

Geneva Southall

- Youth and education 1-
 - born in New Orleans 1
 - Methodist parsonage 1
 - moved to California 2
 - learns piano 2-3
 - family cohesive 4
 - Dillard University, 1941-45 6
 - all black 7
 - marriage, birth of children, death of husband 10
 - Ph.D. - University of Iowa 1966
 - study of "Blind Tom" begun 15
 - Grambling College 15
- Southall called to University of Minnesota by Anthony, Lillian 17
 - attracted to community culture 18
 - tenure appointment - Afro-American Studies and Music 19
 - Ward, John 19
 - King, George 19
 - loss of community base 20
 - internal power plays, 1973-74 21-24
 - hiring of Buckner, Reginald 24
 - Southall - chair Afro-American Studies, 1974-1980 26
 - college committees 26
 - white/black issues - faculty/students 27-29
 - Sorauf, Frank - his role 30
 - outreach to community 31
 - Taborn, John 32
 - Women's Studies 33
- Twin Cities black community 37-42
- Changing nature of students 38
- Assessment of University of Minnesota presidents 39
 - Boston, McKinley - affair 40

Interview with Geneva Southall

**Interviewed by Professor Clarke A. Chambers
University of Minnesota**

**Interviewed on June 1, 1995
University of Minnesota Campus**

Geneva Southall - GS
Clarke A. Chambers - CAC

CAC: This is Clarke Chambers, your friendly oral interviewer. This afternoon is the first day of June 1995, a nice summer's day—we haven't had many. The interview is being conducted in my office, 833 Social Science. I'm conversing with Geneva Southall who came to the university in 1970 and retired only very recently and is a distinguished member of the faculty not only in Afro-American Studies but also in the Music School, and was active in all kinds of college and university committees, and was an enormous reservoir of strength for us in many things.

Geneva, as I said before we turned this funny machine on, we're kind of going to go back and look at some of the early story and bring us down to 1970. I think it's important for listeners to know who you are and where you came from. A lot of it is in the printed material you have, but give us a little intellectual, academic, family history background.

GS: I was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, in the Methodist parsonage, the People's Community Center. My father was a minister there. There was connected to the church a community center so he was over both. He was responsible for one of the first nursery day cares for working black mothers in the city of New Orleans.

CAC: Heavens. This would have been back in the 1930s?

GW: My birth date is 1925.

CAC: The 1920s and 1930s.

GS: Because of that . . . this is why I started school very early. I went to the nursery part while my mother was expecting another baby and another baby, so by three years old, I was in that day

care part. My roots are very much a part of the Methodist church. I was nurtured by them, the people in the church, and, fortunately, others in the denomination. Interestingly enough, I could not talk till I was about seven. I had a speech problem. My father was moved to Pasadena, California—you know how Methodists move around. There were four of us children and when my mother got to Pasadena, the first thing daddy had to do in Pasadena was go and take on the school board to accept my cousin in school for junior high school because she was black. This was because—if you know anything about the rural parts of the South—they would go to school till about eighth grade. You found that many of the urban family members would take those nieces and those cousins in the home so that they could finish high school, so that's why Camille was living with us. I didn't know it then. I just knew I got this big cousin living with us. Mother had her. The first thing daddy had to do in Pasadena was to take her and go and fight to get her in junior high school.

CAC: This is Pasadena, California?

GS: This is Pasadena, California. When they took us into school, my brother who was seven, or maybe Talbert was eight, was in the school for very bright children. He's the one who's a retired Methodist bishop now. But, Geneva was put in the school for very slow children.

CAC: Ahhh.

GS: Yes. So, I was in the slow school and my brother was in the smart school. We stayed in California two years and my mother said to my daddy, "I want to go back South so my children can get an education." People don't understand that. Two years later, we came back to New Orleans and were at Mount Zion Methodist Church. My daddy was there nine years. I could say that that really is the base for everything . . . my life in the parsonage in Mount Zion Methodist Church, the old Mount Zion, before they built the new Mount Zion. Those members of that church, many of them, were teachers of mine and the whole community saw to it that you did right. What happened is because I had a lot of problems . . . My father is from the last class of New Orleans University [NOU] in New Orleans which is the precursor of Dillard University. They had a lab school there because, at that time, when I grew up as a child, black teachers did not have a teacher training in the public school system. Their training came through the connected high schools and elementary schools in the college.

CAC: That's the old normal school?

GS: This was not the normal. This was actually the lab school. It was good for me. It was really a one-room schoolhouse. The principal was Miss Huberdine Daniels, who happened to be a Methodist minister's wife and, also, was a very good musician. daddy took me to NOU to the lab school because I had a lot of trouble in the public schools. I just was not the smartest, very low esteem, had an inferiority complex, and all of that. What happened was Mrs. Daniels was aware of my playing the piano. My mother had been a music teacher and so I loved to play the piano. I played the little hymns for the rest of the class. I realize now that . . .

CAC: You're now seven, eight years, nine years old?

GS: I'm about nine or ten because I was in the third or maybe fourth and fifth grade at New Orleans University.

CAC: You were a pretty young kid, in any case.

GS: Yes. Because I could play and, then, they had the little drama club . . . she brought out those talents that had been hidden. Imagine, I had had a speech problem and yet I am in the drama, in all the little plays. So, teachers, these people, did a lot to help nourish. Someone said, "How did you come out the way you did?" I said, "One thing I realize now is our black teachers in the South accentuated our positives." Even though I was having trouble and still would be having trouble with math, the people who were doing math may not have been able to play the piano.

CAC: You bet.

GS: As a result of that, I had something that made me feel good.

CAC: That's a model of teaching, isn't it?

GS: That's it. It always help me to realize what happened to me and what could have happened. Really the nourishing came from my community. The church was very strong. In those days, the church and the school were very connected.

CAC: You're describing an overlap of church, of family, of school, and, then, it comes to be music as well; so, these all go in the same direction.

GS: You have to remember, most of the colleges, then, were church related. They always had a community component. For instance, at Dillard, when they finally opened up Dillard, there was a community orchestra. There was a youth choir. There was a Methodist Youth Fellowship Choir. I was involved in all of those things on the campus as well as what my school had. At our school and high school, we had operas and operettas. There was something about those black teachers where they just really gave it to us. You have to remember that most of their college life had come out of Fisk, and Tuskegee, and Hampton; so, they had a great deal of pride. I can remember as a child in school being called, as a twelve, thirteen year-old girl, Miss Handy. They always put the Miss to our name.

CAC: Ahhh.

GS: I didn't understand that until I got very involved in the whole Civil Rights Movement. Then, I realized they gave us a sense of dignity that we were not meeting in the larger society. That's what sustained us. They tended to try to counter whatever . . . They always said, "There's

no such word as can't." I heard that all my life. "It's not in the dictionary." You never said, "I can't." You'd get in trouble. It was I can. We always had to be on time. Time was very important. It was like they were definitely nurturing us to counteract any of the stereo types about us in the community.

CAC: Yes.

GS: It's very hard for some of my white female friends to understand that as black women or as black girls in the South, they were the ones that you tried to give an education to. Many a brother worked to help send his sister to college, mainly so she could become a school teacher, or a social worker, or a librarian so that she did not have to work and take care of white people's children or work as a cook. It's a lot of that that people don't understand. There was this black male protection of the sister and all of this kind of thing that took place in, I would say, middle-class black homes. I would say my roots are very strong. My father had finished Tuskegee and had sung in the Tuskegee quintet. He sang at Booker T. Washington's funeral. He had worked his way through school and, then, went to seminary. My mother had gone to Mary Holmes Seminary in Mississippi. She was one of these southern black proud women, really. She went back to college to finish her degree when she had four children. Education was critical, very critical. My parents were right there always pushing us, and loving us, and disciplining us; but, they had the support of members of the congregation or anybody. It was hard to do wrong. Also a very important person in my life . . .

CAC: Excuse me. It's almost like living in a small town.

GS: That's right.

CAC: Even though it's New Orleans, everybody knows each other.

GS: They would call and say, "Mrs. Handy, I saw Geneva doing this wrong."

CAC: I had the same experience living in Blue Earth. Everybody knew who I was and by god! I had to measure up.

GS: Another thing . . . I can remember when my father used to say to us, "Remember, when you walk out of this house, you represent this family." That whole thing—there was so much that was happening then that I did not understand—that you're representing this family. They took very seriously; whereas, by the time I started having kids—only one—and my daughter and my grandson were putting me through changes, I had to begin to say, "Look! I can't take the blame for some of this cutting up they're doing." How different . . . when we were made to feel that you are representing this family and the whole community when you go out there.

CAC: Here you are, a young preadolescent, adolescent girl, and you're getting empowered and strengthened everywhere you go. That's really a positive story.

GS: I just—as I told you—came back from my fiftieth class reunion at Dillard. I was sitting there at the piano because Pluke who was over the alumni association called and asked me, would I play the class memorial, play the prelude for that? I said, “Pluke, when you consider there were only three music majors in that class, two of whom are dead, I will run to the piano.” As I sat there, I thought about what had nurtured me at Dillard and I talked to my classmates about this. The one thing they kept talking about that was so important at Dillard to them was the chapels three times a week.

CAC: Do they still do that?

GS: They can’t. They have to call it convocation now because . . .

CAC: When you were there, it was chapel?

GS: Yes, it was chapel. It wasn’t really chapel in the sense of church. What it was is it was the place where I heard Thurgood Marshall’s speech, Langston Hughes read his poetry, Nathaniel Dett play his music. Sterling Brown came one year and Howard Thurmond. It was the place where also the varied sororities and classes had a program. It was where leadership came. You planned the program. This is where the Jesse Jacksons got their leadership . . . from those black college campuses. As I sat there, I remembered I used to play—part of one of the things music majors would do—the prelude to the three days a week chapel. It really brought back the memories of how important that had been, just playing the hymns and the prelude. Miss Blanton would work very hard selecting which Chopin prelude, which Bach prelude, which Mendelssohn *Songs without Words* and all of this. All of that was very important in my development.

CAC: By the time you got to Dillard, you were a fairly good pianist?

GS: Yes. I studied for seven years with the teacher at Dillard.

CAC: Even before you went to Dillard?

GS: That’s right. I studied at Dillard four years before I went to Dillard as a college student.

