

1 Samuel Von Winbush, interviewed by Carol Quirke at SUNY College at Old Westbury, New York
2 on October 18, 2012.

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4 Carol Quirke: Today is October 18, 2012, and we are at the Old Westbury TV Studio, and this is
5 Carol Quirke and I am interviewing Samuel Von Winbush who is a former Distinguished
6 Professor of Chemistry here at Old Westbury and has an amazing history that we are going to
7 learn about. If we could start by you telling us about your early childhood and the kind of
8 neighborhood you were raised in?

9 Samuel Von Winbush: Well, I was born on a farm in North Carolina, in a little town about, oh
10 fifteen miles from Henderson, which is about thirty miles from the capital Raleigh. I was a third
11 generation out of slavery. Really, I was brought into the world by my maternal grandmother.
12 Believe it or not, she was a, what do you call it, a midwife. She delivered me and she also gave me
13 my name, Samuel. She thought that would be a strong name for me, and I had to live up to that.
14 She was from Eaton, Virginia. She was an Eaton, so I guess the plantation or something was Eaton
15 where she grew up. My father's side, they also had different kinds of names for example. But, the
16 key group on my father's side are really the Bullocks. It's a little town called Bullocksville, where
17 they grew up more or less. It was great growing up in that area because the farm was a fantastic
18 learning experience. As I said, you would go into the woods with my grandmother and she could
19 cure you of anything. I didn't have a store-bought medicine until I was a teenager because
20 everything was done. She knew how to make all these medicines for all of us and we never had to
21 go to the doctor. In fact, she said, "Stay away from doctors?" I said, "Why?" "And hospitals also."
22 "Why grandmother?" "Because that's where sick people are," she said, "I went to my first doctor
23 when I was seventy-six and that was a mistake." She lived to be 104 and died chopping wood. So
24 that's the kind of woman she was.

25 [04:46] So anyway, I grew up on this farm. I didn't come to the city until I was about eleven. At
26 eleven I met one of my ex-slave ancestors, Mrs. Riddle, who was 110 when I met her, she was still
27 walking around, she was born in 1831, and she was still alive when I went away to college when I
28 was about seventeen. She was an amazing person. That's the kind of background and I stayed
29 with... When I was in town, in Henderson I got there because I had caught typhoid fever. One
30 year at the end of school year three of us were out searching for strawberries and we came to this
31 spring. No one was using it but it was flowing. We were thirsty and I was the first one to drink the
32 water. I got sick as a dog. I had to go to a hospital. I was in a coma for three days. The other
33 person who drank after me got sick, had to call the doctor. The third person didn't get sick at all
34 because we had cleared up the pond.

35 So while in Henderson staying with the relatives, that's when I went to a private school. In Vance
36 County there was no high school, for example, for African Americans, or "Negroes" as we were
37 called in those days. The school I went to was called Henderson Institute. It was a boarding
38 school and it was run by the Presbyterian Church. That's the way it was, in fact in Oxford County
39 too, the county next door to us, there was no high school for blacks in those days. Mary Potter
40 was the school next door—next county—for black people. It wasn't until probably the late forties,
41 fifties before they really had a high school for blacks that was paid for, like the other white
42 schools. That was the kind of area I grew up in, very segregated.

43 [06:43] I had a great high school period though. I worked for a guy named Avery. He ran one of
44 these drive-ins that was before Burger King or any of those kinds of things. He hired me, this
45 white kid and me that he hired. He was going to choose the better one and I was much better, so
46 he kept me. In those days you had a tray that you carried and you hooked it on the side of the car.
47 You put the beverages on it, but I was very good at it. Because I would memorize it, take two or

48 three cars at a time, and memorize their orders and have two or three trays and put them on the
49 side and serve a lot of people. I had an agreement with the cook, "If you get my orders out in a
50 hurry, I'll share the tips with you." The tips were very good, because people were coming back
51 from the Army, the economy was booming and as a consequence it was just very good. In fact I
52 had a nice bank account, and when I went away to college, believe it or not, my folks didn't have
53 to pay anything because I had saved the money from all the years I worked at the drive-in. They
54 called it The Hilltop. It was just for whites because you couldn't serve, that was one of those areas
55 then, where you couldn't serve anyone but white people at that particular drive-in. I used to feel
56 bad because people would come by—it was on Highway 1, that was before the interstates—and
57 they'd come by Highway 1, and people would stop in and see this black kid out front. They'd say,
58 "Well maybe I can get something." I'd have to tell them, "I can't serve you." It was not a good
59 feeling to tell a family you couldn't serve them but that's the way it was, I couldn't. There'd have
60 been a riot if I'd done such a thing. That's the way it was in those days.

61 [08:33] From there I went away to college, at Tennessee State University in Nashville. That was in
62 the fifties of course, that was a black school. One of the schools that was formed from the so-
63 called Morrill Act—M-O-R-R-I-L-L—state school. I went there because I was on a football
64 scholarship, and a chemistry-math major. So I started there and they would say, "What! You're
65 going to go play football and you're a math-chemistry major?" The coaches loved it because they
66 said, "Hey, this guy is on honor roll." It was quite good. I majored in chemistry and mathematics
67 at Tennessee State.

68 Quirke [00:09:27]: I'm trying to figure out how to frame this. Can you think of an experience
69 when you were younger, you're describing growing up in segregated South...

70 Von Winbush: I almost got killed.

71 Quirke: Do you want to tell us?

72 Von Winbush: Are you taping? I'd tell it first and see if she wants to tape it.

73 Quirke: You'd be surprised how that history sometimes is erased and kids from the North don't
74 necessarily know how absolutely contained it was for people, and the violence that was there. I
75 was hoping you could maybe tell us some stories about that and then tell us if it was racism that
76 fueled your interest in social justice? It seems like you have a very expansive vision of it, so if
77 there were other things in your childhood that fed that vision.

78 Von Winbush: The one thing that was interesting that my maternal grandmother, one of those
79 individuals that was a very strong woman, and she always said, "When you go out and get a job,
80 you'll be a man, because you can always come back home." She was the type who could go into—
81 you know Rose, on television, Charlie Rose. I guess one of his, I guess his great-grandfather it
82 would be. He owned Rose's Five and Dime Store. My grandmother said I could go in there and get
83 anything I wanted, just tell Mr. Rose I'm going to pay you such and such date and it was fine. That
84 was the kind of person she was. So she always told us, "Be a man. If you're talking to me, hold
85 your head up boy, look at me." Her back was as straight as this. [Holds hand up straight.] So
86 anyway, I'll never forget. I was working at Mr. Harrison's house. I was cleaning his house as a kid.
87 I went through to clean the front porch and he said, "You can't go back through the house." So I
88 quit, because "I just got through cleaning your house, coming through your house. Why can't I go
89 back?" "No, if you're on the porch you got to go back around. You can't be seen going back
90 through the house."

91 [00:12:10] The worst time—where I almost, really, I think I would have been killed. I was
92 working the drive-in, it was very crowded. This guy, this young man, he had his girlfriend, this
93 guy in the back with his girlfriend, and as I passed his car he used the "N" word, "Where's my

94 order?" I could see stars. I ran in through the front of the dining room, filled with white people,
95 through the kitchen, got a cleaver and I was coming back through I was going to hit this guy. Of
96 course, that was crazy. Mr. Avery was running behind me and caught me before I got there. I was
97 crying and getting ready to hit this guy with this cleaver. There would have been a riot, I would
98 have been dead of course, if I had done that. That's the kind of reaction you have to racism and
99 how you intend to react because we always wanted to act manly. You had to be very careful,
100 because you could indeed lose your life.

101 13:15 Another time, I was working in this barber shop. It was Wade Reed who, he was an older
102 guy, who was shining shoes and all that. There was one...that's why I really have a great feeling
103 about Scandinavians. This my first experience with a Scandinavian. He owned the barber shop,
104 Mr. Sertenson. Another guy in the barber shop, a little fat guy named Herbert. And Herbert used
105 to always call Wade Reed, he used to like to rub his head and call him the "Big N," and then he
106 wanted to call me "Little N." I said, "You know, you can't call me that." Mr. Sertenson told him,
107 told Herbert, "If he doesn't want you to call him that, don't you call him that." That was the
108 greatest—I had a very positive respect to Scandinavians from that day on. Each time I have met
109 them and I have lived a long time in Denmark, I had this wonderful feeling ever since then. When
110 I met them in graduate school it was a similar kind of experience. More egalitarian, and treating
111 you as an equal rather than you're down here always and I'm up here.

112 00:14:32] Those were the kind of things that happened and you had to be very careful in those
113 situations. For example, I was working waiting tables at one of the hotels, and also doing room
114 service. When you go into the room, if you see someone not properly clad you quickly got out of
115 there because you don't want to put yourself in a situation where you could ever be accused.
116 That's what my grandmother always told me, "Never put yourself in a position where you could

117 be accused of anything,” and I always try to live up to that because the racism is so... What was
118 the story? The black man has no rights that the white man has to respect [Ed.: Von Winbush
119 references the 1856 U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Dred Scott*, that denied citizenship to those of
120 African American descent—later struck down by the 1868 Fourteenth Amendment]. Which
121 means that you had no rights growing up like that, so you always had to be very careful about
122 what you did. Sometimes you’d forget, like I forgot with the cleaver. I was just so angry. I just
123 reacted like that.

124 15:30 But one time—you know it’s interesting how something can happen. Because after I went to
125 college, I was on my way back to the school on a Greyhound bus in North Carolina. By that time
126 the law had been passed that if you’re on interstate commerce you could sit anywhere on the bus.
127 The bus stopped in Henderson and I sat in the seat because it was interstate. I sat with this very
128 nice white woman and she was sitting beside me. She asked a lot of questions about what I was
129 doing and everything. The bus driver didn’t say anything. He didn’t say, “You got to move to the
130 back,” because he was going interstate and there was this law that said interstate commerce you
131 have the right to sit anywhere you want to. The same thing was true when I was coming from
132 Kansas City one time, going back to Tennessee. When it got to the Mason-Dixon line the train
133 unloaded. All the blacks had to get off the train and they reloaded so that you were in a
134 segregated car as you went below the Mason-Dixon line. I said, “Whoa, my stuff is up front there.”
135 He said, “Well, you can get it and take it back there.” I said, “No, my seat is up there.” He said, the
136 conductor said, “Well, you going to be the only so and so in that car.” I said, “That’s okay.” So I got
137 back in my seat and rode. It’s true. The other black people had gone to another car, but I sat in the
138 car where I had sat in from Kansas City. I felt that I should. Because again, interstate commerce,
139 you could sit anywhere you wish.

140 Quirke: [00:17:05] Is this after the Supreme Court decision in 1947?

141 Von Winbush: Yeah, that was the Supreme Court decision, exactly.

142 Quirke: But it wasn't in effect, even though...

143 Von Winbush: No, it all depends on you, really, and how much you're willing to push. But that
144 didn't affect buses running in their state or in their city, only when you're going interstate. Even
145 then, as you well know, there were problems, even then. It just so happened I never had a
146 problem at that particular time because of that interstate law. I never really got close to, but I
147 knew I couldn't vote. When I got eighteen, I could not vote.

