AN INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM TUTTLE

Interviewer: Jewell Willhite

Endacott Society

University of Kansas
WILLIAM TUTTLE

B.A., History, Denison University, 1959
M.A., History, University of Wisconsin, 1964
Ph.D., History, University of Wisconsin, 1967

Service at the University of Kansas

First came to KU in 1967
Assistant professor of History, 1967-1970
Associate professor of History, 1970-1975
Professor of History, 1975-2000
Professor of American Studies, 2000-2008
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Q: I am speaking with William Tuttle, who retired in 2008 as professor of American Studies at the University of Kansas. We are in Lawrence, Kansas, on April 13, 2009. Where were you born and in what year?

A: I was born in Detroit, Michigan, on October 7, 1937.

Q: What were your parents’ names?

A: My father’s name was William M. Tuttle, Dr. William M. Tuttle. He was a very noted thoracic surgeon. My mother’s name was Geneva Duvall Tuttle.

Q: Did your father work at a hospital in Detroit?

A: Yes. He was a professor of surgery at Wayne University and worked in various hospitals, especially Harper Hospital, which is where I was born and my siblings as well.

Q: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

A: I have an older sister and a younger brother.

Q: I suppose you grew up in Detroit.

A: I did. I was born in Harper Hospital and at the age of just a few days I was taken to a brand new home that my parents had had built. And I lived in the same house my entire childhood. I went to college at the age of 17. My plan, frankly, was to return to Detroit, once I got my Ph.D., maybe teach at Wayne or maybe teach at the University of Michigan, but return to that part of the world. I liked it very much.

Q: Where did you go to elementary school?
A: I went to the Peter Vetel School, which was about three blocks from my home. The Europeans who founded Detroit were of French descent. So I’m sure Peter Vetel, as well as Detroit itself, of course is a French name.

Q: Did you belong to groups such as Boy Scouts?

A: I was a Cub Scout and I was very active in high school politics. I was the president of my senior class. I loved high school. It was a great place to be. I was expelled once for truancy, but that was early on in my high school career.

Q: What did you do when you were truant?

A: I had a girlfriend and we just didn’t go to school. We would take the bus. The high school was located right in the city. It was right on a bus line to downtown Detroit. So we would meet in front of the high school and have a cup of coffee, 15 years old, and decide whether to go to school. If we didn’t go to school we’d get on the bus and go to the Detroit Tigers baseball game or to the wonderful Detroit Art Institute, or see a downtown movie or find other ways to waste our time. But I was finally caught and expelled for a while.

Q: I imagine your parents didn’t think much of that.

A: They were very upset. I think at that point they wanted to send me to a prep school. I’m glad they didn’t.

Q: What was the name of the high school you attended?

A: I went to Redford High School, which was a large, all-white high school in Detroit. The school districts were gerrymandered so that they were either all-black or all-white. I think there were about 5,000 students in the high school.
Q: That’s huge. You said you were involved in high school politics. Were you involved in any other extracurricular activities?

A: I had the lead in the senior play and I was on the student council. I did various things like that. They also had, although they were illegal, high school fraternities. I was a member of one of those.

Q: Were they something like college fraternities?

A: They were about as worthless as college fraternities. They were social clubs. We had dances and enjoyed each other’s company.

Q: Did you have honors in high school?

A: One semester. The semester after I was expelled I got all “A”s and was honored. But my grades were pretty mediocre.

Q: Did you have influential teachers in high school?

A: You know, I didn’t have many. I had two or three in grade school whom I recall. In high school they were pretty lackluster by and large.

Q: What do you remember about your grade school teachers?

A: Well, of course one teacher was extremely attractive, my sixth grade teacher. All the boys admired her. There was also a wonderful science teacher, who later became a science teacher at the high school as well. He was my grade school science teacher. My second grade teacher, whose name was Mrs. Moore, was very caring. A lot of these teachers lived in the neighborhood. So we got to know them socially as well as in school. She was a neighbor and she was extremely encouraging.

Q: Did you have jobs in the summer or after school?

A: I delivered newspapers. I delivered the Detroit News newspaper. I had 65 customers.
Q: That’s a lot.

A: It was a lot. I was only 13 and 14 when I did that. I made some money. This was an afternoon newspaper, so I would do it after school.

Q: My boys did that too. They tended to have trouble with collecting.

A: I had no trouble collecting. One of the problems was that there was so much traffic in Detroit. I’d be going down a very busy road on my bicycle with two saddle bags and 65 newspapers to get to my block, which was Glastonbury Road. I had Glastonbury Road from one end to the other. I had some customers who complained. I’m sure they were justified in complaining about the service, but they were pretty good about paying up.

Q: When did you graduate from high school?

A: I graduated in 1955. I did have some summer jobs too, which were quite interesting, which began when I was 16, which would have been after my junior year. I went up to northern Michigan. Think about this. My parents were both graduates of the University of Chicago and very concerned about me, I guess. But they also were liberal in a way. I was encouraged to take this job in a hotel on a lake where we have a cottage at the age of 16. I went up there as a bell hop and then became a waiter. I had an incredibly growthful experience up there for two months. Then the next summer I worked at a dude ranch as a dishwasher, but we also took people out on rides in the morning. I was 17. This was a dude ranch where most of the people who came were young women from Detroit.

Q: Where was this?