CAC: At what age did they recognize you had this real musical talent?

GS: I started playing for Sunday School. All of us . . . music, violin, piano, and typing were a part of the family. My brother said typing kept him from the front lines in World War II because he typed in the office. I started playing for the Sunday School and the youth choir when I was about nine years old. My mother took me as far as she could take me. Then, she asked Dr. Hall, could he let somebody at Dillard take me on farther? That’s how I got with Miss Blanton at Dillard. Then, of course, Dr. Hall also had a youth orchestra and a youth choir on campus; so, the town and gown were just very united. My music thing was very nurtured at the church, at Dillard, at the high school. We used to have little programs in the high school. They

called them assemblies. I played for the assembly . . . the kids marching in. The kind of music we did, of course . . . I can remember daddy saying, "Geneva's playing Bach. Geneva's playing Chopin." It was no such thing as gospel music or anything like that. It was good old playing your notes and playing your sheet music. Nearly all the black people who came up in that environment . . . like the Delaney sisters . . .

CAC: But, you must have heard all this other music?

GS: I lived right across the street from a beer garden on the corner. I was listening to Bessie Smith and didn't understand what I was listening to. Of course, jazz was a dirty word then in our community. It was very much tied to jazz life; that's really what it was. I can remember when the first Thomas Dorsey pieces came, *Precious Lord* . . . how they'd say, "Bringing jazz into the church." It was those blues tones.

CAC: Sure.

GS: We were greatly nurtured to be able to read music. For instance, to sing in the school choir, you had to be able to read your notes. When I was a private music teacher in the 1950s, as soon as a parent would get a raise, the first thing they'd get for their kid was a piano. I had a list so long mainly because they wanted them to sing in the school choir and to sing in the church choir, they had to be able to read music and even to sing in the church choir, we did not singing. I would say my roots are very strongly tied to community, which itself was a part of the church and part of family. It was just all very, very . . .

CAC: What would the size of your class had been at Dillard that you went through to graduate?

GS: I started Dillard in September 1941. In October, my father was moved to Dallas, Texas, as a minister. At that time, they used to have the conferences in the fall. Later on, young Methodist ministers made them change so that now the conferences are in May or June because it disrupted families. Because I was already in college—remember I was only fifteen, like many of my classmates—my father and mother, then, left me at Dillard and I moved into the dormitory. I had my birthday, December 5, and I can remember when members from our old church brought me my first bakery cake for my sixteenth birthday. Two days later, Pearl Harbor . . . even though none of us really realized what was going on. We were very, very caught off . . . mainly because, if you remember in 1941 and 1942, the first two years, they were really just taking the twenty-one year olds. Most of us were fifteen and sixteen, so we were not losing boyfriends and brothers yet. But, comes my junior year, then, all of the men on our campus, the eighteen and nineteen year olds . . . they were taken them. We had a college choir concert that was supposed to be for the Easter program . . . the Friday before the program half the choir was lost.

CAC: You lose your tenors and your bases.

GS: By my senior year, they only had a girls' glee club and I lived in the men's dormitory my last two year in college because there were no men on the campus.

CAC: I'm trying to get a sense of the size of the class.

GS: We ended up, when I graduated, with thirty.

CAC: There should have been sixty or seventy.

GS: There should have been about a hundred and some. We not only lost the men but we also lost some of the girls. The girls, some of them, joined the WAC [Women's Army Corps] or got jobs. There were no loans and stuff in those days so when these jobs were opening up, some of the girls stepped down to take these jobs.

CAC: It was small enough really to be like family.

GS: Oh, yes. There weren't but 290 students on the campus. This year's graduating class at Dillard was about 240. We've capped our student body at 1,650. We don't want anymore than that.

CAC: That's about the size of Carleton [unclear] now.

GS: Yes. We don't want anymore than that and the kids don't want anymore than that. It's very difficult to keep it down. So many smart kids are having to be turned back. It was very important. The point is all the teachers knew you.

CAC: And no white students?

GS: We didn't have white students. We had white teachers. I had white teachers. You have to remember, you didn't have a lot of blacks with Ph.D.s then. I think for me, having white teachers at Dillard had a lot to do with my ability to interact with white people, which I needed. One of the things that I remember—these things you remember later—our white teachers would not ride the bus because they were not going to sit in front of the screens. They were very sensitive to racism and very angry about it. If they didn't come in a car . . . most of them lived near the campus so that they could walk. But, the head of the English Department was a white woman. No one thought when something went wrong that it had to do with racism. They just didn't even think in terms of that. I would say most of these white teachers were from New England areas. There were very few from the South, at that period of time. It's different now, of course. That's why the black private schools have always dealt with Affirmative Action on the other side. [laughter] Yes, we've never been a segregated [unclear].

CAC: I think back to the Reconstruction when a lot of those New England young women went from . . . white women down South into the school systems. That's primarily what they did.

GS: That's right. That's where my mother got some of her very stated, fine young lady traits from. My parents are from Hazlehurst, Mississippi. My mother went to Mary Holmes Seminary when it was all women and she said, "I'm sure the people in heaven are looking down with men walking on this campus." Those teachers were all from New England, very straightlaced. They were trying to make nice little . . . I guess it was the Reconstruction carry-over.

CAC: As we say in history, "The past is not dead. It's not even past." These things move on.

GS: That's right. You begin to realize these things after.

CAC: Oh, of course. But you're learning at an intuitive level, that's pretty good learning. You don't know it explicitly until later.

GS: It's funny. We laugh at some of the things that we didn't know. I think one effect on me when I went to Dillard, too, was that after my father was in Dallas—of course, I went to Dallas that Christmas to see my parents over the Christmas holidays—that April, my little brother died. He was thirteen. They brought the body back to New Orleans. That freshman year, we did have a family crisis. It was pretty rough. Then, my sophomore year, I spent the summer in Dallas, took piano under a woman who was Maynard Jackson's mother. His father was at the biggest Baptist church in Dallas while my father was at the biggest Methodist church in Dallas. These, of course, were black historical . . . My sister and Maynard say they were spending their time who could prove that they could be the worst minister's children.

CAC: [laughter]

GS: That's where I first met Mattiwilda Dobbs, her little sister. My mother had what is called a Go-Back-to-College program. You have to remember there were no colleges in Dallas and the black kids were going back to the varied schools around the country; so, she had what was known as a Go-Back-to-College and Mrs. Jackson said, "My two sisters are coming here from Spelman [College] to spend a couple of weeks with us. I'd like them to appear on the program." That's the first time I heard Mattiwilda sing and she was seventeen years old. The next time we heard here, she was winning a lot of awards and things. Mrs. Jackson, then, after her husband died, moved back to Atlanta. Mrs. Dobbs, who had been a French major but a very fine musician, organist, pianist, went to Paris and took all three of the kids with her. Matti was a little kid then. She went on and, eventually, got her doctorate in French and was over the Romance Language Department at North Carolina College in Durham, which is where Maynard went to law school after he finished Morehouse [College]. There was a lot of connections. These are the kind of people who walked into my life. I studied with Mrs. Jackson in the summer in Dallas and worked in the war plant. I washed dishes in the war plant. I was proud because I got thirteen dollars a week, and my meals, and all my transportation. That was big money back then in 1942 or 1943. I can remember, it really hit us our junior year because, by this time, all of our boys had gone and to have a dance on our campus all of the USO [United Service Organizations] boys, the black soldiers who were in [unclear] or in the surrounding area,

were brought to our campus by bus to be escorts for us at dances. We realized what was going on. Everybody had their soldier's picture in the room. When [President Franklin D.] Roosevelt died, I can remember . . . It was in March, wasn't it?

CAC: April.

GS: April. I can remember we were laughing about this, how we were all marching around the campus saying, "Oh, my god! This [Harry S.] Truman is going to send us back to Africa." We almost died because we didn't know any president but Roosevelt.

CAC: Of course.

GS: We knew that Truman had been in the KKK [Ku-Klux Klan] and that was a fear on that campus among us that this man was going to send us black folks back to Africa.

CAC: Here's the man who integrated . . .

GS: Yes. So it shows you, you never know . . . you never know.

CAC: You've got to stay open. You got your baccalaureate in 1945?

GS: In 1945.

CAC: We can't tell the whole life story; but, fill in how you extend your music and, then, you get your doctor's degree and so forth.

GS: There are a series of things that happened. The first thing is when I finished college, I didn't have a music education degree because Dillard didn't have one. Nobody had music ed[ucation]. I had not gotten a teacher's degree per se. This same cousin that they had to get in school in Pasadena was now living in Pasadena herself, a professional type lady, so, now, it's pay back time. I went out to California to live with Camille in Los Angeles. I was trying to get a job. Remember, I'm only nineteen years old. I'm from the South. Eventually, I got a job in a private conservatory, the Gray Conservatory of Music. Mr. Gray had been a man who had studied under Clark Tow. He was a student of [Franz] Liszt's. He was a very fine musician and he couldn't get a job in Los Angeles; so, he opened up his own conservatory. It opened up doors for people like me to teach there. It was out there that I met a young man by the name of Patrick Roan from Oklahoma City. He was 4-F. He had been in the Army, but had to leave because of health problems so he was out in California going to USC [University of Southern California]. Through a series of blind dates and stuff, we were put together and a romance blossomed. What happened is that there was a strike in Los Angeles. I didn't drive. Black kids weren't driving cars then. When the streetcar stopped, I had no way to get to work, so I had to go back home.

CAC: Good grief.

GS: Also, Pat and his brother, who were out there in school, both went back to Oklahoma City. We all went home. As little as it was, time came on . . . Patrick and I got married. Then, we went back to Los Angeles while he went back to school. I was still teaching at Mr. Gray's conservatory, but I was also studying with Mr. Gray. I didn't just teach, but I also took lessons. When I got there, there was—if you know one thing about southern people—a great migration. People would write back home about all these homes they were buying. What they were doing is they were renting rooms to pay for these homes.

CAC: Ahhh.

