Conversations with Theodore C. (“Ted”) DeLaney, Jr.
IV: “From Student to Professor”

With David S. Peterson, Interviewer

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Peterson: Welcome. I'm David Peterson, Professor of History here at Washington and Lee University. It's August 24, 2018, and I'm in the Mason Taylor New Room with my good friend and colleague, Professor Theodore C. "Ted" DeLaney, Professor of African-American history here at Washington and Lee. We've been discussing Ted's intellectual development.

We talked a little bit about his library-oriented and religiously oriented youth. We've reviewed Ted's many years working here as a lab technician in the Biology Department at Washington and Lee. Then I guess it was John Barrett, you said, who really sort of turned your interest toward history courses. You took a course with him at VMI [in 1975]. In 1979, you began taking a course a term or so here at Washington and Lee University, and by 1983 you had pretty much decided to become a full-time student here at Washington and Lee. At that point you had a wife, Pat; you had a son, Damien. You had a number of civic commitments. You were active in the PTA and the voter registration system here in the county of Rockbridge. That was an awful lot to juggle.

Delaney: Let me back up just a little bit. Not only did John Barrett turn my interest to history, but my high school history teacher, whose name was Louise Johnson , later Louise Johnson Michaels , was also very, very influential in my interest in history. I would certainly credit those two people as the reason that I chose history as a major or why I chose history as a profession.

With regard to my civic commitments, one of the things that happened to me along the way is that I just felt a commitment to serve and had served in a lot of capacities. With regard to the community, I'd been a Scout leader. I'd led Appalachian Trail camps for a church group in Virginia—I forget the name of the church group now—and also for Massanetta Springs, so I had been doing a lot of stuff in the community. In addition to that, once I became a full-time student I was Secretary of the Board of Elections. I was Treasurer of the Rockbridge Library Board. I was, at one point, President of the PTA. I was a member of the Mental Health Clinic Board and I was also a member of the Mental Health Association Board. Yes, I did have a lot of commitments at the time that I was a full-time student at Washington and Lee. Those were things that really meant a lot to me and things that resulted in me receiving the League of Women Voters Community Service Award at the time. Things that sort of made me feel good about myself and what I was doing in the community.

Peterson: As a full-time student, you said you gravitated also toward art courses and toward French courses and biology courses.

Delaney: One of the things that I tried to do was follow the W&L requirements for getting a liberal arts education, so there was a smattering of everything. The art courses came because I'd always had an interest in art and had I gone to college as a teenager I would have gone in as an art major.

Peterson: You have a very distinguished artistic ancestor, don't you? Beauford DeLaney?

Delaney: Yes, my grandfather's youngest brother was a famous artist, but my grandfather had another brother [Joseph DeLaney] who was also the artist in residence at the University of Tennessee during the latter part of his career. Those uncles I never met but maybe there's a genetic link in interest in art. I also did woodcarving here before I became a student. There was a dean named Bill Pusey. Bill Pusey's wife, Mary Hope Pusey, had a very large house and she had learned how to wood carve from the woodcarving family that was local named Barclay, who had carved the W&L mace that's carried at the beginning of the academic processions. Mary Hope had a lot of wood and a lot of tools and she would open her house up every Monday night for a group of people who came in to carve together, learning from her. Even when she wasn't there, this room in her house would be open, coffee pot would be on, and there would be a sign in the door for us to come in and make ourselves welcome. I think that Dean Pusey was obligated to come down every time that we were there that she wasn't and admire the things that we were carving; he was something of a shy man. She oftentimes supplied fine woods, like Honduras mahogany or walnut or whatever we were working in. That had sort of gotten to be an avocation that carried over into taking four courses in studio sculpture when I was a student here, although I didn't do anything in wood in the sculpture studio. That's another story for another time, perhaps.

The French courses would certainly be in compliance with the liberal arts requirements at W&L. The biology courses, the arts and the sciences, all a part of that. And so I had a good time as a student and enjoyed the courses that I took immensely and enjoyed the fact that my son was very, very much a part of seeing his father being a student ever since he was old enough to go to school.

Peterson: You've told me stories, in fact, of sitting doing homework in the evening at the kitchen table, I guess, with Damien, both of you doing your assignments.

DeLaney: Right, absolutely.

