

Forrester "Woody" Ashe Lee, Class of 1968
Dartmouth College Oral History Project
Dartmouth Community and Dartmouth's World
March 1, 2013

DONIN: Alright. So today is March 1, 2013. My name is Mary Donin. I'm here in Rauner Library with Dr. Forrester Ashe Lee, Jr., Dartmouth Class of 1968. And in the room with us also is Shan Williams, who is going to be joining in the conversation as well. Okay, Dr. Lee, I guess the first thing we'd like to start out with is just to get an idea of how it is you ended up at Dartmouth back in 1964. Were you a legacy? Did a mentor at school tell you about Dartmouth? How did you end up here?

LEE: A part of how I knew in advance of coming here 'cause at least one good family friend, who was black, had attended Dartmouth. It was Floyd Williams. He's roughly Class of 1960 or so. And he actually loaned me his skis. He's six foot five. [Laughter] So I never learned how to ski while I was here.

So part of it was because there was a family friend who talked Dartmouth up in a very special way. Part of it was I learned after graduating from Dartmouth and came back to one of the—after I left Dartmouth and came back to one of the black alumni events, and I met a guy who's a basketball player named [Eugene] Gene Booth. And we were talking. I think it was the first organization meeting for the black alumni of the Dartmouth Association. And Gene asked me who I was and where I was from. And I mentioned Red Bank, New Jersey, as one of the towns I'd been to. And he said, "Well, I'm from Red Bank, and I know everybody in Red Bank, and I don't know you." [Laughter] "So, what's going on here?" So I told him my name. He said, "I know a Forrester Lee from Red Bank. He was the head of the YMCA, the black YMCA, there." And I said, "Well, that's my dad." And he said, "You're kidding!" He said, "I was your babysitter." He said, "I always told your dad I wanted him to make sure his son went to Dartmouth."

DONIN: Amazing!

LEE: So I was about five or six.

DONIN: When he babysat you?

- LEE: Yes. And here I am. [Laughter]
- DONIN: That's fantastic!
- WILLIAMS: That's cool.
- LEE: So he actually called my father that night to confirm the story at two o'clock in the morning over, you know, after six beers between us. And he says, "Gene! How ya doin'?" [Laughter]
- DONIN: That's fantastic.
- LEE: Yeah, so.
- DONIN: So what were the stories that Floyd told you about Dartmouth?
- LEE: Floyd...well, it was the same kind of conversation that I had when I actually was in the process of applying and being interviewed by alumni from Dartmouth down in Plainfield, New Jersey. They just had this admiration for the quality, the experience that they'd had here. They really just talked so warmly and lovingly about their own personal experiences, how much it'd meant, which I later learned about the community of Dartmouth, how important it was to them. And there was just joy and happiness in their face when they talked about it. And so it was like I didn't—I wasn't trying—I didn't need to be sold because I was pretty much convinced I wanted to go here anyway. But after hearing, you know, hearing what they had to say about the place, I said it was definitely for me. I went to a very good public high school in Plainfield—in New Jersey, Plainfield, New Jersey. This was one of these state-ranked schools in almost everything they did, sports, academics. And we always sent kids to the Ivy League, and no one wanted to go to Dartmouth. And I said, "Great!" [Laughter]
- WILLIAMS: Less competition.
- LEE: Less competition. I guess so. And, you know, it spoke to me even though I grew up sort of in a suburban kind of environment, not a city environment. Something about being in the outdoors and being away from big cities was important. Our family would go into New York City every once in a while, and I was afraid of the city. I mean it was, you know, this scary kind of place to go. We'd visit relatives who lived in Brooklyn, and I just—you know, it was just too jammed in, too packed in. I said, *Oh, I want space, I want...* I was used to

running out of the house and going up and playing ball and whatever, so, the idea of being in a place like this made a lot of sense to me as opposed to the city universities, you know, Penn, Columbia, some of them up in Boston and so forth. So that was part of it. There were other parts, too, as well. Yeah.

DONIN: So had you been up here to visit the place physically before you applied?

LEE: No—not before I applied. And one day I said—this is when I was a junior in high school—said to my mother, “I need to go up to Dartmouth to really see it firsthand.” She said, “Well, we don’t have time—“ or whatever “—to take you up.” Oh, I know what it was. My father—I finally moved. The year I went to Dartmouth, my family moved to Delaware, and my father was in Delaware, so there was only one car in the family. And my mother said, “No, you can’t take the car up to Dartmouth.”

DONIN: Great.

LEE: So the next morning I woke up at six a.m., and I just took off to Dartmouth.

DONIN: You didn’t!

LEE: I did.

DONIN: You must have been in trouble.

LEE: And so my mother called my father home, and, uh... Once I got here they got a call from, I guess, the Hanover Inn and said, “I’m here. I’m safe.” And they were just so relieved. [Laughter] So that was my first—this was in the summertime—and that was my first actual on-site visit to Dartmouth. And one of the professors here spotted me and, you know, actually housed me for the weekend. And we subsequently became friends. I don’t remember his name. But he showed me around. And it just was everything I wanted. It was perfect.

DONIN: So how does it feel to come onto a campus where you don’t see very many people the same color as you?

LEE: Okay, so...

DONIN: Or were you used to that?

LEE: No, no. I was not. So I grew up in Plainfield, New Jersey; it was a relatively at the, you know, at the higher view looking down, it was a relatively integrated community. But just block by block it was a very segregated community. Italians in this block, the Jewish community over here. I lived on a block that was in an entirely black neighborhood. I mean, we were—left, and we were in and out of each other's houses because everybody knew each other. A very, very strong black community within that block and for the few blocks around it. And my family was very, very, you know, we're a historically black family so to speak. So I—my day-to-day life socially was with black families. But my school was, you know, very integrated school; about three quarters of the students were white, about a quarter were black. And in most of my classes I was one of the few black students in the classes. So I was used to both worlds. I was used to having black friends, having white friends, you know, growing up in a black community and being in a predominately white school. So it wasn't anything too un—too jarring about the fact that I was gonna off to a school where there would not be a lot of black students because that had been my classroom experience up to that point.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

LEE: It was a little more severe than I realized. [Lee and Williams chuckle] When I got—when I arrived here, I arrived with roughly 12 or 13 other black students. And we got to know who each other were. We didn't come together closely for another year, but we quickly recognized that we were a new and different group of students here at Dartmouth. But as best as I could tell—it turns out it was I did not quite get it accurately—but I thought there were only two other black students on campus. One of them was Edgar Holley, who was on the football team.

DONIN: Oh, yeah.

LEE: And he lived right over here—I'll call it Main Street, the main street in front of the Hop. He lived in one of the fraternity houses. And blaring out of his window, as I walk in, as I arrived in Hanover, as I recall, was a James Brown song, "Papa's Got a Brand-New Bag." And that was my first introduction to Dartmouth College was this black student with his music blaring out of his window. So he was in a fraternity. There was another black student whom I actually never

met or talked to, but heard about, who was also in a fraternity, living in a fraternity. And as far as I knew, those were the only two other black students on campus. It turned out there were a few others, upperclassmen, that is. And then I walked in with 12 or 13 black students. So we knew there was something very, very different. And I actually...I wouldn't say I was upset or anything, but I was definitely surprised that there were no other black students here.

DONIN: Why was it your particular class had so many more students?

