

Dan Williams Interview Transcription

February 12th, 2021

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

This is Sylviane Greensword, I am here with Dan Williams. Today is February the 12th, 2021 and we are recording for the Oral History Project with the Race and Reconciliation Initiative. Dan Williams, thank you for joining us today. We appreciate you taking the time to conduct this rather informal interview with us, and we're looking forward to hearing what you have to say with the vast institutional knowledge that you are bringing to this Oral History Project. So, let's start by telling us a little bit about yourself. How did you become acquainted and affiliated with TCU?

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

Well, I first came to TCU in 2003 and that was after 15 years at a Southern university, a Southern impoverished state university and. And so, I was very glad to land here at TCU. I was originally in the English department and then in 2010 I switched over to the newly formed Honors College.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Very well. What were your expectations before you joined TCU?

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

Well, you know, every time you move there are push and pull factors and there were a lot of push factors to get out of my old university, which was struggling with its past, frankly, and is still struggling, and so coming to TCU was really a kind of personal salvation for me. And I have been quite happy here overall, no university is perfect but I have prospered and thrived during my time with TCU.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Very well. How about the demographics here? Any change over time since you first joined?

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

Well, I can come right to the point. I am old enough that I qualify for the first vaccines, I'll say that. And so, that gives me a longer view of the past and transitions and recent developments that some might have, and to me, frankly, what's happening on TCU's campus right now is remarkable. I have never, I've seen other programs like CRES, but I have never seen a movement like DEI take hold on the campus before as it has on ours, and I have never seen the momentum and enthusiasm for your current project Race & Reconciliation. So, I'm really glad to be a part of it in a small way. When I arrived here, students of color comprised, I think 8% of the school population. And now, today it's over 20%, and it is still starting to grow. I don't know

what the original numbers were in 2003 for faculty of color, but I know that has grown quite a bit since then. The changes I see overall are a much more diverse population. And our community willing to support even greater diversity. I'm old enough that my parents were Adlai Stevenson Liberals, back in the 50s. And I grew up in the 1960s and I was a little young, but I have some memories of what was going on and 1968 especially, which was a really difficult year for the United States.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Were you in Texas then?

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

No. I was, 1968 I was in a Methodist Boys boarding school as a young kid in Pennington, NJ. And I vividly, remember Martin Luther King's assassination. And we weren't too far from Trent, New Jersey and Camden, NJ, and there was a great deal of unrest.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

So, tell me about that part. You remember that day specifically? Can you walk us through what it was like for you to experience that?

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

Well, this was a small Methodist boarding school of maybe 400 kids, 500 kids total, and all borders and the school went in lockdown.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oh wow.

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

Because of fear of unrest. And it made enough of impact on me that I was really concerned about what was happening around me.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Did you imagine that Martin Luther King would have such an impact, such a lasting impact overtime, and that institutions would embrace his message the way they are today?

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

I remember him as a powerful figure. And eloquent figure. It took a few years for me to get around reading letters from a Birmingham jail, which I've taught many times and had a great impact on me. So no, I could not imagine that we would have an MLK day and a Black History Month. At that time, it was still quite binary black and white.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

And there was some suspicion on both sides. I mean, this was also the time of the Vietnam War,

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Correct.

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

And honestly, that had a greater effect on me because I knew people who had gone to war and had come back mangled and wounded. But the unrest was all tide together right at that time.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

So, you hear people today say we live in an unprecedented time, and that's true, but I can certainly draw parallels to the late 60s and early 70s because that was an unprecedented time, too. It was a time of change. It was a time of instability. And those two things seem to go together as they seem to be with us today.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

That's very wise. So, I'm gonna fast forward to you working with the TCU Press. Can you tell us a little bit more about how you came to work with the TCU Press and what position you've had in this department? Well, I arrived, I was recruited to be the Chair of the English department and I was chair of the English department for six years. And very early on, I was invited to become a member of the TCU Faculty Board of Advisors for the Press, and I enjoyed that. And in about 2009, just about the time I was transitioning. The chancellor proposed closing the Press, and a lot of us were quite concerned. I actually remember getting an email from Jim Kolker, the interim director at that point. I was on my way out of town and I was at the DFW airport. I got this long email about possibly the Press closing and what could we do? And I immediately wrote the chancellor and offered all the reasons I could, why having a University Press was good for the university.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

What was the argument for closing it in the first place?

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

Well, our Chief Financial officer really makes no distinction between a University Press and a commercial Press. And thought that we were losing money for the university. But we really don't cost the university that much. At any rate, the Chancellor thanked me for my thoughts and said it is still under discussion. I offered, since the only real expense at the university are the salary lines, I offered to volunteer there for free to help it along. And the next thing I know, I get a call from Jim Kolker asking me to come over to her office. And I went over thinking this was just to

set up some volunteer hours, and it was like 10-15 minutes into our talk that I suddenly realized she was asking me if I was interested in taking over the directorship. And I did. I became director 2010 of TCU Press, and being a book person, I had some acquaintance but it was a steep learning curve.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Was it? Now tell us about that.