148 Quirke: Even in the city, even when you were in college?

149 Von Winbush: I could not vote.

150 Quirke: You were in Nashville?

151 Von Winbush: Nashville, Tennessee. We couldn't vote. The first time I voted was in graduate
152 school. After I had gone to Kansas. In fact, while I was at Tennessee State in Nashville, Stella Bond,
153 was a good friend of mine. Her father was an undertaker. He was trying to go into the town to
154 vote. He had been told, don't come to town. He had been told. That was 1950, outside of
155 Nashville. He was shot on his way to vote. Can you imagine? On his way to vote, the man was
156 killed because he tried to vote. We couldn't vote at that particular time. That's why today I vote
157 for everything—dogcatcher—because I couldn't vote and now I get very involved.

158 Now remember in Nashville when we were marching to try to change things. It was huge
159 numbers. It was very interesting because both blacks and whites were involved in those marches.

160 Students for a Democratic Society had formed. It was very good to see them involved. You are

161 dealing with an inter-racial kind of situation.

162 Quirke: [00:19:05] You were in Nashville in the midst of the sort of sit-downs that attempted to
163 integrate...

164 Von Winbush: I came after that.

165 Quirke: After that?

166 Von Winbush: I came after the sit-in that took place.

167 Quirke: Which was like I think, '62 or three?

168 Von Winbush: Yeah, at that time I was at Tennessee State. Yeah, at Tennessee State, in '62.

169 Quirke: Where is that?

170 19:30 Von Winbush: Nashville. Then I went from Tennessee State to A&T College in Greensboro.
171 That's where we had the marches trying to desegregate downtown Greensboro.

172 Quirke: Greensboro, is a much tougher city than Nashville right? From what I've heard.

173 Von Winbush: Yeah. What's interesting is how easily it occurred. We had been marching,
174 marching, marching. One time the police surrounded all of the kids. They weren't ready to go to
175 the jail, they were using the football stadium at that time to incarcerate kids. After they let them
176 out, we were still marching. And Jesse would be on one side, I'd be on the other side marching.
177 One time we had sat down in the middle of the street at night. The police surrounded everyone.
178 The kids weren't ready to go to jail that night. So we said, "We got to break the police arms." So
179 we just ran at the police with the whole army to break them. A guy was getting ready to hit me
180 with a baton and the chief said, "No, no, no, no, no!" Because he knew it would create a riotous
181 situation. That's the night I went home and I shaved because I knew the next night I'm going to be

182 back again. I don't want the police to recognize me as one of the people who ran through.

183 We were marching, marching, marching. Finally, the business was losing money and so the key
184 people, the mayor of Greensboro, the chair of the National Bank, the chair of Burlington Mills,
185 about four or five of them got together and said, "Look, we're losing money. Let's end this." So
186 they agreed that there would be this trial situation, where a few of us would go to Morrison's
187 Cafeteria at the O'Henry Hotel. A few places like that and see, if nothing happened, the place was
188 integrated. Theaters, everything from that day on were integrated. Just because those four or five
189 people who were the key individuals in that town said it's time to end this. They could have done
190 it before, but they didn't do it until they were losing money. That was the end of the marches in
191 Greensboro. We didn't have to march anymore because everything was integrated.

192 Quirke: [00:21:38] So that's '62, '63?

193 Von Winbush: Yeah, around '62, '63 exactly.

194 Quirke: You've done your bachelors degree at Tennessee State and...

195 Von Winbush: My Ph.D. at Kansas.

196 Quirke: Now, you're back in North Carolina in Greensboro.

197 Von Winbush: Right. What happened was I finished Tennessee State and I went to Iowa State in
198 Ames, Iowa.

199 Quirke: One of the whitest of states.

200 Von Winbush: Interestingly, that was also the place where I first discovered that the students, I
201 really found that hemp grew along the riverbanks. During World War II they were afraid that the
202 source of hemp would dry up. They were experimenting with it along the banks of the river there

203 in Ames, Iowa. The students discovered it in the sixties, and so a lot of people were getting high.
204 The town would go to try to cut it down, but hemp is self-propagating. It's growing all over the
205 place. So we never did....

206 [00:22:52] Then I went from there to, I did most of my research at the Institute for Atomic
207 Research at Ames. Then from there I went to the University of Kansas. I finished, got my masters
208 at Iowa State, my doctorate at University of Kansas in Lawrence. That was quite an experience.
209 Then from there I came back to Tennessee State where I had gone and been in undergraduate
210 school. We stayed there for a short while, because we had one of those presidents that had no
211 vision. I was going to bring in people, I wanted to bring in several excellent theoretical chemists,
212 white, to work at Tennessee State along with a few others. We wanted to really build a strong
213 chemistry department. The president said, "Well, Dr. Von Winbush, we cannot hire any white
214 people until the University of Tennessee hires some black folk." I said, "Come on, you have your
215 department suffering because these people are myopic. Come on. So I could not hire Fred Horne,
216 who is an excellent theoretical chemist. He ended up being a dean out there at Oregon State
217 University. That's the kind of person he was. The other guy was an Englishman who went back to
218 England, he was a mathematician. It was very difficult during those days because people couldn't
219 see very far. It's like when the students during that, a bunch of students that were part of that
220 group that was on the buses. When the buses going interstate. There were about six students
221 from Tennessee State who were involved in that, and when they came back the president said,
222 "We can't allow them to re-enroll." So we surreptitiously re-enrolled the students because we
223 said, "It's crazy not to re-enroll these kids. After all look what they've been doing." So that's when
224 I left that place, because I said, he is myopic. He can't see. He will pay a whole lot of money for
225 band uniforms, but he won't support these people who want to come in, so I left.

226 Quirke: So then you went to Greensboro and you're a professor, from the point at which you were
227 at Tennessee State.

228 Von Winbush: Yeah, I went to Greensboro after Tennessee State. That's when we started getting
229 very involved with the movement.

230 Quirke: [00:25:27] Can I ask you just one backtrack question? Because you have described, liking
231 the earth and being from a farm or rural area. And I'm curious, at what point did you know that
232 you did not want to go back? That you wanted instead an education that was going to take you to
233 a very different place?

234 25:00 Von Winbush: Oh my grandmother, she was extraordinary at math. She used to tell us that
235 you get an education, then no one can take that away from you. She pushed education, even
236 though she herself was not educated. She could neither read nor write, but you could read the
237 Bible to her, a verse, and next week she could repeat that verse to you, because she had that kind
238 of memory. Her thing was that education was very, very important, and that if you're educated
239 you always got a job. And the same thing happened in school growing up, the teachers in those
240 schools, would always push you to do the best that you can. They wanted you to become
241 educated, and I got that push not only from my family, but also in the schools. They recognized
242 that I was pretty good, and that maybe I'm one of those that should be pushed. I also enjoyed
243 learning, I really did, I was one of those individuals who always had a book. I always used to run
244 with my grandfather, I thought he knew so much. He taught me so many things. I could take this
245 chair, if it didn't have a seat, I know how to take stuff from the woods, and put a seat in it, twine
246 and put a seat in it. He taught so many things, practical things in addition to books. We always
247 had books to read around the house, so that push came from my family as well as from the
248 teachers that I encountered growing up.

249 Quirke: Was your grandfather a farmer? Is that what he did for a living?

250 Von Winbush: Oh, he was a fantastic farmer. In fact he was a truck farmer, which was
251 extraordinary back in those days.

252 Quirke: So that means you take stuff to market somewhere?

253 Von Winbush: Yes, our job as a kid was to build crates that he got and then we'd load them with
254 things like cantaloupes and corn and take them to town, and sell them. In fact, he bought his farm.
255 He also learned how to make moonshine. So I always said my grandfather was a chemist,
256 because he made moonshine. That's how he bought his farm, he sold moonshine. And that's what
257 ended up...actually he died early because the state took his farm by eminent domain, and the
258 money they had paid him he couldn't do anything. He went from a self-owning farm, owning a
259 farm, to someone who was going to be a tenant farmer. And you can never get ahead in tenant
260 farming, never. Because the person who owns the land, will tell you "Well, Ms. Quirke, you
261 almost got even this year" "Yeah von Winbush, you almost broke even." You never get ahead; you
262 almost broke even, so you always owe. So literally, it gave him a heart attack from when the state
263 took his farm and he died at a very early, early age. He couldn't take the idea of starting over
264 again as a tenant farmer; he just couldn't take it. So that's the kind of thing that happened, that
265 my first real encounter of what it's like to be shafted by the state.

266 Quirke: Was there the sense that this was racially motivated as well?

267 Von Winbush: We felt that it was, because he was doing too well. He had bought his farm, now
268 he's a truck farmer selling goods, and people would come from town during the depression and
269 they would come and get food from him. He grew all his food, smoked the meat, smoked potatoes,
270 so they would endure. So we had a smoke house filled with meat, hams, all that kind of thing.

271 During the hog killing season, for example, everything about the hog you use, even the blood. You
272 made blood pudding. And then you took the head off the hog and cut it up, and smoked the ham,
273 the thighs, and stuff like that. He was very independent, and I think that was one of those cases
274 where he was doing too well, and the state took his farm by eminent domain. It was tragic, from
275 the family's standpoint.

276 Quirke: What did your grandmother do?

277 Von Winbush: We moved to another place, and tried to farm. With her, she had eleven kids, and
278 two of the older kids had gotten married and the other kids were with her. We tried to farm on
279 that particular land, but it was never profitable; it was always tough. I remember one Christmas,
280 we usually always got all kinds of gift for Christmas. One Christmas she told us, "Santa Claus, we
281 didn't have enough to pay Santa Claus this year. So we could only get such and such." So we got
282 very little that Christmas, because there was not much money, very little to none. Because we
283 were tenant farmers, it was tough from then on. We had plenty of food and that kind of thing but
284 no excess money after we became tenant farmers, very different. So that was one of the things
285 that she said, "Make sure you become educated, so you don't have to do this. Do something else."

286 Quirke: 31:49 I want to move us forward just a little bit. You were describing earlier when we
287 were first starting the conversation, you were telling us about, I think it was being in Greensboro,
288 am I right? Probably in '65 when Black Power was coming into vogue. So do you mind telling us a
289 little about that? Because that was very interesting because I think we got half of it, but not all of
290 it.

291 Von Winbush: The Black Power movement, I was move involved with that in Nashville and then
292 in Greensboro.

293 Quirke: Oh so in the early '60's then? Oh, you went back to Fisk...

294 Von Winbush: [00:32:37] No, I taught at Tennessee State first, went to A&T College in Greensboro
295 which is another land grant school, and then from there I only stayed in Greensboro for another
296 three years because I didn't like the president again. Fisk had more opportunity, and that was the
297 idea of being at a private school, we thought that it would be much different. They offered me a
298 very attractive salary and they were trying to, Steve Wright was the president, he was trying to
299 bring in a lot of African Americans in different departments to try and even build up the school
300 more. Fisk at the time was one of those, very good black colleges, and Steve Wright was really
301 trying to build up the whole group, and Killens was a writer in residence, and David Driskell, who
302 was there, he got an honorary degree from Yale, also.