LEE: Yeah, I've actually tried to figure that out. And actually if you read the history of the civil rights movement and just the events that were happening around that time, that was one of those bridge years between affirmative action and, you know, the in the streets, in the Woolworth's, and the sit-downs and so forth. One of those bridge years where white institutions were waking up to the fact that they had a new responsibility than they had historically. And black groups, of course, were saying, *Of course things are gonna be different going forward*. So I don't—there wasn't the—this isn't to put myself apart from the affirmative action era, 'cause I think in effect I was a part of that era, but I think it was the first time the colleges were paying—it was the first few years they were paying attention to a larger social and ethic—moral responsibility to be more open and availa—accessible to students of color.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

LEE: So I didn't realize it at the time, that Dartmouth was doing anything differently, but as I looked around, I realized things were suddenly different here at college than they had been. And that ultimately became the framework around which, you know, we organized our thoughts about what needed to be done to the college because it wasn't so different. So from my point of view it was a predominantly white, and effectively an all-white campus, up to the day I arrived. And, you know, as you know, I'm up here now looking at the history of black alumni here. And from my point of view, at that time, since we didn't have Internet, we didn't have heroes to think about, we didn't have faculty to talk to about the past, I thought we were the first black students here, save for a few like, you know, Floyd Williams that I mentioned, and a few others that I'd heard—I'd heard that there was a contingent from Washington, DC, that had historical ties to Dartmouth, black students, but I never knew who they were. And they were, uh—so I thought that basically we were the first, except for, you know, one or two. Yeah.

DONIN: So does President [John Sloan] Dickey get credit for working with.... At that point it was the Tucker Foundation that was doing the outreach, I think, recruiting students. I don't know if that's true or not.

LEE: I think—well, there was A Better Chance [ABC] was starting up at that point.

DONIN: Yeah.

LEE: There was this confluence of a lot of things that happened then and I just happened to be there at the right time. It was one of those perfect storm kind of situations. But, yeah, there was awareness on the campus. Dean Dey at the Tucker Foundation—who was not my greatest friend or ally, but nonetheless he was there—and he was trying hard to do something different for the campus.

DONIN: In what way was he not your greatest friend? If you want to share it.

LEE: Um, yeah. I just found him to be a very.... At that time I don't think we would use these words. But he seemed to be a typical, well-meaning, white liberal guy who thought he knew and could direct the lives—knew what was best for blacks and therefore could direct the programs, the direction. For some reason I just automatically backed away from him. So I just kept my distance from him. It wasn't like we had any battles. He later claimed that I did some things—we can talk about later. But, no, we never had any direct head-to-head battles. I just never felt very comfortable around him. He was too white. He was too, um, you know, [spells, knocking on table with each letter] W-A-S-P. He really was. As you know, I'm now down at Yale. I say, the only time you see real WASPS is at Yale graduations. They all come out in droves to the Yale commencement. [All laugh] After that they go back in hiding.

DONIN: They go away. [Chuckles]

LEE: Dean Dey for me was just the personification of the New England WASP. And I didn't know anything, you know, up until..... You know in Plainfield, New Jersey, it's a suburb of New York City, but we didn't have people like that. [All laugh] People—so I just didn't feel comfortable with him.

DONIN: Yeah.

- LEE: Okay.
- DONIN: So let's hear what it was like when you first got here, say, you know, your first term as a first-year, as a freshman. What dorm were you living in?
- LEE: So, I was in Fayerweather. And, uh—
- DONIN: And how many roommates did you have?
- LEE: So, yeah, actually I had two roommates: Paul Kiely ['68] and Bob—whose last name—I just got a note from him, too...Bob Ayman [13:35]. Paul and Bob. Paul was a high school quarterback from my high school, so we had decided to room together.
- DONIN: Oh, nice!
- LEE: So—he was a white guy. So he was one friend. And then Bob was also an athlete. He was—I don't know if he'd been recruited, but he wound up playing for the baseball and the football teams at Dartmouth. And I'd done athletics in high school, too. So we were three, kind of, jock-like—
- DONIN: Jocks. You can say the word. [All laugh]
- LEE: In Fayerweather. And, uh, it didn't start out that way. I think—I started out with another roommate. Paul, myself, and there was a third guy whose name I've long since forgotten. But he just—it was oil and vinegar, we—just didn't work out, and he—through some of the pranks that we were guilty of made it very uncomfortable for him, and he moved out. [Williams and Lee chuckle] And Bob moved in the following year. So it started out with three of us, but by my sophomore year it was three people that I knew very, very well. And we stayed together for three years. And then in my senior year I moved into Casque & Gauntlet [C&G].
- DONIN: Uh-huh. So who was your group that you initially—I mean it sounds like since you knew people from your high school when you came, you weren't sort of starting out cold here. You had a basis on which to build some friendships, but—
- LEE: Yeah.

DONIN: Who was your—

LEE: But life centered around the dorm in this way.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

LEE: So the neat thing about Dartmouth is, as I grew to understand it later on, was that everybody sees everybody because you always—because of the Green. You're always passing by people. So I knew all the other black students. I knew who they were. I must have spent some time in my first year talking to them because I just knew who they were, and I didn't know everyone on the campus, but definitely the black students. So in some way we were, whether it was at—in class, whether it was at—in the dining hall where we were in touch with the other. But not in an organized way; just, you know, one by one we would get to know each other.

But so there was that going on. And I think in that process, I was trying to figure out, okay, I'm a black student at Dartmouth. I was clear about that. But I didn't know what I should be doing as a black student at Dartmouth because so much was going on. And I recognized that there was something important about being black here at Dartmouth. But what I should be, what I should do about it, how I should be part of the larger issues that were going on in society, I had no idea. And I don't know how hard and focused in what kind of way I thought about that.

But I do recall, you know, thinking that *Something is going on here that I've got to start paying attention to, in addition to all the fun that I'm having hanging out with the guys in the dorm and, you know, getting to know them.* So there was the basic Dartmouth experience of getting to know the people in your dorm, playing intramural sports, going out for some club sports. Finding some success in the classroom doing academics and liking the environment. There was all of that. But there was, in the background, this issue of *I'm black and I'm at Dartmouth and things are changing, and I've got to figure how to sort this out.* And a little—back then I wrote letters to my parents at home, and, you know, a little of that comes out. I was trying to sort that out my first year. And it wasn't until the second year that it really became clear that we had to do something.

DONIN: Do you still have all those letters you wrote home? [Lee presumably nods] Oh. [Lee and Williams chuckle] This would be a wonderful home for them someday. [Lee and Williams laugh]

LEE: Those will definitely rest until I go into my grave. [Williams laughs] My sister, she calls 'em—I think she calls 'em The Dartmouth Chronicles. So she found all the letters I wrote home to my mother. And she compiled them in a book. I have a book at home, so it's—

WILLIAMS: Oh!

DONIN: Oh good.

LEE: So at some point you guys will get them. You know, they're embarrassing to me right now. 'Cause I don't remember my—they help me remember the times. But I don't recognize the person who's writing them, writing those letters.

DONIN: I think a lot of people would say that about their college letters, for sure.

LEE: Yeah. Some of them were so silly, telling them about things that were going on, it was, uh—

DONIN: We have to remember to tell Peter Carini.

WILLIAMS: Yes. About the letters?

DONIN: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Okay.

DONIN: Nothing excites him more than letters home. [Laughter]

WILLIAMS: Really? [Chuckles]

LEE: [Chuckles] He's—and I now read letters that black alumni wrote to their parents and they're just so different than what I was talking about. [Laughter] I was just—I was embarrassed. So anyway. But yes. You'll get 'em some day. But after I'm long gone. [All laugh]

DONIN: So—oh, the letters got me all distracted. [All laugh] So this feeling that something important was going on. Obviously this is the early sixties. You're in a group of whatever, ten or 12 black people. Did they all feel the same as you did, that something was happening? Did you talk to them?

LEE: Oh, well, by the second—well, that didn't come 'til the second year. So I'm not sure whether we were sitting down having conversations that first year. I just don't remember. And because I don't remember, I suspect that we were not sitting down collectively as a group and trying to figure this out. And I don't remember struggling with—with issues. I just knew they were on my—I mean, they were on my mind. I recall that. But I don't remember struggling with it in a specific way. And, you know, the outside world is so isolated—I mean you're so isolated from the outside world that it's not surprising that you could live in this little....

DONIN: The bubble.

WILLIAMS: [Chuckles]

LEE: The bubble and not really care or worry about those things that are going on. But it really was—just to jump ahead for a second—it was the arrival of Billy McCurine the following year. He was also at Fayerweather. And, um—

DONIN: How do you say—how do you spell his last name?