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

Oh well, I didn't know anything about the actual physical process of printing. I didn't know a lot of the old bookmakers' terms and so I was having to learn that. And university Presses have been in a pretty great transition for the past 15-20 years. And we're still undergoing rapid transition to new technologies, new business models and new conceptions of what a book is. And so, I immediately tried to learn as much as I could about what was happening around me. Luckily, we have a parent organization, the Association of the University Presses. And their conferences and the help I got were of great importance to me. And I still reach out to fellow directors around the country and to the directors of the Association of University Presses for help whenever I can. It is a great community.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

So, is the digital age and threats to the more traditional ways of conducting Press?

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

Well depends on who you ask.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

I'm asking you (laughs).

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

Well, our Chief Financial Officer might say that books are okay. They're no longer needed. You can get everything you want online. But the fact is, books have been a primary tool, vehicle of information distribution for 400 years, and they're not gonna go away. What's changing is the concept of a book and books are obviously moving online. They're expanding in capacities. It's really kind of thrilling to see some of the changes, we have now what are called enhanced books, which are basically books with soundtracks, video clips, anything interactive where people offer feedback and the knowledge continues to develop. Where a printed book is static. That's where the information is, and you can look it up and nothing more. But with today's books there are threaded discussions and blogs related to books, so you know it's an exciting exchange. One of the concepts I'm particularly interested in it, is our changing concept of authorship. We usually think of the author, especially the literary author struggling in some garret at night, you know, riding by candle. That's actually a romantic notion that hasn't been around with us that long. When books started, the writer was part of a team creating a book, and I think that's what it's moving back to again, because you have so many other people contributing the books. And to

me, that's exciting to see some of these changes going on. I read on a Kindle at night for pleasure and I think I have 400 mystery novels on it, that kind of thing was unheard of, I mean, it's just miraculous that you could have 400 books in your pocket at one time, 20-25 years ago. Now it's exciting to see the changes.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

I bet; it is. Now part of the Race & Reconciliation Initiative, part of what we do is research, research of text research in the literature, the literature about TCU, the literature from TCU, the literature by TCU, and then the TCU Press has been kind of a central piece for us. We want to look at how the TCU Press can help enhance and develop institutional memory. Can you speak a little bit about that and how books can contain the memory, communicate the memory, share the memory and what TCU has done in that regard?

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

Well, one of the first things I did was reach out to Dr. G, who simultaneously was interested in talking with me. And we are planning a book together on the history of African Americans on this campus. I'm sure everything you research, what you're doing right now will go into that book. TCU Press has always been able to publish books that contribute to our understanding of our campus, our community, our region, and the state. We publish elsewhere, but primarily most of our books tend to be related to Texana and Southwestern history, literature, and culture. I have some show and tells if you're ready for me now.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

I would love that.
So what do have here?

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

Well, along the way, several books have been written on TCU's history. Some are better known than others. I would say the first book is Randall Clark's *Reminiscences*. It was first published in 1917. He worked on it before he passed a few years later, and it's basically his recollections of his brother Addison and their work together and includes some nice chapters on what they did down in Thorp Spring and their later association with TCU. It was republished in '79, and then again in '86 and we're gonna re publish it, a facsimile of the original edition for the sesquicentennial. And so, this is really where- the first book I would tell people to look at if they're interested in the history of TCU. The second book to me, is equally fascinating. It was published in 1947 and it was written by Colby Hall. We have a Colby Hall on campus. It's not Colby Hall, Hall. But it is an honor of Colby Hall. He was a student here at the turn of the century, was a coach for one of the early football teams, and then talk classics and the Bible for a long time and became Dean at the college. In 1947, he published this history, and it is kind of a hodgepodge. I assigned up to students and they haven't loved it, but it had some really fascinating sections and it has invaluable information about the history of this campus. And so, I really suggest people reading it. This is our reproduction of the original Colby Hall book.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

We published our edition, 2014. And we included a sketch of Colby Hall in the beginning.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yea, it was 1947...

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

1947 was this publication. And we have still copies around.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

There's one in the library and Special Collections.

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

Oh yeah. Every time we publish a book, 2 copies of go to library, 2 copies go to the Library of Congress in Washington, so that our books will be preserved. But yeah, if anybody is interested in history, this is invaluable. For the Centennial, 1973, TCU Press published *A New History* and this one is by Dean Jerome Moore. And it was published specifically for to celebrate campus for the Centennial. Starts out with a little history on the Clarks, and then it basically covers everyone and everything on campus up to that point, 1973. And right now, I and a group of people are writing *A New History* for the sesquicentennial in 2023, and we're constantly referring back to Jerome Moore's book. As you know, I assume anthropologists do as well, historians build on other historians.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Absolutely.