Peterson: But you did gravitate again to history as a major, so you presumably worked with Professor Holt Merchant and Professor Bob McAhren?

Delaney: Yes, I worked with Merchant, McAhren, and [David] Parker. I was more interested in what Holt was doing than what the other two people were doing. Holt was teaching Southern history and I think that it's very, very difficult to be African American and not be interested in Southern history. And so I found myself caught up in his Old South, his New South, and his Civil War classes, also his course on sectionalism. Parker's class intrigued me because Parker was using primarily, and I don't want to use the same word twice, but he was using only primary source books. Reading Latin American history from the perspective of people who lived during the time was unique, although the problem with those courses was that there were no secondary source books used, so there was no skeletal framework of the government that was being put in place or the governments that were being put in place in Colonial Latin America. Nonetheless, I was intrigued by learning about Colonial Latin America. And to some extent I was intrigued learning about Colonial North America from Bob McAhren, and so these were the three people that I most readily worked with in the history department during the time I was a student.

Peterson: Being a mature student, was it comfortable working with faculty who were almost or about roughly the same age as yourself?

Delaney: Not always. Barry Machado wouldn't let me take any of his classes because he said we were too good friends, so I didn't have a chance to do diplomatic history classes, which I regretted.

Holt Merchant's classes were fun. Holt's approach was very, very traditional. Keeping up with the lectures was difficult because he would lecture pretty rapidly, but I had permission to use a tape recorder. I would rewrite the lectures after class listening to the tape recorder, so my lecture notes were almost like a transcript. It was a good experience. It was an excellent experience. Holt was a good mentor and became a good friend. He also did not let friendship get in the way of his red pen.

Peterson: He's famous for his red pen.

Delaney: Not only is he famous for his red pen; one time I got a “C” in one of his classes. This was also the uncomfortable thing about doing it at W&L. It had been nearly twenty years since I'd been a

high school student, and the idea that I knew the faculty so well and might fall on my face in front of people that I knew was a frightening thing. It might have been more comfortable doing the degree someplace else for that reason. And I once had a student who accused me of being in a situation where I didn't have to worry about the grades because all the faculty were my friends and I would just float through. It certainly was far from that. I made five “C”s when I was an undergraduate and I am proud of those five “C”s. But I did finish *cum laude*, and my grade point average was almost high enough to be *magna cum laude*, but that was not the case.

Peterson: Well, a “C” then was much higher than a “C” is today, really. How about your relations with students in the courses? Did they find it awkward or uncomfortable?

Delaney: The relationship with students was fantastic. First of all, my notebooks were very popular at exam period because I took good notes and rewrote my notes after class. Students would ask if they could copy my notes and I didn't care if they did, and so my notebook was in great demand.

I also got invited to be part of study groups with students. Study groups were interesting, especially studying art history classes. There was a guy who took art history classes at the same time as me named Ted LeClerq. I recall, it seems, that he was from South Carolina. He would find these dates for the painting in brush strokes. Now he was imagining the dates in these brush strokes. These were some crazy mnemonic devices. It would be so funny that everybody would remember that painting is from 1828 because Ted LeClerq said it was because in that curl on that woman's head he could see an 1828 that really wasn't there. Those study sessions were great.

The only thing that was difficult about the study sessions … At the time, The Cockpit, which is now the mail room, was the student center and it served 3.2 beer. And so the guys would be eager to go over there to get beer after the study sessions and I never got invited. And I used to think, you know, we sat here and studied together and we had this great rapport as we were studying together, and not to be invited to go to the Cockpit to get beer afterwards was sort of a moment for retrospection. And I would think well, they're twenty years old and I'm forty. I wouldn't invite a forty-year-old to get a beer either. So I understood not being invited but it did feel a little lonely when you'd sat there and studied with these guys and then didn't get asked to join them for a beer in The Cockpit.

Peterson: A generational thing probably inserts itself. They knew you were a man with a wife and a son.

Delaney: Sure, sure, even with PE courses, but it was an interesting time. Students were very nice to me and I've always tried to be very nice to students in return.

Peterson: So you graduated *cum laude* in 1985. You wrote a [Hist.] 403 thesis, didn't you, on desegregation in Lexington?