LEE: M-c-C-U-R-I-N-E. He was the second president of the Afro-Am Society. He went on to become a Rhodes Scholar. So Billy and I—I was assigned to be his—the advisor or ment—whatever you call it.

DONIN: Big Brother?

LEE: Big Brother, yeah. Whatever. They had a program where you were assigned to a first-year student. And Bill and I—the—he lived one story below me, but—we were just real, real close friends. And that's when awareness, or focus on, okay, what are we, you know, that's when the discussions that began about, about being black here and what we might have to do about that. But I'll get into that as we go. Go further into the interview, you know.

DONIN: So people from other groups, whether it's the first women here or the Native Americans who started coming here in larger groups, many of them recount stories of being offended by, in the cla—we're talking about in the classroom now—always being asked to be the voice of whatever their ethnicity is.

LEE: Yes. Okay, so let me fill in the gap between...so that came later, much later on. So by my third and fourth year, I was tired of being

the voice for the black community and kind of made that plain, clear on several points. Let me just guide you quickly through how we got from me coming in being very naïve and unaware to being much more focused and aware.

So, in—but in the second year, we had another roughly a dozen students come on the campus, so there—and they were much more politically and socially conscious than we were in our first year.

WILLIAMS: Mhmm.

LEE: And they were meeting among themselves, in groups of two to three, and I didn't know this at the time. They were meeting among themselves to talk about what was going on in the world, what their responsibility as black students at Dartmouth. And they were moving in a direction of organization. The net result of that, as I experienced it and I only know about these meetings from listening to them today, 'cause I didn't know what was happening at the time, but what I do know is that a white student came by, to my room, one day. His name was James Bopp—Jim Bopp. I don't know why I knew him, but I did know him, and I trusted him. And he came by my room and said, "I'm organizing a meeting tomorrow evening, and I'd like you to come." And I said, "Happy to be there, what's it about, Jim?" And he said, you know, "Why don't you just come tomorrow? I think you'll enjoy the evening and the opportunity." So, you know, I showed up with them. I'm pretty sure it was six o'clock over here at the, uh, where the—right where Christian Union was—on the corner here in one of the upstairs rooms. And so I arrived there the next day and got there a little bit early. There were two black students in there. And over the next 15 or so minutes, all the black students on the campus came into the room. And I was like, what's going on here? [Laughs] And Jim Bopp was there. He'd orchestrated—convened the meeting. And he stood up and he spoke for like 15 seconds. He says, "Gentlemen," roughly these words, "Gentlemen, I've asked you to come here together because I suspect you have a lot of things that you want to talk about. And I want to give you the opportunity to do that." And then he walked out.

DONIN: Amazing!

LEE: Yeah. So it turned out Jim had been talking with some of the other black students who were the ones who were the ones that were

trying to figure out what to do. And he—they had—and because of those discussions—and for some reason, I don't know why they knew him. But anyway, he became ultimately the convener of this meeting. And that night we established the Afro-American Society of Dartmouth College.

DONIN: Wow!

LEE: And I think at that meeting, or within a short period of time, I was elected president. And there's a letter in the letters I have that I write—because I didn't talk much about my political life on campus to my parents; 'cause it was just like, you know, that was out of bounds. But I did say, there was one sentence: "Oh, and the Negro students at Dartmouth have elected me to be president of the Afro-American Society." That's the only time I ever mentioned black student organization to my parents in the letters.

DONIN: Did they react?

LEE: No. I've been president of everyth—I was president of my class for four years— [Laughs]

DONIN: They were so used to it. [All laugh]

LEE: —in high school. Yes. It was just, you know...

DONIN: So this is 1965.

LEE: 'Sixty-five, yeah.

DONIN: Okay.

LEE: Or, actually it would be '66.

WILLIAMS: Sixty-six.

LEE: It was the winter of—

DONIN: Winter of '66.

LEE: Sixty-six, yeah.

DONIN: Yeah, okay. Did you have an agenda?

LEE: I thi—you know, you go through life and you wonder who you were in these events and what your role was and so forth. And I think I was the one that everybody respected because I was doing academically very well. So I had a very strong reputation on campus. And I was listened to and trusted. And I—in retrospect, ‘cause I don’t remember *doing* that much, I just remember feeling that I was around all these [emphasizes next two words with a knock on the table each] amazing people, and all I had to do was give them space to do what they wanted to do, which was consistent with what I wanted to see done.

So Alvin Ailey is here this weekend, so I should tell him about this... So one of the things we said in the two or three years that I was involved with this, you know, *If we’re going to be here at Dartmouth, there should be arts and other ethnic content of culture in the environment here that’s interesting to us. And maybe we can share that with everybody else.* And so we insisted that there be a Black Arts Festival. And the Hop was—had been built at that time. And, um—

DONIN: It was brand new, yeah.

LEE: It was brand new, yeah. I don’t remember it going up, so it must have been here when I got here. And the Hopkins—you know, the director of the Hopkins, I forget his name—famous guy—he said, “Great! [Laughs] Let’s do it!” And so we had Alvin Ailey coming. We had these folks come up. So everything we wanted to do, it was just like easy to do. *Let’s put together a literary magazine! Let’s do this, let’s do that. And let’s have....* But ultimately it became the Shabazz Center over here at the Afro-Am House. You know, we need a place where we can meet and get together, we can live together and, da-da da-da, let’s do that. And, you know, ironically—I mean that happened about 1969 just after I graduated. But the College said—in effect, you know, there was a little push—but they said, *Sure, okay, let’s do that, too.* So I just felt like I was a conduit around which these things could happen. I don’t know if I had a clear vision about what needed to be done. I just knew I was around guys who had good ideas, had a lot of energy, had a lot of passion for it. And I was just part of making sure—helping it get done. So, um—

DONIN: Was there any pushback from either stu—your co—students or the administration, or...?

LEE: Not that I remember. There ultimately was. There was obviously push—there were incidents that caused a lot of, um, push—you know, as the students got more radical and the voices were raised, appropriately, around what were considered to be radical issues. But in that sense there were confrontations. But I think Dartmouth handled most of them so much better than other institutions. You know, the Harvards—having spent time with students who go to Harvard, you know, Yale, in particular. There was just—it was a community here, okay? So there were voices that were new, they were different. But they were still part of our community. Let's sit down and listen to 'em. It was just sort of that kind of thing.

It wasn't like—like you had to club people over the head to sit down and listen to you, or—down—you know, I worked for five years in Harlem after I left here. You had to club people at Columbia over the head to get them to sit down. And then they would sit down, listen, and walk away. And it was all—as if, you know, they said, *We'll be back in a hundred years*. [Laughs] You know? There it was just a totally different world compared to, you know, dealing with things up here. And so I found everything easy. And part, I think, was just because the group of guys that came together were, in my opin—you know, what I felt then and continue to feel, the strongest and most powerful group of blacks that I've ever come together with.

We made it a mission that every black student who came on this campus would be part of our community, our black community. And it wasn't like we were going to be a community that would be over here, and everybody else was over there. We were going to be a community that was central to the experience of being here at Dartmouth. So we would be *of* Dartmouth, but we would have our own part of Dartmouth that was special to us and unique to our experience. And so it was both inclusive as well as—inclusive in the sense that we were not trying to be apart from—we wanted to be a part of this community. But on the terms and the ways that we thought were appropriate to what we were and what our needs were, and so forth.

So that was kind of a—to an extent it was a vision. *If Dartmouth is going to bring black students here, then Dartmouth has to change to make a place where black students feel welcome and comfortable and are able to thrive.*

DONIN: And do you think you had the support of President Dickey?

LEE: I'm not hesitating because I have any doubt that he did support us. I just never—it never got to the point where he, you know—there'd be confrontation and it was either yes or no. I just never remember it being that way. So I now know in retrospect we clearly did, but I didn't quite understand it at the time because it never got to the level where you had to march into the president's office and say "Are you with us or are you not with us?" You know?