303 To give you an idea of these people, Driskell has a wing named for him at the University of
304 Maryland now. He was part of that group that Steve Wright brought in. John Killens wrote two
305 or three books, he was a writer in residence just like myself. Oh, Jesse Smith, who was one of the
306 outstanding librarians, that you ever want to encounter. So there was a whole group of us that
307 came with Steve Wright in which he wanted to expand and improve the various departments
308 there. So we formed this little group that was interested in, more or less, before black power, we
309 wanted to push the Africanness of these different places. We wanted to have this "Non-Western
310 Studies" we called it. That was before Black Studies came into being. Black studies was not the
311 thing in those days, so we called it Non-Western Studies, and we felt with that we'd have a
312 different board. Harry Belafonte, Sidney Poitier those are some of the individuals we wanted on
313 this board for this Non-Western Studies program.

314 Quirke: And it wasn't Pan-African, it was almost global, it was non-aligned?

315 Von Winbush: We got approved by the council to set up this particular program. That's when all

316 these people came together, and Belafonte was interested at that time to help fund it.

317 Quirke: That's really innovative.

318 Von Winbush: It was, at that time, it was. Because we felt that Fisk was a great place to have this
319 Non-Western Studies, that instead of people going elsewhere, they would come to Fisk to study, if
320 we were to set up this program. A lot of people were opposed to it. Really, we had a tough time
321 getting the faculty, we had to integrate the faculty, a lot of white people working at Fisk at time.
322 Some of them felt threatened by it. It really was quite a task to get that done, but we did. After
323 Steve Wright left, it was difficult to maintain it, and so all of us scattered, and that's when I left
324 Fisk and when I came here to Old Westbury. David Driskell left and went to Maryland, Killens
325 came back to New York, he continued his writing, he lived in Brooklyn, and continued his writing.
326 One of the few people who stayed was Jesse Smith, because she was head of the library. Chris
327 Deshpande stayed, but a bunch of us went to different places after that. I was encouraged to
328 leave, when I felt that Fisk would... There was a kid named Stevens who had just got his doctorate
329 at Vanderbilt, in inorganic chemistry. And I felt that Fisk, I had been there six years, Fisk could
330 get this kid, cheaper than for me to stay, and they bring him in and I'll leave and you'll save
331 money by bringing in Stevens. So I did get them to do that, because by that time I had met John
332 Maguire, and he was pushing me, pulling me, to try to come to Old Westbury.

333 Quirke: So maybe you can tell us a little about that, how did you end up here?

334 Von Winbush: I was at Wesleyan, as I said, on this exchange program at Wesleyan University, in
335 Middletown, Connecticut, on this exchange program. It was a joy working at Wesleyan
336 University, because before I even got there they said "What do you need for your research?" And
337 when I got there, everything I gave them, my laboratory was set up for me when I got to
338 Wesleyan, I could not believe it. Students were involved in the Vietnam protest during the time,

339 this was around 1969, and this faculty meeting in which the question was what are we going to
340 do with these students who now have been protesting, some have been arrested, when it comes
341 to the exam. And I was one of those faculty members who were pleading for, you give the
342 students extra time to make up for that which they were doing, because that's an educational
343 experience. So John Maguire came to introduce himself, he said "I'm John Maguire, Assistant
344 Provost" or something like that, and he told me about himself, and we became friends, from that
345 day on. I would come to his house and have dinner. Then one time he told me "I've been named
346 president down at Old Westbury, I would like for you to come to Old Westbury." And I said John,
347 "I can't come, because I'm on sabbatical, I'm on leave, and I'm committed to go back to Fisk, for at
348 least one year, because they had granted me this leave." So he said "why not come become a
349 consultant?" So I said, "Ok, I'll be a consultant." Because at that time, John would be the second
350 president. The first thing that they wanted to do, because Old Westbury One didn't work out, to
351 some degree, because the CRAV, the Craven Committee did a study on the people at Planting
352 Fields at that particular time. And part of that report said "We notice students grooving in the
353 grass, smoking pot and polishing pots. We need to change the direction." That's when they
354 decided to, Wofford went to Bryn Mawr, and they selected John after being searched, because
355 John had been associated with Martin Luther King Jr. they said hey this is a good guy to get, and
356 so I came as a consultant.

357 That time was a very interesting period of time because John wanted the people who were really
358 interested in innovation in education. What can we do differently than just stand in front of the
359 classroom, talking to the kids. We had different study groups, a guy named Val Woodard was
360 head of the group in Science. He was really one of those, how would you describe him, very, very,
361 very liberal kind of individuals. [Laughter] He was really in charge of this group putting together
362 how we were going to deal with science. The idea was to do it in such a way that you almost had

363 individualized instruction. In fact, at the old Campus Center, the science area was designed to
364 have sort of a Socratic kind of teaching of science. And Val felt that we ought to have the students
365 involved in setting up their own curricula. We always had our work done very quickly, we in the
366 science group, but the people in the Social Science group were still talking and we said when are
367 they going to decide on anything? It took them forever; they talked and talked and talked. They
368 never really ended up coming to any conclusions. But eventually they did.

369 Quirke: I didn't realize that the sciences were also interdisciplinary at that point in time. That's
370 really interesting.

371 Von Winbush: 42:00 Oh, that was the way to do it. We felt that we should not put science in
372 different compartments; that we should actually try to show the inter-relationship with science.
373 As a consequence that's when we set up this program called "Science and Technology" that was
374 one of the programs, very early program, Math, Physics, and Chemistry were going to be taught in
375 that particular area. We wanted to show the inter-relationship of those various sciences. And we
376 also wanted to get the people in art involved with science because we felt that the chemist might
377 use these various chemicals to describe an event the art people used. There is certain creativity in
378 both cases, it's just the difference is what we use to express that creativity. We indeed can have
379 an interrelationship between the arts and science. We had a program, a course in which we did
380 indeed have a lot of people in the arts, would take that particular course. We used to remind them
381 that the periodic table was set up initially based on the musical scale. So there is that basis for
382 thinking that way, and it was very good because we wanted that interrelationship between art
383 and science.

384 Quirke: So who were you working with, at this point? Who's part of these conversations? Is
385 Kamnitzer [Luis Kamnitzer, of the Art Department] part of these?

386 Von Winbush: You know what's interesting, during this period of time, people looked at Old
387 Westbury One as has having failed. So keep in mind Old Westbury One was very creative, because
388 they wanted to have four such villages, like the Academic Village. To us that was extraordinary to
389 have that kind of arrangement. But when we came, none of the people at Old Westbury One were
390 involved in the discussion for the developing of Old Westbury Two.

391 Quirke: [00:44:24] Because they were just turned off?

392 Von Winbush: Because they failed. And actually there was this discussion as to who from Old
393 Westbury One would we keep to be a part of the faculty at Old Westbury Two, as it was called.
394 And Kamnitzer, was one of those questions, an extraordinary individual, I love that guy to death,
395 he's extraordinary. I've never met such a human being, he's a rarity, a rarity I could talk for days
396 about him as he's my friend.

397 Quirke: We'd like to interview him too.

398 Von Winbush: I wish you would.

399 Quirke: I hope that we can.

400 Von Winbush: I would tell him to do such, because he's extraordinary.

401 Quirke: I love the story of his setting up a sort of boulder over the main building, so people would
402 walk under it, and sense uncertainty, and also danger.

403 Von Winbush: He's the one who created the *Little Finger*, that newspaper I showed you. It was his
404 idea, a way of really criticizing and talking about the administration. I don't know how Kamnitzer
405 survived that period of time, nor myself, but we did, you know. Because freedom of speech is
406 your freedom of speech and we exercised that, and since we wrote these articles and put our

407 names on it, then fine. You see, at that particular time when these committees would meet, keep
408 in mind, that was during the time people were undergoing various kinds of group analyses, and
409 people having these times when you're having their foot rubbed, and going through these vast
410 kind of changes of expressing themselves, and liberating themselves. We would sit out in the dark
411 out in the field by Trainor House and one-on-one liberating ourselves, emptying our whole soul
412 of anything that was hindering us from doing what we wanted to do. Some of the people would
413 sit around in the circle start talking about themselves, pretty soon they were crying. And it was
414 an amazing kind of environment. My wife said, "I don't want any part of it." But we were at
415 Trainor House and we were having these sessions, in which this individual, I can't remember his
416 name; he was coming so that we could have this, we would commune with each other, emptying
417 out our souls of those things that might hinder us of being pro-women, and anti-racism, against
418 racism, obviously. It was very interesting I must say. I have pictures from some of those days.

419 47:28 We initially wanted a super chemist, a super scientist to head the Science Department. We
420 had invited for example Pedro Smith from Oak Ridge National Laboratory, he was an
421 extraordinary chemist to come and sort of head the group. But Pedro said "No," he didn't want to,
422 and [Ron] Mickens who was an extraordinary young chemist who used to converse with the
423 Nobel Prize laureates at Stony Brook, he was that type of individual. He came and said "No, no,
424 no." So we sort of changed the direction of having this super chemist to just having, as we say, the
425 interdisciplinary kind of thing.

426 Quirke: Was there even a possibility, that there would have been resources for these things?

427 Von Winbush: At that time money was quite plentiful, in terms of research during those days.
428 Keep in mind that this was after Sputnik in 1958 or '59, so there was this push for science
429 education.

430 Quirke: Money coming from the feds primarily, or state as well?

431 Von Winbush: Federal grants, and things that allowed the state and even private, that possibility.

432 And if you got a well-known scientist, he would be key for doing such a thing. One of the things

433 that we were pushing for, when we brought in people, was that even though we are a teaching

434 institution, you must try to do some kind of research because that's so important. We wanted

435 students involved with that research also, so we, right from the start, we wanted the students

436 involved with whatever we did.

437 Quirke: Which is unusual for undergraduates?

438 Von Winbush: We felt that we wanted to be different, because at that time the idea was to create

439 different modes of teaching, and then we would transmit that to other institutions in the system.

440 We were supposed to be the so-called "experimental college," and we were experimenting in

441 different ways of teaching. For example, in my case, I was doing "self-pacing" mode in chemistry,

442 in which each student would go at his or her own speed. One young lady for example in chemistry

443 did two semesters of chemistry in one semester, but another may take three semesters but the

444 students both end up at the same level, grade-wise. We felt that people learn at different rates,

445 and therefore you shouldn't penalize this person, because he or she is slower than this other

446 individual. So that's why we were self-pacing, and you could go as fast as you wish, and this

447 young lady was extraordinary. She, as I said, finished two semesters of chemistry in one

448 semester. Then she transferred to Stony Brook. Then she went out west on a vacation and met

449 this cowboy and never came back to science. She came back and told me this story, I was

450 disappointed that she had not continued science, because she was so bright. Cowboy, come on.

451 But that was one of the things that we did in those days, total immersion. For example, we

452 would have a series of experiments that we would do, and the students would only be doing

453 those sets of experiments for that period of time. It enabled that kid to go from step one, two,
454 three, and do a lot of work in a short period of time. The new science, the new chemistry building
455 was designed in such a way that you could do different things; you could rearrange that
456 laboratory in the course of a day, so that you could have different compartments in there to do
457 different things. We felt that the building should not dictate that which you are doing. So we
458 wanted to be able to change this structure so that you could do different things in the building. So
459 it was a fascinating period of time because you could try these different—we taught a course
460 called “Science and Racism” in which there was a biologist, a chemist and a sociologist all
461 involved with looking at racism from a different standpoint. And Monica Jardines, Bill Grant and
462 myself taught the class.

463 Quirke: Who was the sociologist?

464 Von Winbush: Monica Jardines, and she went back to Latin America, Bill Grant is now a full
465 professor at North Carolina State University, in Raleigh. But we taught that class, it was an
466 interesting class.