Delaney: No, I did not write a thesis. I wrote a 403 independent study paper and that independent study paper was on school desegregation or black faculty placement during desegregation in Lexington, Virginia. And I used that as a writing sample for my application to graduate school.

Peterson: But you didn't go immediately to graduate school, did you?

Delaney: No, I did not.

Peterson: I think you had to find a job.

Delaney: From Washington and Lee I went to The Asheville School, which was a residential, independent school in western North Carolina: two hundred students; forty-three faculty staff members; three hundred and fifty wooded acres; three prominent buildings, roughly circa 1900. It was kind of like the English private school model, even to the extent that we didn't use things like freshman, sophomore, junior, senior. It was third form, fourth form, fifth form, sixth form, that kind of thing. When I started there it was all male boarders but it had female day students. By the time that I finished there three years later—I finished working there three years later—they had either completed building a girls' dormitory or they were in the process, but female boarding had occurred by the time I left.

Peterson: About the time Washington and Lee was beginning to make that transition.

Delaney: Well Washington and Lee actually made that transition before I left, or at least the decision, because the decision was in 1984. The summer of 1984, Washington and Lee decided to co-educate. The Asheville School's had been sort of a long-drawn-out process because there was a girls' school in Asheville that had closed down. Maybe it wasn't at the time it closed down all girls, maybe it also had boys, but the name of it was St. Genevieve/Gibbons Hall. It was a Catholic, independent school, and

when that school closed down those girls had no place to go. And so Jack Tyrer, the headmaster at Asheville School, convinced his board to let those girls who were local Asheville students come to the Asheville School for high school. Then there was the subsequent move to female boarding, which is what I was referring to a little while ago. The closing of St. Genevieve's and the co-education of day students at Asheville actually happened prior to the Washington and Lee debate about co-education.

Peterson: But you didn't stay at Asheville very long, because I gather that you received a very remarkable letter one afternoon.

Delaney: That's not the only reason I didn't stay at Asheville very long. The job at The Asheville School was one of the most demanding jobs that I ever had. My weekend oftentimes amounted to about fifteen minutes. There were six days of classes. I was supervisor for a dormitory hall that thirty boys lived on. I had to teach history and ethics classes and, in addition to that, I was in the outdoor program. I had to work in the mountaineering program and I took kids on four-day backpacking trips because mountaineering was a required activity for graduation. The time of a faculty member in a school like The Asheville School was very exhaustive. I literally worked with students in the morning from eight o'clock until eleven o'clock at night when lights were out on the dormitory hall. And then I had my class preps and grading to do. I was exhausted at the end of three years.

At the end of three years, I get a letter from Holt Merchant. Of course, Holt is always given to being overly optimistic and given to hyperbole. The letter pretty much said why don't you go to graduate school, get a PhD, and come back here to work. Of course, none of that is going to happen very easily and the presumption that I would be able to come back here to work is like pie in the sky. I was so surprised when I got the letter, that it sort of fell out of my hands what I was reading. I had been thinking about going to graduate school to get a masters degree because I think you need, when you're teaching high school, more than a bachelors degree in U.S. history to do a good job. You don't have enough background. With a masters degree in history you should at least have a textbook knowledge of American history. I don't believe you have that with a bachelors degree, so I wanted to go to graduate school to get a masters degree.

Peterson: This had been percolating in your mind.

Delaney: Right. And I hadn't thought about leaving secondary teaching, but when I got to graduate school the bug was there, and I stayed longer than my wife or I had anticipated.

Peterson: Where did you go to graduate school?

Delaney: I went to graduate school at the institution we have in common, The College of William and Mary. And I have no regrets. It was probably the perfect place for me. They only took six Ph.D. candidates in history a year, but they only offered Ph.D.s in about five or six different areas anyway. So it was a small graduate school and, having come out of a small undergraduate program, the fit was absolutely correct.

The one thing that I would like to say about this because you brought it up earlier, and this is the 403 paper again about school desegregation and using it as a writing sample, one of the things that I've found that's been very, very difficult in my life, including in academe, is to get away from the issue of race. This paper becomes another problem, or maybe problem is the wrong word, but certainly a red flag. As I said, they only took six people into the program a year and that meant they had six fellowships to offer. I was one of the people who got a fellowship to enter into the class that began in 1985.