DONIN: Right.

LEE: I mean, ultimately there were incidents that reached that level, but...

DONIN: Well, that was the war.

LEE: Yeah, right, the Vietnam War was breaking out.

DONIN: I mean the sixties had all sorts of political stuff going on.

LEE: Well, yeah. You know the school literally shut down. There was—and classes all closed for one semester. It was an amazing time. So, yeah, I think it was a time when because everything we thought was important to get done, we were able to do—we just felt powerful. Like, "Oh, we can do that, we can ask for that, we can bend this, we can do a little demonstration here to raise consciousness around this, and the next thing you know we have that." Everything just seemed to fall into place. I mean I just thought life was going to be like that for the rest of it. [Laughter]

Meanwhile our consciousness around being black was being raised in part just because we were.... Oh, we spent.... We made it a point to make sure that every black student was a part of our group. I don't actually remember why we thought that was important [chuckles] other than the obvious thing. You know if you have a group, you wanted to show strength, you know, any organization would like 100 percent membership, whatever your constituent group is. But it was almost like the union, like, "You have to be a part of our union." And it was not strong-arming. It was around this kind of a religious sense that if you were black and you were coming to Dartmouth, you must be part of this group.

And so we would sit down with guys, and we'd sit—[chuckles] remember they were all guys at this point—and we would sit in their

rooms. And I remember sitting with Rick Porter, who was very skeptical of us. He later on—became a lawyer. And I said, “Damn! This is one of the smartest guys I’ve ever run into,” ‘cause you’d sit there and argue with Rick for hours about this. “And why do we need to form a black group? And why can’t we do..? You know, why can’t we just, you know, work with the legal str—?” And dada dada da. You could tell he was gonna be a lawyer. And Billy McCurine and I would sit there are argue with him and argue with him. And what actually happened with Rick, later on—it’s kinda cool. At first, well he did become part of the group. He actually authored some of the articles that were written in the journals that we published. And he went on to do wonderful things with black folks once he left, after going to Yale law.

But, um, yeah. We just—you know we had this kind of conversation with everybody. I just ran into somebody today. Nels [Armstrong] actually. I was talking to him last night. He said, Jim Hutchinson sat him down and said, “Since you’re on the campus, you’ve got to be part of this group.” And again, I never saw it as—it never was strong-arming. Not that we weren’t people incapable of that. But it was around a sense of mission that if we were going to be effective, we had to have 100 percent unity around what we were doing. So all but one or two students in my time here that came here as black students were part of our group.

DONIN: Whether they were athletes—

LEE: Didn’t matter.

DONINL Or non-athletes or—

LEE: Didn’t matter. There was only one specifically, and there’s one that I’m probably forgetting about. But there’s only one I know for sure didn’t, you know, didn’t say “I’m a member Afro-American Society of Dartmouth College.” We’re really proud of that. So we thought we had the strongest group of black students. We weren’t the first black student organization among the Ivies. But we thought we had the strongest. And whenever we would go to conferences, you know, that involved other college students, and particularly Ivy students, we always thought we were just so far ahead [chuckles] in terms of our ability to be effective in what we wanted to get done. Yeah, we were impressed with ourselves, we didn’t— [Laughter] We were very, very good.

DONIN: So how does this distinct black group, how did you fit into the sort of social life on the campus? For instance, Greek life? I mean did you disperse and just go do the Greek life thing? Or did you stay among yourselves and socialize? Or did you form your own fraternity? I don't know. How did that work?

LEE: I'm not sure. I know because of letters I wrote—which, I'd forgotten that initially I thought I wanted to be a part of a Greek fraternity, and ultimately got invited to one. But ultimately I had—I know by my—I certainly didn't. I went into my second year—I think it was when rush occurs. You know I just—I didn't want to be part of it. I had my social group. I don't remember. I know a couple of guys became part of fraternities. And there was one fraternity in particular that was very open to the idea of having black students, not that they were...I'm sure some students...I mean I'm sure there were plenty of fraternities that didn't want to have black students. But I know that there were a couple that were specifically saying "We should have black students."

DONIN: That is one of Dickey's legacies. Is he worked to get their—all the, what do you call them? The bylaws of all these fraternities....

LEE: Right. Or else they had to become local. Right, right.

DONIN: Yes.

LEE: Exactly. But I don't think—there never was a—I don't ever recall it being a part of our agenda, so to speak, as the Afro-American Society that you're either with or you're with the fraternity guys. I mean, there was nothing like that. There were—

DONIN: Uh-huh.

LEE: You know fraternity life was central to what was going on here at the campus then—and maybe now, for all I know. But it definitely was very central. So I don't—it was not part of my thinking that you would say to a black student, "By the way, don't go—don't join a fraternity." I don't ever remember thinking that way. Maybe some of the other guys did. But I never thought that way. I personally did not choose to go in that direction.

WILLIAMS: I know Alpha Phi Alpha was founded in '72, I believe.

LEE: Yeah, it was after I left.

WILLIAMS: So soon after, but not that time.

LEE: Right. Yeah, I think we, um—I'm pretty sure there was discussion when I was here about should we form a fraternity. And I'm pretty sure—and this is a gestalt more than a specific memory—that the sense was that the political mission we had here on campus was much more important than the fraternal admission of the A Phi. My father's A Phi and my mother's AKA. I mean, fraternities are big in my family, black fraternities. So I had that legacy. But we felt that—and I suspect some of the other guys did, too—we thought what we were doing here was beyond and more important than, historically, what black fraternities were about. So if the issue had come up, I probably would have said, "No, we don't need a fraternity now. We need an Afro-American society."

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

LEE: "And it has to be as strong as possible, and a fraternity would just dilute the strength of what we were trying to do here." So I probably would have been opposed to an immediate organization. But I saw even as it got towards my third and fourth year that eventually the community would grow large enough, the black community here, that you would have more than one center of activity for black students because it's going to become a more diverse community within the black community. And this idea that everybody would be swept under the arms of the Afro-American Society, I knew that was not going to last forever. You know, but the time I left there were eighty or so students coming in every year. By '72 I think they had a hundred one year, so. So, yeah, that was a short-lived part of the black experience at Dartmouth where you really could count on all the students to be at your side, whatever.

DONIN: Regardless of the issue.

LEE: Yeah.

DONIN: Yeah. Well, that's gonna happen in any group once it grows.

LEE: Yeah, exactly.

DONIN: So the agenda that you came up with in those early years when you were still small enough to be sort of one unit, was it distinctly

focused just on Dartmouth? Or did you want to work with other Afro-American groups in the other—in the Ivies?

LEE: No. It was pretty focused on Dartmouth, what we wanted here. And we wanted social space. We wanted programs. We began to address the issue of curricular—what should be in the curriculum.

DONIN: Yeah.

LEE: And it sorta, kinda—in an interesting way, it just sorta, kinda got divided up among the guys that were here who took the most interest in any particular issue. But for me *the* most important issue was the social space. There had to be a place for us. And that wasn't an initial idea. But ultimately when the idea was, you know, presented, more and more people began to discuss the idea; I really saw that was really essential, that there needed to be a.... Maybe by that time I'd figured I didn't want to be in a fraternity, I don't know. I'm not sure what. But there needed to be a social space around which we could, you know, galvanize our interests and our activities, so...

DONIN: But what about the academic piece? I mean were you asking for, you know, African-American history?

LEE: Eventually we were. But I don't think at that time our awareness was strong enough to know what African-American history was [chuckles]. I mean I just, you know, we'd never been taught it. Things we take for granted today were just, I mean, back then we were just not.... [Ernest Everett] Edward Just? I'd never heard of Edward Just. [Laughs] I had graduated here, long gone before I ever heard who Edward Just was. So I don't think that awareness was there. It was by, roughly, 1969, that there needed to be curricular elements. And I think, you know, conceptually we had the idea that there was something about our history that needs to be a part of what's.... But I don't—but the awareness about history—African-American history, as a distinct subject for academic, intellectual, experiential focus on a campus? I don't know that we had that awareness.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

LEE: Probably some did. I didn't. Once the idea got planted, I mean, it was easy to see why. Of course we'd have to.