467 Quirke: That’s an early example of a class like that; I saw that in the book.

468 Von Winbush: We taught that class, and one time, for example, there was an incident in which
469 this lady in Texas had claimed that a man, that she had identified the man who had shot someone
470 at a McDonalds. They said “How did you know that he was the person?”, “How did you identify
471 him?” “I blew the horn and he turned and looked at me.” We said, “Now come on, if someone had
472 just shot somebody, you’re ducking, you’re not...So we conducted an experiment in our class to
473 show that, telling someone that you can identify that person that is one of the least things you
474 should depend on because it’s very difficult. If the Mafia goes into a place filled with people and
475 shoots someone, you can’t identify who did it. So we had this experiment and we told these three

476 students what we were going to do so they would be in on the experiment. Monica is supposed to
477 come into the room and I'm supposed to be having this argument with her, and I was supposed to
478 point my finger at her and I was supposed to slap her. But actually I never slapped her, I just
479 waved my hand, and she did like this and stormed out of the classroom. So we staged this thing,
480 and I'm talking to her, and she's talking back to me right at the front of the door, and all the
481 students are sitting there looking at us, right. And we went through that experiment and had the
482 students write about what happened.

483 And they said Dr. Von Winbush argued with Dr. Jardines and he ended up slapping her. Instead of
484 slapping her I actually kissed her on the cheek. And only those three students who were in on the
485 experiment actually wrote about what really happened. And here you have students right by the
486 door. And here you are now in the middle of the night and someone shoots somebody, and you
487 said that you blew your horn so you're going to identify the person, no way man. In fact, they
488 found out that later on, that that person was not even nowhere near that place. She identified the
489 wrong person.

490 Quirke: So did you look at stuff like Thomas Jefferson's writings?

491 Von Winbush: 55:00 No, we looked at stuff like the whole idea, we looked at facial structures. We
492 used to say that the silliest thing that you could do, is to say that any one person, any racial group
493 is superior to any other person or racial group. That's what segregation says, right? Or it would
494 be if you're white, you are superior. We know that even among white people that there are
495 people at the top and all in between, so when you're looking at another group you cannot say that
496 every person over here is superior to all the people over here. In fact, just recently, I wrote to
497 Carter, President Jimmy Carter, he was asking for ideas to discuss. I said why you don't just
498 discuss this idea, about the superiority that any white person, that's what segregation says, is

499 superior to any black person. Because that's what had happened in those days. I can't go in the
500 store because I'm black, I can't sit there because I'm black.

501 Quirke: It's both different and the same today. The ideas circulate in a different ways, but they're
502 still there.

503 Von Winbush: It was so interesting, you may have heard the story about Watson, the Nobel Prize
504 laureate, right?

505 Quirke: Mr. DNA.

506 Von Winbush: He said some negative things about African Americans, and then someone had
507 done his DNA and found out that thirteen percent of his pool is of African origin, and yet he says
508 some disparaging remarks. That was quite interesting. That's what's was so fascinating about
509 coming to Old Westbury at that particular time, we didn't feel like we were coming to work. We
510 felt like we built an institution that was so interesting, because we could do all these trial things
511 and our door was always open so students can come in and get help at any time; we'd never turn
512 down a student. It was a beautiful experience, I thought that when John Maguire said that was
513 one of the most wonderful periods of time that I ever had, in my being at Old Westbury.

514 Quirke: [00:57:37] Based on the interviews I've done, that everyone would say the same thing.
515 Certainly some people spent a fair amount of time fighting him [Maguire], in the same way that
516 people fought with Harris Wofford. So how did that play out? Because it seems from what I've
517 heard, that so many of the battles felt not particularly productive in hindsight. What did they feel
518 like in the middle of them? Can you talk about some of the conflicts that were here maybe in the
519 Maguire years and maybe later.

520 Von Winbush: One of the things I had difficulty with Maguire—and he's a friend—I always felt

521 that some blacks didn't get a fair shake, when it came to tenure. We lost two people because
522 there's a different standard in my mind, used with the black professors, as compared to whites.
523 We had Selby Hicks, she was a good friend, and she was acting as Academic Vice President. We
524 had a long discussion about two individuals who, one in psychology who did not get tenure, as
525 contrasted to one of the persons in the biological science who did. And the major difference
526 between the two individuals in our mind, but one was ruled, they did not get, grant that man
527 tenure, and the other person that was white and they granted him tenure. We had some serious
528 problems about that. And we had problems about the idea. John used to want the people who
529 were on the chair of the ARPT Committee (Appointment, Reappointment Promotion and Tenure
530 Committee), to have a discussion with him prior to the meeting of the ARPT. Person X, I have
531 some problem with, Person B I have some problem... When I became chair I said "No, no, no. We
532 can't have a discussion of these individuals prior to considering them. There's nothing in the
533 bylaws that says we have to have this discussion." So we did not.

534 Quirke: This was prior to hiring them, or prior to tenure?

535 Von Winbush: Prior to tenure. We had questions about departments, that brought in African
536 Americans, who were ABD, all but dissertated. We said, "Why can't you can't find someone who
537 has a doctorate so they have a good chance of getting tenure. We in science, and mathematics, I
538 say, we can find people in Mathematics who have a PhD, why can't you get somebody in
539 American Studies who has a PhD, in Comparative Humanities, who has a PhD, so they have a good
540 chance of getting tenure? If we can find a woman with a PhD in chemistry and mathematics, why
541 can't you find the same, an African American with a PhD?" We always felt that in chemistry and
542 physics and mathematics, that we should have the minorities there first. Because if you have the
543 majority person there first, there's a tendency not to attend, even at Old Westbury. If you look at

544 American Studies over the years, they didn't have anywhere near the kind of distribution of
545 individuals like in Chemistry. If you look at Chemistry and Physics right now, you have women,
546 Asians, African Americans, the whole distribution. And we've always been that way in that
547 particular department because we knew that we wanted to have a diverse department, because it
548 was very interesting to have such a grouping. Other departments, look at the Biological Sciences,
549 the top people there are white, you don't have an African American in that department. Because
550 the tendency [is] not to seek such individuals. We, who were the senior persons, went out and got
551 those people. We wanted a diverse department because we thought it was best. We had a
552 diverse student body, why not have a diverse department, and that's what we tried to do.

553 Quirke: I don't know if American Studies is better now, or not?

554 Von Winbush: I don't know either.

555 Quirke: You left in 1996, who was there in 96?

556 Von Winbush: In 1996 there was no one there, tenured, black, who was tenured in American
557 Studies at that time.

558 Quirke: So that would be different now, since we have two African American tenured faculty, and
559 one who is coming up for tenure in a faculty of nine, so it's definitely better. I'm curious about the
560 money. In our field, in American Studies, people get snatched up. When I was in graduate school,
561 the lone African American woman in my department got snatched up in year five of our studies.
562 Which was not the case for most of us. So it's harder to compete because the college doesn't have
563 the money to pay. Although some people are attracted to the college, and want to come for that
564 reason.

565 Von Winbush: I know the two people who came during that time, none had their doctorate when

566 they came, and neither one of them really got tenure. Whereas we in Mathematics got Louise
567 Richards PhD; [Henry] Teoh in Physics; PhD, [Jong Pil, deceased December 2011] Lee, PhD. We
568 had no problem getting those individuals. In Chemistry, Evelyn Garrity, an older woman, PhD, in
569 analytical chemistry, she acted as Dean for a short while. And later on a younger woman, Judy
570 Lloyd, and later on Barbara Hillery, another woman. Now we've got—[Youngjoo] Kim—I'm
571 acting like I'm still in the department. But they still have that diversity that we started with.

572 Quirke: I was surprised we were called the white people's department

573 Von Winbush: We always would scream about American Studies. How is it we can find a person
574 with a PhD in mathematics, and you can't in American Studies. You see, early on there was one, I
575 think it was Novak,

576 Quirke: Michael Novak? The right-wing Catholic?

577 Von Winbush: Novak, he was an early individual in that department. He went on to become a
578 consultant to some of the people in Congress. He couldn't deal with the diversity that was coming
579 in, so he left. I always was critical of American Studies myself, because I felt that they could do a
580 better job of hiring and finding and hiring an African American who could get tenure. We always
581 felt, if we could hire people like that. Make it attractive, and you could find such people. Make it
582 attractive. And they were tenureable people. Not a single person that I can remember we
583 brought in who did not get tenure in chemistry and physics, not get promoted. We had no
584 problem. If we can do that in chemistry and mathematics, we don't have that many people going
585 in that area, in mathematics.

586 Quirke: 1:06 Particularly because the department liked to think of itself as progressive, it's an
587 interesting disjuncture. How are you doing, we've been going, but it seems as if we've just begun.

588 Can we do another half hour?

589 Von Winbush: I'm fine, let's keep going.

590 Quirke: I'd like to go backward to the different curricular innovations that you were making. I'm
591 curious, because the college is not as experimental anymore as it was, I think even in the sciences,
592 and I'm curious, our department, American Studies, is one of the last interdisciplinary
593 departments. What happened? Can you describe the trajectory of what happened?

594 Von Winbush 1:07 I think what happened, it came with the people who were being hired. When
595 John left, a major change. That's what we wrote about in the *Little Finger*, about Pettigrew,
596 because she was more of a traditionalist. She was pushing for...Just before she came, Wingfield,
597 [ed. acting president Clyde Wingfield] actually it started with Wingfield. Wingfield was more
598 interested in more traditional kinds of departments. He created Business, and put a lot of money
599 there. So he was more of a traditionalist. The idea of being in an experimental college sort of
600 went by the wayside. And more people who were brought in, were more interested in the more
601 usual way of delivering information.

602 Quirke How did that play out in your classroom? If you were having a really wonderful
603 experience teaching with your colleagues, how did it happen? Did it slowly happen that the
604 interactivity eroded?

605 Von Winbush: Well money dried up too, I must say. For example, in order to teach by the self-
606 pacing mode, you need assistants, graduate assistants. I used to get people from Stony Brook
607 who would come and also be part of the group that was available for the students with self-
608 pacing. And the money started drying up for that, so we had to go to a more lecture-type format.
609 But even there we did things like, the students didn't have to be in class, at that time we could

610 record the lectures and put them on tape, and had them in the library. So the student could go
611 and listen to it if he or she missed the class, that kind of thing. We had programs so that when
612 students came in, we would see where he or she was through examinations, then we would start
613 that student into a space. That's why we had open, so-called open enrollment. We always said
614 the door is wide on entrance, but narrow on exit because we want you to be able to compete. And
615 we did. We had students who left here, and got admitted to medical school at the interview, at
616 schools like Vanderbilt, at schools like Harvard. We had students who left and went to Stony
617 Brook for a graduate degree and they would give that student a stipend, at the level of the
618 students who were leaving their PhD, because the student had been so well trained at Old
619 Westbury. We had a lot of students involved in the research. A lot of students, almost all of us
620 had students, back in those days, who were part of our research team. So they had a reason to go
621 to Nashville meeting to give papers.

