

Eileen Cave '76
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Community and Dartmouth's World
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WILLIAMS: This is Shan Williams with Rauner Special Collections Library, and I'm doing an interview today with Eileen Cave. We're going to talk about her experience at Dartmouth.

So just to start off, could you tell me a little bit about your life before coming to Dartmouth?

CAVE: All right. Before coming to Dartmouth, I was born and bred girl from New York; Brooklyn, New York. I hadn't really traveled outside of New York and did not come to Hanover prior to going up to Dartmouth, so...it had a great reputation, it was a great opportunity, being in the first class of women, because I like challenges. Even at the young age of 16, I was attracted to that idea, and our program—I heard very positive things about it, which is what I wound up majoring in, so that's how I wound up being in the first class of women.

WILLIAMS: Okay. So then I was going to say: What made you choose Dartmouth specifically?

CAVE: Well, I think they did heavy recruitment at my school, because actually I think there were three of us that wound up going there, decided to go to Dartmouth, and it just seemed like it would be a good fit. It was a smaller university or smaller college lifestyle, which I thought would be attractive to me just to stay focused on the studies, and that was I think one of the reasons, and it was a good distance from New York, so I did want to just have the opportunity to be away from home and be independent. And I think those were all the factors that brought me up there.

WILLIAMS: That makes sense. So could you talk about your experience coming to Dartmouth and how you integrated into the community?

CAVE: Oh, it was... I would say visual culture shock is probably the most profound experience as I arrived in Hanover. My mother and my aunt and uncle brought me up, and

basically—you know, they knew it was a co-ed dorm in Choates, but when she saw a guy come out of the male dorm with just a towel wrapped around him, she looked at my uncle and said, “If I don’t leave now, I’ll be taking her back with me.”

WILLIAMS: [Laughs.]

CAVE: So they just hugged me and got in the car and left the bags and drove off.

WILLIAMS: [Laughs.]

CAVE: So that was how my experience began, but—and then I had an incident—as we just landed on campus, asking for directions, the Smitty twins, Ronald and Donald Smith, were in a car with sombreros on, and so it was—it struck me as being a very diverse community. I think that was one of the things that hit me straight off. Coming from Brooklyn, New York, it is very much a culture shock and a contrast, so that took some adjusting to.

On the negative side, the first time somebody used the n-word was when we were coming out of the movie theater in Hanover, and a car went by. That was a kind of jarring experience because I wasn’t expecting it, but it—really, I think the way I would look at Dartmouth is to say it was a microcosm of the real world, and you began to appreciate that, I think, after you left. But it was an adjustment to get through in the beginning, and then also the ten to one ratio of men to women, because that was—[Laughter.] That was an interesting adjustment, an interesting environment. I want to say it spoiled me for life, but—

WILLIAMS: [Laughs.]

CAVE: —but it just had its own challenges to handle and to manage. I think what it did for me on the positive side was—in business—and I’ve had several different careers in the aviation industry, in marketing and now in teaching, and always I was outspoken, but I think the confidence to feel that you can express yourself so you can advocate, you can be relentless and confident in what you do as a strategic thinker or somebody who is initiating things in business and

not feel that there's a certain role that you have to play as a woman. That never entered my mind because I think that experience that young made me feel very comfortable feeling passionate about things and changing my mind or deciding to go in a totally different direction that was not related to this career path. So I think it's also had an effect as I became a parent and wanted to instill those same values emphasizing the importance of a quality education, and giving my children access to the same—

WILLIAMS: Yeah.

CAVE: —to things that would broaden their knowledge and experiences.

WILLIAMS: Yeah. Had you considered a woman's college?

CAVE: I interviewed at Smith, and I remember the woman saying to me after she asked me where else I had interviewed—she said, "Well, we need not have this discussion because I'm sure you'll wind up going to Dartmouth."

WILLIAMS: [Laughs.]

CAVE: And I thought, *Wow, that was kind of interesting.* But I just didn't think that that was the experience I wanted. That's where my mother wanted me to go. [Chuckles.] But I chose Dartmouth. I just said, *No, I just think this is it. You know, it's waaay up there.* [Laughter.] *And I just know that it will be—I just had a feeling it was just going to be more interesting.*

Also my roommate in college—she went to my high school. And so I said, *I will know somebody up there,* and that also helped to influence my decision.