- DONIN: Sure. Right.
- LEE: But it wasn't obvious at first, yeah.
- DONIN: So how did you yourself evolve over these four years? This experience of building this distinct group, how did that change you?
- LEE: Oh! Well, you know, so part of this is in the context that, you know, in terms of your personal development, the four years of college are *the* most formative time of your life. And you don't realize it as you're going through it, but you certainly realize it soon after. So I think I was struggling personally with the fact that I was doing well academically in high school with leadership responsibilities. But there were some other people like that. And then I come to Dartmouth College, I found a lot of guys like me with talent, with ability. And so I think it awakened inside me, "Wow! There are some very—I'm not alone." [Laughs] That's the simplest way to say it. "It's not just me that has to go out and work and do things. There are a lot of people like me who are capable of doing...."
- When I say "like me," people who have academic ability, who have a sense of responsibility, who have leadership potential, who are growing an awareness of what has to be done in this society. I didn't come here with a mission to, you know, change the world around issues important to black folks, but I certainly left here feeling that way. And so, you know, I evolved from an individual who was—came from the black community, from a black family, from a very historical black family, a black academic family, to one who became a very socially and politically committed individual. And that all happened in three years, really. Very, very—very, very transformational. Which is why it's hard for me to read some of these letters. [Laughter] 'Cause they don't—most of them come from the first year, and I was just.... [Laughter]
- DONIN: That's alright. It's all just an evolution. [Laughter] So wha'd'your parents see was happening with you?
- LEE: They didn't see it except that my hair was longer. [Laughter] That's the only thing they saw, grown it out. They didn't see it. My sister, who went to Bennington College, which is just down the road, she's two years behind me; we were both caught up into the same thing and—no, they didn't. And my parents—
- DONIN: You protected them from it.

LEE: Yeah. I felt like, that I.... 'Cause they were kind of, you know, conservative, middle-class black folks even though we lived in a working-class black community. And I was afraid that they were not ready for it. So I, you know, I never really.... They later became themselves quite radicalized, but as they looked back over their lives and saw things they had did and were like... But, yeah, not at that time.

DONIN: Well, I think a lot of kids of the sixties protected their families from what was going on [Laughter] with them personally.

LEE: Exactly. Yeah.

DONIN: So did your—as this group grew because the incoming population was growing, of black students, did your sense of who your community was change? I mean did it grow, did it change?

LEE: Well, so let's define who my community was before I came here. My community really was my family and the block I grew up on. You know, where I spent my formative years, and school. We did not have a huge extended family, but we had a strong core family, both nuclear family and a few relatives. And my father, who essentially was a social worker—he was a director of a black YMCA most of his life. And then in the 1950's, the YMCA was associated—actually had been recruited to come to Plainfield, New Jersey, a medium-sized northeast suburban city, to be the director of the black YMCA. But then they decided, "Well, we shouldn't have black and white; we should have one YMCA." So he became associate director of the main YMCA.

But essentially it's—then, unlike today, it had a social mission. There were others in my family who were physicians, so there was always that present. But my father was essentially a social worker. And so I think the sense of...so in that sense there was a community around what he sensed was his mission, which was to be a mentor and a leader in the social work sense to work with black kids. And as the two Y's—YMCA's—in Plainfield merged, there were his staff of the black YMCA merged as part of the staff. And I, you know—it was a great space. I mean, it was just sort of black kids and white kids all under the same—only—and there were no overt—you know there were clearly always racial tensions in a community—but in that space, there were no overt racial

tensions. So that was part of—that was another p—community that I had, was in the YMCA, go up to YMCA camps and so forth.

WILLIAMS: Oh, yeah.

LEE: And without thinking about it, it was an integrated environment. I didn't think about it that way. But, you know, just—so there was that. And then there was the church. And that was a little bit funny—'cause my mother, my mother was a very upwardly mobile middle-class mom, black mom, who thought, you know, therefore we should be in the Episcopal Church. My father came from the historical African American Episcopal Church, AME Church, and thought—fact his grandfather was a bishop in that church—so he went to that church, and we went to a black Episcopal Church. My family was kinda— [Laughter]

So I never felt very rooted spiritually, so because of that, because there was this divide, the family never went to church together. And to this day I get—'cause, you know, I wrote down I'm Episcopalian 'cause that's the church that my mother wanted me to go to. And to this day I still get mailings from the Episcopal—whatever they call themselves over here. I never, uh—

DONIN: The church here?

LEE: The Episcopal student organization.

DONIN: Oh, yes, Edgerton House.

LEE: Edgerton, yes. I never set foot in the place, never said boo to anybody there. But somehow they got me on their list, and forever. I've forgotten, yeah...

DONIN: That's great!

LEE: But, yeah. But anyway, so there was a world a little bit around the Episcopal church, a community there. And the YMCA. And then sports were huge in my life.

DONIN: [To Williams] Do you have to be out there at three?

WILLIAMS: Oh, yes. I'm gonna go on the desk.

DONIN: I'm sorry, Shan, you have to miss this.

WILLIAMS: Oh, no, it's not problem. Yeah...

DONIN: Well, we'll just keep going.

WILLIAMS: Okay. I would be interested to hear how BADA came into play because I know that you had a part in that—

LEE: I did do that.

WILLIAMS: —as it was developing out of the Afro-American society.

DONIN: We'll do that. Are these the BADA questions?

WILLIAMS: Well, sorta. I mean they're generally related. But, this is fine. Okay, carry on. [chuckles] Scratch that from the record. [Exits]

DONIN: Sorry. We'll scratch this.

LEE: So, your question was about....

DONIN: About how your community.... I was actually wondering how the— during your four years here...you started out with this tightknit group of—

LEE: Four friends, yeah.

DONIN: —the kids that were here that you knew. And then obviously this group of black kids that you put together to be the Afro-American group. Was that your community?

LEE: Oh, absolutely, while I was here. Yeah, and I wouldn't say I put it together. I mean, we came together, and I was elected the head of the group. But that was definitely the center of gravity, where my life and my soul and my energy was.

DONIN: The group grew here, I mean by the time you were a senior.

LEE: Yeah. So I was—it says there—I think that it's true, I think I was president for two years. But Billy McCurine was the—

DONIN: Yeah, between two and four.

LEE: Yeah. And then Billy McCurine was president, and then Wally Ford after that. So there was a succession of.... But, so let me just tell you this part of my story, because by my senior year—remember I left I think the spring of my senior year. The other important event in my experience here which was— Do you know the story of the Chicago....? [Donin nods] Okay.

DONIN: What was the name though? I've totally....

LEE: The Foundation Year Program.

DONIN: That's it. The Foundation Year.

LEE: Foundation Year Programs.

DONIN: Right.

LEE: So Dean Dey and others thought it was an interesting and good idea to bring gang leaders from Chicago to Hanover. So they decided that I—or they asked me to be the one that would be their roommate for the first year they were here. So this was my senior year. And I was at that point living at Casque & Gauntlet. So Dean Dey first of all asked myself and Billy McCurine—Billy was president of the Afro-American Society—to go and meet them when they came, gave us the background, then asked us to meet them at the airport in Lebanon. So we went down, dressed as I am now in jeans, you know, sweatshirts and so forth, not really knowing what to expect. But, just—and Billy was from Chicago. So that sort of made it, you know.... Whatever was gonna happen here, at least there was going to be another guy from Chicago that's gonna make sure everything goes smoothly here.

