I think it  
844 was it in any case— he said, “And that’s why I’m leaving Stanford to go to Old  
845 Westbury.”

846           At the end of the first year Chris Harte —who remained a good friend of mine  
847 throughout the years, his family owned the Harte-Hanks Newspapers in Texas— at  
848 the end of the first year, where Michael Novak had become sort of an enemy to the  
849 radical students because he was shocked by sort of the indiscipline and the “do your  
850 thing” approach. He came to me and said, “I’m sorry to abandon you but I’m going  
851 back to Stanford.” I met his parents when I’d go to Bryn Mawr and I was wondering  
852 what they would think because his sister was at Bryn Mawr and they must have  
853 thought this president who really screwed up Chris’ academic life the year at Old  
854 Westbury. Instead his parents said, “Oh my God, it’s so good to meet you. You are  
855 the savior of Chris!” I said, “Tell me what —I was afraid that they really— people we  
856 were hoping to get a lot of money from for Bryn Mawr— would be really turned off  
857 by this president who screwed up their son’s education. They said, “Oh my God, you  
858 know before he went to Old Westbury he had Mao Tse Tung photograph all over his  
859 room and he talked like Mao Tse Tung. We imagined terrible things in store for



860 Chris. After a year at Old Westbury he came back, the poster's still there, but now  
861 he's just a liberal democrat. So we're in your debt."

862 The other thing, people who I've talked to who were at the reunion, said— and it's  
863 in line with people I've met from the first two years, first four years, student  
864 planners and others— however bad we felt about the degree to which political  
865 struggle on what we should do with this problem and that problem, it was itself, that  
866 argument was a part of their liberal education. We had a fair number of students  
867 who made money as consultants to new colleges who came out of the Old Westbury  
868 experience.

869 Quirke: Do you know any names?

870 Wofford: I can tell you but I can't tell you out of my head right now. I think if you  
871 gave me the list of students or you know Ghebre Selassie would probably remember  
872 that. I can think of two women. I think the Kaizes [ed: verify] became advisors to  
873 some places.

874 Quirke: Who is this?

875 Wofford: Ralph Kaize and Muriel. I think they would. There are two or three  
876 women, and not all women, who got places who had heard about we had student  
877 planners and students, they got hired.

878 Quirke: Can you tell me a little bit more about diversity at the college in those first  
879 years and perhaps the challenges? Some of the conflicts that arose, you are  
880 describing the sit-in, and the conflict of the degree but the challenges of that.

881 Wofford: Well Ghebre Selassie Mehreteab was a big challenge not because of  
882 himself but because of the roommate he had. In his first arrival full of Ethiopian  
883 authority and wearing ties and respecting the president as if I was an emperor, all of  
884 that, he comes into the middle of Old Westbury which is beyond anything he had  
885 ever experienced. The first seminar on civil disobedience, either Malcolm X, or  
886 Martin Luther King's *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* —I was teaching with Carls—

887 Quirke: Russel? Carlos Russel, the Panamanian?

888 Wofford: Yeah, and Ghebre was fine he was interesting all very fresh and all. The  
889 second week he came in solemn, sullen, and looking sort of angry and confused, and  
890 he said confusing things. It was very alarming. So as soon—and he walked out of  
891 the seminar after about a half hour or an hour. As soon as it was over I said,  
892 “Where’s Ghebre, let’s find him?” He wasn’t anywhere on campus. In the middle of  
893 the night we got this call from Harlem that they have this young man who says he’s  
894 looking for the Ethiopian embassy, and he’s a student at your college. We went in  
895 and got —I did but—we went in and got Ghebre back to the college. It seems his  
896 roommate had said, “Have you ever taken a trip?” And Ghebre said, “Yes a very big  
897 one from Ethiopia.” And he said, “Well if you just take this pill. It’s going to give you  
898 the greatest trip you’ve ever had.” And gave him a full dose of LSD. The student  
899 council that had been established by then went to work immediately on this and  
900 unanimously recommended that that student be expelled from the college. And he  
901 was.