A: In Gaylord, Michigan.

Q: I didn’t know they had ranches in Michigan.
A: It was incredible. It was a dude ranch run by a Polish American family, so it didn’t make a lot of sense. But it was fun.

Q: So you knew how to ride.

A: A little bit. Actually, I was a little afraid of horses, but it was okay. Horses were fine. We would take people out on morning rides to a certain location where a jeep would deliver pancake batter and big quantities of hot coffee and orange juice. We’d have a nice meal and then ride on back. So it was really a very enjoyable job. Then once I was in college I worked every summer in resorts in the Harbor Springs area.

Q: Is that in Michigan?

A: That’s in Michigan on Lake Michigan. Very, very beautiful.

Q: I assume you always expected to go on to college.

A: Right. I wasn’t sure where I wanted to go. I wanted to go to the University of Michigan, but my father thought there were too many Communists there, which was interesting because I later went to the University of Wisconsin, which is where they really were.

Q: What gave him the idea that there were Communists there?

A: My father had trained at Washington University. This very noted doctor brought him to Detroit. He was a very bad influence on my father, I think. He had two daughters and no sons. My father quickly was the son he never had. My father was very bright and got along with this old man. But he had a very bad influence. He’d gone to Michigan. This was in 1934. He thought the University of Michigan had ruined his daughters. So instead of going to Michigan I followed my high school girlfriend to Denison University in Ohio. It turned out to be fabulous. I loved it there.

Q: Where is Denison University?
A: It is near Columbus. It is kind of a play school for the pampered children of the Middle West and the Mid Atlantic.

Q: Is this a small school?

A: It was about 1,400 when I went. I think it is about 2,400 now. They had a wonderful history department. There I really was influenced by a number of teachers.

Q: What was your major?

A: I majored in history.

Q: Were these influential teachers history teachers?

A: Some were history. There were two in English. One taught poetry and one taught creative writing. The other was just my freshman composition teacher, an elderly woman who was fabulous. Then in the history department there were several history professors, including two I stayed in touch with. Once I graduated I went into the Air Force for three years and was a training officer for a B-52 wing. When I graduated at the age of 21 I was very immature. I was slightly more mature at the age of 24 when I started graduate school.

Q: What year did you graduate?


Q: Then you went into the service. Had you been in ROTC?

A: Yes. My service was an incredibly important experience for me, largely because I met a lot of African Americans.

Q: Where did you go for basic training?

A: Selfridge Field in Michigan. I worked at Lackland Air Force base as a second lieutenant. My plan was to fly. I went down there and passed the preflight physical. They said,
“You can’t do this for three years. You’ve got to do it for five and a half years. Then we may let you out.” I knew I wanted to go to graduate school. That’s one thing that I can’t quite explain, why I knew that. But at the end of my sophomore year, a fraternity brother asked me, “What do you plan to do with your life?” I said, “Well, I’m going to go to graduate school and get a Ph.D. and become a history professor.” I don’t really know where that came from, except that my father…. We had a room in our house called the library. It was a wonderful room, lots of history books. Also, at one time he took me and my younger brother, who was a Yale student, aside and said, “Does either one of you plan to become a doctor?” We both said no. He said, “Thank goodness. It’s a terrible life.” If he had it to do all over again, he would become a history professor. So that clearly was part of my thought process as well.

Q: You said you were in a fraternity in college.
A: Right.

Q: Did you live in the fraternity house?
A: I was the president of the fraternity and I loved it.

A: Which fraternity were you in?
A: Phi Gamma Delta, known as the Fijis. We were the Fijis. We had no house mother. It was a pretty rough and tumble existence. As president I tried to maintain some control. But I enjoyed the situation very, very much.

Q: You said that one of the things that you got out of your military service is that you met African Americans.
A: My best friend was a B-52 pilot. Even in Detroit it was so segregated that I knew no African Americans. We did have an African American maid. And I played a lot of
baseball in Detroit. Occasionally we would encounter black teams. I don’t remember actually ever playing against an all-black team, but occasional black players. But we would play at these big baseball fields. There might be eight diamonds. There would be a lot of people playing down there, including African American baseball players. It was kind of unpleasant at times. We would kind of jostle each other and this and that, but I didn’t really know anybody until I got into the service. My best friend at one point was killed in a tragic B-52 crash. He was a B-52 pilot, maybe two or three years old than I, but we became good buddies. Then my commanding officer was black. We were very close. At one point I ran a—this was one of my first jobs—I ran a group of volunteer wives. I was the Family Services Officer. A number of those wives were African American. So I got to know them. I was just so blown away by the whole experience. When I got to graduate school, which was at the University of Wisconsin, in my first class someone asked, “What do you plan to do?” I said, “I want to study black history.” So that’s how I got started.

Q: So you changed your ideas about what black people were like, I suppose.

A: Well, I had read Langston Hughes, like everybody. I had read *The Invisible Man* and I had read some important books by black writers. And I listened to a lot of music. I think that was part of this influence as well. It wasn’t really until the Air Force that I got to know African Americans. For example, the pilot who was killed, he and I spent evenings drinking bourbon and listening to jazz and talking about things that people talked about. So that was really very important. Then my commanding officer and I had lunch about every day. We would shoot pool for an hour or two afterwards. He was a very good guy. And I got to know their families.
Q: Was your service always in the United States?
A: Almost always in Maine, in Bangor, Maine.