622 Quirke: I know this stuff happens—it's so exciting.

623 Von Winbush: It's exciting that the student had a chance not only to do research, but to give
624 papers at national meetings. I don't know as the money changed, we had to change some things.
625 And then when Pettigrew came, and her idea of college differed. She was no longer interested in
626 any experimentation kind of thing. She was the one who got rid of, Luis [Kamnitzer] said, she got
627 rid of Music and Dance because she wasn't made a full professor. But I don't know. She can't
628 play, one thing we know, she can't play, she was not a good pianist. I remember, to give an idea
629 how backwards this person was. I had been doing research in Denmark, and met our
630 ambassador in Denmark, I had dinner at his house. I was told about an exchange program we
631 would like to have with a technical university in Denmark. We would have four or five students
632 coming from Old Westbury going to the technical university in Denmark, along with some faculty,

633 and faculty from Denmark would come. And we would have grant money to pay for the
634 differential so no one would be out of any pocket money. And Denmark, the director of the
635 technical university in Denmark had agreed, and the Ambassador said it was a fantastic idea. So
636 all we needed was the approval from *el presidente*. The people in Denmark, Dr. Fairman had been
637 here one summer and looking at the facilities. Everything was ready to go. All we needed from
638 her was the approval letter. So I was going to leave for a conference at St. Andrews. And I
639 wanted a letter from her so I could take it with me, because it's not that far from St. Andrews to
640 Denmark. And she wrote this letter that said, "Dr. Fairman, I want to introduce you to Dr. Von
641 Winbush." I said "Whoah. Dr. Pettigrew, I've been working with these people for ten years—you
642 can't introduce me to somebody I already know." And then she told me, "Go back to sciences and
643 rewrite the letter." So I went; we rewrote the letter and it hardly mentioned her. All it said, "I
644 approve of this program," signed, L. Eudora Pettigrew. She did not like that, because she was not
645 emphasized. So she said to me. "Dr. Von Winbush, What do the people know about the College at
646 Old Westbury?" I said "Dr. Pettigrew, they came here, they've seen our facilities, and they love
647 everything, and everything will be fine." "It seems like the only thing they know about the college
648 is what is in your head. I want you to take this." She had this folder with all these newspaper
649 clippings, "Tough Lady on the Hot Seat." That was the headline on one of the newspaper
650 clippings. I said, "I'm not taking this." She said, "Dr. Von Winbush. If you don't do what the
651 president says, there is no program." I said, "Then there is no program." I'm not taking her junk.
652 It had nothing to do with her, it was a faculty-student exchange. But she could see herself, I'm
653 sure, talking with the Queen. When she went to China, with a faculty member, she wanted the
654 faculty member to come back carrying a bunch of statues that she had bought. The person
655 refused. She got rid of the program that the person was in charge of. The person disappeared,
656 with no job.

657 Quirke: What program was this?

658 Von Winbush: Language, what was the young lady's name. Beautiful young lady, she was the
659 head of the program. But we had a faculty meeting dinner, because they were using her material
660 and giving her no credit. Then we found that's possible to do, and as a consequence the president
661 could indeed, if she got rid of the program, then the person has to go too. And she did the same
662 thing with Music and Dance. I went to the Board of Trustees, trying to tell them what was
663 happening at Old Westbury, what was happening to Music and Dance. I said, "This individual is
664 doing nothing but destroying the college." I said, "I told her, Music and Dance is inexpensive. You
665 want to get rid of an expensive program, get rid of Chemistry and Physics. We are a very
666 expensive program." She wanted to get rid of Music and Dance, because something that
667 happened. Music and Dance was a great program, and it just disappeared. When the Board of
668 Trustees talked about this, she had of course tried to say it was like this, but she was the problem
669 at this college.

670 Quirke: She was here for close to...

671 Von Winbush: 1:15 Twelve years. This black woman, and she said, "Dr. Pettigrew, these are my
672 parents." "How do you do? Remember we got such and such coming up." She didn't have the
673 courtesy to talk with the parents. The first thing was when she was down in, where the little café
674 is.

675 Quirke: The Rattskeller?

676 Von Winbush: In the Campus Center. No, it's here, where you can buy food. There's a little area,

677 Brianne Barry: The Atrium.

678 Von Winbush: Where you go in and get your food. She had been walking, so she wanted to stop

679 in and get something. She got a turkey sandwich, a wrap, a piece of pickle, a toothpick stuck in it.
680 She told the woman "I don't want that." "What?" "I don't want that, the pickle." "Well Ma'am, you
681 can just take it off." "Do you know who I am? I am the President. Take it off." Can you imagine?
682 But the worse scenario, this will give you an insight to what this woman was like. When her
683 secretary used to fix the President's lunch. She had spread things on the little tray, and took it to
684 the President. She had some bananas she had brought for herself, and she gave the President one
685 to add fruit to her lunch. "Oh thank you, thank you very much." The mistake the young lady
686 made, was the next day, she put another banana on the tray, because she had pleased the
687 President so well that first day she put another one on there, and took it to the President. "What
688 is that? Take that off. Take that off." She must have assumed that the woman assumed that she
689 was like the animals that like bananas I guess, because she called the Director of Personnel. "I
690 want this person off this campus." "No, she has a continuous contract" "No, I want her out of this
691 building." So she sent her to the gym, just because just because for two days in a row she gave
692 her a banana. That will give you an insight of what this person was like.

693 Quirke: She was here a long time, close to a decade right. Why did the College Council keep her?

694 Von Winbush: You couldn't get rid of her. That's what the Board of Trustees said. They had
695 other...she was one of the few blacks of the thirty [SUNY] campuses they was a president at that
696 particular time, and also a woman. So they felt that they had...it was political. It had nothing to
697 do with her competence, because she was not that. I always knew how to get under her skin and
698 did so. Because in labor and management meetings; we are equal. I am representing labor, she
699 was representing management. So I would send an agenda to her. And the thing that I would
700 never write down.L. Eudora Pettigrew. I would write Lenore E. Pettigrew. And she, it would get
701 under her skin. She did not want to be Lenore. But my thing was that we are equal. If you want

702 someone to put L.E. Pettigrew. All it is, is an agenda to our thing. But that would anger her.

703 Quirke: Did she make decisions about the curriculum by fiat? When we're describing money
704 drying up, and the push from above to make the classes less interdisciplinary—was she making
705 these decisions, particularly for your department?

706 Von Winbush: 1:20 We more or less went that way because of the cost. We had to change
707 ourselves because of the cost involved. The larger sizes of classes and things like that. That's
708 what caused us to change also. We still felt that the things that we were doing with students, the
709 amount of time that we interacted with them. For example, in the laboratory, we still had, we
710 wanted to use simulated experiments before they did the actual experiments. They go use the
711 computer to do an experiment, so they could get an idea about the experiment before they did
712 the actual wet experiment. And that was a lot of fun for them to do that. It became very easy
713 then for them to do a titration if they had done a titration on the computer. Then you could go
714 and do the titration, it became very simple for you to do it, it became very simple, and much more
715 understandable. So we still used technology whenever we could. Audio-visual techniques, we
716 always tried to do as much of that as we could.

717 Her biggest problem had to do with things like research. For example, Luis Kamnitzer had
718 written a grant to bring in a Cuban artist here. It was in connection with Harvard. He had told
719 them, "Look, if you have a problem with the grant, please call me." And there was a deadline.
720 And she always had someone else read these things, and at the very bottom they had to initial it.
721 At the very bottom she would put her name. By the time it went through all these other people, it
722 ended up being too late. So he lost his grant because of that. My grant, because she wanted to be
723 involved with a program that she had no part of. So those are some things that were difficult
724 with this person, had to do with things like that. Because she couldn't see the value. Imagine, a

725 school like Old Westbury, having an exchange program with a technical university in Denmark.
726 Four or five students coming from Denmark, along with professors. And our students going to
727 Denmark. It would be a fantastic experience and we had the money for that. We had grant
728 money for travel, grant money to make the difference in between the costs in the two countries.
729 All they had to do was approve it. But because she wasn't involved in it, her name...she would
730 rather see it go. She wanted to have lunch with the Queen, that's what it seemed like really.

731 Quirke: 1:23:30 Can I ask you about the student body? If you were here during the planning
732 stages with John Maguire, then you were probably here during the discussions of what the racial
733 composition of the student body should be. I am wondering if you could tell us anything about
734 those discussions, and also about the diversity in your department? It seems as if the
735 department, not just the faculty but also the student body was quite diverse.

736 Von Winbush: In the early days we thought we had this concept, but we couldn't put it in print, of
737 30:30:30:10. Thirty percent black, thirty percent white, thirty percent Latino, ten percent Asian.
738 We felt that we could discuss it ourselves, and we could strive for that, but we couldn't actually
739 put that in print. Because even some of the courses that we had, caused people, those external to
740 the university, to scream about it. Even wrote about us in the newspaper, about what are they
741 doing over there, in so many words. So it was never written. But we had that as a goal, to try to
742 have that kind of diversity. I'm not sure what it was, but we did strive for that kind of
743 composition. You see, I remember talking to a group of presidents at a meeting, at a statewide
744 faculty senate meeting. They were talking about the percentage of students who graduated after
745 four years. And I was trying to explain to them that at Old Westbury, our concern was not with
746 how long it took, but the quality of the students graduating. That's what we were concerned
747 with. You may see that we may have a low percentage of graduating in four years, but, we had a

748 higher percentage of students graduating per se. And so you should look at that in comparison,
749 because of the nature of what we did. We weren't that selective at the entrance, because we
750 wanted to be wide at the entrance, but very narrow at the exit.

751 Our students could compete with anyone. To give you an example, one time we had had
752 this competition, for the best students from the various colleges on Long Island, would go to
753 Stony Brook, one from each campus, the best student, would go to Stony Brook, for this exam.
754 And there would be prize for the best student. Adelphi, Hofstra, all the schools, Famingdale,
755 Stony Brook, Old Westbury. I remember the chair said, "Don't you think we should have a fourth
756 prize so that....Old Westbury?" We're not concerned about a fourth prize. We know what we put
757 out, because our standards were set up according to the American Chemical Society. So when
758 they started having the tests. First time, the Old Westbury student came in second to the Stony
759 Brook student. This is in chemistry, right. The next year Old Westbury student came in one. The
760 next year, Barbara Haskell, who is now an MD, finished, got her doctorate from Stony Brook, and
761 now practicing down in North Carolina, she came in again, the first woman, she came in first.
762 That was the end of the test—they stopped giving the tests. [Laughter] An Old Westbury student
763 never finished less than second. We knew that our number one student could compete with
764 anyone, because we used the same standard that everyone else used, and that an "A" from Old
765 Westbury Chem Department meant you were very, very good.

766 127:43 So they cut out that. So that's the kind of students that we knew we had at graduation.

767 That they could compete with anyone. We weren't putting out, graduating students, who couldn't
768 perform.

769 Quirke: Is it your sense, that that was the case across the college?

770 Von Winbush: I'm not sure. We wanted an environment that...to give you an idea of what we

771 would do in Chemistry. We would have the student write up his or her experiment, because we
772 wanted that student to have writing skills. If you're writing a grant, you can get turned down,
773 just from the way you write your grant. So we wanted the student by the time he or she got to
774 the senior level, he or she can write a paper for publication. So we started very early, we would
775 go through a student paper with a lot of red ink. Telling the students how he or she should
776 correct what he or she had written. We had twelve experiments; the best ten would determine
777 your grade, that's how we did it. So by the time a student got to a senior level, he or she could
778 write a paper for a journal. That's how we taught our students. Whether or not people in other
779 classes did that, other departments did that, I don't know. I know that we did in Chemistry and
780 Physics.