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

And so, we look closely at what's been written about TCU before. Just to mention a couple other books, *Walking TCU*. This was published by Joan Hewatt Swaim, who grew up around TCU and then worked here throughout her life, and she is still with us, she lives in Granbury. This was originally written in 1992 and it basically is a walking tour of TCU, building by building. The history of each building when it was erected, why it was named after, and so it has invaluable information. And right now, we're working with a Dean Phil Hartman of Science and Engineering, who is going to update a new edition of this book.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Because the campus has changed.

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

We have a few more buildings since 1992. This last book is one that I just discovered about a year ago and it is a family history of the Clarks. It was published, "Thank God, we made it a family affair with education," written by Joseph Lynn Clark. It was, let's see, this is one of 200 copies.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm. And so, just for our audience, you may specify Josephine Clark is the grandson.

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

Grandson, yes. I'm not sure of which Clark, but yeah, he's a grandson of either Addison or Randall. And so, this has- I paid \$200 for this copy. It's difficult to find since only 200 are printed, but it has a wealth of information about the Clark family. And it was in this edition that I first came across Charles and came to Thorpe, and I think they're central to the teaching story.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Absolutely. Now as the archive team goes through the literature and I'm glad that you're mentioning Charlie and Kate Thorp. One of the things that is recurrent, one of the observations that our archives crew is finding is the scarcity of information about 80 black people associated with TCU. How can we account for that?

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

Well, I think this is one of the burdens of our own past. My own thoughts is that there was such a distinction made at that time of racist assumption about the different races themselves, that the really wasn't a lot of thought given. The Jarvis family, for example were wonderfully progressive for their time, like the Clark brothers, but still racist. They could not conceive of Black and whites going to school together at that time, they simply could not. And for that reason Ida B. Jarvis funded the original Jarvis College and Tyler, TX, which still exists today. And I think part of our own reckoning, at least what I would like to see is reproachment with Jarvis college because we share so many similar things in the past. It is a disciple school as well. In the 1970s, there actually was an exchange of faculty back and forth. It's about two-hour drive to Tyler and back, so it's not an easy commute three times a week by any means, but people did it. They thought it was important enough in the turbulence of the time, in order to reach out. And I would personally like to see something like that take place in the future.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

A couple of years before that, well, I think it was 1967, there was a actual exchange program where students from Jarvis came to TCU, stayed the week, and students from TCU visited Jarvis. now based on the literature of the time, the students from Jarvis stayed the whole time that they were supposed to, but the students from TCU did not remain at Jarvis. Do you have any information as to why?

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

No, I can only speculate.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Then let's speculate (laughs).

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

Well, the facilities themselves were probably less than what they had here at TCU. And they might not have been comfortable suddenly being the minority when they existed throughout their lives as part of a majority. I had a good friend, he arrived in '64, he's passed now, but he took part of that exchange. And he taught at TCU for nearly 40 years before he retired, and he told me that the exchange he had with Jarvis was still one of his favorite experiences.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

That's interesting. So now I'm fast forwarding in time again as we're discussing the publications from TCU Press. We're looking at narrative works that have been published in the 1990s. How can we still account for the lack of mention of any African Americans that joined TCU? I know that there are some brief chapters about integrations of the 1960s, but very little beyond that. The photographs include very, very little mention of Black presence, to where if somebody comes from the outside, they would almost believe that it is an all-white campus, when we know that it's not because we so proudly integrated in the 1960s. Well, technically before that, but the main campus in the 1960s. So, 30 years later, we would think that we would be more comfortable discussing the issue of race, what is still hindering us? Why is it such a taboo to this day?]

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

I think it's difficult for people, really to our present time, to discuss race, it makes people uncomfortable. I've taught slave narratives from the Antebellum period and students can get quite interesting reading about Frederick Douglass, but if I tried to move the discussion up to more contemporary settings, this was at my old university, it was difficult for me. I think, I hope, I believe we're over some of that difficulty right now. I really can't speak to the 1990s, but I can point to and actually I'll give you a copy of it, an interview that the TCU oral history project did with Darren Turner, where he was a young kid from the Houston area and came here in the early 80s to play football. And he talks about his first image of TCU and he frankly says, "oh, it's a white kid school. It's not for me." But his father pushed him in the direction of TCU because he wanted Darren to get the best possible education. And Darren came here and he has since devoted his entire professional career helping this university. So still in the 1980s, and I'm sure for the 1990s it is such a predominantly white school, that students of color coming here, faculty coming here of color are gonna find it awkward, or found it awkward, I should say.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

So, what can we do to ease this transition to modern time?