Q: Then when you got out you decided to go on for your master’s. Where did you go?
A: I went to Wisconsin. One of my teachers at Denison had gone to Wisconsin. He had quite an influence on me. I knew it was probably one of the top five history departments in the country then. My sister wanted to go to Michigan as well. She actually went to Wisconsin as an undergraduate. She had married and she was there, too. So there were a lot of reasons for me to want to go to Madison. And I was very glad I did.

Q: That’s a much larger school than your undergraduate school.
A: Yes. The undergraduate school was about 1,400. Wisconsin was 30,000 or 40,000. I’m not sure how big it was at that time. You know, you create your own little existence at these places. So I lived in graduate student housing. I was married and soon after I got there I had a son and then a daughter.

Q: When did you get married?
A: In 1959.

Q: What was her name?
A: Her name was Linda Stumpp. She had gone to Denison. So we married in December 1959 after graduation. Soon after we got to Madison she had a baby. We had a son in February.

Q: What is his name?
A: He is William III. Now there is a William IV as well. We also had a daughter born in Madison, Kate. So William and Kate were born in Madison. I only spent three years there. I passed my comprehensive exams and languages, etc. Then I had an opportunity
to go to work for Dr. James Bryant Conant, Harvard’s president and a well-known chemist, to help him on his autobiography. So that was in 1965. I was in Madison from 1962 to 1965.

Q: What year did you get your master’s?
A: 1964. And I passed my comprehensive exams for the Ph.D. That was in 1964. I was kind of on a fast track. Then I had this opportunity to move to Washington to work for Conant. Conant had been one of the developers of the atomic bomb. He’d been one of the founders of the National Science Foundation. He had a lot to do with mobilizing science for the national defense, both during World War II and during the Cold War. Then he’d been the first U.S. ambassador to Germany after the war.

Q: How did you happen to get such an opportunity?
A: A mutual acquaintance. A professor had worked for Conant, and I knew him a little bit. He called my major professor. Those were the old days, probably no affirmative action. Somebody calls somebody else who says, “Yes, I’ve got a good guy for you.” I think part of the fact was that I had been an Air Force officer for three years. That seemed to be some evidence of my reliability or something. But by the time I went to work with Dr. Conant, and he was very nice to me, I have to say. I worked for him for two years. I went to work for him in 1965, still not sure how I felt about the Vietnam War. But clearly by 1966 I did. I was very much opposed to it.

Q: So he was writing his autobiography and what were you helping him with? Looking up facts?
A: I looked up some facts. I wrote my dissertation on him. I gave him a copy.
Q: This was for your Ph.D.
A: Yes, I wrote my dissertation on Conant and some of Conant’s activities. And I also worked with Conant. We would go to Harvard and spend a week or so there. I lived in Washington. He lived in New York. I would visit him in New York or he would come to Washington. There was another history graduate student from Wisconsin also who worked for him. He lived in Princeton, which is where Conant’s office was. He lived with us for a while too, he and his family. We were good friends. It wasn’t a bad experience but the one discordant note, I think, was the war.

Q: Did you have different opinions about it than he did?

A: One of the things that he had done, really beginning in 1940, was to become involved in pressure groups to try to influence American foreign and military policy. Prior to World War II it was a group called The Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies, which was chaired nationally by William Allen White. It was a committee to send military aid to the English and the Free French and the Chinese. Many of those people were interventionists, who thought we should get into the war immediately. Conant was one of those. After the war he got involved in a committee advocating for universal military service and various other things. During the Vietnam War he and a group of people including Harry Truman, Eisenhower, General Omar Bradley, and some others—and he was very much involved in this—formed a group called The Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam. So it was a pro-war organization of prominent citizens. In 1966 I had gone to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings. If you live in Washington, the first thing you do in the morning is get the Washington Post. It’s a wonderful paper. There was a list of committee hearings and what was going on. So I read “The Foreign Relations Committee. Testifying will be General James Gavin,” who
was a great World War II hero and was a prominent citizen and George Kennan, who is considered to be the father of the containment policy, and other people. And they all testified against the war. These were military people and famous diplomats. They said, “This is a tragic mistake.” So I think, beginning about that time, my views changed almost over night really. So there I was with Conant. So the second year we would talk about this. He was one of the people also involved not only in making the bomb but making the decision to drop the bomb. He was on the very Interim Committee, which advised Truman to do it. So there were just different things that came up. He was very genteel and gracious and very kind to me, really, but we certainly were moving apart politically and in other ways as well. By then it was 1967 and the world was changing so fast.

Q: There was a lot of unrest in Washington at that time too.

A: Well, there was quite a bit. Actually, in 1967 there were race riots in Detroit and Newark, New Jersey. I had studied the Chicago race riot for my M.A. thesis. So by the time I came out to KU in 1967, I was going back to that. That was one thing that was going on, race riots in Detroit and Newark. Dr. King was killed in 1968, and there were race riots every place. There were some antiwar protests. You are right. Some of that occurred after I got out here. But it was certainly beginning to build up. So I changed my mind on that. One of the things that Conant did for me and for his other assistant was to invite us to visit him at his country home in New Hampshire in the White Mountains. It was beautiful. We went up there and looked at his own personal papers and spent several days with him. It was just a nice thing to do. He didn’t have to do that. It was
just a way of kind of giving us a vacation, which he felt we deserved. So he was very nice and my goal was to write a biography of Conant. And he knew that too.