902 Quirke: Was this a white student?

903 Wofford: White student. Very white, and very radical. Radical hippy, I mean  
904 wishing to be that, I don't know. So you know the challenges are diverse. The  
905 faculty was very ready to —different ones in different ways— to counsel the  
906 minority students. One became a fairly famous radical from a Mexican- American...

907 Quirke: Gary Delgado?

908 Wofford: Probably, what's he doing now?

909 Quirke: He ran The Center for Third World Organizing.

910 Wofford: Sounds like him.

911 Quirke: Or maybe Mickey Melendez maybe you're thinking of him, who was one of  
912 the Young Lords people.

913 Wofford: Not sure.

914 Quirke: Student, you're talking about?

915 Wofford: Yeah, Jane Campbell, John Coyne or Ghebre, or others will remind me who  
916 this fellow is. He became quite prominent after Old Westbury in New York radical  
917 politics, Puerto Rican probably.

918 Quirke: Anything else about making that decision to have a diverse class?

919 Wofford: It wasn't any big decision. Everyone was very —as far as I know—  
920 anxious to have a high proportion. Then in the sit-in, the sit-in leaders, partly to —I  
921 don't know whether the non-white students initiated it, or the white leaders of the

922 sit-in did— they had the goal of fifty percent of the student body being— originally  
923 it was non-white and then it got changed to third world peoples to include the  
924 Caribbean and whoever else they were. My position on that as a Civil Rights  
925 campaigner was, that's a reasonable idea but it's not the idea that drew us together.  
926 It would be a very interesting experiment but not one that I was going to be  
927 supporting. It wasn't that it was beyond the pale but that would require a full  
928 decision that you were going to make that a central part of the experience. Could be  
929 potentially a very, very interesting experiment. I've been urging in the National  
930 Civilian Community Corps— one of the things we got adopted in the Senate before  
931 Clinton was elected— that they should try some teams that were half Latino and half  
932 Anglo, and that each would be committed to teaching their language to the other  
933 members of the team. I'm still pitching that in various AmeriCorps places. We had a  
934 language, Ivan Illich became —have you read some of his stuff at all? He was a  
935 monsignor.

936 Quirke: I managed to graduate college without reading Ivan Illich\*\*. Everyone  
937 walked around with the little books whose title I'm not going to remember but I  
938 managed to graduate.

939 Wofford: He had started this language learning center in Cuernavaca and claimed  
940 along with Rassias at Dartmouth, a very different approach. In the Peace Corps we  
941 got Rassias to take on training for French speaking Africa and he took the Peace  
942 Corps volunteers up into all Canadian-French speaking part of Canada and did the

943 training there. 60 Minutes and others have featured Rassias over the years as the  
944 rapid most intense teacher.

945 Illich has the principle that you could have uneducated people teach the oral  
946 language if they're charming. It's intense one-to-one exchange and he became a  
947 chief trainer in Cuernavaca of priests and nuns and others going to South America.

948 Later the Police Department of New York, which we were working with for  
949 assignments and helping with some advice on, hired him to organize how they  
950 would teach New York police officers who worked in Spanish parts of New York.

951 Illich had discovered that this one-on-one tutoring was very dangerous. That if you  
952 didn't change every three weeks your tutor, or five weeks, a huge proportion of  
953 people would fall in love with each other. It was devastating to some nuns, and  
954 priests, and other people, if you keep looking at the other person in their eyes or  
955 their mouth, no telling what would happen. He came out to teach and build the  
956 language but I can't remember much about it.

957 Then Nicolas Nabokov, do you know about that? He's the cousin of Nabokov, of  
958 *Lolita*. He did the music, he was a composer, and he did The Don Quixote Ballet, and  
959 others. An extraordinary multi-discipline person, tied to St. Johns in some way. I  
960 don't know how we got on to Nikolas. He was wonderful. He said, "Well what I  
961 want to do, what I've wanted to do all my life is teach Shakespeare by doing it. I'd  
962 like to have one of your regular classes, including the people who came out of the  
963 slums of New York, do *The Tempest*. By doing it, put it on, act it, choose the music,

964 the property, put on the play, talk about it, argue about it. It was a spectacular  
965 success. The people that were in this Shakespeare—

966 Quirke: And this was at Old Westbury?

967 Wofford: Yeah.

968 Quirke: Wow, I never heard of this. This is great.

969 Wofford: No, he was one of our star achievements.

970 Quirke: He taught or he did like this —a course? Was he a full-time faculty?

971 Wofford: No, not full-time but he got well paid. And he lived in New York.

972 Quirke: He did it for a term or semester?

973 Wofford: Yeah, I think we had him do it twice, but I may be wrong on that. We  
974 certainly had him there off and on for most of the year.