GS: Pat and I were rooming with a very nice lady and everything; but, I got pregnant. Naturally, there wasn't going to be no baby; it was just going to be adults—out! I was going to have a very hard pregnancy. Patrick's family were medical people, surgeons, and they were *the* medical people in Oklahoma City, the medical family; so, I went back to Oklahoma City to live with my in-laws while Patrick was in school. Then, my little girl was born in 1948 in Oklahoma City. We stayed there. I decided, after she was born, to take some more piano lessons from a man by the name of Herbert Ricker. Patrick had gone to dental technician school from UCLA and when he got back to Oklahoma City, none of the dentists would give him any . . . his kind of work was the kind that they do on the Hollywood people and all that . . . he'd learned from UCLA. He wasn't getting that kind of job anyplace; so, we went to New Orleans and stayed there for a couple of years and he worked insurance. That's when I was teaching and opened up a studio in New Orleans. That's when I taught Ellis Marsalis. He was a junior high school of mine. Then, in two years, in 1952, Pat decided he wanted to go back to Oklahoma City. I'm happy now that we went back because Patrick was dying, pretty soon, later, of glomerulonephritis . . . that's both kidneys are bad. There was no dialysis machines. So, we went back to Oklahoma City with a little girl.

CAC: That's awfully young to have that [unclear].

GS: Yes, he died when he was twenty-nine. He died in the veteran's hospital. So, we went back to Oklahoma City and I was studying with a very fine teacher.

CAC: Excuse me. Wherever you go there are good teachers and there are good students to teach.

GS: Oh, yes I'm going to find them. What happened—this is an interesting thing—in Oklahoma City is I walked into the music store to inquire about the best teacher in Oklahoma City. This man said to me, "Herbert Ricker, but I don't think he teaches Negroes." I said to him, "If he's that good, he'll teach anybody." So, then, I got on the phone and I called Herbert Ricker and I said, "You should know that I'm a Negro"—as if he couldn't pick up my accent— . . .

CAC: [laughter]

GS: . . . "and I was told as the music store that you don't teach Negroes." He said, "Who told you that? No, Negro has ever asked to study with me." He told them off at the music store. He was very angry about that.

CAC: Isn't that interesting.

GS: When I left Oklahoma City, he took all of my private students. He took them himself. When I went to Herbert Ricker, he began to work with me and, then, he started getting me ready for the piano guild competition. I'll never forget that there was a competition at Tulsa with the Tulsa Symphony and some outside people were coming to listen. Mr. Ricker had prepared me with one of the Mozart concertos and a Tchaikovsky Second Concerto. He took me in his car to Tulsa and I played.

CAC: Heavens.

GS: As I was playing, the judges were sitting there eating, not paying any attention to me at all. I don't know what they wrote because Mr. Ricker wouldn't let me see it; but, he told me, "No matter what you had done, they weren't listening." And he became aware of racism. The arts were known not as being racist. By this time, Patrick was in the hospital. In November of 1953, he went to the hospital with what we thought was the flu. When I went in a week later to talk to his doctor, they said, "We give him a year." I didn't know what they were talking about. That's the first time I knew what nephritis was. It was both kidneys. I spent that last year . . . I still was studying and teaching privately. I had a big studio place. As I told you, most people wanted their children to take music so they could be in their school choir or their church choir. Then, as soon as Patrick died in November 1954, I knew I needed to teach. I needed a job. I needed not one where parents could say . . .

CAC: Your little girl is two years old?

GS: No, she was six. I knew I had to work. I knew I needed a master's [degree]. Ten years after I got my bachelor's, within three weeks of burying Pat and getting my daughter situated with my mother and father, I was living in the YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association] in Chicago, working on my master's at the American Conservatory. That's how I got into the graduate . . . so, it was a matter of no choice. Then, after I got the master's, I taught one year at Paul Quinn College in Waco, Texas. That was in 1957-1958. The reason I can remember it is because that's the year the Little Rock [Arkansas] school thing took place. One of the teachers came in that night—it was when [President Dwight] Eisenhower sent in the troops—and she said, "I'm proud to say, 'I voted for Eisenhower.'" [laughter] I had, too. By this time, to really get all of the black schools accredited, they were counting your Ph.D.s. You found that anyone who wanted to really get into college teaching needed to have a Ph.D. So, just one thing led to

another and that's when I started at the University of Iowa. The University of Iowa was the only school that gave a Ph.D. in music.

CAC: In the whole country?

GS: Yes, at that time.

CAC: Isn't that interesting.

GS: In performance and I wanted . . .

CAC: They had that creative writing program, too; so, they were strong on that.

GS: The M.F.A. [Master of Fine Arts] was kind of what they did. I wanted the research doctorate. Another thing that made Iowa very different and the reason you found a lot of doctorates in music from Iowa was because, at that time, most of the black schools were not accredited and Iowa had a way that if a graduate of their school wrote a letter of recommendation for you, they would let you in. I had remarried, then, and divorced . . . but Mitchell Southall, a great composer, had gone to Iowa and had gotten three degrees in three years, an M.A., an M.F.A., and a Ph.D. No one else has done that. The record has already been set that black folks could do it. We found ourselves looking at Iowa. These are the only schools that I knew doctorates came from in music and that was because they had definitely opened up to students.

CAC: You had to do theory and history . . . ?

GS: Yes, and all of that. They had really been very, very much supportive. Blacks had proved they could do the work.

CAC: How many other blacks were there in the music program when you were there?

GS: There was T. J. Anderson, the composer and Ollie Wilson. There were several. We were all from black colleges. As a result, we had a good network and supported each other very much. I was the only woman, of course. It was very difficult. I went there. I started my doctorate in the summer of 1958 and I was there through the year. What happened at Paul Quinn . . . I had saved enough money to put myself through one year. Then, I lived in the dormitory. They were so proud that now blacks could live in the dormitory. Isn't that a [unclear]? When the thing happened in Montgomery, people began to realize, when they were looking at what was going on down South, they had to look inward at what was happening in Iowa City. They realized that blacks were not living in the dormitories there, so they opened up the dormitories.

CAC: As you probably know, it was the mid to late 1930s here at Minnesota before dormitories were open.

GS: That's right. I was one of those first students to . . . it was rough because it meant that between my getting a doctorate and a lot of things, my daughter was with my mother and father. That was hard.

CAC: Yes, that's always hard.

GS: She realizes now since she's a mother with several children that it was a sacrifice. She didn't understand, then, but I had to eat. I had to make things so that she could. In between teaching . . . what I did is I started at the University of Iowa in 1958-1959. I was there a year and the summer. Then, I needed to get back to work to make some more money. I'm a very proud person so I was not going to let any college send me, to give me any money to go because I wanted to be independent enough that if I decided to leave, I didn't want to hear, "Well, we helped you."

CAC: Yes, yes.

GS: I'm a Handy in that respect. Also, in the South, back there, they would give you money to go to another school because we couldn't go to LSU [Louisiana State University-Baton Rouge]. That's why you found a lot of blacks going to graduate school elsewhere. That summer, I worked and I went from that first year at Iowa to Knoxville College to teach in Tennessee. It was a Presbyterian college. I went there and my daughter was with me. I taught a year. That summer, I went back to Iowa and, then, went back for another year at Knoxville college. Then, I decided I'd save enough to go back to Iowa. I went to Iowa and, then, I stayed there another year. From there, I went to South Carolina State College. At the time, I went to South Carolina State College, the Civil Rights Movement had gotten in gear. In 1963, I became active in the Orangeburg [South Carolina] Civil Rights Movement. I was there two years and, then, at the end of that, I had finished all of my course work. I had gone one summer and taken my written exams. I had finished all my concerts so now I'm at the stage where I'm going to just be finishing my dissertation. It was at that period that I got a teaching assistantship at the University of Iowa. I went to Iowa to complete it and my daughter moved with me. She was in senior high school then. We went from the Orangeburg movement to what she considered one of the worst periods of her life because it was so racist. People didn't realize how much racism was at Iowa, then. Most of the problems she had when she went first went to Iowa City High [School] came from two black students who resented the fact that she wore her NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] button. They told her there wasn't no such thing as racism in Iowa and don't be bringing the problems there. I finished Iowa . . . those two years. I stayed until I finished. That was the history of how I got my degree and the time period and all of that.

CAC: Now, we're in the mid to late 1960s.

GS: That's right. I got my doctorate in 1966. Then, I went to Grambling College. I stayed there four years and I became a grandmother.

CAC: In the meantime, back at the ranch, here, at the University of Minnesota, a new program of Afro-American Studies was created in 1969.

GS: Yes, black studies was hitting the country around 1968.

CAC: Yes.

GS: I'll tell you how I got involved. I'd gotten my doctorate in 1966. My daughter started at the University of Iowa to go to school. She started that summer. I got back to Grambling all ready to go on with my life. I'm not quite forty—need I say?—and my eighteen year old daughter comes up with a baby. What do you do? Without wanting to kill her, you pick up and say, "We go on from here." She was with me. Then, one day she said, "Mother, I need to go back to the University of Iowa." She had a straight *F* average. You're pregnant. You're eighteen. You care less about school. She didn't do *C* and one *F* . . . all *F*s. That's what I got when she went to college the first year. She's a college teacher herself now. She said, "Mother, I need to go back and to clean up my record at Iowa."

CAC: [unclear] herself.

GS: "But," she said, "I'm not going to leave my baby." I said, "Okay." What does grandmother do? That summer, I agreed to go back to Iowa with her and keep the baby with the understanding that I must have my evenings to do my own library work because I was getting involved in Afro-American research at that time.

CAC: Sure.

GS: I was very concerned that black music, to most people, only meant jazz and blues. They did not realize that classical composers were . . . Some of us in the field of music became very interested in doing the research. That was the agreement. In fact, it was a good summer for me. We went back. She went to school. She's in theater, and I keep the baby in the day, and, then, in the evening, I was going . . . They had just started an Afro-American cultural project at the University of Iowa. Everybody was into it. This was the fad, then. I was getting all kinds of letters about . . .

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Tape 1, Side 2]

CAC: . . . persons like yourself around the country who were making that commitment?

GS: Yes, we were very concerned that the true history . . .

CAC: These programs are springing up in lots of different places?