Q: Even though he was writing an autobiography?
A: It was an autobiography, but there was plenty of room for other studies, I thought. In fact, there now is a very good biography of him written by a young man I helped somewhat because I had all of this material on Conant. But I think because of the war and also because of Henry Kissinger and McGeorge Bundy, the so-called defense intellectuals, they were so hawkish on the war and, I thought, so arrogant, that I changed my mind about a lot of things. So when I got to KU in 1967 they hired me as a Truman- Eisenhower specialist. I talked to the chair and said, “Would you mind if I did a book on the Chicago race riot of 1919 instead of Truman and Eisenhower?” He said that would be okay.

Q: That had been your master’s thesis. Then what year did you get your Ph.D.?

Q: Was that also from the University of Wisconsin, even though you were in Washington?

Q: So this was your first job after getting your Ph.D. and you’ve been here ever since.
A: Well, I’ve been lots of places. I was here for two years and then I went to Johns Hopkins for a year. I finished the race riot book.

Q: Why did you go to Johns Hopkins?
A: They offered me a fellowship at an organization called The Institute of Southern History.

Q: So you were going to study Southern history.
A: No, I was going to write my book on the Chicago race riot. So they offered me the opportunity. They offered me some money to come out there.

Q: What got you interested in the Chicago race riots?

A: Well, my parents had both gone to the University of Chicago. My mother’s family was from (unclear) Kentucky. He was a country doctor. They eventually moved to Chicago in the 20s. He became a public health officer and taught at the University of Chicago. So they had lived there. When I went to Madison, it was only a two-hour drive from Chicago. My first graduate paper was on what was called the “Red Summer” of 1919. It was on all these race riots, Washington, D.C., Omaha, and elsewhere.

Q: And they were thought to be Communist?

A: Some people thought they were. There was also the Red Scare of 1919 and 1920. A lot of radicals were deported, including Emma Goldman. They were deported and sent to the Soviet Union. Most of them were totally harmless, but there was some anticommunism clearly. The book that I wrote had a chapter called “The Red Scare and the Red Summer.” The Red Summer was the summer of racial violence, probably 24 race riots, lots of lynchings and 38 people killed in Chicago. So it was a very bloody summer. It was also the summer when there were some bombings. John D. Rockefeller’s house was bombed and the attorney general’s house was bombed. There was the anticommunism as well as a very turbulent year. So I focused on the great black migration north to Chicago and other cities, competition for jobs in the stockyards, competition for housing and political power, etc. Then all of that erupted in the summer of 1919 in this horrible race riot. So I went to Johns Hopkins University. My salary was
pretty low, of course, like most people, but it enabled us to move to Baltimore. I had a nice office at Johns Hopkins.

Q: So you took a leave of absence from KU?
A: Right.

Q: And you were at Johns Hopkins writing this book for a year.
A: And I was promoted while I was away. So I think they thought I wasn’t coming back. I was publishing a lot at that time, including this book. I was publishing things in The History of Higher Education and some of the Conant-related stuff. I did publish a lot. So I came back here in 1970 and by that time KU had changed so much.

Q: Well, you were away when a lot was happening.
A: I was here from 1967 to 1969. One of the last things I witnessed—I didn’t participate—was the disruption of the ROTC parade in Memorial Stadium in May 1969. Wescoe was still here and my colleague Amby Saricks was down on the field as the Provost. Wescoe ran his finger across his throat and they cancelled this demonstration. A lot of these young people were thrown out of KU. I could see that the change was coming.

Q: Then when the Kansas Memorial Union burned you were at Johns Hopkins.
A: Right. I came back in July and one of the first things that happened after I came back was Tiger Dowdell, a black student, was shot to death by the police. That was in July. Two or three days later Nick Rice, a white student, was shot and killed right across the street from this building. So I began to come up to the Rock Chalk Café and the Gaslight and talk to people. Things had changed a great deal. I wasn’t here for the fire or the aftermath of Kent State. My friend David Katzman was here. He had come to take to
take my place here the year I was in Baltimore at Hopkins. Then he stayed and we became very
dear friends. He was very much involved with what was going on, protesting the curfew
and other things in the spring of 1970. But things really had changed and I was changing
too. I was undergoing all kinds of change. I came back for two years and started a
biography of W.E.B. Du Bois, the black writer, a genius, I think. So in 1972 I went to
Harvard to what was called the Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History
and spent the year at Harvard and wrote this book on DuBois and then came back here in
1973. Then I taught for two years. That was sort of our plan. The university, to its
credit, was very encouraging of my efforts to find outside support for the books that I
wanted to do. I never neglected my teaching and I was always able to get outside funding
from the National Endowment for the Humanities and these various other universities.
Then in 1975 I was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship and I took that along with another
fellowship from the Truman Library, plus my sabbatical. I took two years off.

Q: Where did you go?

A: I was here much of the time. I was in California much of the time. I think it was sort of
transformational. I didn’t get a lot of work done, I have to say. I did a lot of traveling. I
met a lot of people. I worked on the Conant project. I went back to that, trying to
salvage something. As I said, I had published a few articles but I had lost a lot of interest
in that project. I had put a lot of time in on it and I didn’t want to give up on it.