975 Quirke: Are there other faculty? It's interesting I was surprised when I saw Michael  
976 Novak given his political trajectory.

977 Wofford: Michael Novak?

978 Quirke: Yeah, when I saw him as early faculty I was taken aback. I saw Alan Wolfe,  
979 is there anyone—Can you tell us about some of the early faculty?

980 Wofford: Well, Alan Wolfe became a leading critic of me, my ideas.

981 Quirke: Well, he also became more right wing I must say over time? He became  
982 more right wing as well over time?

983 Wofford: I didn't know Alan Wolfe ever became right wing.

984 Quirke: Oh, okay.

985 Wofford: We've met at presentations and all since. He's written really interesting  
986 stuff. The stuff that he wrote at Old Westbury I thought was not so impressive. He  
987 writes for the *New York Review of Books*.

988 Quirke: No, he's quite renowned.

989 Wofford: We had a few good times together but not anything intimate. Michael  
990 Novak, I can't believe how fast he changed. It was sort of an epiphany for him. So  
991 now he's in a place that's all like he was. He says, "There's a law of politics. There is  
992 always a right wing. At Old Westbury there had to be a right wing." Compared to  
993 Alan Wolfe, and to Arthur Adelstein, and others, he made his choice. The  
994 transformation came over—well the sit-in actually broke because Michael's letter to  
995 me and why he should have tenure was the letter that they broke into and they  
996 distributed, they photocopied his letter. It was the vainest, it was a terrible, terrible  
997 letter explaining how brilliant he was, not a touch of modesty. Sort of greed, it was  
998 super embarrassing to him. They of course must have gone through —now there  
999 were other private things in there, people that had gay experiences or other things  
1000 that were somewhere in their files. This is the one thing that showed that they had  
1001 gone through the personnel files that let us say, "You know, you violated the law."

1002 Sitting-in was —we had developed the theory as to why. We were determined not  
1003 to, if possible, to call in the police. The State University had an iron rule that within  
1004 a certain number of hours or something you can't permit the academic venture to be  
1005 destroyed, that within that they can. We got basically a week, without having to do  
1006 anything. We got a week that we had scheduled for evaluation. So we declared it  
1007 isn't the evaluation that we planned but there is very intense evaluation going on  
1008 right now. There are discussions. There are arguments. It is a tremendous  
1009 evaluation experience— so they gave us that week.

1010 Quirke: This was the spring of '68?

1011 Wofford: Yes, right through the Memorial Day weekend I think.

1012 Quirke: And then? And then what happened? Cause we've been talking around but  
1013 we—

1014 Wofford: Well, it got hotter and hotter in the Quonset huts. Right, that happened.  
1015 Particularly Memorial Day weekend it was blazing hot. The conversations on how  
1016 you could come to an agreement here were very intense and going on all the time.  
1017 Then, the Michael Novak letter was distributed. So it gave us, the administration the  
1018 moral upper hand. The State University was saying, "You know, you have to clear  
1019 them from the academic buildings. You had a week for this. We're enforcing this on  
1020 other parts of the State University where this has happened." Many of those parts,  
1021 there had been violence. There was nothing of that kind in this sit-in. In any case,  
1022 Bill Canby later the Court of Appeals judge, was part of our planning session and  
1023 doing the law curriculum. And he said, "Well, why don't we ourselves issue a



1024 subpoena to them. Our own subpoena, not the police, but make it like a subpoena  
1025 and deliver it to them.” So we did, by nine in the morning they must be out or we  
1026 would go to the civil authorities. They then said, “Would you make it 3:30 in the  
1027 afternoon?” So we did agree, and at 3:30 the blaring music, revolutionary songs that  
1028 were on the loud speaker ended and they came out of the huts. One of them said,  
1029 “We left you a present.” So I went into the president’s office, the Quonset hut, the  
1030 dome, whatever you called it, we called it domes. They were domes. They had left a  
1031 bottle of wine I guess it was, red wine on top of copies of Thoreau’s essay on civil  
1032 disobedience, or something like that.