About three months prior to school starting at William and Mary, I got a telephone call from the director of graduate studies in history. It was one of those hemming and hawing kind of conversations. He said, "I've got a question that I need to ask you that I don't feel very comfortable about asking. I've read your writing sample and, based on your writing sample, might you be black?" I was a little bit surprised. Anybody could have written the paper that I wrote, but because it was on a racial topic the question comes out. Then he says. "I've got another question to ask you. The state of Virginia has this special fellowship that is administered through the state Department of Higher Education that would allow us to take another student if you would turn down the fellowship that we offered and take this state-sponsored fellowship that is targeted for African-American students." And so you find yourself in an awkward situation. Are you really going to say no to someone you've never met, who's the director of graduate studies, and who's saying there's this other pot we can go to for you?

There were times that I regret it because the fellowship would come late and it would come late after bills were overdue. It did not come at the same time as the fellowships that my peers received. Plus the fact, it also occurred to me that this fellowship that could have been used, certainly, to pay for another student of color was not. Instead it went to fund another white student in reality. One of the things about race in academe is nothing is ever black and white, but there are all kinds of shades of gray out there.

This fellowship would also come back to haunt me at the end of the program. At the end of the program, George H.W. Bush as President wanted to get rid of race-identified fellowships and scholarships, and so The College of William and Mary wanted me to talk to *The Washington Post.* This was one of the reasons that I thought it's time to leave William and Mary and maybe take an ABD fellowship at a place like W&L. There's this tug of war about this fellowship that I had regretted accepting in the first place, but now it's involving presidential policy. I gave an interview to *The Washington Post* and I said the same things to *The Post* that I said to you.[1] In reality, the fellowship went to fund a white student because I agreed to give up the fellowship that I had been awarded and take this other fellowship instead. It's an interesting thing. You never, ever get that far away from race. For people who have questioned me on never forgetting about race, it's matters like this that cause you not to forget.

Peterson: In other words, your effort to be cooperative and to be a team player led to an awkward identification between yourself and the fellowship, and the misperception that you were getting special favors.

Delaney: Right. Why should a paper that was written about black teacher displacement during school desegregation signal the director of graduate studies that I might be black? It was an awkward moment. Certainly it was a moment that has not easily been forgotten. But I loved William and Mary, and I certainly had a great experience there.

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[1] Amy Goldstein, Mary Jordan,"Chilling Effect Feared: Area Colleges Say Ban Imperils 4,000 Grants." *Washington Post*, December 14, 1990, pp. A1, 23.

Peterson: If I am correct, your dissertation actually was fairly distant from desegregation in Lexington.

Delaney: I wasn't really interested in doing desegregation in Lexington as a dissertation. What I was interested in doing with a dissertation was a history of free blacks in Virginia. My real hero in history had been John Hope Franklin, who was the esteemed black historian who took his Ph.D. at Harvard in 1938 and published his dissertation, which was on the free blacks of North Carolina. My idea was to do something like that in Virginia. Eugene Genovese, who ended up having more profound influence on me than anybody in my educational background, was at William and Mary when I went there to beef up the nineteenth century part of the American Ph,D. program. He looked at me and he said, "You don't have time to write that dissertation. It would take years and years and years to do that research. You've got a family. You need to find a quick and easy dissertation to write so you can get back to working and supporting your family," which was good advice. It was absolutely, incredibly good advice.

And so, William and Mary being the small place that it was or is, as you well know, the people who matter the most to you outside of the History Department when you do a degree in history are the reference librarians and the people in Special Collections. There was this wonderful lady, who I still hear from, in special collections named Margaret Cook, and Margaret Cook said, "You know, we need a good biography of Julia Tyler." Well, I know biographies are out of vogue for dissertations. But this promised to be the quick and easy dissertation that was available. I thought all the papers would be at William and Mary. They were not. There were more than sixteen linear feet at Yale. There were papers at the Free Library in East Hampton, New York. There were papers at the Virginia Historical Society. There were papers at the Library of Congress. They were scattered everyplace. Nonetheless, I was able to finish up in a total of five years including class work, comprehensive exams, and getting the dissertation done.

Peterson: And part of that time you spent as an ABD [All But Dissertation] at Washington and Lee, correct?