Q: So you hadn’t yet written a book about Conant?

A: No, the book that I wrote was called Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919.
The second book was on W.E.B. Du Bois. I had done more research on Conant but I had
just lost interest. But I did take those two years off. Then in 1980 or 1981 I had a
wonderful opportunity provided by the university. That was to become what was called an Interuniversity Professor and spend one solid year free of teaching and administrative responsibilities studying in another discipline. So I studied developmental psychology with Francis Horowitz and John Wright and Althea Huston. The reason I wanted to do this was that I had decided to write a book about American children during World War II. It was called “Daddy's Going to War:” The Second World War in the Lives of America’s Children. So I left black history and I left Conant as well and went into this other field of children’s history. I had this year to study with these fabulous scholars, who are also just wonderful people. So I learned a great deal, I think, about how children develop and how their development might be altered by historical circumstances, like a father going off to war or migrating from one part of the country to another.

Q: I heard you talk about this book at an oral history conference several years ago. I believe you said you had started out to write a rather different book.

A: Right.

Q: Then you got the idea to ask for letters from people about what they remembered.

A: It started out when I was studying developmental psychology. I knew the social history. So I wrote this long manuscript which the publisher, which was Oxford University Press, seemed happy with. But I wasn’t happy with it because the voices of the children were not in this manuscript very much at all. So I tried to figure out what to do about this. I had received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. I had a little bit of money left over. So I decided I’d write the one hundred largest newspapers in the country and ask these newspapers to run my author’s query. “I’m doing this book. If you are a homefront child, would you share your memories with me?” As I said in that
talk, the letters just flowed in. I couldn’t believe it. I was dating Kathryn Nemeth, whom I subsequently married. We took these letters, boxes of letters, up to northern Michigan. As we drove up there, we read them to each other. They were just unbelievably moving. Powerful, wonderful. I eventually got, I think, about 2,500 letters. So then I had to figure out how to use these letters, which involved a kind of a complicated little system I set up, all done by hand. I just had to get up earlier and earlier every morning to process these letters.

Q: I suppose you put actual quotes from the letters in your book.
A: I wrote to these people, like you, to ask for their permission and they signed release forms. So I was able to quote from them.

Q: Was it something like what Studs Terkel does with his books?
A: Yes. And the letters dealt with everything from father absence to anti-Semitism to war bonds. Everything was in there.

Q: It must be awfully hard to go through all those and come up with what you can use.
A: It was. It was quite a meticulous labor on my part. One thing for scholars in the humanities especially, we work very much on our own. It is a very solitary endeavor. So in order to try to make sense of all of these letters it was very time consuming and required meticulous attention. But they were fabulous. So I rewrote the book. And the book came out in 1993. It was very different from the book I had started on. But I was very pleased with it as well.

Q: I think you said that you were married to someone different at this time.
A: No, when the letters came out, I was dating someone. Then subsequently we were married.
Q: What is her name?
A: Her name is Kathryn Nemeth Tuttle. She is currently an associate vice provost in the Office of Student Success. She has a Ph.D. from KU in the History of Education. She was a student of mine in 1970. Then we had our first date in 1987. In the eighties I went out to Stanford, 1982-83 I was at Stanford.

Q: What were you doing at Stanford?
A: Well, that was the year after I had studied with Francis Horowitz and others while I was here. I got a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities and a fellowship at the Stanford Humanities Center. So I went out there. Throughout this period I also had become involved in a big project to write the history of the United States with five other people from other universities around the country.

Q: Oh, my. Was that to be several volumes?
A: No, it was a text book. It was a 1,000 page textbook. It was a wonderful book. So I was involved in writing six editions of that. The first edition of that came out in 1982. It became the best selling U.S. history textbook. And it was very different from anything that had come before.

Q: What was different about it?
A: Well, it wasn’t just a top down history of the U.S. that focused on presidents and Supreme Court justices and generals and captains of industry. We did have that, but it also came from the bottom up. So it was about African Americans, it was about women, it was about working class people, different ethnic groups. It was about the family and religion and school and different influences that are important in people’s lives, beginning with childhood. So it was a different book, but it was published by Houghton-
Mifflin and they did a wonderful job with it. It became a best-selling textbook. So I did six editions of that. I did the part from 1929 to the present. So I always had to write the last few years.

Q: So your specialty then has been American history but more recent American history.
A: Right. I began to teach a course on America in the 1960s.

Q: What are some of the courses you have taught here?
A: I taught African American history, America in the 1960s. Ted Wilson, who is a professor in history, and I for years taught a colloquium on the history of the United States from 1920 to the present. Every graduate student in American History had to take that course. I taught that frequently. I taught a lot of courses in the honors program, which were mostly recent American history courses or African American history. So I’ve really enjoyed the teaching so much. I won the HOPE Award. I was just so pleased about that. That was in 2000. I also did something after being in the History Department for 33 years. I left the History Department and moved into American Studies with David Katzman and Norm Yetman and Ann Schofield.

Q: Was this a new department?
A: No, it had been established in the 1950’s. But it had had its ups and downs. We were part of the effort to revive it. It is now a very strong department. It is a top ten department in the country among American Studies departments. I had personal reasons for wanting to leave the History Department. And I also was very excited about it. David and I left and two secretaries came with us. We went over to Bailey Hall. We have wonderful graduate students, lots of international students.
Q: What do American Studies students do when they graduate, or is this mostly a degree where they go on to graduate school?