1033 Quirke: What had the students wanted from the sit down, or sit-in —I always say sit  
1034 down because I’m a labor historian—What did they want? Did they want the fifty  
1035 percent sort of racial balance? Were there other issues involved as well, why were  
1036 they sitting in?

1037 Wofford: They were sitting in to stop the —a very good point I haven’t made— the  
1038 “college of colleges” idea, that we had agreed to and the State University had  
1039 approved, would be different curriculums. They wanted this first college —which  
1040 was assembled and collected for this Urban Action College— they wanted to control  
1041 the approval of any additional colleges. Ours was that each additional college would  
1042 be started in a planning process not that the first college would control the  
1043 disciplines college, which we already promised the State University would be the  
1044 second one, Novak was heading it. That was the most fundamental issue this  
1045 original student body wanted control of that. So even after we formed the College

1046 Council— which was six students, five faculty, three administrators, “the six, five,  
1047 three formula,” subject to the president’s responsibilities that were not devolved  
1048 form the State University, so they accepted that —the battle over those other  
1049 colleges was going on. The disciplines college got created so it was just that a lot of  
1050 the first college, the Urban Action College didn’t like having the disciplines college.  
1051 Then the law, medicine, theology college was just too much for them. That’s when I  
1052 became medieval. I’m sure a lot of people would say the same thing. Although,  
1053 anyway—

1054 Quirke: It felt awfully personalized some of the time. I was surprised. I mean things  
1055 do get personalized but the degree, even at Planting Fields, obviously not among  
1056 many, but for some, it was still a very personalized rancor.

1057 Wofford: You were there at the reunion?

1058 Quirke: Yeah, how did you and your wife experience that?

1059 Wofford: Well, my wife hated it.

1060 Quirke: She was from Minnesota. People don’t act like that; I lived in Minnesota for  
1061 four years.

1062 Wofford: That’s right. That’s a good part of it. She thought I had overpromised.  
1063 That the full partnership we should have defined earlier as to what we mean and  
1064 that it didn’t mean majoritarian democracy with students and faculty equal in  
1065 power, etc; that there was a faculty, and a student body, and there was the president  
1066 with responsibility, and it should have been made clearer. It is the one part of my

1067 own life that leaving Old Westbury, it was a defeat in a sense. It was hard to justify  
1068 going to Bryn Mawr. But with Byron Youtz and Jerry Ziegler and some of the people  
1069 I was close to— a lot of people I was close to— we talked a lot about whether  
1070 fighting it out at Old Westbury would be the best thing for Old Westbury. Leaving it  
1071 now would be sort of deserting it and to a bad fate. The other case was that Byron  
1072 Yuotz had the respect of almost everybody and certainly the State University. We  
1073 thought he would be a natural president. There would be none of the, “You  
1074 promised,” that was tied to me. We rationalized it, at least I did. Of course my wife  
1075 loved the idea of Bryn Mawr cause she thought it was the kind of hard challenge she  
1076 would like to have me do rather than this turbulent radical experiment. But with  
1077 Byron and I think he probably felt that it was better on balance that I go, but I don’t  
1078 think he very much wanted to be president. He tended to think that the first college  
1079 should be treated as a fascinating thing and let the State University plan—

1080 Quirke: Separate colleges?

1081 Wofford: Yeah, well, go ahead with the planning any way they wanted, but be free to  
1082 change things. What happed was close to that, partly because they didn’t just make  
1083 Byron the president. I can see, he was there if they really thought a change was  
1084 needed, they called me to Albany and pleaded with me not to leave, “We’ll back you  
1085 and you could win the battle.” I said, “But it isn’t a battle that I am necessarily am  
1086 good for or that— I am not that concerned with winning the battle.” It’s a very open  
1087 question whether I lost my courage on that like I didn’t go to St. Johns College.