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

Well, I think right now we have a wonderful opportunity. Again, let me emphasize that throughout my entire life and higher education, which is approaching 40 years, I have never seen

anything like what is going on now and it gives my heart the deepest hope that real change is finally here. I have seen programs come and go that promised this or that, but this university has really put full support and to making these changes. And I am so proud of my colleagues and DEI. It is way past time but yet this moment is here and I think we cannot afford to lose this moment.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Now some critics of programs like DEI and the Racial and Reconciliation Initiative have made remarks, such as “we're not racists,” “we don't need to document anything,” like you say, you know, TCU has become more and more progressive. How do we start a dialogue with a population that still believes that there is no problem?

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

Well, as we know, people who deny they're racist, most of the time are simply demonstrating that they are. That's the way that conversation goes, unfortunately. I do remember one wonderful thing from the 1960s, a bumper sticker slogan, “If you are not part of the change, you're a part of the problem.” I think we have to take that message to everyone on campus, that the time has come to be part of the solution. I think all of us, myself included 200 years from now, people will look back at us and say, “they were damn racists.” But for our cultural context, we need to do the best we possibly can, to help go forward so that there is no more discrimination based on superficial characteristics like skin color, or religion, ethnicity. We have to involve everyone in this discussion, even the people who don't want to be a part of that discussion. If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem. There is no middle ground. You can't, and I've encountered this, instructors saying, “well, I'm not political at all. Politics has no place in my class,” and I really say the same thing for different reasons, yet that denial is a political statement as well.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

It is.

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

And you cannot be blind to the bigotry that goes on around you, especially now. So, I'm thrilled with what you're doing. I just think the world of Dr. G. He is a great colleague and I'm so glad he's on campus. And I am optimistic that a couple years from now, let's say for the 2023 sesquicentennial, Race and Reconciliation could be a major part of our celebration of this campus's history, and an essential part of its future.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

And what part do you see the TCU Press play into that future?

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

Well, provided we can overcome budget cuts. That have been difficult all across campus, but especially for the Librarian's Press. We will keep looking for books that will disseminate

information about the issues we need to address. Our mission is the dissemination and distribution- discovery, dissemination, and distribution of new knowledge and creativity. And I would love to do different books. I have approached Press and DEI and raised the possibility of the book about what's happened and what will happen. Dr G and I are going to collaborate on this history of African Americans on campus. Right now, I think in our publications pipeline we have two or three other books that I know will be of interest and contribute to these issues as well. So, luckily TCU Press, right now, has the chance to pick and choose what we publish. We still get 2-3 queries and manuscripts a week. And some we can easily say it just doesn't fit with us. Others we look at closely. But we're always looking for books, no matter what form that book might take, that will be of relevance to our community.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Do you get a lot of proposals from African American authors?

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

Not enough, some, and those that we get we look real closely with. I've been working on and off for more than half a dozen years with a woman who's writing history about African American education and public schools from the late 19th to early 20th century. And it's difficult in some ways because she, you know, she's a high school teacher. She doesn't have the scholarly background. And so, we work carefully to help her prepare the manuscript. And it's a time commitment, but it's one we gladly make. Another, and hopefully this will be of interest to a lot of people right now, this spring, we're gonna publish a book, a memoir by a Jonestown survivor. His mother, wife, and 6-month-old child died in Jonestown, and he survived, and it was a difficult transition back to a world in America he thought he had left. What was even worse is that Jonestown survivors were blamed for survival because so many others, 800 others succumbed. And I think that it is really a remarkable book because ultimately, Jim Jones, it's a book about demagoguery. And I jumped on the chance to publish it because I think it is relevant to our times.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

And how do you advertise such a manuscript?

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

Well, we do the best we can. We don't have a lot of money to reach major glossy magazines and advertise. We can't advertise, for example, in New York Times Book review because that costs thousands of dollars. So, we have to pick and choose, and we're much more selective, but we rely on our community to help spread the word. We rely on our authors and we try to get the best we can.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Well, very good. Just one last question if you were to send a message or give a testimony to other university presses, what would you tell them when it comes to racial integration? Whether we're talking about documenting racial integration on campus or integrating racial integration

amongst the authors that you choose to publish, or among faculty and staff in the university body. What message would you have for other universities?

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

To proactively seek collaborations on your campus and in your communities with people who might be able to contribute to a book, different kinds of books, different kinds of publications, especially for university presses today. Which sometimes administrators see as marginal programs, it's especially important to have the deepest roots you can on your campus, in your community. To do projects together to seek new authors, or simply to go out to different groups around and promote your books. Talk to retirees, talk to corporate businesses, but just reach out as much as you can.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Very well, this was Sylviane Greensword with Dr. Dan Williams. Today is February the 12th, 2021. Thank you, Dr. Dan Williams.

DR. DAN WILLIAMS:

Thank you.

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