781 Quirke: I got here in '04, eight years after you had left. When I got here, I would say the sense
782 was—I think it's better now—but when I got here, the sense was that many students were not
783 that interested in what they were doing in their degree. It might be different in the sciences, I
784 think it's different in our department right now.

785 Von Winbush: Students just talk about the joy they had at Old Westbury during that time. Nadine
786 O'Neill, she's a chiropractor in Northport. Physically beautiful, and very smart. She talks about
787 the experiences she had at Old Westbury as one of the most enjoyable experiences she had, was
788 when she was at Old Westbury.

789 Quirke: Was she in your department?

790 Von Winbush: Biological Sciences. But she took a lot of Chemistry courses. We thought she'd go
791 to med school. She's one of those individuals who has a wonderful practice. She calls herself Dr.
792 NO, that's what's on her card, Nadine O'Neill, Dr. NO. But those kinds of students had such a good
793 feeling about Old Westbury. They felt, not only were they a student, but they also were helping to

794 build the school. In fact, you go to other places, you found graffiti. In those days there was no
795 graffiti at Old Westbury. The students felt they were such a part of it, there was no graffiti.

796 Quirke: What did that mean in your department? Were your classes diverse? Can you talk about
797 what that meant in your classes, the diversity? Why it mattered?

798 Von Winbush: 1:31 I felt that we attracted students because we were for them. In the sense that,
799 I used to give talks around at different high schools, talk about Old Westbury. I'm not sure that
800 made them come. We had a lot of students from different places in those days. And we felt that,
801 we always felt that if you came, we would help you to succeed, if you were willing to work hard.
802 We could help you to succeed. We would put you in arithmetic, and Algebra from the start, if
803 your math skills weren't that good, and English, beginning English if you had trouble writing.
804 And we had students who were in those places, but they ended up—goodness, gracious—some of
805 those kids started out very poorly, in those so-called introductory classes. But later on they just
806 blossomed. And we saw that so many times.

807 So we had these different students from different areas. African students, some of our
808 best came from different parts of Africa. The kids, I can think of Tulip, an Asian student, an
809 extraordinarily bright young man. That was their first name. But we had that kind of diversity.
810 In Chemistry and Physics, we encouraged them to come. And they knew that they could go to any
811 one of the faculty members, and get help. I think that was one of the attractive parts of our
812 department. Because the students knew, you had hours listed there, but you could also come at
813 another time. Some of us had an open door policy you see the door open, you come. That's the
814 way we were. I had two students from Israel, they were a little shy, and I encouraged them to
815 come. They ended up being two of the top students of the class. They got an award at
816 commencement. Extraordinary students. They invited me to Israel. We had those kinds of

817 students. One thing about Chemistry and Physics in those days was our interaction we had with
818 the students. There were no barriers outside the classroom. You can call me Bush. I didn't mind
819 that. I didn't want the barrier set up. All the formality was in the classroom. Outside the
820 classroom, informality. I think this happened a lot. We wanted to eliminate barriers. Students
821 not to come to class because you're Dr. Bigshot. No, no, no, no, no. You come because we're here
822 to help you learn. That's what the feeling was in those days, we're here to help you learn, to
823 maximize your ability. And that's what so exciting about the place.

824 The students realized this. One young man, who was having problems, I bumped into him,
825 on his way up, he was getting ready to go up before the Judiciary Committee because he was
826 having some problems. I had met him before, and I knew he was a pretty good student but he
827 was really screwing up. I said, I grabbed him, "what are you doing?" Just like that. "I'm going
828 here for a disciplinary action." I said, "You don't have any representative, someone to represent
829 you? Then I'll go with you." I went in, I talked to the group. I said, "Assign him to me. I'll make
830 certain. Don't kick him off campus. You just let him report to me." And I got on the kid's case. He
831 ended up being one of the excellent students. His father came to his graduation, and brought me
832 a gift. I said "You didn't have to do that. "No. But, thank you, thank you, thank you." It was that
833 kind of thing we used to try to do with students that we saw had potential. We didn't want them
834 to mess up, we wanted them to perform. That's how we were, back in those days, in science,
835 anyway.

836 Quirke: 1:35:40 Can you tell me, there was so much activism, about the racial composition of the
837 student body, about some of the programs, perhaps about firing professors, at least from what
838 I've been reading in the archive. Can you tell me about some of that activism?

839 Von Winbush: [Laughter] Well you know, in early days, down at Planting Field before I got here,

840 the students felt that they were, should be initially they would be an integral part of all the
841 decisions, 50-50, they felt in those days. And when that didn't occur, on one occasion, they went
842 on strike. And that's what instituted the Craven Committee Investigation, when they went on
843 strike, and that happened a little bit before I came. Now there were two cases of very activeness
844 here, at first we weren't sure whether we were going to close the campus down.

845 Because there was always a chance in which, people were talking about closing down the
846 campus. And once, at a commencement, at that time we had the commencement, it was small, in
847 D building over in the Academic Village, in the auditorium there, in D100. And the council was
848 on the stage, and [Ernest] Boyer, the Chancellor was here for it. And McDermott and a few others
849 were here, with some African-American students, protesting the composition, and the chair of the
850 council, the black councilmen, what was his name, said, "I now declare these activities, ended—
851 closed." And John Maguire did a great job of speaking to the group, and saying we will continue.
852 And Boyer did an excellent job as the Chancellor, who went on to talk about the activism. And
853 maybe we will look into those things about which the students are concerned. He did a fantastic
854 job until everything was calmed down, and we went on with the commencement, and the place
855 was not closed. Really, I used to always keep a job in my desk, because I didn't know when they
856 might close Old Westbury. There was always that possibility, of closing the school, because of
857 that kind of activism.

858 And during the Pettigrew era, when she would get rid of this and that, the students then
859 were talking about closing down the place, until something happened. And we made, Runi
860 Mukerjee and I made a big mistake, we went up to the President's House, Pettigrew, and got up
861 and told her that the students just want to talk to her, and they won't harm her, and that she can
862 talk to them. And find out what's on her mind. And we should have said, you have to resign, but

863 we felt, but we thought more about the college than we did of her. We didn't want the school to
864 be closed down again. So the students agreed to listen to what she had to say, and she agreed to
865 listen to them, and security was there. And we ended up with her remaining, and the students
866 not closing down the place as they had threatened to do. We had several times that we had that
867 kind of activity, and several times that we thought that the school would be closed, but it never
868 was closed during that time, like it did when it was at Planting Fields. And John stayed his whole
869 time.

870 Quirke: John Maguire?

871 Von Winbush: Until he decided to go to Claremont.

872 Quirke: Are there other people from the earlier time period when John Maguire was here, or
873 during that later time period during the Pettigrew years, that you think are interesting for us to
874 know about, who seem important to the character of the college?

875 Von Winbush: 1:40 I thought Gloria Young Sing was an extraordinary person. We had sought her
876 out in the early days to act as one of our deans because she was so bright. She did a lot to help to
877 create Politics, Economics and Society. I thought she was an extraordinary person, but of course
878 she's down in the islands these days. Luis was an individual, he was from Planting Fields. He's
879 been here through all that time, he's a very active person. He's extraordinary, I remember one
880 time when we were wanting people to sign letters to send to the Congress, I mean, up to our
881 representatives in Albany. And we had a stamped envelope and a letter, and all the person had to
882 do was send it. Now we could have put all those things together ourselves and sent them. But
883 Luis said, "No—we have to get people to send them individually." That tells you something about
884 this person. He's an extraordinary individual. That was when I said, "Man, you are unreal." We
885 could have put stamps on and sent the whole pack. That wasn't the same thing as giving the

886 letters to individual faculty members and saying, "You send them." A world of difference. That's
887 the kind of individual. And talk about creative—a genius. An extraordinary person, doing some
888 tremendous work right now, I wish you could get him, I'm going to call him. He's so busy though
889 Quirke: Is he out here, or in the city?

890 Von Winbush: He lives in Great Neck, but he travels so much, he does work setting up study
891 centers in Latin America. He has an art school in Italy.

892 Quirke: I knew he had that big show at El Museo del Barrio.

893 Von Winbush: He's so fantastic. He was at Planting Fields. He went through the whole period. If
894 you could get him he would be a great person to talk to. Luis was one of those individuals who
895 had no fear. He was on the faculty senate. And we would go to the meeting together. How he
896 would interact with the President, he had no fear.

897 Quirke: 1:43 Can you think of an example?

898 Von Winbush: He came as close as you can as telling the President you're lying, as close as you
899 could. Because of some of the things she was saying at the meetings. And I always wondered
900 how he [did] so much. Read some of the *Little Finger*, that will be the best way, that will give you
901 an idea. If you will read the *Little Finger*, that will give you an idea of the things that he was
902 saying in terms of what was happening at the college with the president. It came, we wrote more
903 during the Pettigrew years than we did earlier, because there were so many things that she was
904 doing that required a response. And so the *Little Finger*, was one way to say certain things, of
905 which we did.

906

907 Quirke: Did you feel that you spent way too much time doing that kind of stuff in the eighties,
908 instead of expanding, or doing interesting programming or.

909 Von Winbush: No I was doing my research.

910 Quirke: I knew that you did, but it sounds like the context of the college was changing, instead of
911 building an institution, you're fighting?

912 Von Winbush: No it was difficult because we always felt that there were certain rights that faculty
913 had and we didn't want people trampling on those rights. For example, when it came to the ARPT
914 committee, at one time a program had to send it, to represent you. You made your file, and the
915 program went over it, and then someone like the chair of the program took it to the ARPT and
916 presented your case. Luis and I re-wrote the faculty bylaws, approved by faculty, so that you, or a
917 person of your choosing, could go to the ARPT and present your case.

918 Quirke: That's very valuable. I was on ARPT so I know that was a valuable help.

919 Von Winbush: We know that the individual who did not get tenure because they allowed the
920 program to send a representative to represent them. I tried to tell that individual, you shouldn't
921 have—I told him all along. Not to have that person represent them—but he did, and he didn't get
922 tenure, even though he should have gotten tenure. So we did those kinds of things. But at the
923 same time Luis was doing his art, and I was still doing research in the laboratory?

924 Quirke: I'm trying to figure out, how? I say that we work so hard and it's hard to squeeze out that
925 time. It sounds very vital, you had a very vital school life, but also you created a space for your
926 researches.

927 Von Winbush: You see, I was one of those individuals, when I chaired the faculty, we started on
928 time, we could finish in one hour. And I got enough faculty members to come to have a quorum.

929 And so we would start at one o'clock; we would start at one o'clock. And sometimes when people
930 were drifting like they used to, and the faculty meeting is almost over. And I did the same thing in
931 the union, when I was President of the union. When we had our meetings, bring your lunch, and
932 we're going to start right on time, and we're going to leave, right on time. I'm one of those kinds
933 of individuals. As a consequence you could do that. You could go to faculty senate meetings, only
934 once a month, and state-wide.

935 Quirke: Twice a month now. They used to last for three hours...

936 Von Winbush: Statewide faculty senate is once a month, or once a semester. It wasn't that much,
937 it was easy to do. And so in between you did your research, published some papers. Doing the
938 summer you can do go full-time, see. Some of the research that I did at Argonne National
939 Laboratory.