WILLIAMS: Yeah. So were there any kinds of things from your upbringing or your early life that you would say impacted your sense of community at Dartmouth?

CAVE: I would say that in the '70s, as you look and think back about the music, the politics of that time,—I wouldn't exactly say I was a militant, but I think that the pride in black culture and black heritage was very clear. So when I got up there and got into the life as a freshman, it was interesting because I

think that was also the year that the Black Alumni of Dartmouth organization first formed. Then I wound up running—and I was the female president of the African-American Society, the Aam.

So I was finding my place and my voice, and then also dealing with the fact that while some brothers embraced my philosophy and supported me because they had a more evolved sense of the role of women, there were still brothers who weren't quite ready to see a woman in charge, particularly when they were recruited to go to an all-male school. The issue of when coeducation would come or not come confronted me as the first class of women matriculated at Dartmouth. Then—there was also the concern that they had that once the women arrived—not the women that they found road-tripping or had relationships with from other schools—that this would be a very divisive factor in the black community.

WILLIAMS: Mmm.

CAVE: We also dealt with the issue of the fraternities and the sororities within the black community. There was some of the faculty that felt, well, to support those forming on campus would form a divisive concern among the black population, whereas, for a lot of us, who came from communities where you had three or four black fraternities and sororities on campus, it was an important part of the college experience. Your uncle might have been an Alpha and your brother might have been a Kappa, and so you were aware of them, and to that extent, there was a different thought about, well, of course, you would want see that up there.

WILLIAMS: Right.

CAVE: So those were all very interesting dynamics at play, and I think it pulled at the sense of community. But I think that the friendships that formed were stronger than the pulls.

WILLIAMS: Okay. So then, I guess, maybe for clarification, could you define exactly what you think maybe the principles of community are, you know, in regards to kind of Dartmouth life, and then how do people identify with those?

CAVE: I think that the sense of community I got was so important—I mean, you're there for an education, but what education means and how broad it can be—these were the real life lessons. I think that the sense of community came from the friendships and the relationships that help to support those efforts to get that quality education, to experience the programs and the opportunities and to also look at how do you take what that community has given you and then go back to your community and remain fluid as you travel between the two. That was a process that for those four years also was happening, you were away, and then you were coming back. You had relationships form with the people that you met at Dartmouth and you had relationships at home, and you were always trying to integrate those two worlds.

I wound up going to UCSD for the fall term of my senior year, so I experienced that off-campus program. And it was very interesting because of the Dartmouth brothers that had gone out there before me that [chuckles]—you know, they had made their own impressions—had their own experiences and a reputation that had preceded my arrival at UCSD, and I travelled there by myself, intentionally.

WILLIAMS: [Laughs.] Uh-huh.

CAVE: That was a very positive experience as well for me, going out and experiencing southern California.

So I had intentionally planned to be away from Dartmouth my entire senior year, I was an intern at PACE Institute at Cook County Jail in Chicago. That was a Dartmouth program where you tutored inmates. I have to say that was—

WILLIAMS: [Laughs.]

CAVE: —an experience in itself as well. I didn't have my phone number listed in the phone book for about two years [laughs], but [laughter] it was a reality check.

WILLIAMS: Mm-hm.

- CAVE: And I think that's what Dartmouth did well: It provided you with connections from the school community back to your community—that sustained you, anchored you.
- WILLIAMS: So, then, would it be possible that you could talk a little bit about maybe how your sense of Dartmouth community maybe changed or evolved kind of in contrast with your away terms?
- CAVE: Okay. I would say that probably—when I traveled, or in the programs away from Dartmouth, you began to look at Dartmouth and your experience there a little bit differently. Dartmouth has always had issues that were happening on campus—you know, with *The Dartmouth Review* and just the things that were happening related to adjusting to coeducation, so you would have that going on. You would have the reaction of people focusing on the conflicts outside the community saying, “Oh, you know, this is what’s going on there.”
- And I think that’s what helped me to really learn how to put things into perspective. You have to look at the situation not just from the view of living in it, being in a community, but also stepping back and looking at it from the outside.
- WILLIAMS: Right.
- CAVE: I think that that ability to be more objective but still be passionate about something while figuring it all out, that was my life lesson. Asking myself *Well, what's my position, and what's the rationale behind it? Is it valid? And do I need more information?* I learned the process of strategic thinking, and how important it is for me to become part of something that is a worthwhile cause to support. While I was a student at Dartmouth, we faced the issues of institutional racism, and presented this report (Institutional Racism and Student Life at Dartmouth College) authored by Judith Redding '76, Monica Hargrove '76 and myself. When we started talking about that experience, it magnified how the small Dartmouth community was representative of the outside world.
- Coming from New York, I was used to facing and dealing with tough situations, but it was different when confined to a small college campus. There were many things you were