GS: Yes. You've got to remember that those of us who were doctoral students or got our doctorate in the field of music had come out of black colleges where we had learned the music of William Grant Still, Ulysses Kay and composers who were not a part of the mainstream as far as what we learned in Iowa. Everything was [unclear]. We were concerned that the William Grant Stills and the Sammy Coleridge-Taylors were going to be ignored and that our black kids were not going to realize the totality of their music. A lot of us got involved in those areas. Me, being a pianist, naturally, I was really interested in the piano composition. That summer at Iowa—I had my doctorate already and had taught a couple of years already at Grambling—I took my daughter there, and we stayed in an apartment, and that's when he asked me, would I present a paper in this summer workshop? I said, "Sure. What I will do is something on black composers." As I began to delve into the history and everything, I realized there was too much and I decided to do it on Nineteenth Century black composers. As I began to do this, I got more . . . this is how I got into my research on Blind Tom. When I went back to Grambling, I presented this paper. When I went back to Grambling, I remembered that I was preparing for my faculty recital and Afro-American music was getting its thing on black campuses. I decided I was going to do a concert of piano music of black composers for my recital. I said, "I want to do a piece by Blind Tom."

CAC: He was known universally as Blind Tom?

GS: Yes.

CAC: What was his full name?

GS: Thomas Green Bethune, but everybody knew him as Blind Tom.

CAC: Is this the Bethune family of [unclear]?

GS: No, that was the slave master's name. I'm trying to think and deduct . . . I said, "If he was a slave from Columbus, Georgia, maybe, there's some things at the University of Georgia." I wrote them and the library there did the interlibrary loan. They sent these pieces of Blind Tom.

CAC: Nobody had seen it before . . . not for 100 years?

GS: They may have seen them . . . they were published, but they were on microfilm. Then, I had to go to Shreveport to have them blown up. Two things hit me. First of all, one of the pieces was published in 1880. For all of the research, I had read for my summer paper in the [William Monroe] Trotter book talked about . . . no one had heard of Blind Tom since 1865 after he went to Europe and came back. That 1880 piece just blew that out the window. Not only did the time element hit me, but as I looked at that music, I said, "No idiot could have written it." I saw the phrasing. I saw the melody. I saw the pedaling and I knew right then that only someone who had knowledge of music and had been well-taught could have . . . That's really how I got involved in doing the Blind Tom . . . doing all my research.

CAC: That took another how many years?

GS: Actually, I've got one more chapter to finish off book three.

CAC: [laughter]

GS: If I can stop doing all this other stuff I'm doing . . .

CAC: Good for you.

GS: I've got one more chapter to go and Clarence is about to have a fit. The research is done. It's a matter of sitting down and saying, "Okay, everything else gets out the window and now I'm going to finish this." I hope to do it.

CAC: These chance things bring you to a topic that lasts decades.

GS: That's right. That's how I really got involved in Afro-American music. Then, at Indiana "U" that next summer, where the Black Music Center is, they did this big symposium. I got a letter from [Dominique] de Lerma asking, would I come present a paper on black composers of the Nineteenth Century? I said, "Yes." So, I went there for that and my name began to circle around as one of the resource people who was doing research in the field. That's how Lillian Anthony might have caught on about me.

CAC: Lillian Anthony was the first chair here and founder.

GS: C. Edward Thomas and I were classmates at Iowa. He was getting involved in his Afro-American Music Opportunities thing. Everybody was getting on board with their guilt, all these white liberals. They selected Eddie to run this thing. Now, Eddie had never been involved with black folks nor black music. He was Chopin . . . all of this stuff; but, all of a sudden, he's going to become the expert because he's black. Eddie was busy pulling together people to be a part of [unclear] thing. I heard from Eddie and he was telling me he wanted me to come on board.

At this time, I knew I was going to leave Grambling for two reasons. First of all, I'm a city girl. I liked Grambling. My daughter was back. She really wanted to go on and finish her degree and we were looking for a school that had a good theater department and all of that. That was part of it; but mainly, as I began to look around the campus in 1968 or 1969 at Grambling, I began to realize this was an all campus situation. I was a professor. I had gone as far as . . . I could set there the rest of my life and never do nothing. That's not the way I was at age forty, maybe forty-one or forty-two. I just wasn't that kind of person. I had no interaction really except I'd go read papers and [unclear]. There was just no incentive. I also began to look around and see the retired professors from Grambling looking so pitiful. Because what do you do on a college campus when you've taught and, then, there's nothing but that? I've always been

involved with my church. I've always had a strong community component, which if I went to church there, I'm going with the deans and I don't need to go with my church folks to be my . . . I just wanted a life outside of that. As these letters began to come, I began to look at them; but, I did not want to take any of those positions that were funded under the special foundation money. This was to keep black kids quiet, I guess, for awhile.

CAC: What we call in the academy soft money.

GS: Soft money, that's right. I saw nothing about tenure, nothing about budget, and stuff like that. I'll never forget, one day, I got this call from Lillian Anthony. She said, "I understand that you are ready to leave Grambling." I said, "Yes, I am." She said, "We have an Afro-American Studies Department at the University of Minnesota and it's a *department*." She was stressful right away, "It is a *department*. I would like you to come and meet with us."

CAC: As you know, that was quite a fight to get a department status.

GS: That's right. Eddie had come to try to see if he could get the Afro Department to tie in with his [unclear] for a summer symposium. Lillian started looking at the varied people who were going to be involved. Seemingly, she saw my picture and bio[graphy] and she said, "Who is she? I like her." That's the basis upon which Lillian called me.

CAC: I'm going to interpose with a question now. I would imagine—it's no more than imagining—that most Afro-American studies programs, black studies programs, around the country were looking first for social science and, then, for people in literature and, maybe, the theater and music must have been down the line in priority?

GS: Music and theater really was down the line. It was mostly literature and history, which was not the hardest to find because one of the things black graduate schools like Howard, and Fisk, and Atlanta "U" had produced was a large group of black intellectuals in the area of history, literature, and sociology. As a result, those were the areas where you didn't have too much trouble.

CAC: It took some imagination for Minnesota to take on a . . . ?

GS: Lillian was very aware that the culture was tied to the music and the folk.

CAC: Good.

GS: It was part of her ability to think through that, that your religion . . . Lillian Anthony was in the field of religion. She had been a youth religious worker. That's what she's back into now. She was a heavy person in the Presbyterian church in religious education. So, that was her area. She was aware of the religion, and the music, and that tie, which is very critical . . . philosophy, and all of that. She called me and she had me to fly. I did. I got up here and the first thing

I liked about it was that it was the city. I had been here the spring before because AAUP [American Association of University Professors] had had their national convention here. They wouldn't go to Chicago because of what had happened at the 1968 convention. I had seen the city. I saw the Guthrie. I was very impressed with the cleanliness. When she called me to come, I knew this was a city that I could be interested in. That was the connection.

CAC: Lots of cultural resources.

GS: Yes. When I came, there were several things that hit me. First of all, the classes were integrated. I would not have come had there just been a bunch of black students sitting there because why should I go to teach black students only in Minnesota when that's what I was teaching then. I was changing career. I was going from piano teaching now to mainly musicological things. That was a big shift; but, I was tired of teaching piano.

CAC: it's a real challenge, sure.

GS: It was challenge. I really wanted to do more classroom things besides just music history and teaching a very limited . . . It was the ideal thing, at that time. That hit me. One of the things that happened was when Lillian looked, she realized I was a full professor. This position was for someone at the assistant professor level. Lillian was smart enough to know I was not going to leave a tenured position to come to Minnesota with no tenure. It was just [unclear]. She was able with John Webb—I liked John Webb—to negotiate to see, could they move that position to an associate with tenure with the understanding that two years later, I would go back to my full professorship. The budget would not allow for the full professorship, at that time. Lillian wanted to hold out, but I was willing to come with tenure with that understanding.

CAC: That was our luck.

GS: Where I made the mistake is that I didn't realize John Webb was going to be leaving.

CAC: He didn't either.

GS: Yes. You need to get these things in writing.

CAC: Oh.

GS: When the time came for me to get the full professorship two years later, they wanted to throw it through the P & T [Promotion and Tenure] [unclear] idea. George King and John Ward went over to [E.W.] Ziebarth—who I dearly loved—and began to say, "Look, she agreed . . ." Ziebarth was smart enough to pick it up and give me my full professorship. It was an agreement that had been made for me to come here.

CAC: Then, it was a bit later that you get a joint appointment in the School of Music?

GS: Actually, the key to me coming is before I got here, I got a letter from Dean Ziebarth saying that he felt strongly that, with all of my musical background, it would be awful for me not to have a connection with the School of Music.

CAC: Good for him.

GS: That was really the key that brought me.

CAC: So, you had a joint appointment from the beginning?

GS: That's right. It was graduate faculty status. With that, I was very happy because it meant that my discipline home had not been ignored. I had that before I hit this campus that September. I knew, at that stage of life for me, that I was not going . . . like I tell people, "When I came to the University of Minnesota, I came knowing I would retire from here; so, you all better like me because you're stuck with me."

CAC: [laughter]

GS: I am not going to be anywhere that I'm going to be unhappy. I took the position right away. I went in. I took my retirement money from the state of Louisiana; that was my down payment on a home. I bought the home and I bought it as far away from the campus as I could because I had lived on them campus situations and I wanted a life totally removed from my campus life. It fulfilled me in those kinds of areas. It was very interesting because, at that time when Lillian recruited me, I did not realize she wasn't going to be chair. I knew nothing about some George King coming in. When I come in September and they're talking about the chairman, George King, I almost flipped because I did not realize Lillian was not going to be chair.

CAC: Had Miss Anthony selected him [unclear] faculty? He was an historian?

GS: Yes. Lillian was so mad about this. John Ward . . .

CAC: He was in Law?

GS: Yes. John Ward and George King had been friends for years from Indiana "U". She did not realize that there was this kind of connection. John is the one that lobbied to get George that position. I think, Mahmoud [El-Kati] and some of the others were not for George. They had their idea on somebody else; but, it was John Ward who if he had said, "Just stand on your head," they would have all stood on their head. John is the one that did the politicking.

CAC: El-Kati was part of the program when you came here?

GS: He was then, yes. Of course, remember, within two years is when George and them got rid of him. He was really on a one-year appointment.

CAC: At that time, he didn't have a Ph.D., is that correct?

GS: He didn't have a master's and still doesn't. As he says, he's using Macalester and they're using him. He's doing whatever he's going to do over there keeping the kids quiet. He said, "We're using each other." He has said that to me. He said, "We're using each other. Earl Craig, also, was here and the whole idea that George came . . .

CAC: He was working on a graduate degree in political science?