1088 Quirke: I cannot imagine a worse year to open a college. 1968 could not have been  
1089 — the worse year of the century.

1090 Wofford: It's my little version of I think the best president we had in my lifetime  
1091 becoming president in the situation, our economy, and the two wars, and the  
1092 divisions in the country. I still believe Obama is the best president we've had in my  
1093 lifetime. But it's the very worst time. The thing he most wanted which was to end  
1094 partisanship and bring people together, which he tried on several fronts as hard as  
1095 he could, and waiting as long as he could. We'll see where we go. This is the first  
1096 time I've made a comparison between little Harris Jr. had his chance to be president,  
1097 I was president of Old Westbury. I had one other chance to be president and that  
1098 went well. But, so we made the decision—then I actually had many, many months  
1099 before I started at Bryn Mawr. I started —it would have been— in July of 1970, I  
1100 went to Bryn Mawr. In retrospect I wish I had just left after I decided to go to Bryn  
1101 Mawr. Instead, they were still asking me in Albany to stick it out, with Byron, stick it  
1102 out until I should go to Bryn Mawr. It would have been probably better to have gone  
1103 then, because I stayed then for eight months. The arguments continued.

1104 Quirke: Oh, that explains the discrepancy in the timeline. I'd heard that at the sit-in  
1105 not long after that you announced you were leaving. I didn't realize there was  
1106 almost a full school year as you were saying.

1107 Wofford: I think so; I'm trying to think of the actual timing.

1108 Quirke: I'm afraid if we talk longer we might lose consciousness.

1109 Wofford: Say that again?

1110 Quirke: I'm afraid if we both continue talking we'll both lose consciousness. I hope  
1111 we are able to talk more about Old Westbury in the future. Is there anything you  
1112 feel you should share with us? It's such a rich experience.

1113 Wofford: No, I think the main thing I want to share with you is how reading that  
1114 first catalogue and what our hopes were made me not only nostalgic about those  
1115 times. They were intense times, and unbalanced. I wouldn't have missed them. It  
1116 was scarring in one sense and very sad to live through just reading the catalogue,  
1117 how good I think it is even today. Not the only thing I would favor in education, it is  
1118 more or less probably what I would favor for higher education now and how far  
1119 away from being able to imagine that kind of a college now. The world has gone the  
1120 other way. It was a saddening experience to do this with you but illuminating.

1121 Quirke: The genesis for me comes from hearing --my initial interest in a project like  
1122 this came from knowing where we teach now, and hearing these stories of an Old  
1123 Westbury with very high aspirations, both Old Westbury I and Old Westbury II, and  
1124 the struggle of working within that. It continues to be a struggle, hopefully not one  
1125 that's lost but it continues to be a struggle.

1126 Wofford: You know the joke about Old Westbury? One of our faculty planners who  
1127 joined the faculty but he was exploring it as a planner, he explained to his kids that  
1128 he was going to Old Westbury again, and going to Old Westbury. His very young  
1129 child was missing the father who's spending this time with Old Westbury. And he  
1130 said, "Who is this Old Westbury?" There were a lot of people who were "the who."

1131 David Riesman gave us the advice to call it "Old Westbury". In the mandate for the  
1132 new college that I read, it says a new college at Nassau County. It doesn't say Old  
1133 Westbury, because half of the acres are in Jericho and half in Old Westbury, the  
1134 townships. We were given by the State University, "Do you want to be called the  
1135 New College at Jericho or the New College at Old Westbury? David Riesman  
1136 happened to be with us he said, "For God's sake if you want to be a radical college  
1137 choose an old English name like Old Westbury, respectable name. You choose  
1138 Jericho it's just signaling the walls are going to go tumbling down!"