A: You could probably ask the same question of people in history or English or political science or whatever. Some become doctors, some become lawyers, some do graduate work in American Studies. Some of them go into Museum Studies, which is another program here. They do all kinds of things. One of my very best students teaches yoga downtown. One is an actress in New York. They do all kinds of things.

Q: Have you ever had administrative responsibilities?

A: Not really. In the History Department I was director of graduate studies for a while. But I think one of the reasons that I have maintained some enthusiasm for what I do is that I haven’t done that kind of stuff. I’ve had to go to a minimum of meetings. I’ve had responsibilities for quite a few doctoral students. One of them came to visit me yesterday from Washington, D.C. She teaches International Health at Georgetown University. She is a Ph.D. in American Studies. But she teaches about Africa, HIV/AIDS etc. She’s gone in a different direction but she’s taken the skills that I think she picked up in American Studies. She and her husband have two little children. They are German. She came to visit yesterday. I think one of the things that has really been fun, especially in American Studies—I’ve had quite a few Ph.D. students in history as well—is working closely with these people, who become professionals, finish their dissertations and then write books. That is the ultimate payoff. I have had quite a few students write books.

Q: I was going to ask if there were former students who you remembered who have gone on to greater things.
A: This woman who teaches at Georgetown, her husband is with the World Bank. They are moving to Tanzania. But she just had a book published, which is called *Voices from Haskell*, which is the study of Haskell students from the founding of the school in the mid 1880s until the 1930s. It is a fabulous book. My students have written books. One of them is called “This is America? Lawrence, Kansas in the 1960s.” That book is of great interest. Then there is a wonderful study of the Civil Rights Movement in Wichita. That book has won several awards. The first sit-in was in Wichita, not in Greensboro, North Carolina, but in Wichita in 1958.

Q: I didn’t know that. I guess I didn’t know it began that early.

A: People just sort of overlook Wichita, which is too bad because it was an extraordinarily creative and brave effort on the part of these young people.

Q: At that time certainly.

A: And they won. They desegregated the lunch counter at Dockum Drug Store in Wichita. Eventually the desegregation of all the Rexall Drug Stores in Kansas.

Q: I’m sure you’ve been on committees. Any you particularly remember?

A: Yes, there is. One of the most rewarding experiences I’ve had at KU was in 2002. I co-chaired the Langston Hughes International Symposium. Langston Hughes was born in 1902 and grew up in Lawrence for 10 years of his childhood. In 2002, if he had lived he would have been 100 years old. So we, Maryemma Graham from English and I chaired a committee to honor him. It was called “Let America Be America Again:” An International Symposium to Honor the Life and Work of Langston Hughes. Alice Walker, the poet and novelist, came. Danny Glover, Ishmael Reed, performance artists, dancers, all kinds people came, scholars from literally all over the world from five
continents. There were, I think, about 600 people here. It was just for me such a great experience. We spent a lot of time on this fundraising, working through Continuing Education, which was really helpful. So we had most of it right here at the Union. That was probably the most rewarding administrative experience I’ve had at KU. I also chaired the Langston Hughes Visiting Professor Committee. Over the years, every year for one semester KU brings in a visiting scholar. Most of them are African American. We bring them in, again, because we have this connection with Langston Hughes but also to see whether they might like to stay or whether we’d like them to stay. So there are some wonderful faculty additions, people who came here initially as Langston Hughes Professors and who have stayed. I’ve done quite a bit in the area of African American Studies, but those are the most rewarding.

Q: You mentioned receiving the HOPE Award. Have you had other awards?
A: You know, I think I’ve had a wonderful run of awards. I got a Kemper Fellowship, a Higuchi Award and the Chancellor’s Club Career Teaching Award. I think those were both in 2004. Then in 2006 I received the Steeples Service to Kansans Award. So I feel well honored and well recognized. I’m so pleased, I think, especially with the HOPE Award and the Higuchi Award. The Higuchi Award is for research accomplishments in the humanities and the social sciences. I am very honored to be included with some of the people who have gotten it over the years. Then the last thing I did in 2007 my wife and I went to the Netherlands and I became the John Adams Distinguished Fulbright Chair at a wonderful university in the Netherlands. So we spent the spring semester of 2007 there.

Q: How did you like living in the Netherlands?
A: We had a wonderful time. I told them I wanted to teach on Wednesdays. Why Wednesdays? I wanted a six-day weekend. It made them a little unhappy, but we did travel a lot. We just had a wonderful time.

Q: You taught in English, I suppose.

A: Their English is fabulous. That made it very, very easy. Their English is wonderful. They are very inquisitive, very knowledgeable about the U.S. Of course, the election talk was beginning even then, about Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama.

Q: What were you teaching?

A: I taught African American history and I taught America in the 60s.

Q: You belong to professional organizations, I suppose. Which ones?

A: The one that I probably appreciate the most is called the Organization of American Studies, which is all historians of the U.S. anywhere in the world, really. Most of us are in the U.S., of course. The American Studies Association. I’ve been very active, frankly, in another organization too. This is sort of one of the reasons I got the Steeples Award. I’ve been very active in the Association for the Study of African American Life and History. Especially, there is a branch of this organization in Kansas City. I’m on the board of directors. So that’s meant a lot to me. Then I was elected to a group called the Society of American Historians, which is about 250 historians. It is for recognition of literary excellence in the writing of history and biography. So that was nice.