Delaney: Yes, and the ABD program was my rescue. William and Mary had promised me funding through the completion of the dissertation, as long as it didn't go forever, and I was really afraid that I

was going to lose funding when the President of the United States starts questioning fellowships like the one that I had. W&L was looking for ways to attract people of color to teach here. One of the ways that was common practice in the late '80s, early '90s, was through ABD fellowships; people who had taken the comprehensive exams in their field and could come. W&L offered pretty much the same place that other people offered with the ABD fellowship. I had the possibility of getting one, for instance, at Loyola of Baltimore as well. W&L paid me twenty thousand dollars a year. For twenty thousand dollars a year, I taught two courses, and they provided two thousand dollars of travel money for me to do my research for my dissertation. And so I was able to spend time at places like Yale doing research and other places. During that time I had some great experiences as well. The teaching experiences were unique and were a lot of fun.

Peterson: Which courses did you teach?

Delaney: One of the courses I taught that was really funny was Holt Merchant's "Old South". He was so impressed that I'd studied with Eugene Genovese that he said, "You need to teach that course this year. You know more about it than I do." If you could have seen the look on the students' faces when I walked in the classroom. There was one black student in the room. It must have been twenty-two or twenty-three students in the class and they all looked like they'd swallowed a canary. I mean, they were so shocked. I had a great time with that class.

Peterson: By your age or your race, or both?

Delaney: I think it was like *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner.* The idea that Merchant wasn't going to be teaching, but there's this black guy and we don't know who he is. Surely none of them knew who I was. I'd been gone too long. I had one student who sat mid-center of the room and she glared at me for about two or three weeks, like she was just furious. One day she came to my office to talk about a paper and I said, "What is wrong?" She said, "I don't like people who put down the South." I said, "Have you ever heard me put down the South?" She said, "No, sir." And I said, "I try to be objective when I teach, and we will be critical of the South when the South is due criticism. That criticism may be good or it may be bad, but it all depends upon the situation." She wanted to talk about her research paper and I turned her on to a book that had been written by Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, named *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South.* She loved the book. The glare turned to a smile and she became a great friend. One of the students in the class now has a Ph,D. in history, a guy named

Dan Knight, who is actually from the same town as the young woman I was talking about. There were some really fantastic kids in the class that I got to know and really enjoyed. Merchant did not offer the "New South" to me the next term, however. He taught that himself. I think that what I had to do the next term was to teach domestic history of the U.S. since 1945.

Peterson: That's quite a switch.

Delaney: It was quite a switch and took a lot more preparation.

Peterson: It would be difficult to be teaching with a student glaring at you for half of the term. Would you say that was typical?

Delaney: No, it wasn't half the term, about two or three weeks of the term, which would amount to six to nine days.

Peterson: It's a tough way to start.

Delaney: It is a tough way to start, but she's a wonderful person and I still have communication with her.

Peterson: So you were at W&L for two years and you went up to SUNY Geneseo?

Delaney: I was at W&L for two years and those two years ended with the reality that I didn't have a job here. I later found out a delegation of students, whom as I understand were all white male, went to see President Wilson to ask him to find a way to keep me here. I'm glad I didn't know in advance. I'm glad that I learned that after the fact, but I was deeply flattered. But I went on the job market and might have ended up someplace other than SUNY-Geneseo had I finished the dissertation. That was the only offer I got, but the dissertation was far from complete when they offered me a job.

Going from here to Rochester, New York, was a real experience. But it came at a very, very difficult time in my life as well. As you well know, the AHA [American Historical Association]] interviews for jobs fall during the Christmas holidays and really towards the afterside of the Christmas holidays. That Christmas was a really traumatic Christmas in my life because my younger brother [Charlie] died of a first-time heart attack on Christmas Eve that year. And so when I went to interview at the AHA, we had

just buried my brother. I had just come from the funeral, in fact. The meeting was in Washington, D.C. The circumstances under which I was interviewing for a job, and with an incomplete dissertation, were not the best in the world, for sure. I did get this job but, there again, race entered the conversation, but in a not so forthcoming way with this particular one.

I thought that I was applying for a job to teach Civil War there. Nobody corrected me on that, but when I got there I discovered that my office mate, who was newly hired, was the new Civil War historian. Certainly she deserved to be. She was a student of David Brion Davis. She had a Ph.D. from Yale, a newly minted Ph.D. She was an absolutely brilliant woman. She had also been James McPherson's student as an undergraduate at Yale and he is the preeminent Civil War historian.