GS: Yes. The whole idea was George and John were going to try to bring in faculty for this department.

CAC: You had to build the program, right.

GS: The people from the community did not realize for it to be an academic unit, you've got to have people with the academic credentials. George and John, of course, lost their—never really had it—their community base. These people from the community did not realize they were just an interim kind of thing. That's where it broke down.

CAC: When you say the community, you mean the black community, primarily, in Minneapolis or also St. Paul?

GS: In the Twin Cities. Also, you had some white people in the community who were very involved with El-Kati and people like that. You had your liberals. You had your liberal whites who were all off into this being whatever black folks wanted. You found that when George and John came . . . The only thing I blame George and John for is they did not connect enough with the city, the community, to try to do what they had to do. They just did it! [sound of fist pounded on table] Legally, they were right. But, the people out in the community didn't understand academia, or all this tenure stuff, or what was a *T* appointment. They just didn't understand it.

CAC: That communication wasn't created.

GS: It wasn't there. Then, you got into a power play. I realize now that George and El-Kati both had these little Napoleonic complexes; so, it became a power play really between this group and that group. It got out of control. It was a real bad scene.

CAC: It's widely perceived—how accurate, I can't testify—that Mr. King did not pay full attention internally to his own responsibilities. Is that a fair . . . ?

GS: That's true. Part of the problem I think came down . . . Remember the vice-president then was Fred Lukermann.

CAC: He was an assistant vice-president.

GS: Yes. George and John brought in this great big grant . . . Tri-Racial Center. They brought all of this money.

CAC: Tri-Racial?

GS: Center, yes.

CAC: What were the three then?

GS: It was for Hispanics . . .

CAC: It would include the Hispanics? Okay.

GS: . . . and I think American Indians and blacks . . . the Tri-Racial Center. George brought all that money in. I think the big problem he had is he did not hire community people to be part of it. That's what it boiled down to. He was bringing all of his buddies in from all over the country for positions. They were all well-qualified people, but this hit a sour note. Remember the community had been part of the Morrill Hall takeover.

CAC: Sure.

GS: They took an ownership of this department like they did all over the United States. The difference was [unclear] John Ward had been very strong in helping them understand it had to be a department with a budget! He was very strong on that. You had the right kind of dean, at that time, who could relate to this and that was Ziebarth. As a result, when John and George came in, that was their first mistake. I later realized what all these dynamics were. If they had hired community people in their Tri-Racial Center, you wouldn't have had some of that stuff that happened. From what I understand, one of the things that they were going to do is . . . Fred Lukermann wanted them to have some kind of a conference on Africa. He's in Geography. He wanted to tie the Geography Department into it and George and John, as black men, said, "Hell, no." There was always something between Fred Lukermann and George and John . . . always. So, it's no accidental that when Fred was the dean, it helped get rid of . . . There was more to that than the university . . . George didn't help it any by letting his act be ragged. He really didn't help it. There was a lot of power plays going on [unclear] black men because one of the things that George wanted to do was to keep the Afro Department very autonomous. When I came in as chair, the one thing I knew we had to do is have connections with the other units. That was the one thing George and John did not want. I realized all of it was a reality of historical takeover. Blacks were very, very concerned even in Civil Rights . . .

CAC: Understandably.

GS: I realize historically, they were coming from that black male reality, plus the fact that that autonomy . . . they were afraid that we can't give that up. A lot of power plays was going on. I didn't think we could survive as a university community unless we had linkages with the other departments.

CAC: In the departments but linkages also to the community?

GS: That's right. In fact, I had already made my links with the community, mainly, because, coming out of the parsonage, I knew my community starts with the black preacher. [laughter]

CAC: [laughter]

GS: I knew that.

CAC: Of course.

GS: In 1972, I had done a Black History Month program with Zion Baptist Church and linked a lot of things with the black musical community and the black church, Zion, so I was already moving within that religious community. By doing that, I was moving my linkages. I had the Urban League supporting me. They accepted me real well. That was something I did not need. I really didn't need that one in 1974. That was part of the thing. I had to get the larger black community and the university campus community links going.

CAC: I'm going to back up just a bit. You come in 1970 and, then, you have four years. These are pretty tumultuous years for you personally?

GS: The really tumultuous were 1973 and 1974.

CAC: And because you're trying to establish your career as teacher and scholar while you're trying to do all these things, right?

GS: Yes. Then, I've got this daughter going off being crazy . . .

CAC: Sometimes that happens.

GS: . . . with a grandson. I had to go through the mother thing and watching her being nuts. All of that 1970s bunch . . . she was a part of that. I'm telling you, I'm going through changes. I had all of that on me. Then, George and John and all this . . . By this time, Lillian had gone.

CAC: Oh, sure.

GS: She left. When she left, her position as associate professor was open and John and George immediately pulled [John] Taborn into that position. Then, Josie [Johnson] went over into the regency. That left her position in the Black Family open. That's when they brought in Anita Tucker; though—it was real interesting—George and John were trying to bring in someone else. This person didn't have the credentials that Anita had. I didn't realize this was a friendship thing. All these little things were going on and they were really trying to do a whole lot of little things. It was very interesting that year. Things were happening that I didn't understand then. Later on, I did.

CAC: One of the stated causes against Mr. King, finally, was that he didn't attend to his classes.

GS: That's right.

CAC: That seems to be a lapse within the academy that's difficult to understand.

GS: George had some real problems there. Right now, George is over the education thing for Willie Brown in California.

CAC: I wondered what had happened to him.

GS: That's his job. I found that out. Of course, John is still an active lawyer in Indianapolis. I'm sure he'll be here for the NAACP convention. It was somebody who told me, "Do you want to know what George is doing now?" I said, "What?" They said, "He's Willie Brown's education director." John Ward . . . one of his wives was an assembly person in California, a very big lady with the education for the state department and she helped George get that position. I understand he's doing a good job. He's the research person.

CAC: So, 1973, 1974 are pretty tumultuous for you and, then, you were asked by now Dean [Frank] Sorauf, I would guess, to be chair?

GS: Was it Dean Sorauf?

CAC: He comes in in the fall 1973.

GS: John Webb took the position to Frank Sorauf because Frank didn't know me from an animal . . . from anybody.

CAC: He was brand new. He had just come in.

GS: Yes, he was new. He had missed all of what had gone on. One thing about Sorauf . . . he was very concerned about department autonomy. He was very concerned about that.

CAC: You mean in preserving it?

GS: Yes, preserving autonomy. Even though he had problems . . . I think Frank really had problems with an Afro Department, with Women's Studies . . . any of them out of the traditional.

CAC: He's a more conservative individual.

GS: He was very conservative, but he grew in this. He comes in and they were able . . . I guess Ziebarth was, also, kind of helping to give some feedback and everything. John was a very impressive person. John Ward is brilliant. As a result, we end up with . . . they were able to get me to take it. I felt very strongly about taking it, not because I wanted to. I felt that that cup could pass for me because I could go to the Music Department. I had tenure. John could go to Law or Political Science. George could go to History. They'd have to take him whether they liked it or not. He was a tenured professor. What happened to all the others, the Reginald Buckners, the Anita Tuckers, and the kids?

CAC: Was Reggie Buckner aboard by now?

GS: Reginald was finishing his doctorate and he was coming in as a . . .

CAC: Just about that time?

GS: I think Reggie got his doctorate in 1974. That was another interesting thing.

CAC: That was another person in Music but the jazz [unclear]?

GS: Reginald comes in 1974. He, finally, gets the position. He comes in and I notice it says, "T" on his contract.

CAC: T for temporary?

GS: That's right. I went over to see the man who was chair then and I said, "What does this mean?" He said, "It's a one-year position and what we're going to have to do is get the position hardened and, then, go into a national search." I said, "Does Reginald know that?" He said, "No." I said, "Don't you think we better let him know what that T means?" It tickled me . . . Reggie said he thought it meant tenure.

CAC: [laughter]

GS: Yes. Then, Reggie found himself in the position of having to compete nationally for the job that he . . .

CAC: That he was sitting in.

GS: It was very difficult. It was a long time before he realized that I had to act with him the way I did. He said that I acted as if I didn't want him because I was so formal. What I did is I said, "I have to say 'Whoever gets this position . . . who comes before me is . . .'" I wasn't going to run a facade. So, Reginald, later on, realized what I had put him through. He said, "When I started being on search committees in the Music Department and found out the games that they were playing to get their friends and everything, I realized, then, how hard it had been for you to have to do that. But, I began to respect you more." What it was is I said, "I can't run a charade. If this is a position, I've got to make him fight for it, so he would love to say, 'I had to compete for this position.'" He was really very strong on that, but it's because we had gone through that. I had to tell [Roy] Schuessler, "We must sit down with Reginald . . ."

CAC: Who was chairman of Music?

GS: Yes, chairman. I said, "We must be able to tell Reginald what this means because he doesn't know this is temporary." We called Reg over. We had a meeting to make him realize this was a temporary, one-year position, and that we had it hardened, and what we'd have to do. We'd have to write a job description, have it approved, and, then, he had to go into the pool. That was hard.

CAC: It was a very painful thing. When I was chair at exactly the same time, Geneva, we had a temporary person, and she knew it, in Women's history, and we hardened that position, and she had to stand national competition, and we chose someone else.

GS: I think Gayle got the job.

CAC: Sara Evans got the job.

GS: Sara, yes, okay.

CAC: That was Women's History. Gayle Plummer came later.

GS: I was thinking about Gayle [Graham] Yates who was the first permanent chair for the department over there.

CAC: That's American Studies. I'm talking History.

GS: For Women's History, yes. I remember that.

CAC: It's hard to do.

GS: It's hard. I hate to have an internal candidate.

CAC: It's hard on them.

GS: I told people, "It's harder being internal." I used to think it was a plus. No, because you know them better. As a result, those first two years as chair were very difficult.

CAC: What other priorities did you set, Geneva, those first, two, three, or four years for the department? You speak of the outreach to other departments and the outreach to the community. Can you fill those two in?

GS: Those were important as we began to . . . I think I began to have my internal university outreach by the fact that I was on a lot of committees. That helped me to start meeting . . .

CAC: College committees?

GS: Yes, college committees . . . especially the Promotion and Tenure Committee. That helped people to begin to know me. There weren't many women professors on this campus. Also, there were national promotion and tenure decisions which were being challenged and I found myself on national committees always doing some things nationally.