used to dealing with, the politics and social issues going on, and activism in the black community Then you come to Hanover and the issue of discrimination seemed to be magnified, whether it was in the classes or experiences that faculty or students were having, particularly the brothers playing sports would tell us about. So that was what led us to the point where we said, “Okay, we have to write this report. We have to document it and address it with the college administration. It just seemed the right and necessary thing to do.”

WILLIAMS: Right.

CAVE: So that experience, and having the protest on the steps of Baker Library. We were very young doing this but not really thinking about, *Well, are there going to be consequences or ramifications?* We were living in the now, and this was the minute we had to express ourselves. So there's always going to be a connection to the students at Dartmouth, I feel, when I hear there are similar issues back on campus. It was disturbing and very moving when I went back to campus for the reunion last October, to hear the sisters talking about the issues of disrespect they were experiencing, along with the fractionalization of community that was occurring. And it was almost sad in a way, because you were hoping to hear that there was progression and change in a positive manner four decades later. But then you are reminded that, you within every phase or every decade there are always issues that will be there, and the question is how, as alumni, do we support these students, how do we become engaged, how do we reach out? But it was a very stirring—I found myself almost rising out of my seat with a Brooklyn-like motherly instinct: Well, “Who called you *what*? ”

WILLIAMS: [Laughs.]

CAVE: “They called you *what* when you passed by?”

WILLIAMS: [Laughs.]

CAVE: And so—

WILLIAMS: [Laughs.] “Let me find out.”

CAVE: Exactly, you know. It's that same feeling—when we were there, whether as the first class of women to experience the outrage, or sharing it with the undergraduates now. Knowing "Well, we still have some responsibility. What are we going to do? What can we do?" Several of us talked about some of the issues and the things that we had learned last October, and I'm not sure that we've moved forward doing anything at this point, but it was an important sense of reconnection.

WILLIAMS: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

CAVE: It was a point of reconnection. I think that that's what community is. Community means that even when you're no longer physically in a location— you are still part of that community. I think what I've learned is that community is something that you experience for the extent of your lifetime, experience that you take, depending on how strong or intense the experience is.

WILLIAMS: Mm-hm, mm-hm. So, then, would you say that your relationship with Dartmouth has evolved and changed now that you're away from it?

CAVE: Yes. Absolutely. And it's interesting because I have two sons. One, was applying to colleges last year, and the younger one is applying this year. The older one, because of what he was interested in—Dartmouth was not a fit. But the younger one actually came to me and said, "Mom, I want to apply to Dartmouth. He's a great artist and also interested in economics—," and, of course, we have gotten the admissions office literature and I've done alumni recruitment, and applicant interviews over the years. But his father went to Harvard. I went to Dartmouth. Within the family there is always that— [Laughter.] It was always that standing school rivalry and competitiveness.

WILLIAMS: I can imagine.

CAVE: So at one point we said, "Well, here's how we'll compromise: They won't go to either of our schools." But my son made the right choice.

WILLIAMS: [Laughs.] At the time.

CAVE:

So in retrospect, I would say it *has* changed in that I feel more of a sense of responsibility as an alumna to stay connected and to attend the reunion events like this kind of a thing. You know, I am not an active member of the Dartmouth Club, and I think that part of it is that my true community when I was up there was really within the black community. I did not really connect to the broader college community much. Now, at this point in life and my profession it's different, and so I guess we all seek a level of comfort, and mine was, to me, was indicative of the '70s. But now by serving my community, I'm in the Gateway Arts District of Prince George's County, MD working as an art teacher and artist, I know a much deeper sense of community. The ability to feel comfortable advocating and fighting for change, to remain active, I have broadened my sense of community as I matured. That's really—well I credit the Dartmouth experience for that growth.