I discovered there that I would be teaching an African-American history class and I was told that I would be teaching it through biography. It would be twentieth century, but I would start with Frederick Douglass, who died before the twentieth century. I thought: “why am I starting with Frederick Douglass?” I was told: “because he is ours; he is buried in Rochester.” I was just furious. I thought: “you don't teach African-American history as a great mens' history class by looking for biographical figures, outstanding figures in African-American history” And to start with someone who clearly is a nineteenth-century character when the course is going to be twentieth century African-American history just infuriated me. It was like “surprise, surprise, surprise!” I shouldn't have been surprised because John Hope Franklin wrote an essay, a collection of essays that I have in my office, about how even though he was trained in Southern history he kept getting pushed into African-American history[2]. That was what my experience was. Somehow I was being pushed into African-American history when my training had been Southern history. It's really difficult to divorce those two fields. But, there again, I thought they were a little bit disingenuous with the interview and certainly had never articulated that publicly before. It bothered me.

Peterson: So it was happy that you were able to come back to Washington and Lee in 1995.

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[2] John Hope Franklin, “The Dilemma of the American Negro Scholar,”,in *Race and History: Selected Essays, 1938-1988* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), pp. 302-306.

Delaney: The circumstance that caused me to come back to Washington and Lee, that I've already said in other interviews and I will say in this interview, is that the State University of New York at Geneseo was a very, very rough place to work. To call it a rough place to work is sort of startling because you don't think about academia that way. [History Professor] Harry Porter once said to me "Everybody needs to have an experience teaching at a public university," And certainly my experience teaching at a public university in this case was horrific. There were people who had restraining orders against students. The idea that people were so frightened of students that they would have restraining orders was unbelievable to me.

I had an incident with a black male student in that very African-American history class that I was told that I would teach. I was using the first narrative of Frederick Douglass. The narrative is more of an argument against slavery than it is an accurate biography. Some of the stories that Frederick Douglass tells in the narrative are completely implausible and would not have happened. So I'm explaining this in class and, after class, this very large black man who was a sophomore comes to my office. He's very, very upset. He begins by telling me that I know nothing about slavery, which is really interesting when you have gone through graduate school and you have studied with the foremost authority on Southern slavery that you know nothing about slavery. He also told me that I gave white people too much credit in my lecture. The third point, which was even more insulting, was that I was the kind of African-American professor that was an embarrassment to black students. I tried to explain to him what I had done with the lecture only to have him repeat that litany again. I was hoping he would drop the course. He did not. He stayed in the course for the whole term and the whole term there were barbs. The barbs were not serious enough, at least through most of the term, that I worried too much about it.

I always approve term papers and I cannot imagine approving this term paper ever unless I was just absolutely scared out of my mind. He wrote a term paper where he compared Benjamin Franklin with Stokely Carmichael, probably the most absurd term paper anybody could conjure up. By the time I was grading it I was just fed up. I found myself becoming a real coward as I graded the paper, given the fact I was always hearing these stories about people with restraining orders against students. I wrote in the margins, as we tend to do, everything that was wrong with the paper, but I gave it a "B" that I should not have given. I should have given it an "F" and, in any case, giving it a "B" accomplished nothing.

He shows up at my office. I've got an office mate, as I indicated before, but aside from her presence—and she's a white female—aside from her presence there's another young white female who was an adjunct. I would let her use my computer because she didn't have a computer. She was sitting at my table using my computer and the student barges in. The hall was wide. I took him across the hall to a bench to sit down to talk about the paper, telling him what's wrong with the paper as gently as I can. He says, “No, that's not what's wrong. What's wrong is you don't like me.” At that point I said, “Conversation is ended.” I walked back into my office and he followed me. He's huge. He's six feet, five inches. He's large with it and he's blocking the door. My office mate is on the telephone; my friend Carol is on my computer. At one point I asked him to leave and he doesn't. I went over and I put my left hand on his shoulder and I said, “Leave.” Then he starts screaming and he laid hands on me, I could not have been more thankful for Carol and Judith being in the office when this happened because they saw what happened. Then he stood in the hall calling me all kinds of names, including “house nigger.” Then he went to my department head and complained. Then he went to the dean and complained. Those are the times that you learn what little clout you have when you're a faculty member.