But all we knew at that point is that we were meeting two gang—two former gangs members from Chicago. And so we go dressed down, looking like country bumpkins. And off the plane stepped Tiny and Henry, Al Nevins and Henry Jordan. And they are dressed like they are ready to attend a Wall Street board meeting. To this day—Tiny had on a tweed three-piece suit as he comes down off this little, you know, small airplane. Henry had these flannel slacks, gray slacks with a—I can still see this—with a blue jacket. They looked beautiful. And we looked at them and our eye—you know, it was just, like, wow! And we shook hands. And Tiny and Henry and I became the tightest group of people that I have ever known.

They lived with me for the next three or four months. We spent every night talking about what they were doing in Chicago, what they had done, what I was doing here, and what we were doing here at Dartmouth. And that somehow connected me with an experience that had not been a part of my life, but by the time I left here, I felt was very central to my life. Which is the experience of growing up in urban America as a black. And it was just phenomenal.

DONIN: Must have been an eye-opener.

LEE: A lot of it was, "Wow! This is amazing!" Yes. But what was more interesting to me was just how instant the connection was between Tiny, Henry, and I because our skins were the same color. It was just such a powerful, powerful part of being here. And so powerful that, you know, I left—the reason I left the campus actually—Bob Reich, who was, you know, he wanted to be head of the Labor Department. Bob was also in C&G. He came by my office one day and said—I mean, by my room one day, and said, "Do you want to go— Let's go work on the campaign. I'm going out to Indianapolis and then out to California." I said, "Oh, sure." So, we went off—that's why I left. And I never came back after that. So that's why I left the campus. And, but for about three or four months up until that point every night was spent with Tiny and Henry.

DONIN: You were with Tiny and Henry.

LEE: And they were just so marvelous, particularly Tiny. And the thing that was so interesting to watch was how they negotiated their way into the campus environment here and got what they needed, using all the street skills that they had and the really incredible personal skills they had.

DONIN: Just the sheer power of their personalities.

LEE: Exactly. To get what they needed. So they would go to Dey and say, "You know Woody has all these books on his shelves." And they would say, "You know, we look like we're, like, you know... We need some books." And so, bingo! They'd get, you know—they'd get some money, next thing you know they'd have a bunch of books on their shelves. They just had this way of effectively demanding, without clobbering people over the head, what they wanted to make their lives, what they wanted them to be. And they always said to me: "Woody, we're on your turf now. [chuckles] We

know that. [both chuckle] But next year, 'cause we have our foot in the door, we're bringing our boys up here. And things will change," they said. But they were very clear that once they opened that door, they were going to make sure the opportunity was available to a lot more people. And that's sort of my vision of what I want to do with my life: open those doors and make sure a lot of people came here after I got through them.

DONIN: Did they succeed? Did they bring—

LEE: Yes. Oh, yes. For two years, you know. Then the program...that's a long, different thing.

DONIN: That's another whole story.

LEE: Story, exactly. But they did the following year. And they kept saying, "Wait 'til you meet Crump." Henry Crump. And I actually came back in '69 just to visit the campus. And I met Crump. It was—and this is told in the story that's told about the Foundation Years—we were walking down the Green, and Crump is coming towards me. He was the big guy in the whole whole gang environment there, just sort of walking down the street towards each other. Like, you know, "Showdown at O.K. Corral." [Laughs] It was like I was the leader on the campus; he was the leader in Chicago.

DONIN: Whoa!

LEE: So, and I actually was scared. But we shook hands and everything was fine. But it was, um, yeah—that was a real important experience.

So I left. After the three or four months I spent with Tiny, I left to work on the campaign and wound up in Indianapolis and then in Los Angeles at the time that Kennedy was killed. And then ultimately never came back to Dartmouth. But worked for Dartmouth the following year down in Jersey City.

DONIN: Oh, that was the—was that the Bridge Program [Jersey City Bridge Program]?

LEE: The Bridge Program, yeah. And then... Worked at Harlem for five years after that, thinking that all the guys that I knew in college were sitting around talking about all these things, about going back and working for communities, would be joining me. And no one came.

So I said, "Oh, that's right. I'm supposed to be a doctor." So I turned around one day and said, "You've got to get on with going to med school." So that's what I did.

DONIN: So it's fair to say that you were transformed during your four years at Dartmouth.

LEE: Absolutely, yeah.

DONIN: But the question is, was it the atmosphere? You know, this was going on all over the country.

LEE: Correct.

DONIN: But there was a condensed version of it going on here at Dartmouth.

LEE: I think there was a perfect version of it going on here at Dartmouth, in the sense that the urgency, the immediacy, the importance of what needed to be done was sensed here, and things were done and changed very, very dramatically. And it became, you know, a bit of a model for what should be done everywhere. The New York Times had this article: DARTMOUTH ADMITS 100 BLACK STUDENTS, and the most ever in the Ivies, something like the most ever in the Ivies. It happened in 1972 I think. It really did become a model for what is possible. And, you know, I carried that with me for the rest of my life, that—what a few guys can do.

DONIN: And the whole.... You know they were starting at the high school level with this ABC Program.

LEE: Right. And that had started...that was not our organization, that was the college.

DONIN: No. Right, right.

LEE: But we were all were involved in it, you know. I was involved in it one summer. A lot of—some got involved in other ways. Yeah.

DONIN: You were a tutor.

LEE: Yes. Exactly. Mm-hmm. Exactly. In fact one of the kids in the program that summer was from my high school. Yeah. So, yeah. And then, you know to have these students come out of, through

that program, and go on to be Rhodes—it's all, you know... So, I mean—and partly...

Ultimately, you know, I went to Yale Med School and then stayed there and joined the faculty. And so as I was doing my academic thing, as a, you know, as a faculty member of the School of Medicine. I actually put all this stuff behind me and just became an academic for ten years and ultimately got tenure. And looked up one day figuring that the whole world was changing because we'd set in motion all these things. And I said, "Not much had changed." Oh! What a realization. That's almost—I got—I mean, I literally spent a decade just doing a pure, focused academic—well, medical training and then academic thing. You know you feel like you're in this huge world 'cause medicine's so grand, it's so big, it's expanding, it's growing. You're seeing more black students come in, you know. You know, you're sitting side-by-side; there are all these black students around. You think everything is happening in the whole society because it's happening right in front of you. And then you stop one day.

And the moment I realized that something was wrong, something very terrible had happened over those ten years, was when I looked at—at this point I was a dean—I said, "Let me look at the statistics on the black faculty at Yale." 'Cause I'd been a faculty member for close to a dozen years at that point. I said, "I know I'm a faculty member. I know [Gary, 58:52] is here"—who was almost a classmate of mine at Yale year-wise, year behind me at Yale—"He's a faculty member. Let me go check the department list." And there were only two black faculty members. I said, "Wait a minute. It's been ten years, and there are no others." And I was floored. How could that have happened? Who was asleep? What is going on? I couldn't... I couldn't figure it out. And some ways that's okay, you know. Essentially what happened.... You can look at medicine, you can look at Dartmouth, you can look anywhere, at any part of what was going on in society. There was this tremendous, tremendous acceleration of interest, effort, focus on behalf of bringing African-Americans into mainstream America. And it accelerated in the late sixties.

DONIN: Sixties.

LEE: Into the mid-seventies, and then it plateaued. And I think the most distressing thing to me is to look at over the last two, going on three decades now, the achievement gap—I mean, SAT gap. You know,

scores, whatever—the achievement gap between blacks and whites in our society has not changed in over two decades.

DONIN: It needs another kick-start.

LEE: Right. But it exposes the fact that there's something very structurally wrong, that we were just skimming the surface of in the issues that we were dealing with.

DONIN: In the sixties.

LEE: Yeah.

DONIN: Well, you rode that wave, though.

LEE: Yeah. And it felt really good. Really good. That's exactly right. We rode the wave and got as much out of it as we could. But it was just, there were.... You know as someone summed it up in roughly 2000: we've been enslaved for 400 years—I mean, there's been—African-Americans have been—we're 400 years in this country, 350 years of those were either enforced slavery or effectively slavery, Jim Crow, effectively an environment of slavery for 350 of those years. And only for 50 years have we had a chance to experiment with freedom.