CAC: That's a lot of work.

GS: We had another real crisis. I think the biggest crisis I had was the one when we brought in the African Studies. That was the period when we went to hire [Charles [Ben] Pike. We had this position open for an African Literature position. There were only Pike, the white man, and the one African who applied. His act was kind of ragged as far as finishing his degree and everything. When Pike came in, at first the students didn't have a problem with it, but George and John began to work underground. The next thing I know, the students didn't want him because they didn't want this white man. I had made a firm decision that the best person was going to get that job. I had to do that. I cannot say, "No," because somebody is white. Something in me wouldn't let me do it—too much of Reverend Handy's preaching I guess. My daddy used to tell us as children, "All white folks ain't bad and all black folks ain't good." As a result, I grew up with that and I had had white teachers. Pike is a very popular teacher. His adviser, of course, was this very well-noted African literary scholar. He was the one who had sent him to us. He had done one of the seminars here; so, it wasn't like somebody they didn't know. When I knew anything, one of the east Africans who was on the faculty—his act was ragged because there was stuff with his visa—and had been on the search committee, changed his vote and we know where that came from. What was happening is George, and John, and some of the faculty decided that they were going to vote against Pike. That meant it had turned as far as the numbers. That's when, of course, the people who were doing the African part in the department, Allen Isaacman . . .

CAC: Lansiné Kaba?

GS: And Lansiné . . . all of them had a fit. They all wanted Ben Pike. George and John—I'm chair—had decided we're not going to have them white folks from other departments telling us who to hire.

CAC: Of course, Lansiné was black. He was a west African.

GS: Yes, he's very French though. The whole idea was that I had no real strong . . . Taborn voted with me because he was chair of the search committee. There was a representative from the African Studies component. That's when we started meeting with Sorauf. How do we break the deadlock? The others told him, "What we need to do is bring in the African component known as the African Studies." That component gave voting rights to the five Africanists. That was Earl Scott, August Nimtz, Kaba . . . these are three blacks. Then, there was Allen [Isaacman] and [Phil] Porter. Those were the five.

CAC: Phil Porter in Geography?

GS: Phil Porter. We went over and Sorauf was very reluctant to do that because it looked like he was doing something by fiat, but there didn't seem to be any other way. What he did is he brought in all of the Afro faculty and sat down and talked to them about it . . . all of whom, Taborn and all of them, felt very strongly that there was no other way. He knew that George and John were going to fight it. What happened was he put them in the department so that I could actually move the department ahead because I had no votes. That's when the African Studies and Afro-American became united. Of course, George and John went to the press and had poor Mr. Newman who didn't understand nothing that was going on.

CAC: This is Cecil Newman?

GS: Cecil. They had him as the spokesman and a great big article. At that time, Cecil didn't know that three of the African Studies people were black . . . had no idea three of them were black people. They just were caught up in this race thing . . . that these white folks were taking over this department. But, Sorauf had no choice. They also did not know he had talked to every member of the faculty to find out how they felt. They all felt the need to bring in this help so that we could move. That's how African Studies became [unclear].

CAC: Did Mr. Pike come then?

GS: Oh, yes!

CAC: But he didn't stay long?

GS: Pike is here. He got his tenure. He's here.

CAC: I'm sorry.

GS: Ben Pike is here . . . one of the very favored and loved teachers in the department. The kids love him. What we had to do to get Ben Pike on board . . .

CAC: Then, you had Vickie Coifman who was white, also.

GS: Vickie was also. They were mad with Vickie anyhow because they felt Vickie hadn't supported them when this whole thing blew up, when George and John [unclear] and all of that. Vickie just kind of stayed out of it, mainly, because I understand Vickie was having some family problems.

CAC: Yes, you bet.

GS: So she had to stay away from it. They put in a racial thing. Vickie wanted Pike. She had been on a search committee. She was on a search committee . . . this east African whose stuff was so ragged and we found [unclear] his visa stuff. George and them were able to play games with people like that. John Taborn had been on the search committee and, then, the representative from that African side, I think, was either Allen Isaacman or Phil Porter or it might have been Lansiné Kaba. Whatever happened, it was something that was the next big crisis. That was the first big crisis. That's when I was just getting ready to just resign and leave.

CAC: [laughter]

GS: I just could not deal with it. I did not need that.

CAC: But you rode it out?

GS: Because I had the support of Frank Sorauf and John Webb—I think Webb was here that year when it happened or either John Howe.

CAC: Probably John Howe.

GS: It was John Howe, and Frank Sorauf, and they got Wenda Moore . . .

CAC: Wenda Moore?

GS: Yes, the regent. She was aware of what was going on because she and John Taborn were good friends. They all reassured me that I had support, and just hang in, and I did. This was something that John and George just could not deal with . . . they just couldn't deal with it. From then on, they just cut up, just plain cut up.

CAC: At that time in the 1970s, were students in the program part of the advisory system? Do you have a student advisory [unclear]?

GS: Oh, yes, we had a student on the search committee. The student on the search committee was pro Pike and, then, overnight, something happened. [laughter] It had turned right around. We had an Afro-American student group and everything. Everything came one day like this and the next day, it had completely turned around. The interesting thing is with all this white/black stuff going on, George was out and out going with Kathy, who was his white girlfriend, who is he is now married to. I'm saying, "You're looking at all of these contradictions, but there's this racist thing coming in," and I'm saying, "I am not going to make a decision based upon race in this department. I just can't do it." It was a statement, too, for the department to have whites in the department anyhow.

CAC: Sure.

GS: I felt that that was very important.

CAC: I'm guessing that 80 percent of your students were white taking courses?

GS: I've had classes when 99 percent of my students were white.

CAC: For the program in general . . . ?

GS: For the program in general, it was always 80 to 85 to 90 percent.

CAC: You were meeting the needs of those white students?

GS: That's right. The white students were coming in and they were really taking these courses. One of the things people had to realize in the area of African Studies, most of your scholars in African Studies or in the African area are all white. There's not as many black Americans in African areas. What it is . . . it's very hard for Afro-Americans to do research per se in Africa. There's a big thing. They still had a colonial mentality, so it's not as easy. Of course, Nimtz was able to talk to Sorauf being in Political Science. They were worried about the whole African Studies component also. There was a need for this connection. The Afro-American part was there before the African Studies came in. That's how they got in. It was by a need with this crisis.

CAC: But, it made a stronger department because you had both sides of the [unclear].

GS: That's right. It was a very important thing. Of course, if anybody can hang in with this kind of stuff, it's Frank Sorauf. Frank's not going to get caught up in no power play. It did become a power play between Frank and John. One thing Frank will say is that a lot of people panic when it's a lawyer. He said, "I'm not scared of lawyers."

CAC: [laughter]

GS: One thing I found out about Frank, and I guess I always liked, is that Frank . . . when he made a decision, it was never based on personality . . . never based on personality. It was based upon the whole idea . . . He wouldn't get rid of George when we had problems with George. He felt very strongly . . . that tenure thing was very important to him, a full professor. He said, "If I start getting rid of somebody for teaching problems, I'd get rid of 60 percent of this faculty."

CAC: It was left to Mr. Lukermann as dean?

GS: That feud went back to the 1970s.

CAC: I hear that now.

GS: We had stated that the department needed to get George out of it, but we did not say, "out of the university". Find something for him to do. Then, he'd leave. That had happened all over the country where you had these bad eggs. That happened at Harvard with [Lonnie] Granier's father. They found him something to do and, then, he retired [unclear]. The thing is, he still had his tenure. Lukermann had decided, I'm going to get rid of this man. It was a very personal thing. Frank wouldn't have done it that way. I really resented the way Keller and them twisted this. I would have never voted for George to have his tenure taken away because I have a lot of feeling about tenure.

CAC: I understand.

GS: The way they did it is say, "You can't just put him in any other department." I said, "We didn't say that." Find something for him to do where he would have to be there and, eventually, he himself would leave because he couldn't sue the university if he had not lost his position. He just is not in Afro anymore; but, it has nothing to do with . . . I always hated the way that was done, but I realize it was done out of a real personal kind of thing and it was badly done. Sorauf wouldn't touch that one. He really wouldn't.

CAC: Let's go back and say something more about the relationship of the department to the community, then. This had to be one of your constructive . . .

GS: One thing is, we began . . .

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

[Tape 2, Side 1]

CAC: . . . active with the Urban League.

GS: I think the thing that really helped us is that in 1975 or 1976, Dean Webb came down one day and he said he had gotten a way in which there was some monies we could get for

something and what did we feel that was really needed? I said, "We need a newsletter so that we can get the information out to the broader community. If people don't know what you're doing, they assume you aren't doing nothing. Not only do they need this information in the university, but they also need this information in the broader community." So, we hired a community outreach person, with this grant money, for two years. Actually, the community outreach person, one year, was the guy who runs Sounds of Blackness. He had just finished as a political science major at Macalester, Gary Hinz. So, we had someone who was connected to the university. We happened, luckily, that year, to have Alice Bledsoe, who had just graduated from Carleton, here in a journalism degree program—she's about to get her doctorate now in St. Louis—and Alice came in as the newsletter editor. It gave her a job at the same time. We had people to really go out and find out, what did the community want us to do? It's easy to say, "You all want to connect to the community," and nobody knew what in the heck they wanted us to do! I thought, let me find out what they do want. It was very interesting. They didn't know what they wanted anyhow. It was a personality thing with George and John. I realized, later on, it was tied to the fact that when he had that Tri-Racial federal program, none of them got jobs. From what I understand, when George was interviewed—Gene Cooper told me—by the community people and the students and they knew he was bringing in this grant, he promised that this grant would be something of benefit to the community. Then, when he comes in with this money, he brings in all these outside buddies of his into these jobs.

CAC: Sure.

GS: That was the key thing. That had more to do with what was going on in the community breakdown than anything else. Then, of course, the icing on the cake was letting Earl Craig go and Mahmoud. Mahmoud made a big thing about it . . . made a big thing about it. That's really what blew the whole thing up.

CAC: Of course, Earl Craig had very strong connections in various communities.

GS: Yes, he was active.

CAC: And that's what he became in his career.