Q: Have you held offices in some of these?

A: Yes. On the nominating committee, nothing big.

Q: Have you been involved in community activities in Lawrence?
A: I have been quite a bit over the years. What I’ve been involved in deeply the last four or five years is—this comes out of the Langston Hughes Symposium—I am co-chairing an effort with the Rev. Verdell Taylor from St. Luke A.M.E. Church in East Lawrence to save the church, which was about ready to fall down. So we have raised quite a bit of money. We have to raise a little bit more. But in 2010 this church will be 100 years old. The congregation was begun in 1862 by people who had escaped to Kansas on the underground railroad, people who had fought alongside John Brown. So it is a very historic church. It was the church that Langston Hughes attended. So it is historic for that reason as well.

Q: Does it still have a thriving congregation?

A: The congregation is small and it is quite elderly, at least at this point. We are hoping that once we are done with what we’re doing it will attract some good attention to the church. For what we are going to do we need $283,000. We have raised about $250,000, so we are getting very, very close. In the last few months we have done very well with our fundraising. It would stabilize the church from the top down. But it would also involve taking out a false ceiling that’s in the sanctuary and reopening this vaulted ceiling that’s there that’s been hidden from view for many years with these pressed tin panels all around. The upper half of the stained glass windows haven’t been seen since 1972, when they put this false ceiling in. So we’ll take that out, expose the wonderful stained glass, the vaulted ceiling, replace little places where tiles are missing, put in new heating and air conditioning, new carpeting, paint the sanctuary. It will be beautiful. So we’re hoping to put the fundraising to bed fairly soon, and I think we will, and then begin the construction
sometime this summer. You’ll be reading about it. So I’ve been very much involved, and also in the NAACP here in town, but not too much.

Q: So they have an active chapter here.
A: Yes.

Q: There really aren’t a large percentage of black people in Lawrence, are there?
A: No. For a book entitled *Embattled Lawrence*, which is about the history of Lawrence, I wrote a chapter on African Americans in Lawrence from the 1850s to 1960. Around the turn of the 20th century probably 20 to 25 percent of the population was black. Now I suspect it is three or four percent. It was, and is, a very segregated town.

Q: Still?
A: Still.

Q: Since you are retiring, what do you plan to do in retirement?
A: Well, I’m working on the church project and I want to get that done sometime in the next few months. I’ve gotten very interested in local history, partly because of this *Embattled Lawrence* book that we did.

Q: You wrote this with somebody else?
A: This book was edited by Dennis Domer and Barbara Watkins. It was published by Continuing Education. It came out of a television course that we did about 10 or 12 years ago on Channel Six. KU, through the Humanities program, has offered a course over the years called Biography of a City, Rome, Rio, Los Angeles. We decided that we would do Lawrence. So we did Lawrence, with wonderful lectures by all kinds of people. Then those were put together in this book called *Embattled Lawrence*. For me, again, some of that comes out of the Hughes symposium and the church project, some very interesting
things about the black population in Lawrence, who they were and what they did and where they came from. It’s really quite fascinating. There’s so much to be told. So my wife and I—she has a Ph.D. in the History of Education—one thing we might do and we have talked about it, is to write a book about KU, which we would call Freedom Struggles, an adjective or a noun or Freedom Struggles, a noun and a verb, about freedom struggles at KU from the beginning to the present, dealing not only with the Civil Rights Movement but also the gay rights movement, the women’s movement, the movement in the 1980s to divest from South Africa. We have a lot of good material to do that with. And I also am thinking of writing a book called Portraits in Black Lawrence to focus on some of these individuals and some of these families, not just Langston Hughes but others who lived here who have been totally forgotten. So I’ve got a few things like that in mind. But like most grandparents, we want to visit our grandchildren and want to be free to travel.

Q: How many grandchildren do you have?
A: We have four.

Q: Do they live somewhere else?
A: They live in Boston and Minneapolis. All my kids went to KU. They did great.

Q: What is your assessment of KU, your department, past, present, hopes for the future, that kind of thing?
A: Well, I think with the tuition enhancement that began a few years ago, we were able to use that money to hire some incredibly good people. So on the up side, I think, certain departments at KU—and History is one of them, Sociology is another, American Studies is another—have hired some incredibly impressive young people. And they are people
from the best possible graduate schools. They are just extraordinary in many ways. So from that perspective I'm very enthused about the future. I think it is exciting to contemplate. I think that the university will be able to raise admissions standards. I think that’s coming along. The regents might give the university the authority to do that. And that should be helpful. There are a lot of students who shouldn’t be here. They just always thought they would be here, so here they are. In fact I think there is an additional problem, students who psychologically are a little bit off. They should not only not be here, they should be somewhere else. That’s a whole other story. But I do think I have had such extraordinary students here. I’ve had opportunities to teach in the honors program and with graduate students and people like my wife, who was the valedictorian of this small high school senior class and came to KU and did beautifully. There are a lot of people like that, very smart. They are well educated already. A lot of them know how to read and write. I’m enthusiastic about that.