WILLIAMS:

Mm-hm. Absolutely. And so, then, I wanted to kind of tease out this idea of community that you started talking about a little bit, and so would you say that over time—like, within your Dartmouth experience maybe from, you know, freshman year to senior year—did that idea of community change at all? Or did it evolve or, you know, shift in any way?

CAVE:

I think that during the experience of being an undergraduate student, it was pretty consistent. It was all about going to class, then I had a work-study job, it was also about spending time in the art studio, and the rest of the time was spent studying. Of course another large part was being part of the social network of life and identifying myself as an African-American student. That was really the thread, and it stayed pretty consistent throughout my life. Even when traveling and participating in off-campus programs, it was pretty consistent.

But then when you enter your professional life, that's when you reconnect back into the real world. That's when having the Dartmouth alumni network to help with job interviews, that's when you appreciate the power of the alumni network. As soon as you said, "I went to Dartmouth," it had advantages. It didn't matter "Well, you were the first class of women. I wasn't for coeducation." What was important was

that, "You went to Dartmouth. I'll help you get the interview." When I was looking to get into advertising at one point, I used the alumni network to make connections, so— I learned about the power of the network, early in my career.

WILLIAMS: Mhm. So, did you ever feel, you know, in some ways, that you fit into Dartmouth or you didn't fit in? Or, I don't know if you—

CAVE: Well, I guess I really didn't look at in those terms—and as I talk to people in retrospect who've said they felt on the outside at times—or may have had a negative experience. My memories were positive overall—I don't know if it was because I was 16 and I was away excited to be far away from home and on my own. But I felt—part of the community I identified with up at Dartmouth, I always felt comfortable. I felt I had the resources and support that I needed. And I also think that the faculty staff and advisers—like Joan and Berkyl Nelson at that time that were up there, the Smiths, and the Hills were there, also. I think, that our class felt enough of a sense of family within the black community. Also Nels [Armstrong] and the others that were actually the college counselors—we had the support we needed to do well academically and socially, I think, and the vigilance to make sure we were staying on the path to succeed. They helped me to stay focused on the academics. So that was also a sense of having parents away from home.

WILLIAMS: Ahh. Okay.

So could you talk a little bit about the counselor role? It's not something that we really have now, so I don't know if you could explain kind of how it worked.

CAVE: Sure. Well, through the admissions office staff they had recruited—and I don't know if it was just by pure luck or a reflection of the times, but we had the kinds of black faculty, staff, and administrators that really cared about what was happening in the community. They were aware of the challenges that we were experiencing when women were recruited to join an all-male population. They also had a sense if your academics were getting a little shaky or if there was something you needed to take care of, you always felt that they knew what was going on, and they would pull you

aside and let you know— “You might need to handle this now” or “You need to be aware of how this is being perceived.”

I remember one time one of them contacted my mom to come up when one of my grades was getting a little shaky. It was Charlie Simmons; and when I think about him, —I really appreciate that there was a deep and sincere level of support, and I wonder if it’s there now, you know? Or was it just the feeling of the ’70s, that because of solidarity our people looked out for one another.

WILLIAMS: Right, right.

CAVE: You know, while there were all kinds of other things happening around me, I always felt that support, so I did feel connected and not as an outsider.

WILLIAMS: So, then, were there ways that you would be able to kind of—if you were able to kind of characterize who was an outsider—

CAVE: Mhmm.

WILLIAMS: —what were the characteristics of a person like that?

CAVE: Well, you know, that’s an interesting question. I don’t know that I perceived of anybody as an outsider. I know that there were black students up there that clearly did not identify with the black community, but they might seem as an outsider to me because of how they chose their associations when they were in the general population, but they were happy where *they* were [chuckles], so—you really didn’t pay attention to who made different choices because you just had so much to do and engage in. There were, numerous cultural activities, the programs at the Hopkins Center, so there was always something entertaining to do. There was always something to enjoy doing. But because of “the booking” that you had to take care of, I don’t think I really thought of it as, *Who’s an outsider? Who’s not fitting?* Because—particularly with the ten to one ratio of men to women, I always had folks who, wanted to talk, reach out—you know, the whole social thing. So I don’t think that was really an issue I focused on much.