GS: Yes. One thing I'll have to admit, Earl Craig was a gentleman with it. He dropped back. He did not create no big problems about it, but Mahmoud . . . It was the way it was handled. That's why the university was very angry with George and John because Mahmoud did not have to get a communication about it until June 15. They took Martin Luther King Day to give him that letter. That's what the university, Moos and all of them, were angry about. They said, "You didn't have to do that." That was not accidental. They knew what they were doing . . . especially that John Ward. He's a tricky one. That's really what blew it up. Over the summer, you wouldn't have had the students. What happens is that Mahmoud gets his gang from out in the street and they walk up here with brick, bats, and everything else and started going after George in a faculty meeting. The administration does not support George and John, mainly,

because . . . George and John said there was a lot of racism there; but, it was the way it was done. They said he didn't have to give him the letter at that point.

CAC: Was there ever a community advisory committee for the program and the department?

GS: We tried to have one. The idea is—George is right on that—you can't have community people running an academic department. You can't. That was the one thing George did not want, so that was taken care of. Once we got the Community Outreach Committee and I became chair, that seemed to . . . They loved Reggie because Reggie was always out there.

CAC: Both of you [unclear].

GS: And John Taborn was out there doing a lot of things. A lot of us were doing . . .

CAC: John was working a lot in the schools, was he?

GS: Yes.

CAC: This is John Taborn. There are two Johns [unclear].

GS: This was John Taborn. He was doing a lot of things in the community. Then, Anita Tucker did a lot of things in the community. It really just kind of squelched itself. It didn't blow up again until the Pike position became a problem and, then, of course, when Sorauf put in those Africanists. People were mad because they just decided they were all white. George and John had gone out and told them they'd put these white people in and it was going to be colonialism.

CAC: Right.

GS: They didn't understand that three of those people were black and that Frank had talked to everybody. They didn't understand all of the things that went on.

CAC: Is this still the composition? The Africanists in other departments are voting members of your department?

GS: Those first five Africanists were.

CAC: But no more were added?

GS: No.

CAC: They still are?

GS: They're involved in the African council or something, but the relationship is a little different from the others . . . of these first five. Of course, you begin to lose that when Lansiné left.

CAC: Lansiné left for Chicago.

GS: What it did, it meant that by them voting, they could be department chair and that was the big rub. After I went down, Earl Scott became chair. That meant you ended up with somebody from another department sharing a department . . .

CAC: I see.

GS: . . . and that was a big problem to them to have someone outside of the department, not a core member, being a chair.

CAC: I understand.

GS: There were a lot of little touchy things in this. You're giving up your leadership. Who did you have after I went down?

CAC: You say you went down. How long were you chair?

GS: Six years. That's long enough. That's long enough. It's much too long.

CAC: Geneva, say something about the department's outreach and your outreach to American Studies and Women's Studies.

GS: Somewhere in the 1970s, they were trying to put together the Women's Studies Department. They were asking for departmental status. I think Sorauf put together an advisory committee in Women's Studies. Shirley Clark, I think, chaired that committee. He was moving women from other units to be a part of that.

CAC: Shirley Clark was from Education.

GS: Yes. I think Virginia Gray was from Political Science. What we were doing is trying to look at curriculum and some courses. When I first went in, there were some men on the faculty . . . a man from Sociology and you were kind of involved. Gayle needed some help.

CAC: This is Gayle Graham Yates in American Studies.

GS: You had some real interesting dynamics going on there, some of which I will not put on the tape. The whole idea was to look at the seriousness of curriculum. One thing . . . Frank had a lot of problems with Women's Studies. He really did. He would be the first to agree with me. I'm not talking out of school. He just had problems. He wanted to make sure it was not what

this woman who wrote the *book* said women's studies really is. This committee was to begin to help with the curriculum and the faculty and, then, we had cross-listed courses and things like that. That was my role in Women's Studies. Then, later on, I realized I needed to get out of this. It was just something I needed to get out of. Yes. There were some games and things that I didn't feel comfortable with. It was a transition. They were going through the same transition . . .

CAC: Except, they were never a department so that it made it more difficult for them.

GS: . . . that Afro had gone through. What you said, "We teach from an Afro-centric. We have to teach . . ." Information is information, as far I'm concerned. I was with them in that period of developing the Women's Studies. That was the role. I was on that committee. It really was to help Gayle.

CAC: In that program, by the mid 1970s, there were women in various departments, Psychology, History, Literature, and so forth . . .

GS: All trying to help.

CAC: But, there weren't very many black women like yourself?

GS: There were no black women here.

CAC: That's what I was going to ask. At that time, you were the only black woman with faculty status? There were people in administration?

GS: I was the only black tenured professor until Anita Tucker got tenure and worked [unclear]. Of course, she was really dying kind of then, I realize. Her cancer was progressing.

CAC: In the 1970s . . .

GS: You didn't even have a lot of women professors, period.

CAC: Yes, but even fewer African-American women?

GS: Oh, yes, very few African women were on the tenure track or even tenure. It was kind of a rough period. Yes.

CAC: You were a real pioneer.

GS: Yes. You were overworked.

CAC: Oh, I know that, yes.

GS: You were really overworked when you're the only one. I agreed to do a lot of things so that I could save some of my non-tenured professors from being overworked so that they could work toward getting tenure and research. I didn't have anything to lose. I'm full professor already so why . . . ? They needed to do their research because they had really tightened up on the tenure requirements and things like that.

CAC: You had a pretty full platter because you were still teaching and you still wanted to do your research.

GS: Yes. In fact, I retired to finish my book and I've been in everything else.

CAC: [laughter] Did you teach piano in Music?

GS: I've never taught piano since I've been here. That's why people were shocked to find out piano wasn't . . .

CAC: Do you ever have private pupils here?

GS: Never. When I retired from piano teaching, I retired, even though now I'm studying. I plan to do a recital on my seventieth birthday. I'm going to the Rachmaninoff second piano concerto, so I'll be working all summer.

CAC: Good for you.

GS: I picked up the piano when I got ready to retire. I said, "I'm [unclear] to do a program and invite my friends." It got out of control. It got bigger than it should have, but that was the way it was. Yes, I called it "Going Out My Way." [laughter] I'm going to have an invitational recital for my seventieth birthday. I just told my teacher yesterday, "I'm going to work over the summer."

CAC: That's coming up pretty soon?

GS: In December.

CAC: This year, yes.

GS: You have to have something. I kept playing chamber music. I always played a lot of chamber music.

CAC: With what other instruments? All kinds?

GS: Flute, cello, and I have a permanent flute/oboe trio called Women of Class. My oboist now lives in California, so I have a trio called Rondo, a classic trio. That's violin, flute, and piano. I was always doing a lot of chamber things because I do love chamber music.

CAC: When I was in high school, I played the flute. We had piano, cello, and flute. That's a nice combination.

GS: That's a wonderful combination.

CAC: Just lovely, yes. Although, there's not much music written for it. I often had to play the violin part. We had violin, cello, and piano, but I'd have to play the flute from the violin score.

GS: My sister's trio was [unclear]. It was flute, cello, and piano and there was a lot of things black composers wrote for her.

CAC: I see.

GS: She found a lot of music for it because she spent a year in Paris at the University of Paris Conservatory. The French composers wrote a lot for that combination.

CAC: Good for the French. I think they have a stronger flutist tradition there.

GS: That's one reason she went over there and she found a lot of literature for that instrument.

CAC: Isn't that interesting.

GS: They've written a lot of beautiful flute music. We even find with our piano, flute, violin trio a lot of the beautiful music was done by the French composers and, also, the Russian six. They did a lot. We have some nice works for that, too.

CAC: It seems to me Debussy uses a lot of flute.

GS: He did.

CAC: Geneva, we're kind of nearing the end of the story. At this point, I always say, "Are there some things we haven't covered that you want to cover?" Then, after that's done, I'll ask you to reflect on what Minnesota has meant to you, and how you perceived the students and the university as a system, and how it's changed. Do you want to comment on that?

GS: Some of the problems I found at the university were problems I'd find anywhere. I didn't find as many of the problems that a lot of people found, mainly, because I came here with tenure. I didn't have to work through that foolishness. Immediately, I found a community life outside of it. I didn't need a social life because I had my daughter and my grandson and I knew I wasn't

going to get married so I wasn't dating and all that kind of crap. As a result, some of the things some people might feel, I wouldn't feel, which meant it's hard for me to judge from that angle.

CAC: It's only your experience. I understand.

GS: Yes. I found the community was a very interesting community in that the people who have been here and were born here . . . you're an outsider, I don't care how long you stay here. You're from away. They had some real problems with their understanding of southerners or people who are not from here. These folks here have a class. They're elitists. They don't understand that they have had some racism. They just don't understand it even though they had their communities, the Rondo community, for survival and everything. It's real interesting. You find that most of the people, when they started looking to get people here for jobs, were sending for people from away to fill these jobs in the [unclear] and all of that. That caused some little resentment. I never quite had that problem, mainly, as I said, coming out of a parsonage background, the religious community was always very important to me so I found my . . . That was one of the things I did, getting myself in with the outreach when I became chair, I went to all of the black churches. For a long time, I would just go to a different one every Sunday. That way, I could see who goes here, and who goes here, and all that. As a result, I related. I had the preachers. A lot of times, when [there were] things they'd hear about somebody at the "U", they'd call me before they'd come running out here. They'd always check with me. I liked that. What they felt is they had somebody they could talk to. These people come and bring you all . . . There's two sides to everything.

CAC: Four or five, I think.

GS: Yes. They would jump out on these causes and before they would jump . . . even like Matt Little in the NAACP. You know what really quieted that whole thing with Pike, and African Studies, and all that . . . Matt Little and some of the NAACP people came to see me to find out what was the story. When they found out what the story was and that I didn't have a problem with it, then, they backed off. Then, they had no problems with it. It was because I had made those connections and they knew they could talk to me about things. You just don't jump out . . .

CAC: They knew you were straight.

GS: Yes. I said, "I wouldn't let anybody just walk . . ." [laughter] The little game George and John was playing . . . black women, how they use black women to deal on black men. I had to deal with that craziness. That's the stereotype that they could say to somebody out there and, then, somebody would bounce right away, "Yes, she's being used." Like some people say, "Merrilee Evans is going to be used." They just automatically think a woman hasn't got sense.