The downside of this was the Dean of Students was absolutely terrified of this guy. I got no support from her at all. The affirmative action officer on the campus telephoned me that day and said, “You're going to have to file a complaint against this student, because if you do [not], no student on the campus will have any respect for you.” I thought “this is turning into a real ugly situation.” And it got uglier. My department head told me the student didn't trust me to grade his final exam. I said, “Well, I guess he has a problem because I don't know who else will grade his final exam.” The guy said, “You're going to grade it but I'm going to look over your shoulder.” Well, this guy's specialty was Latin American history. At the end of the year, I was at a faculty cocktail party and learned more about this student. Somebody from the English department told me that the year before he had threatened a Puerto Rican guy who was dating a black female student—“Leave our women alone”—and so intimidated the Puerto Rican student that the Puerto Rican student defended himself with a razor and ended up getting expelled for it.

About three or four days after that incident [Department Head] Bob McAhren called and said, “How would you like to come back to Washington and Lee?” I thought “anything to get out of this place,

anything." Coming back to Washington and Lee also meant that I would be coming back to a place where there was stability. I'd never, ever, in all my years known a faculty member to have a restraining order against students, and that seemed to be commonplace at Geneseo. It didn't take me five minutes to say, "I'd love to," and Bob said, "But we don't want you next year. We want you for the following year. That will give you a chance to get the dissertation finished and [your son] Damien to finish high school up there." Damien was in a Jesuit high school in Rochester that was a damn good school and probably the best school he had ever been in. It made the following year a lot easier, knowing that at the end of the year that I was going to get a divorce from Geneseo. Although, at Damien's graduation, the son of the provost was also graduating and he stops at my seat and says, "I understand you're leaving." I said, "Yes," and he said, "Come to my office on Monday. I want to make a counteroffer. I said, "No, thank you."

Peterson: Not even interested.

Delaney: Not interested. Not interested in the least. So that's my Geneseo story. Except for that particular student, the other problems I had with students were minor. I was teaching "The Early Republic: : The United States 1787 through 1840," and once again I approved term papers. I had a student who turned a term paper in on the New Deal. When I collected these term papers to go home to grade and I came to his term paper I was totally shocked. I thought: "I'm not grading a paper for the 1940s; it's outside of the parameters of the class." So I go in to the department head and I said, "Why do you think this student turned a paper in to me from the 1940s when I'm teaching the early republic?" He looks at me and he said, "Because that's the only one he could find in the fraternity file." That kind of thing would not have happened here either. The idea that you're going to turn in a paper that wasn't even related to the class that you were taking? It was a good place to leave. It was a very good place to leave.

Peterson: You come back to Washington and Lee in 1995 and it's changed a good deal from the Washington and Lee that you'd known when you were a lab technician in the Biology Department, hasn't it?

Delaney: No. The only thing that's changed is that women are in classes and there are more women on the faculty. It's the same conservative, mostly white school that I left and, as far as diversity of opinion

was concerned, the women students shared the same opinions as the male students. It was a conservative, undiversified place. It was nice to have women in class. It was great to have women in class, but it had not changed that much.

Peterson: But you threw yourself into your teaching, didn't you?

Delaney: I did and with great fun. It's a great place to teach and it's a wonderful place to work. Colleagues are always fantastic. The kind of civility that exists in this community is just absolutely wonderful, civility among the student body as well as civility among the faculty.

Peterson: We can't go through the whole list of all the courses you've taught, but you've developed quite a few courses. Originally your assignment was to teach U.S. history.

Delaney: That wasn't my original assignment. My original letter was that I was to develop a two-semester course in African-American history. There again, I'm coming to Washington and Lee and there's nothing in my transcript that says that I'm trained in African-American history. My major field was nineteenth-century U.S. South; my other field was colonial America; and my third field was colonial Latin America. So once again, my appointment letter says developing a two-semester course in African-American history. One of the problems with bringing me in was they were borrowing against Bob McAhren's retirement as a way of bringing a black professor in at a time when I think there was only one other full-time black professor on the undergraduate campus. African-American is the wedge for bringing me in and so I have to develop that. It took a lot of work to develop that because it was teaching materials that I hadn't taught before.