DONIN: That's sort of depressing to look at it that way.

LEE: That's the way it is.

DONIN: Yeah.

LEE: That's the way it is.

DONIN: Only 50 years.

LEE: Right.

DONIN: And as you say, there's still a long way to go. Big gaps.

LEE: Right. But I thought what we had set in motion here at Dartmouth was...everything was gonna be okay. Not right away, but over time.

DONIN: Right.

- LEE: 'Cause I saw it be okay here on this campus.
- DONIN: But then the momentum flattened out.
- LEE: Well, no, the momentum just faced the ugly truth that this country has deep-rooted—
- DONIN: Yeah.
- LEE: A deep-rooted foundation in making sure that some people get the benefits of what this society has and others are excluded. And that that hasn't changed, fundamentally. In fact it's gotten worse in the last decade. Yeah.
- DONIN: Yeah, the last dec—yeah, the last ten years. Well, our focus is back at Dartmouth. So, you know, this—as I told you when we started out: You know our focus here is to sort of look at this through the lens of feeling that you either belonged or didn't belong. But your story seems to indicate that you felt like you belonged here.
- LEE: Oh, yeah. Right. I have a great friend down at Yale who wrote a beautiful article about belonging, and he—specific to the African-American experience. When you are part of an institution or an institutional environment, do you feel like you belong there? Do you have a sense of belonging to the institution? And at Dartmouth initially... I think I felt like I belonged initially, but that changed; meaning that I earned my way here, I belonged in the sense that I'd earned the right to be here, I was successful here, and that there was a community here I enjoyed.
- But then I met this group of black students and I found another community. So the community that I thought I belonged to changed. But I still felt very much a part of Dartmouth. I still felt very, very much a part of the Dartmouth community. I often characterize the Ivy Leagues that they're some of the schools are all about celebration of the individuals, and a few of the schools that are all about the celebration of individuals and a few of the schools that're about celebration of community. Dartmouth is one of those that's about celebration of community. And so I felt very much a part of the Dartmouth community. And being within that community what was a very, very powerful and strong black community. So I very much felt like I belonged.

I think—and a colleague that I have makes a point of this—is that being there and feeling like you belong while you're there are two distinctly different states of connection with an institution. And that it is difficult for most African-Americans to feel like they belong, that they belong, that they are part of the institution. I feel more a part of Dartmouth, for instance, than I do of Yale, which is more deeply conservative. There's so much I admire about Yale and what it's able to do, what it's capable of doing. But I don't feel like I belong. I do feel like I belong there, but not as strongly as I do at Dartmouth, even though I haven't spent much time back here. Dartmouth is, you know, that's me. That's where I come from. It's like my family. It's where I grew up.

DONIN: It's where you found your—

LEE: Found out who I am, yeah.

DONIN: Yeah. And two questions: When you were here, were there any black faculty, administrators?

LEE: Hm-mmm.

DONIN: No.

LEE: I—maybe. Not that I remember.

DONIN: I mean—not that you remember. Yeah. And how did you relate to Dartmouth? Once you graduated, I mean did you continue to come back here?

LEE: No, no. I—you know, I came—it's interesting. There are a couple of things. First of all, I was fortunate, I got a scholarship coming here—not just the regular scholarship, but an additional scholarship. So I didn't actually have to work. So I didn't have to do the work-study, but I actually did it for one semester and hated it so much.

DONIN: Work-study?

LEE: Work-s—well, I... I had a j—

DONIN: Your job?

LEE: I just needed money in my pocket, but...

DONIN: Right.

LEE: But basically, you know, I didn't—I wasn't forced to work in order to—'cause I had an additional General Motors Scholarship in addition to the college scholarship. Um...I'm sorry, we were..?

DONIN: So we were talking about the fact that you weren't back here. I mean obviously you were swallowed up by your studies and your medicine career.

LEE: Oh, yes. Right, right.

DONIN: But, you know, you were only in New Haven. But you didn't come back here for....

LEE: No, no no no no. So once I left here, you know, as I said, I went—ultimately wound up in Harlem. Worked there five years. I felt very much a part of that community and political. The work that I was in was with the Harlem community. That was really, really an exceptional experience. But I knew that that's not where my passion was. Science and medicine ultimately became my passion, and then academics became my world. And then ultimately I became a dean. And ultimately began to do some of the things that I had started to do here at Dartmouth, which was getting other black kids into medicine, into science. So, you know, it sorta came full circle.

DONIN: So how did you get involved with BADA [Black Alumni of Dartmouth Association]?

LEE: So the year after I graduated, in '69, I still was connected with the College 'cause I was in the Jersey City program. And I don't remember where or how the idea originated. I just know I was among—when the call went out, so to speak, to—“Let's organize,” I just came to the first meetings. And Fritz Alexander, who was a—I knew in New York City, was part of that. Julian Robinson was also part of that, he was the guy I was very close to, Dartmouth grad, a black grad, who was down in Jersey City. And, you know, I just was—the call went out. And of course I answered the call, the “Let's think about joining—”

I know the issue was on our minds. I just can't remember whether it was specifically on my mind, or a few others...I just don't remember

exactly how it all came together. I just know the idea was out there and, like, everything that had gone up to—gone on while I was here—once the idea was on the table and everyone agreed it was a good idea, it just happened. You know, it was—

DONIN: So what year was that that it got started?

LEE: I believe it was 1969. I mean—it probably was the formal part of the organization probably was '70 or '71. But it was in '69. And I wasn't central to the bringing it together. I just—I came to the meetings. And then there were a series of meetings that I didn't come to where they negotiated the College around certain things that the— 'cause the students had made some demands at that time. So BADA became important in facilitating conversations between the College and the students around some of the demands that were made at that time.

But, yeah. But my role with BADA was fairly limited. I'm listed as one of the founders, but, you know, as others have said to me, somehow I got on that list because I showed up at the first meeting. [Laughter] But I didn't call the meeting and I wasn't a prime mover. I just remember it being an important idea that of course we should, you know, given what we've come through as students. Of course that we should have an organization afterwards.

DONIN: And it's a reflection of the critical mass that you clearly had reached.

LEE: Yeah.

DONIN: To have enough people to—

LEE: To do that, yeah. I thought it was— I assumed—and maybe we were—I assumed we were the first 'cause I just remember distinctly thinking that, "Of course, this is the next logical step. This is what we're all about."

DONIN: Yeah, yeah.

LEE: "Being strong and being together."

DONIN: And did that help sort of renew your connection—feeling of connection—to the College?

LEE: No, you know, because, you know, the isolation in this place makes it hard to establish it. Ultimately I became a regular donor to the Alumni Fund, and the connection—I just maintain the connection there. I became very centered at Yale with the work I was doing there, both academic and with the students. And so that just became the center of my universe professionally and in almost every possible way. And it's only in the last year that this kind of reconnection with Dartmouth occurred. So, but I was very...you know at some point in my life when I grew to understand how these institutions became what they were, it became very important to me to think carefully about it and be committed to the idea that you've got to give back in some way. And so—it wasn't a big way, but, you know, but I've been very consistent with financial giving and support.

And if someone had called me to say, you know, we need you up here, I'm only three hours away. I would come right up. And I would travel through, you know, every three or four years with the family. We'd always traveled through here 'cause we usually vacation in the New England area. So I've been through here a bunch of times but never stopped in to see what was going on. And was not part of the evolving BADA experience until recently. Yeah. You know, I was involved in the startup and then, you know, rejoined the effort.

DONIN: That's great. That's great. These are some of Shan's questions: You've answered a lot of these. Sorry. I should have read these ahead of time, but. So what exactly.... Yeah, I mean what do you perceive that BADA is doing for its members?