1139 Of course, we had the fire. Let me just remind you about the fire. It was a huge  
1140 experience for everybody in the first planning. The fire was three days—

1141 Quirke: Now this was '67 or '68?

1142 Wofford: Three days after Martin Luther King was killed.

1143 Quirke: So '68.

1144 Wofford: I say three days, but maybe five days. I had just come back from the  
1145 funeral in Atlanta and the first march in Memphis with my daughter, now the dean  
1146 here at NYU. At around seven in the morning my wife and I were awakened at the  
1147 little white house next to the big mansion, which was the president's house,  
1148 "There's a fire, go to the mansion!" So half dressed, whatever we could put together  
1149 fast, pajamas or whatever, we rushed over to the mansion. By then the fire engines  
1150 were roaring up the long path and the whole roof was ablaze. It happened that my  
1151 papers from the White House and other things in my life were in the attic, which

1152 was first to burn. One of the main ladders went right up to my main office. I had  
1153 what I thought was the only copy of this film that David Shickele called —on Scott  
1154 Buchanan, the book I did on Scott Buchanan’s conversation—

1155 Quirke: You were saying?

1156 Wofford: Well, anyway, the fire was getting bigger and bigger, and I was scared that  
1157 this film he did of Scott Buchanan’s last conversation with me, and this book that I  
1158 did of emperors of the world was going to go up in flames. I tried to let them let me  
1159 go up the ladder because it was right on top of my desk, this metal container. They  
1160 said they didn’t tell any firemen, but suddenly this thing got thrown out like a flying  
1161 saucer, it came through the air and it landed in good standing.

1162 Meanwhile, *Look Magazine* had sent out their top essayist to film me and the four-  
1163 pillar mansion on this funny story about a Mississippi, East Tennessee, then  
1164 Scarsdale, New York, three generations of Woffords had insisted on having four  
1165 pillar mansions. Now, this generation doesn’t own it but he’s in this big four-pillar  
1166 mansion. And this famous editor of photographs and text said, “Oh it’s a hot story.”  
1167 When he got to the gate he said, “How do I find the mansion and President  
1168 Wofford?” They said, “Just follow the smoke.” And they looked from the gate up on  
1169 the little hill, as we went beyond the Trainer House and through the barn, which was  
1170 faculty placing. And this guy came and I said, “I’m sorry, I’ve given you—I don’t  
1171 even know what I said— I said, “You’ve got more than you asked for.” So I didn’t  
1172 pay any attention to him, he was awestruck there. He watched, and watched, and  
1173 watched. Until the fire went down, it had gone all the way down through the

1174 mansion. It was like Atlanta burning, it was an amazing moment. And I said, “ Well,  
1175 you certainly got some amazing photos.” And this guy said, “Oh my God, I been so  
1176 emotionally torn apart by this, that I didn’t take any pictures!” I hope they fired him  
1177 after that, but *Look Magazine* went out of existence. It was a huge test because it  
1178 meant that living on the campus all together there was no longer feasible.

1179 Quirke: You had been living in the mansion, I just want to clarify?

1180 Wofford: I lived in the house nearby. All our offices were in the mansion. People  
1181 were in the Trainer House, and the barns had been renovated for faculty  
1182 apartments. There were plans to have enough for four hundred students that could  
1183 have been completed but it was concluded that only shifting to Planting Fields could  
1184 accommodate our hundred people. Whether the Quonset huts sort of looked like a  
1185 battlefield affected what happened, I don’t know. In another sense, everybody  
1186 pulling together after the fire — it was a pulling together experience for a little  
1187 while.

1188 Quirke: And that was in the spring of ’68? You just said it was after Martin Luther  
1189 King, so it would have been April, April of ’68.

1190 Wofford: April is the cruelest month. We began the first meeting of the whole  
1191 community with various people reading some poems. I read Andrew Marvell’s *To*  
1192 *His Coy Mistress*, “Let’s role all our strength and all our sweetness into one ball, and  
1193 although we cannot make the sun stand still, yet we will make it run.” It’s a 1600-  
1194 something poem but Andrew Marvell. Then later I said on one occasion it was more,  
1195 in many ways turned out more like T.S. Eliot’s, *Journey of the Maji*, “A cold coming of



- 1196 it, it was the worst type of weather for a journey.” Anyway, I’ll probably use that in  
1197 my chapter.
- 1198 Quirke: Thank you so very much. This was really an amazing interview.