WILLIAMS: Yeah, yeah. Interesting.

Well, were there things about your undergraduate experience that you would say really left a lasting impact in your experience after Dartmouth?

CAVE: Let me see. I think—ooh. I would probably say when I went off campus and went out to UCSD for the term. I never really thought of, *Well, where would I settle after Dartmouth?* I just figured, *I'll either go back to New York or whatever.* I spent my fall term in California, and spent my winter and spring terms in Chicago during my senior year. So the question of where my next home would be was where new opportunities or interests would take me. I think I was more open to not thinking my only option was to return to New York after that.

I didn't attend any of the study abroad programs while I was at Dartmouth, and that was always something that I regretted not doing, but my interests were triggered enough so that then when I was making career choices, I worked for both United Airlines and US Airways in marketing. So for many years I travelled the world for a dollar ninety-nine.

WILLIAMS: Wow.

CAVE: You know, and that was a phenomenal 13 years of just doing that, and then I went to work for a travel management corporation in Washington, DC after leaving the airline industry. I enjoyed travelling the world and my artwork captures these experiences of staying in four-star hotels, dealing with the corporate travel management industry—I loved it. I think that Dartmouth—even though I physically didn't go overseas in any of the student programs, made me curious to see the world and enjoy it. Getting that sense for adventure—that was something I attributed to Dartmouth broadening my horizons.

WILLIAMS: Yeah. Absolutely.

So in what ways would you say that the Dartmouth community has changed since your time there?

CAVE:

Well, I think clearly change or what the community is now, is a reflection of what the younger generation today is dealing with. When I went up there this past October for the 40th reunion, I looked at it to see where these kids are at now, what were they experiencing, and having my own children in that approximate age group—it's an age where technology, social networking and just being connected to things, almost to a fault, is—it takes the place of and the value away from the importance we placed on physical relationships, of being and doing things interacting in the presence of one another.

I mean, I'm freaked out when I see young people sitting in a room with their telephone in their hand, texting, maybe even texting people in the room they are in or people somewhere else, where we would be enjoying, engaging, talking, circulating or whatever with one another, eye-to-eye. And so I'm not sure that's a great thing or a good thing, but it is the point at which the sense of community of combined with technology and communications is at; this is the place where we live now. So I think that as a community—Dartmouth is always going to reflect the current times and all the good and the bad that comes with it.

WILLIAMS:

Mm-hm, mm-hm.

So, then, have those changes kind of altered your relationship to Dartmouth in any way?

CAVE:

I think it's now easier to stay connected as an alumni and be more aware of what's happening up there on the campus, to get an ongoing sense of what's going on up there. The information that we get on the website—and the connection to the alumni network who have really been engaged in the organizations and the formal clubs and the social structure that exists—you can get as much information as you want. You can choose your comfort level of being engaged. And mine has gone up and down. And it's back up again, because at this stage in my life, I look at it and think: *Okay, now it's time for you to give back. Now it's time for you to be a mentor. Now it's time for you to make sure your children are placed in their path and their life is launched.* And I think from that perspective, my role has changed, so therefore my relationship to Dartmouth has changed.

WILLIAMS: Mm-hm, mm-hm. That makes a lot of sense. It makes a lot of sense.

I wanted to ask just a few questions—

CAVE: Sure.

WILLIAMS: —kind of focusing—well, this is interesting because I wanted to make some questions that focused a little more specifically on the black experience, but essentially that was how you characterized your experience.

CAVE: Right.

WILLIAMS: So, I think a lot of these—you might have already talked about them, but there were a few I wanted to highlight.

CAVE: Sure.

WILLIAMS: And one of them was: Were there any momentous historical events that shaped your time at Dartmouth and your experience at Dartmouth?

CAVE: Well, as an undergraduate, I remember Nixon resigning. I remember the national politics that were going on in the world. I remember when the whole issue of divesting from South Africa became part of what the black alumni were focusing on, and that became a very contentious and major issue.

So I think that those kinds of things, business issues that are part of your educational institution, also become part of your life and your sense of community, and not necessarily by choice. So the place where you decide to get your education is never as simple as you think it is. It's also about what *that* institution is doing, its ideals and its operations. It's complex and includes more than what that institution's commitment is to its community, it's also finding out how it's tied to corporate America and to the world—it's all interrelated.