940 Quirke: Is that in Zion, in Illinois?

941 Von Winbush: Outside of Chicago, North. At Argonne, Victor Maroni and I discovered a way to
942 take chromium out of deep sea nodules. And there was a non-polluting method. Before our
943 project it took about ten steps to get the chromium out. Chromium is very vital, because at that
944 time you could only get it from South Africa and Russia, and apartheid was going on in South
945 Africa, so we didn't want to do that. And Russia was our opponent. So we found this method of
946 doing it in a two-step process. So we got an award for one of the most outstanding inventions of
947 that particular year. So I did that kind of research. And also I did research in Denmark, we had a
948 grant, and I used to go over there on sabbatical. Spent a year there, and then during the summer,
949 as soon as my class was over, I would take off for Denmark. And I would walk into classes when
950 classes started. Therefore, I was able to do research there, and then do my research here.

951 Quirke: You're still doing that research in Denmark?

952 Von Winbush: No, I'm through now, I'm through. I spend, I go to Denmark now to visit friends. I
953 did my eightieth birthday celebration there—I spent a month there with friends, and they come
954 here to visit me. I've been doing some writing now, I've got several things I'm writing about,
955 "mom's rules," about my grandmother. She's an amazing person, and I write about her.

956 Quirke: She would have been one generation away from slavery

957 Von Winbush: Yes, she was the first generation out of slavery. I thought she was the most
958 brilliant person you could meet. I mean, how could you know so much. [Laughter] And you can't
959 read and write yet you are able to do these things. I used to show people my navel. I said, "Can
960 you believe a midwife did this, this was not done in a hospital." From on the side of the thing [his
961 hand], but I had extra finger there, and she took them off.

962 Quirke: Did she cut them?

963 Von Winbush: I was a baby, she used a horse hair, tied around, and they just fell off. And you
964 would think that a surgeon had done it. You would think a surgeon did it, because there's nothing
965 there to see. That's the way she was. So I have a lot of things to say about her. One of her rules, I
966 told Pettigrew this one time. "Tell the truth, and you don't have to have a good memory."
967 Because if you're going to tell the truth, you don't need to remember, you know. Those were her
968 rules. That's the way I was. But my research, I always did research, and trying to find, build a
969 model of a protein molecule, and trying to find out by building this model, we could find out how
970 the electron transferred between sites. We did a lot of work on that. And we didn't get it
971 published because I had to leave. I couldn't take Pettigrew any more. Either I had to quit being
972 active in the union and with the faculty, and I wasn't built that way, so I said "I have to leave."

973 Especially after my friend, Paul Welcher died, I said, "I don't want to die at Old Westbury." Paul
974 Welcher, he was in Comparative Humanities. He was one of the ones from Planting Fields, for
975 example. He had been at Planting Fields. There were very few from Planting Fields, Luis
976 Kamnitzer, Paul Welcher, there were four or five. Not very many.

977 Quirke: Maybe Paul Lauter?

978 Von Winbush: 1:52 Paul came later, in fact, he came with his wife. Florence [Howe], was the key
979 person, she brought Paul along. Florence was extraordinary. In Women's Studies, she developed
980 that program, Women Studies came with her. Very strong person, wonderful individual. Barbara
981 Ehrenreich was here too. I nominated her for an honorary degree.

982 Quirke: When was that, that she received that?

983 Von Winbush: Before I left. I forget the year.

984 Quirke: Can I ask you two totally different questions?

985 Von Winbush: What's your question?

986 Quirke: It's going backwards once again. When you talked about going to local high schools to
987 bring students to Old Westbury. Were there any other ways that either the Chemistry
988 Department or the school was conscious about reaching out to get a diverse student body?

989 Von Winbush: I don't know that we did, I can't remember that we did really, back in those days. I
990 think the advertisement was the thing that brought them here.

991 Quirke: The second question, totally unrelated, Barbara said you know all this amazing stuff
992 about the grounds, and then also the architecture that's here, and she said there was faculty
993 housing here at one point. And that you might have an interesting story about the tearing down

994 of...

995 Von Winbush: The faculty houses, over...do you know where the stables are? There used to be
996 housing there. And I lived in one of them when I first came. And there were one, to three,
997 four...there were about five, six houses over there for faculty, and some students who were
998 married. Now the problem that arose had to do with married student housing. And that they
999 were protesting, saying there ought to be housing for them and their families. And so, John
1000 Maguire claimed that the Board had said that only the President can have housing. And therefore
1001 they removed all those houses. Stupid, those beautiful structures.

1002 Quirke: They were left over from the old estate?

1003 Von Winbush: Yes, for example...

1004 Quirke: That's crazy.

1005 Von Winbush: Of course it was. Trainor House, for example, was built because...You know the
1006 story about Trainer House. Trainer House has an "or" it should be "er" they named it Trainor
1007 House. Old man Clark built that for his horse trainer when the horses won an event in England.
1008 He built that for him. And when we came, there were still people at the gate, letting you in, when
1009 you came to the campus. He became part of the grounds-people later on. But you had to park
1010 there, and someone took you down to the rest of the campus. But the houses, you may...there's a
1011 brick wall that when you come into Gate A, on the right-hand side, just before you get to the gate
1012 going to the president's house you can see a brick wall around there. That's part of the old man
1013 Clark's, we had his house, his mansion, and then the mansion burned down when we were,
1014 because they were trying to tar the roof. And it caught on fire. And when they went to the trying
1015 to hook up the hoses, the water pressure was too low, so the mansion was burned to the ground.

1016 So all that was left was the walls. And it was a magnificent structure.

1017 Quirke: Wait, Harris Wofford was living there then, is that correct? Or were there two fires?

1018 Von Winbush: No, I don't know if he was living in that house. He lived in old man Clark's retarded
1019 daughter's house. But the President's house now, that's where his daughter lived, and the little
1020 house next to that, was her play house. Now the Clark Estate, now also before the Clark's, there's
1021 a mansion, I think if you went on this walk with me I could show you this path. You go by this old
1022 mansion that was there and the woman who owned it, was an extraordinary person. She had a
1023 big castle there, you can still see the ruins of the castle. She used to have these magnificent
1024 parties, where she used to have these twelve strolling musicians who walked up and down, you'll
1025 see these long walkways where they were having a party, they were playing music. You can see
1026 where the trees used to be kept a certain height, you know, and reflecting pools.

1027 Quirke: And that's on the grounds?

1028 Von Winbush: That's on the grounds. Yes.

1029 Quirke: I did a tour with my students at the beginning of the term, so we could think historically
1030 about the college by going through the space. I really wish you had been here.

1031 Von Winbush: There used to be a water tower there that used to furnish water to the castle, the
1032 castle for the Clark Estate. And you can still see where there was and there's an area, the old
1033 castle is a fascinating structure when you look at it, that preceded the Clarks. This woman who
1034 owned this felt that she was an artist. And you can see some of her pretense, at building a
1035 sculpture. There's one piece in the library that came from her place, used to be, anyway. Used to
1036 be at the entrance there, they had one of her statuary pieces. It's an ugly piece—an ugly piece.
1037 And that came from her, it used to be on her, it was a big piece, it's awful.

1038 Right over next to there was an open area where the students used to try to grow pot.

1039 Really, I saw it there, and I said, you can't grow that here, the rabbits will eat it. And the rabbits

1040 did. [Laughter.] I'm serious. But its' a wonderful place, there's a lot of areas where you can walk

1041 all through that area. And you can see there used to be foxes, and places there, and all kinds of

1042 birds, and in fact one individual used to go around naming things. He found something like

1043 twenty different species of birds that had houses on the ground in different places on this estate.

1044 That is why he didn't want these cats that people bring and turn them loose because they kill the

1045 birds. They wipe out the birds. I don't know why people do that.

1046 Quirke: There was a whole colony in Academic Village.

1047 Von Winbush: Probably hunting really. One of the things that used to occur also, is that people

1048 used to come through, riding on campus on horseback. Riding on dogs as they used [to say]. You

1049 could ride on any estate, in those days, as long as you're on horseback. There was a student

1050 group that you could ride with, you could come, he would teach you riding, you would rent a

1051 horse, and you could ride on any estate, as long as you stayed on horseback it was not

1052 trespassing. There were trails. You could still see the trails on the campus where they come

1053 through. You can get on a horse and ride through these estates.

1054 Quirke: That's like the English rights of common

1055 Von Winbush: But if you get off the horse, that's trespassing. They used to do this every spring,

1056 or fall, you used to see the running of the dogs. And they see people galloping across the estate.

1057 Quirke: I drive through the back way every time, it looks like polo players.

1058 Von Winbush: There was an area where a person used to rent for his polo field. Because there

1059 were people who would not want him to be part of their group. So he rented the whole area to be

1060 part of his polo field.

1061 Quirke: It looks professional—it's Latino guys working the horses, they're South American.

1062 Von Winbush: Do you know the student group had someone who lived in the barns. There were
1063 houses inside. Some faculty used to live inside the barn. Because there were apartments there, at
1064 the stables, along with the other housing, because all of, under John Maguire, that's what they
1065 said only the President can live on campus. That way they got rid of the question of married
1066 student housing. No housing, no problems. That's the way it was. That was a terrible idea though.
1067 Because the perfect place for visiting professors to live, beautiful structures, nice fireplaces, nice
1068 buildings, because I lived there for a year in one of them. I lived there, but it was the chauffeur's
1069 place, old man Clark's chauffeur's place. Screened-in back porch, two fireplaces, you would not
1070 believe how beautiful that structure was and they tore it down.

1071 Quirke: Can I ask you a question on unions? Tell me about your involvement in the union. How
1072 you got first engaged, and maybe some of the battles that were important to you. It sounds as if
1073 you were active to the end?

1074 Von Winbush: I got in the union right at the beginning. I grew up in sort of a, as an eleven year
1075 old, when I used to stay with my people in the town of Henderson. My cousin, who worked at J.P
1076 Taylor tobacco factory in the south...it was tough trying to form a union. So I know about unions
1077 and what they were capable of doing. So when I got to Old Westbury and we had a union I
1078 immediately joined the union. Francis Mark was the chair, the president, and very active. Francis
1079 Mark. He was in Politics, Economic and Society. In fact one of the founders of that particular
1080 department. So I got active then. And I really enjoyed it when I was elected delegate to go to one
1081 of the meetings at Albany. Really fascinating, politics, so I then got elected after Francis, I was
1082 elected President of the chapter. And, my idea was to get as many people involved as possible. So

1083 every committee that we had statewide, so I tried to make sure that we had a member on it. And
1084 I also tried to have the union sense that we had term limitation. I believe in term limitation. I
1085 believed that I had been there too long. And we were able to get a change in the bylaws so that
1086 we had term limitations. And I felt that we had a stronger union, if we had that kind of turnover.