The interesting thing is what becomes transformative for me. Even though initially there was some resentment that I'm always being hired to teach African-American, I was happy to come back. Then I also developed this great love for the discipline that I ended up having to develop, especially when I got to developing courses on the Civil Rights movement. That was a real high time for me. Teaching African-American from colonial to 1877 is mostly teaching about slavery, not something that's very uplifting, although I found ways to bring a lot of successful free blacks into those courses and to talk about those free blacks who were writing narratives or those runaway slaves who were writing narratives, rather than providing another course on slavery. Then I also developed a course on

comparative slavery, comparing slavery in the Caribbean, Brazil, and the United States, which was one of my favorite contributions to the curriculum. I also, because I had studied ethnohistory in the History Department at William and Mary, added a course on Northeastern woodland Indians.

Peterson: This is "Natives and Strangers?"

Delaney: Yes, the contact between European colonists and American Indians.

Peterson: You've continued to grow along those lines. Your "Freedom Ride" course has been a spectacular success, and "The Harlem Renaissance." You pretty much grew into the position.

Delaney: "Harlem Renaissance" may be the most successful course that I've ever taught. The first year it was not. The second year that I taught "Harlem Renaissance in the Jazz Age" was just spectacular and I intend for that to be my swan song winter term. The "Freedom Ride" course, traveling twenty-six-hundred miles through the South to the hot places of the Civil Rights movement, was a lot of fun. Doing it with Washington and Lee students made it really special because the students were cooperative and seemed to get a lot out of it. It was just an absolutely great experience. The only regret I had is I became more and more paranoid about there being a bad traffic accident with students in a van for twenty-six-hundred miles. Five times was enough.

Peterson: While you were doing all of this teaching, you also were doing a tremendous amount of service, weren't you?

Delaney: Yes, but sometimes the service is something I don't notice because I did service in a couple of different ways. I did service for the Southern Historical Association. I did service for the St. George Tucker Society, which is an interdisciplinary organization of Southern specialists. I also did service at Washington and Lee, whether the service be things like being on a task force that was for diversity that was back in the '90s; or being on the Shepherd Committee for Diversity that was back in the '90s; or being on The Student Affairs Committee once; or being on the Faculty Executive Committee or the Advisory Committee. You rattle off all of these things. Then the working group that found a way to commemorate the Robinson slaves and, of course, last year, the Commission [on Institutional History and Community].

One of the things that I fear that a lot of people don't realize when they come to teach at a small, private liberal arts college is that there's not a gigantic staff of administrators to do the service things, and that faculty members really have to step up to the plate. Always I've tried to be a team player so I try to do my share. The same is true with being department head. When I was asked to do it, it was my turn to do it, but when I was not department head, I tried to be flexible with when I would teach so that it wouldn't be a problem with the department head. That is a kind of service too, or to do service within the department that's badly needed as well. That is just a part of who I am that goes back to being President of the PTA or Secretary of the Board of Elections. I've always done that kind of thing. That is just boilerplate.

Peterson: It must be gratifying to be recognized. It must have been very gratifying to be inducted into Omicron Delta Kappa. That happened what, 2001?

Delaney: Yes, it happened 2001, but that was the same year that [President] John Elrod decided that it was high time to include John Chavis into the cannon of the university and he asked me to give the Founder's Day speech on John Chavis. It's probably the most nervous I've ever been because I knew that I was going to be speaking before most of the faculty. I was a nervous wreck that morning. However, my reward was the standing ovation, which shocked me.

The induction was sort of strange because in 2001 I didn't think I was doing much community service at all. I was doing a lot of community service when I was a student and had a grade point average high enough to be inducted and was not. I kind of thought it would have been nicer to have been inducted into ODK as a student than as a faculty member. At the time, it felt like the reward for giving the Founders Day speech. I also have been a faculty voting member since then for ODK and enjoyed that a great deal as well.

Peterson: Well, maybe it's time to wind down. I know you're going to have a discussion of the development of the African-American / Africana Studies Program, and we'll be able to go back and talk some more about your teaching then. We're going to have a little further discussion about your research into the desegregation of five western Virginia counties, so maybe this is a good stopping point and we can pick up these threads in the next couple of discussions.

Delaney: Okay, thank you.

Peterson: Thank you, Ted.

[End of interview]

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