LEE: I'm not sure because I've, you know, I've just become more involved with BADA. And I'm impressed with the leadership of BADA obviously. And I'm impressed with its sense of what its mission should be. But I've worked at Yale for 20-plus years now, and I have a very good sense of what alumni can do and can't do. Kind of a push-pull relationship between administrative folks and alumni. And I think that BADA—my personal opinion is, as I expressed at one of the recent meetings, is that BADA should— their focus should be a—which is where they started out—is be a bridge to the people who make decisions here, to help the students get what they need. But they need to understand what the students think is important, or the faculty. What the black community here thinks is important, and then make that, those concerns, known to the people who make decisions here, you know, at the administrative level or the governance level. And that should be our

role. I don't think it should be our role to, you know, set up programs on the campus or.... I think we can help make programs work to the extent that they rely on an alumni network and those kinds of things. But I think our role is to push and prod the College along those lines and in the direction that comes out of the, you know, what the current issues are on the campus.

DONIN: The feedback, as you say, feedback from students and faculty.

LEE: Yeah. Because how can we know what's important if we're not there every day.

DONIN: Right, right. Yep, yep.

LEE: And I picked this up pretty strongly from the few meetings I've been in recently, is that everybody who's an alumnus relates to current student problems in the way that they were a student.

DONIN: Ah....

LEE: And things are different. And because I'm with students all the time at Yale now, I fully get that. And so you have to—and the students are different, you know. The black students are different. They're a much more diverse group, they have... We were what I call pioneers. I think the modern generation are more—I don't mean this in a negative sense—are more entrepreneurial, not in the sense of going out risk-taking in businesses, but more of—"There's a lot of goods out there in the world and it's my time to gather some of those, some of those goodies," so to speak. Where we were pioneers. There was nothing out there. We had to come and find it.

DONIN: Well, and create it.

LEE: And create it, yeah.

DONIN: Yeah.

LEE: So, yeah. So I think it's important for us to listen and learn from students, faculty, and administrations who are from the minority community here. And then assist them in making that voice heard at the higher levels. Down at Yale I knew all the black members of the Yale Corporation, comparable to the trustees here.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

- LEE: And they all have their agendas. They all had to press their individual agendas. But I knew that they were individually...there were a few that were much more connected with students and with what students go through and so forth, as opposed to what they thought in their own head was the—
- DONIN: Right, right.
- LEE: I found that that's not effective.
- DONIN: Doesn't work.
- LEE: No, you have to be.... And students are so powerful even today. Even today. No college wants the world to know their students are unhappy. [Laughs] No college in the world. So this is....
- DONIN: And they're great communicators, so....
- LEE: [Laughs] Exactly. Especially in this day and age.
- DONIN: Yes. [Laughs]
- LEE: So it's—so they really have power. And so I think if they understand the dynamics of institutional change, which is basically no change, like this place. I just can't believe that this place has not changed since I sit in the center of the Green. It just has not changed. So that's a powerful, powerful constant in these institutions: that some things just do not change.
- DONIN: *Some* things don't change.
- LEE: Exactly.
- DONIN: But the face of Dartmouth has definitely changed.
- LEE: I know. But I'm just saying there's something core in every institution that's—
- DONIN: Absolutely.
- LEE: That just does not move.
- DONIN: Right.

LEE: And with Dartmouth, you know frankly, those are mostly good things.

DONIN: Yes, yes. Great.

LEE: So I love it, being here. It really feels like it was just yesterday I was in Fayerweather.

DONIN: Walking across the Green. Yeah, yeah.

LEE: But then I see the change that's are on the outside part of the Green. So, and I think that's kind of, you know, a kind of a nice way to think about Dartmouth.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

LEE: Is that it's got some core values that are strong and very good ones. And I think we remain true to those. But meanwhile it's changing and expanding its vision of who it is and what it is, so. I think, you know—I was saying to someone around issues of working with minority students, saying to someone at the Robert [Wood] Johnson Foundation, I said, "You know I could take this idea up to Dartmouth and get it done tomorrow." That's the kind of place it is, 'cause that's the way I remember it. [chuckles]

DONIN: Well, it's small enough that it's still manageable.

LEE: Yeah.

DONIN: It's lighter on its feet than some of these bigger universities.

LEE: Yeah. When I worked in New York City, getting thing—it was a lot. It was challenging, but it was very interesting in some ways even though it was very hard. And then now I'm in New Haven which is only about 120,000 people. Same kind of problems. But it's doable because it's just smaller; it's manageable. You can—if you have a good idea, you can walk into the mayor's office, say "Look at this!" Same way here. Yeah. You get in New York, it takes an hour—I mean a years.

DONIN: At least, just to get the appointment. [Laughter]

LEE: Exactly. [Laughs] Yeah.

- DONIN: Well, I hope Shan continues to chase down the history of BADA, 'cause I think it's important.
- LEE: Yeah. She's gonna get that from other folks more than me, but, um—
- DONIN: Okay. I'm going to turn off these recordings. Thank you.
- LEE: Can I tell you just one story? Just 'cause I—
- DONIN: Oh, yes! Definitely. Sorry.
- LEE: 'Cause it just bears on one of your—we can leave this anywhere. So in my first year, one thing that did happen to me was I was walking across the—up to the Hop. And a guy was standing there, he looked very, very...well, he looked very preppy. He walks up to me and he says, "Would you like to be part of a play?" I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, I'm casting a play, and I'll give you a part in it." I said, "I've never been in a play." He said, "Well, you know this role's gonna be perfect for you." So I said okay. I think his name's Richard Feldman. He went on to be a Broadway producer.
- DONIN: Oh, really! Uh! But he was an underclassman?
- LEE: He was a junior at that time.
- DONIN: A junior, okay.
- LEE: So the play was *To Kill a Mockingbird* and I played the poor black guy killing the mockingbird, you know, who was accused of raping this woman and goes on trial and so forth. And all I had to really do was sit up on the stage and moan, you know. [Laughs] So it was no acting involved. I'd never acted in a play in my life. But it was kind of interesting because it sort of set a tone. Because later on another white guy would come by my room and say, "Come to a meeting," that was Jim Bob. And it reminded me of—I think it was Feldman was his name—coming up to me and saying, "Why don't you do this? Just trust me." And it wasn't an unpleasant experience. But it was not something I wanted to do again. The, you know—
- DONIN: The play?

LEE: The play part of it. But Jim Bob opened up a whole ‘nother ream of things to get involved in, which I did want to do. But that moment really is a rich one for me. You know I just being one of a few black students, and they needed a black person.

DONIN: Talk about being visible on campus.

LEE: Exactly. And he literally was sitting out in front of the Hop looking for a black student. And I was the fi—I don’t know if I was the first one who walked by, but I was obviously the first one that said “Yes, I’ll do this”. Never having acted before in my life.

DONIN: Did he explain to you that he was looking for a black man? Or you just assumed?

LEE: I don’t remember.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

LEE: Yeah, I think it was—I think it was obvious from the context. Yeah, so, anyway. There was that.

DONIN: Because we have amazing photographs, you can imagine, in the Archives of people in black face paint—

LEE: No, I didn’t know that.

DONIN: Playing—

LEE: Oh, oh!

DONIN: Playing the roles on the—

LEE: On the—from the drama group.

DONIN: From the drama group.

LEE: Yeah, yeah. I’ve seen—

DONIN: And guys dressing up as women as well. I mean, they improvised.

LEE: Yeah, I’ve seen some of the old yearbooks, yeah.

DONIN: Yeah.

LEE: Pretty amazing. Pretty interesting. Yeah. [Laughs] So, that—

DONIN: That's a great story.

LEE: Yeah.

DONIN: We probably have pictures of you if it was one of the...if it was staged in the Hopkins Center.

LEE: Could be. Could be.

DONIN: So what year was this? We'll have to look.

LEE: I would say '64, '65. It was in my first year.

DONIN: 'Sixty-four, '65. And it was *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

LEE: *To Kill a Mockingbird*, yeah.

DONIN: I'm just gonna take a look and see.

LEE: Oh, yes.

DONIN: If I find something, I'll.... Let's turn this off, and I'm going to get your contact info here.

[End of Interview]