WILLIAMS: Right.

CAVE: And I think that those issues became very prevalent in the '70s that had that sense of consciousness. It included what's

happening in the paper and across the country and across the world that was still impacting me, as I was walking across campus to going to class.

WILLIAMS: Mhm, mhm. How would you say the community reacted then to those types of things? I mean, you talk a little bit about the South Africa divestment and the kind of tension with the alumni groups. I don't know if you could explain a little bit more about—

CAVE: Well, I think that as an organization, BADA was just growing and we were all still coping with the addition of sisters taking their place and finding our own voices within an all-male organization. There were parallels to what was happening in society, I think as the black power movement went through its changes—we also had a range of personalities and different leadership styles emerging and evolving. You had all these things that were happening. They all shaped us. So I look at it, and I say that it influenced me to the standpoint of seeing the need to always find my voice, to always be vocal in a meaningful way, to stand for something, to advocate for something, to fight for something that benefits my community.

WILLIAMS: Right, right.

So, then, just closing off—and then we have, like, a nice little five minutes or so of time—

CAVE: Okay.

WILLIAMS: Well, I mean, we're doing well. We're doing great. Would you say that you felt successful at Dartmouth?

CAVE: Yes, I feel I am successful in my major subject area of study, successful with what I have accomplished in the visual arts and as an arts educator. I mean, it was interesting this weekend when people started sharing, "I've got one of your originals." Or, "I've got some of your artwork" that, because in 40 years I've forgotten who has what. But I would say successful academically? Perhaps not in terms of feeling that I was prepared or understood how to consider graduate school relative to career options. I think that might have been one of the areas that I didn't necessarily feel I did my best—

but at that stage I didn't reach out and go after the resources that the college made available.

Once I got out, I thought *Really what do I want to do now?* And then I was 19, so I—and I didn't want to go to graduate school at the time, and so I felt still the need to wander and to explore what was out there, and so from that standpoint, I would say I found my path eventually—and there were people that I went through school with—who knew exactly what they wanted to do since the first day. “I'm going to med school” or “I'm going to law school.” And I admired that because I just wasn't sure at the time I graduated.

WILLIAMS: Right, right. How did you resolve that?

CAVE: Well, I wound up after my Dartmouth internship finding a graphics designer job working for a credit union in Chicago, that led to me working for United Airlines. It was a great career choice because although I was in marketing, I was responsible for managing the promotional advertising agencies and managing creative projects. So I was able to use the arts—my artistic skill. That right-brain skill always served me well in the corporations because I managed the business issues that the creative groups dealt with, but I also saw solutions through the eyes of an artist. So whenever they would say, “Well, we can't get this back by Tuesday,”—I'd be able to say, “Yes, you can.” You know, that was my competitive edge. And then they also appreciated the fact that although I was creative, I didn't try to do their job.

WILLIAMS: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

CAVE: And so these were the numerous periods of success that I enjoyed, and I changed careers often. After working for the airlines I was an aviation consultant doing master airport art program planning and producing aviation publications for the FAA in DC. I always have felt that what Dartmouth prepares you to do best is making good choices. Make sure you're prepared for it: What additional training, professional development do you need? Go for it; engage it. And then if you decide you want to do something else, be prepared to go in that new different direction.

So I got certified to teach once my children were in the public school system. And so I think that has always been consistent throughout my career—just as Dartmouth at the time—we had the most flexible Dartmouth Plan—it was about finding happiness in the choices you have the courage to explore. You know, it was always about the excitement of making choices and taking risks, more so then than I think they allow students to have now. But those undergraduate Dartmouth experiences set instilled the feeling that *Anything I decide to do, I can achieve it. If I'm prepared, if I'm ambitious, if I'm committed, go for it.* And I think that that spirit of success and stamina characterizes what the Dartmouth experience is.

WILLIAMS: Wonderful. Well, that's a great one to end on.

CAVE: [Laughs.]

WILLIAMS: Well, I thank you very much.

CAVE: You're very welcome.

WILLIAMS: Let me make sure that I've got everything. Oh, stop. Perfect. Thirty minutes. Ah, this one's great.

CAVE: Well, good.

[End of interview.]