1087 Quirke: Well, you're building leadership.

1088 Von Winbush: You're building leadership. And by having people on all the committees that the
1089 union had, it also made a very strong chapter. But once I left, people felt that in Albany they had
1090 no term limits. And so they re-wrote the by-laws here, so there were no term limits. I think you
1091 weaken the union chapters because you get the same person over and over and over and you are
1092 not building leadership. And that, I felt that, and I did, we did have, Eileen Landy came after me,
1093 then Kiko. Now Eileen Landy is in Albany as Secretary, but she never would have been had we
1094 not had term limitations. I still would have been President. I talked her into becoming the
1095 Academic Vice President, I said, and then you can go to become President. That's exactly how it
1096 happened. I've always felt that a union is best when you've got that kind of turnover in leadership
1097 and you build a very strong base because you've been there and you've seen what is happening.
1098 And everyone begins to see also your own rights, because they can read the contract, read your
1099 bylaws, read the policy of the Board of Trustees, and also the Constitution of the State. I used to
1100 tell them, the President, I didn't give up my rights as a citizen of the State of New York of the
1101 United States when I took a job at Old Westbury. There is still the freedom of speech according to
1102 the first amendment. Last time I read it, there is still the freedom of speech. And therefore I can
1103 say those things, and not fear for my job. And that as a unionist you should be able to do that, not
1104 fear for your job. As long as you do your work, what is there to fear? I always felt that that was so
1105 important about union and the more people who get involved and get active the stronger the

1106 chapter is, and that's how I felt about it.

1107 Quirke: Were the battles primarily contractual... or did you feel more like you were in a
1108 movement?

1109 Von Winbush: Well locally, we tried harder to see to make sure that union activity could be used
1110 as a part of your...that part of your by-laws that talks about campus activities. That if you are
1111 active in the union, that also means you've been doing things for the campus. Because we felt...

1112 Quirke: As part of your service to the university...

1113 Von Winbush: 2:07:30 A service component. I asked four presidents of the PhD granting
1114 institutions. I asked them this same question. Stony Brook, Binghamton...There was a conference
1115 in which those four presidents were speaking. And when it came to that question and answer
1116 period, I even asked them that particular question. "Do you consider service in the union,
1117 satisfying part of the bylaws that is called service." Each one answered, "Yes, yes." And I always
1118 tried to encourage that kind of activity. Some people, there's something, I don't know why, they
1119 don't get involved in the union. The union is the most important unit, that helped create the
1120 middle class in this country. I remember my cousin, as I was saying, worked in the J.P. Taylor
1121 Tobacco factory. They almost go on strike. They'd go from 40 cents an hour to 45 cents an hour.
1122 Five cents. And without the union they'd have their own uniform. They had to buy their own
1123 masks to keep from smelling all that tobacco, and things in their hair. If they didn't have the
1124 union to fight for that they would have had to come out of their own pockets. It's the union which
1125 created these things, and that's what's so important. I think without the union we would be
1126 working at the, just like management.

1127 Quirke: Yes, but we're going back in that direction, it seems.

1128

1129 Von Winbush: 2:10 That's why we have to fight. There are those individuals who would like to
1130 see unions disappear. And in my, that's why I only shop at certain stores. There are certain
1131 stores that are non-union. I refuse to buy at a non-union store. I won't go there if I find out it's
1132 non-union. I think it's the union that helped build this country and to make the middle-class that
1133 is here. Without the union we'd be doing slave labor, and the prices would be like that. We
1134 wouldn't have a middle class. Because in Henderson, North Carolina where I grew up J.P. Taylor
1135 owned the town, just like Henderson Cotton Mills and J.P. Taylor, they built the mill houses that
1136 people lived in, and they owned everything. And they fought for not having a union. That movie,
1137 *Norma Rae*, was an example of how difficult was.

1138 Quirke: Some of those towns never got organized.

1139 Von Winbush: They never got organized in Henderson. And the two companies separated—the
1140 white people worked at Henderson Cotton Mill; the black people worked at J.P. Taylor Tobacco
1141 Company. The only jobs that blacks had at Henderson Cotton Mill were janitorial, you know, the
1142 head of the jobs working at machines stuff at J.P. Taylor. There was that kind of separation. And
1143 you could not unionize, because you tried; you lost your job. My cousin still tried.

1144 Quirke: What union was it? Tobacco Workers Union, Could it have been District 65, up here in
1145 New York?

1146 Von Winbush: I don't know what they were trying? I have no idea what it was, because I just
1147 know that she was trying to form a union. They didn't have one; she was just trying to form one.
1148 She was trying to tell people, what you could do if you had a union. But I don't think they ever got
1149 it. And, the only reason she kept her job because [she] was very good. And she also knew people,

1150 forgive me Rosie, she also bought up a lot of property, because she was very good at selling
1151 moonshine. And she had her own house, and Gerta had her own house, so as a consequence, they
1152 had a little more security, therefore they could fight to make some changes. That kind of thing.

1153 Von Winbush: 2:12 It was interesting growing up. I must say I grew up among very strong
1154 women. It was easy for me, I think, to always have, go out and seek people in the Chemistry
1155 department, who were good and female. I didn't have a problem with that because I grew up
1156 with very strong women. My grandmother, my cousin, they were all very strong women.

1157 Quirke: It's hard to imagine the shift, from when you were born, to today. Such dramatic changes
1158 and you were an adult when many of those changes took place—you were well into your
1159 adulthood when these changes took place, which is fascinating.

1160 Von Winbush: I remember when the civil rights laws passed, public accommodations. We were
1161 in Alabama at the time, and visiting a friend. No, it was Florida. My kid was with me, we were on
1162 our way back from Florida, visiting grand parents, going back to, we were on Long Island. No, it
1163 was hilly, Nashville, we were doing Nashville at the time. And we stopped at this one place near
1164 Macon, Georgia. We were going in to get some food. The public accommodation law had passed,
1165 which means you could sit wherever. So I ordered the food for us, and I sat at a table while
1166 waiting. And the manager back there kept looking at me and looking at me. And was talking to
1167 himself; looking at me. So finally, I walked up to the cashier. I said, "What's the problem? He
1168 doesn't want me sitting in this place?" She said, "Your order will be ready in just a minute." I
1169 said, "Well, tell me, he doesn't want me sitting in this place?" And by the time that order came, I
1170 said, "Tell him he should have this, eat it." And I walked out. He's made all this food. I refused to
1171 eat it. If I couldn't sit down while waiting for my order, why should I pay for this. It's the public
1172 accommodation now, you're supposed to be able to do those things. I explained it to my

1173 daughter, that we would stop at a place that would accept us. She understood that very well. I
1174 said, "I'm not going to go to a place that doesn't want me in there. I cannot be that kind of
1175 person." That's the way I was. So it is true that I was in a dark time, all those things changes
1176 Quirke: And then so much dramatic change as well.

1177 Von Winbush: Well you know, we still have a lot to do.

1178 Quirke: Yes, yes.

1179 Von Winbush. Which is so good too. You have minimal people involved in making changes then
1180 we had in the past. And that's what so beautiful about this country is the possibility of change.
1181 That's so great. That part of the first amendment that I love, still you can protest, can petition for
1182 change.

1183 Quirke: This might be a good point to end and ask if you have more to say about Old Westbury,
1184 and maybe if Old Westbury was a way, one person described Old Westbury as being an extension
1185 of the movement. Did you feel that way?

1186 Von Winbush. Yeah, I did feel that way. Unfortunately right now I don't think that our leadership
1187 feels that. I don't think that they have that kind of feeling. They wouldn't be trying to tear down
1188 Academic Village, which is a beautiful structure, great history. It should be preserved as an
1189 integral part of the development of Old Westbury. It shouldn't be destroyed any more than the
1190 castle over there that used to be there. An integral part of the history of the college, it really is. I
1191 still find coming to Old Westbury, enjoyable, but I don't like the matchbox building that is going
1192 up.

1193 Quirke: The technology works, some of the time. That's a big change, and a positive one.

1194 Von Winbush: Thank you for inviting me.

1195 Quirke: We are so...

1196 Von Winbush: You have to go on this trip, to walk through the campus along that path we created.

1197 It starts right back, when you go across the...it's in between the A tower and C. You go right down

1198 those back steps and right across from the back steps, that's the entrance to...You go down the

1199 stairs, and walk out those steps. That's where the paths start. I told Judy [Lloyd] we should put a

1200 sign there. If you go there...it is designed to take different lengths of time. If you go there, you'll

1201 see there used to be steps where people used to walk through, the path used to be lit, so you

1202 could walk through it at night. But all that disappeared lately. But it takes you through all the old

1203 structures and you see different kinds of plant formation, and different things that you used for

1204 tea, and all that kind of stuff. You can see where we used to have an outdoor amphitheater. You

1205 can sit here, and a play is going on up there and stuff and like that. It is a fascinating trail. We had

1206 it set up so we could do it three times a year. We wanted to see the beauty in the fall when the

1207 leaves are changing. Then go through when you can see everything clearly. And then in the

1208 spring when everything is sprouting up. For example, there is a protected plant, the lady slipper,

1209 it is a protected plant. And there is a place on the side of the hill, over there where those faculty

1210 houses used to be, right near the golf course, the whole hillside, absolutely gorgeous. I took Judy

1211 Lloyd there to show her it. You should see it in the spring time, absolutely gorgeous, the whole

1212 hillside is loaded with them. There as some little plants used for making tea, and tapping birch

1213 trees for its sap and stuff like that. We used to take students.

1214 Quirke: But the fauna is different than in North Carolina, so you educated yourself about the

1215 fauna?

1216 Von Winbush: It is, and it's fascinating. I used to get the, right by where the chemistry building,

1217 there is a whole field of sassafras, we loved to pick it, pull it up by the root, a part of the root.

1218 You're not harming the tree because when you pull it up by the root, it sends up another plant.

1219 And you dry it, and you can make a nice tea out of it. Or you can take the bark along with another

1220 herb and make a flavor

1221 Quirke: Like a soda pop, right?

1222 Von Winbush: You make it for...a Louisiana-type Cajun food. And there is a tulip tree up by the

1223 tennis court that gorgeous, and in the spring when it blooms, you can taste it, and it's sweet.

1224 Quirke: Like honeysuckle?

1225 Von Winbush: Oh yes, it smells like honeysuckle, but its much larger. No Brooklyn, we used to

1226 come through and pick blueberries, and raspberries. We would pick them, they were plentiful.

1227 Quirke: I really appreciate you taking the time. I'm sorry we can't do this at least once more. I feel

1228 like we've heard such wonderful stuff.

1229 Von Winbush: It's so enjoyable talking to you, and I thank you for asking me because I like to talk

1230 about Old Westbury. Westbury is dear to me. I worked in so many other places, and enjoyed

1231 them, but Westbury was very special, because we thought we were building something. We had

1232 hoped that various things that we developed here to be used elsewhere, I think. That's the only

1233 thing that I think that we did not complete, that kind of thing. But it partly had to do with money

1234 too. Thank you my friend. (2:21:32.1)

1235

1236 DISCUSSION FROM BEFORE THE FORMAL INTERVIEW BEGAN: Samuel Von Winbush: I went to

1237 Fisk in 1965—segregation, right—and kids didn't want to sit in the back, and so, the police...

1238 There was an altercation—the police came, and then they surrounded Fisk University and a few
1239 shots at the building, and at that time Stokeley, Cleaver, all that group was there at that meeting,
1240 and we had gone over to one of the faculty member’s houses, and Cleaver said to John Killens, the
1241 writer, and said, “John, do you have your piece?” Because it was a riotous situation, and we knew
1242 that my phone was tapped, because Killens was always coming over to my house and so every
1243 time Killens—John Aubrey Killens, he wrote, he got an honorary degree from here.

1244