One thing that has me a little distressed is the commercialization that has taken place at KU. A lot of it takes place in the Athletic Department. There is so much of it. But I think it is every place. Money talks. I know, for example, a few years ago that the Koch family from Wichita, a very right-wing family, were boosters of the John Birch Society. They provided the money and the university hired a man who came here. I got to know him but he was so conservative. He thought that the free market should determine everything. He became the Koch professor of Business and Law. And he taught courses under the auspices of the university, first of all to judges from Midwestern states who would come here for a couple of weeks. The burden of the course was to prove that the free market could solve all problems, racial discrimination, gender
discrimination, improve the environment, do all these wonderful things. You didn’t need any government regulation at all. In fact, they were a problem. So this is what they would teach the judges. They’d be here for two weeks and the other two weeks they would go to Boca Raton or Sun Valley or someplace, all paid for by the Koch family. Then they had another program. That was for men and women who had just been elected to the Kansas legislature. So they’d come over here for a seminar of several days, same thing. You don’t need to pass any laws to regulate the environment, to try to improve race relations. The market will solve all problems. So I think there is way too much of that around. There are various lecture series here. The Vickers lectures and I think the other one is called the Chandler lectures in the Business School. They bring in all these people. There is no diversity of opinion. The free market can solve all problems. It is CEOs from big companies. It was Ann Coulter once. It’s unfortunate that money speaks so loudly.

I do think when I came here, and I suspect when you did too, it was a much more democratic institution. Now, for example, as you drive around the campus you will see all these numbered reserved parking spots. It didn’t used to be that way. The chancellor had his spot. He was the only one. We didn’t have all of these other reserved parking spots. Some people are on kind of a power trip and they think that they need it, so they got it and they flaunt it. I think that’s really rather unfortunate. We do have an opportunity now with a new chancellor coming in and a new provost coming in to make some changes. But my fear is that there will be more of the same. It would be very difficult to bring somebody in and try to resist some of these strong commercial impulses.
It’s probably not going to happen. So I have both some optimistic feelings about the future and a little bit of pessimism really about higher education in general.

I’m very happy to have spent my career here. And I’ve come and I’ve gone and I’ve had opportunities to leave permanently too. Some places which people might consider better universities, I don’t know. But you know what happens. I was married, had three children, got divorced.

Q: I think you mentioned two children. Did you mention the third?
A: I had three children with my first wife.

Q: Who is the third one? I don’t think you mentioned that.
A: His name is Andy. He graduated from KU. He is a letter carrier in Lawrence. He is the president of the Letter Carriers’ Union. So you don’t want to leave your children behind. If I took a job at some other place that’s what would have happened. So I always came back. I think Lawrence has changed in some really nice ways, the downtown and the great restaurants. My wife and I live in Old West Lawrence in one of those wonderful old Victorian houses.

Q: Those are beautiful.
A: So we are very happy, with our dogs and our neighbors and the kids who come to see us. She has a son as well. He’s here in town, which is great. We are happy to be here.

Q: Is there anything else you’d like to add that I forgot?
A: You did a great job, lots of great questions. Of course there are a lot of other things we could get into. I was thinking about what I probably shouldn’t talk about. There’s all kinds of stuff.

Q: Well, what shouldn’t you talk about?
A: You’ve heard enough about my personal life, I think. You can’t live in a place for 41 years without having a few skeletons in your closet, I’m sure. I’ve had a great time here in town. I’ve done a lot of partying. I’ve played a lot of softball.

Q: Oh, you play softball? Is it a University team?

A: I used to play for the History Department team. There was much more of that. I’m not sure there are any departmental teams now. But when I first came here there were. We played English, French and Sociology. When I came here, which was in 1967, the History Department hired seven people. There were scores of new faculty members arriving. We were very fortunate. This is one of the things that you should make a note of. I’m sure it is not news to you, but being born in 1937, they call us “the lucky few.” That’s one term used for our generation, the lucky few. This was the depths of the Great Depression, especially in ’37 things got bad again. There weren’t that many people born. There weren’t that many babies born. So I got my Ph.D. in 1967 and here are all the baby boomers arriving. So being born into a small cohort to serve the needs of a much larger cohort.

Q: Lots of jobs.

A: Yes, there were lots of jobs. So many of us came at about the same time. In fact, two weeks ago I was a speaker at a dinner for a group of faculty who had come here, I think, between the years 1966 and 1969. Jerry Michelson in Slavic Studies gets us together about two or three times a year. We meet at Macelli’s. So we met there two weeks ago and I talked about what my perceptions of Lawrence in the late 1960s were, what I saw going on in town and on campus and then led a discussion for everyone to chime in. It was really, really fun. I don’t know all these people, but I know most of them and some
of them very well. So that’s been one really nice thing. People who came later, some of those cohorts are very small, people who came in the late 70s or early 80s. Those were sort of tough years, I think. But for us, we were very fortunate, I think, to get our degrees when we did. There were lots of jobs. Even now, there are hardly any jobs.

Q: Yes, I know.

A: In so many fields, including my field.

Q: Is that a problem for your students now?

A: Yes. I only have one Ph.D. student left and one M.A. student. The M.A. student is from Africa and he’ll be going back there. The other student is terrific. She’ll be okay. She’ll find a good job. But I would hate to have a bunch of students out there, some of whom were good and some who were mediocre and try to place them. Very discouraging.

Q: Okay, I guess that’s it, then.

A: It was nice to talk to you.