I guess, toward the end . . . one reason I retired when I did . . . students had changed. I don't know if you found that. What happened from the 1970s and 1980s and by the time we got to the 1990s, there was a different student. I began to realize that they were very naive. They were not as activist as . . .

CAC: Now, you're speaking of white and black students?

GS: Yes. Students were just different. They were caring about one thing, getting this degree so they can get a job and that was all. They really weren't as . . .

CAC: Engaged.

GS: That's right, as engaged as they had been in the 1970s and early 1980s. I saw a difference in the students and I also found I didn't like the students. I also always said, "When it gets to the point you don't like teaching, get out of it."

CAC: How do you account for that? Why do you think the student body . . . ?

GS: They went back to the students of the 1950s, that whole mentality. It was the things we'd worked hard to get, they acted like it had just happened. I'm thinking, wait a minute . . . what folks have gone through to get these things for you. They weren't at all aware that these things didn't . . . nobody just got religion and gave them all this stuff. I began to see that.

I think another thing I began to see . . . When we got the Rajender [case -Shyamala Rajender] decision, I felt that the things for black males tended to lose out. I thought there was that tension that began to build up between the black men and the black women because they felt that we were being used as the double, the woman in black. Therefore, we had an ace that black men didn't have. That became a problem and that started some of the faculty [unclear].

CAC: That's really national, too.

GS: That started some of the family struggles that black people had not had yet. They just hadn't had those before. I came out of a generation where we were happy to help our black men have their dignity because they didn't get it anywhere except with us. That doesn't happen anymore that way. You say, "Wait a minute. I'm not going to be held back because you . . ." So, it changed the whole dynamics between the black family, black men and black women. That's been a real difficult . . . The women of my daughter's age group, for instance, didn't live through those dynamics . . . she, a little bit more than some others because she was active in Civil Rights and everything. But, her grandpa and her uncle were such strong men. My brother is a Methodist bishop. As a result, she didn't quite see some of those concerns that a lot of the men have. She's now a teacher herself. When she finished college . . . she had went to Iowa and got her M.A. and her M.F.A. in drama. She's a director and she teaches at the University of Northern Iowa. She's up for tenure next year, ahead of time. Times change.

CAC: Do you have any reflection on the university itself, that is, the administrative structures and the climate at the university, contrasted from 1970 to 1990?

GS: It depended who was in that chair. I liked Harold Chase. I liked him really a lot.

CAC: He was there, but briefly, as an interim vice-president.

GS: Yes. We really found a lot of racist put downs, secondary attitude from [Kenneth] Keller. We saw some changes with Keller. I think a lot of that had to do because of Keller's area. He's engineering, so some of it was tied to that. He didn't have a lot of real strong gutsy feelings for our Afro Department, or for blacks, or for anybody really outside of his area. I found a change with him. [C. Peter] Magrath started off being okay, but by the time his third year came, he was being very, very . . . not quite the way he should be. If he wanted to do something for us . . . We found out he was having breakfasts with the two presidents of the NAACP, both of whom was coming out eating and eating us away. He was really built into that *feed black folks* mentality and they walked right into it, the two men. We found out that when he wanted to deal with something on the campus that had to do with blacks, he ignored us, the black faculty, but he would reach to the community, the so-called—quote—leaders. That was a little hard for us to take. He didn't start off that way. It changed as time went on. Then, with Keller, we found a [unclear]. I think it has been better with Nils [Hasselmo]. One thing is . . . Nils is very sincere. He's a good man. Nils is one of the deans when I was chair.

CAC: Sure, he was Sorauf's associate dean.

GS: Very lovely as a person. He's a good person. That's the reason I knew if I could get McKinley [Mac] Boston's name to him, I knew he was going to appoint him even though that really . . . I would say that search committee . . .

CAC: Where did you know McKinley Boston before?

GS: I didn't know him.

CAC: Oh, I see.

GS: When Nils asked me to be on that committee—I was on the athletic committee—I said, "Lord, what am I doing on some athletic . . . ?"

CAC: [laughter]

GS: Things start to happen and I said, "Okay, you've got some contacts." I called Frank Gillian, who happens to be the personal director of the Vikings, and he had a whole list of names he gave me of people. One was Mac Boston. He had tried to get McKinley Boston to be with the University of Iowa team when he was the coach, but he came here instead. He said that over

the years, he had followed the career of McKinley Boston. He said, "He's your best bet if you can get him." Also, Chris Voelz was high on Boston. They'd been on some committees together. When you saw his vita . . . The boys downtown and the coaches had decided that Jerry, the tennis coach, was going to get that position. What I went through between Sid Hartman and those people and the games they played . . . I was sitting all by myself fighting this. I said, "No, no, no. They are going to run a search that is fair!" [sound of fist pounded on table] It was very painful to see the games . . . Sid Hartman wants to run the Athletic Department at this school. What had happened was I [unclear]. This was not just the white men. It was also coming from the black men, too, and the black members of that committee. It was rough; but, I knew if we got Mac's name out of that pool as one of the finalists . . . I knew Hasselmo would look at those two and he would immediately know who was supposed to get that job.

CAC: Now, he's moved him up to the vice-presidency for Student Affairs.

GS: That's right. That's why, when three or four months ago, when all this crap was going on to save Mac, I'm thinking these are the very people who gave me a fit and sleepless nights! What they would do . . . such things as they would decide . . . We were meeting all over the city incognito. Now, they knew I didn't drive. One night, they decided they would have their Sunday meeting way out somewhere in Bloomington out in one of the hotels out there. It was a Sunday morning and the snow was bad; but, I picked up the phone and I called Clarence Carter and I said, "Clarence, I've got to get there." I beat them there.

CAC: [laughter]

GS: I was determined I was not going to miss a meeting. You could feel these little games. I realize decisions are being made on the golf course.

CAC: Sure.

GS: I realize that the boys . . . like they were saying when the NAACP thing was going and they were still supporting Gibson against Merrilee. Ross [unclear] said to me, "I could not get any of them to say why they were still supporting Gibson." I said, "The white boys and the black boys are the same. It's that little boys' club." I said, "That's all it was. It was the man thing in there." I could feel this. I said, "This is crazy. It is so obvious." Here you are, the first thing that the person has to do when they come in as athletic director [AD] is hire a football coach. Here's a man who graduated from the University of Minnesota, has already been an AD, has his Ph.D., and is in football. Here, you've got someone over here who's in tennis and has never been an AD. Now, it makes no sense that you're going to hire someone who is in tennis when the first job that person has to do . . . It became so apparent that that racism and all of that was just there—I haven't figured out whether it was racism or just we want our friend to still be here.

CAC: It may please you to know that Nils Hasselmo the other day said—we had a personal, private conversation—“McKinley Boston is one of the best things that have happened here.”

GS: That's right!

CAC: Nils recognized it very quickly?

GS: Yes, he looked at it and he stood up . . . When Sid Hartman said he had been promised . . . he had been promised that Jerry was going to get that job. I said, “Nils could not promise that to him,” so I knew he was lying. The next thing he was saying was he can appoint Mac for that v.p. I'm saying, “My god! is this the same man who didn't want us to run a search for . . . ?” [laughter] It's been interesting. Mac's a good man. I think one of the things Mac did when he got here . . . he had some football Gopher friends who were still here and they were able to help make that transition for him. When Mac got here, he sat down and visited with Jerry right away. He's got good skills. I said, “This one wore me out.” I've had a lot of search committees, but this was the one that finalized it for me. It just wore me out.

CAC: I hear you saying, Geneva, that it's never easy . . . that your years here were rewarding in many ways but that you were pleased to retire?

GS: I was very happy to retire. I had a life out there to move into.

CAC: That's the important thing, isn't it?

GS: That's the important thing. You've got to have more than the university.

CAC: Yes.

GS: You've got to have it. When I was interviewing all of the black faculty for Josie to try to find out about the retention problem, none of the problems in retention were tied to their not getting tenure or their fear of not getting it. It was tied to the fact that these were people that had not connected outside of the university. Like we have a young lady at my church in Epidemiology. She walked in here from Berkeley and the first Sunday she got here, she found Camphor [Memorial] United Methodist Church. She and her fiance are married now. He got a job here. She has had a couple of research grants. She's teaching the Sunday School. She's gotten very active in some things. I said, “She's not going to have any problems.” She has found her own community. She and I sit together nearly every Sunday. I said, “This is the key.” They've got to find a life outside of the University of Minnesota. If you don't, it's lonely. It is very lonely being the only woman or the only black in a department. I would say that would be my biggest concern is that we have not gotten enough Afro-Americans throughout this university.

CAC: Or in different positions around . . .

GS: That's right. And those that do come get themselves moved to other departments and that's scary. They bring them in and, then, they find themselves moving to other departments because they're not feeling very secure. A lot has to do with this need for collegialism. For instance, when I was doing my interviews, I found out that some black faculty don't want a mentor. I was telling Josie, "We can't assume that they all want a mentor." Some of them told me, "I had an adviser who prepared me for the college [unclear] because they let me work on my own, so I'm used to working on my own." Then, you'd have another one say, "I've got a mentor relationship, but the person who is mentoring me treats me more like a graduate student." I thought, okay, this is a nice little paternalistic man who's probably got three or four daughters himself and he sees her at that same age as his daughter and he doesn't realize that she is feeling that he's treating her more at a paternalistic way than as a colleague. You find that different people have different kinds of perceptions.

CAC: Sure.

GS: Some of them felt very comfortable. Some of them, I think, will have problems. Like, I just feel that one person that was here that we got that had problems . . . going to have them anywhere she goes. It's a personality thing with her. I find that my biggest concern is that you need to have more Afro-Americans throughout—and not just one. I would see just one person in the History Department, one person in . . . That's not good. That's really not good. They should have more. There should be many more.

CAC: Geneva, that's an interesting story.

GS: I don't know how much help I've been, but that's my academic . . .

CAC: Let me tell you. There are two helps: one by being who you were, and being on this faculty for those years, and doing all those things and that's a help; and, then, your sharing it and that's a help. I thank you doubly for posterity.

GS: Okay. All right. That will be here when I'm gone, which is the reality.

[End of Tape 2, Side 1]

[End of the Interview]

Transcribed by:

Hermes Transcribing and Research Service
12617 Fairgreen Avenue, Apple Valley, MN 55124
(612) 953-0730