

Interview Transcription of Dr. Cornell Thomas

August 31st, 2021

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

This is Sylviane Greensword I am here with Dr. Cornell Thomas and Dr. Frederick Gooding Jr. This is the interview for the Race and Reconciliation Initiative's Oral History Project. Today is August the 31st, and we are here meeting via zoom. Dr. Cornell Thomas good morning and thank you for joining us.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Good morning and thank you for having me.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

We are so honored to have you here; this is an interview that was you know very much anticipated and we've been looking forward to having you join the oral history project. So, we will start with the beginning. Can you tell us a little bit about your childhood, your upbringing, is there any particular influences that have shaped you to the person you are today, whether they are relatives of yours, or spiritual or religious influences that have really shaped you into the man that you are?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Well, I grew up in St. Louis, you know I was there until I went off to college. I guess the thing that influenced me the most growing up, and I'm the youngest of seven kids, was that I guess in a lot of ways my mother was domestic and she you know she'd go out; the butler guy would pick up all the ladies, drive them out to the suburbs and they'd do the cleaning and cooking and all of that, and bring them back. And one of the things that influenced me when I was young, she would bring back home magazines, like Look and Life and all of that and she would say, "you know people actually live like this," you know I lived in the hood, and she said that- she would say that, "if you work hard and go to college you might be able to live like this." And the other thing that influenced me greatly was my father worked for a small furniture store for over 40 years and he delivered furniture and so they-the company trusted him and valued him in ways. They allowed him to use the truck on the weekends for him and his buddies to move people from apartment to apartment for extra money and I would have to go to pick up the littles you know, but it never failed that after we're working in the snow, or the heat, or the rain and whatever; we'd have soda and sit down and he looked at me and said, "you know you can finish high school and get a job maybe like this, take care of your family, or you can go to college." I didn't even know what college was but I told myself I'm going to college because I'm not doing this my whole life, so that kind of gave me the motivation to go to college and then I think the other that influenced me was both my parents, so we lived in the hood but no one ever touched our things. It was because the hoodlums valued my parents cause my parents always talked about the

possibilities, and my father would always say, “don’t look at the kids where they are right now, look at them in the future.” And so, I always get that.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Did any of your siblings, older siblings go to college?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

No, most of them didn’t even finish high school. They’re much older than me. My mother, my father had a kid before he got married and my mother had four kids, and the youngest one was 12 and she thought she couldn’t have any more kids, then she had my sister. And then I came five years after that. So back in those days my mother was 40 years old, having a kid and those days that didn't happen. So, I came up, pretty much only people in the home when I was born was my sister and myself. And then my sister told my father she was pregnant and so my father told her she had to get married, but she knew that but she wasn't pregnant so she got married at 16. And she was gone, and she didn't have a kid till she was twenty. But so basically, I'm pretty much grew up as almost an only child. I have nieces and nephews older than me.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And you know, so kind of was an old soul, you know, grew up with older parents and they had already made their mistakes with the other kids. And so, it was a different world in a sense.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

I see. I like how you mentioned that you know you lived in the hood, but you never really experience any of those like those stereotypical, you know violent acts that that people-

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

I did, yeah, I did. Yeah, the only thing that saved me and the community was that, again my sister was five years older than me and all of the hoodlums like my sister. And so, I was treated like a little brother. So that's the only reason I survived. And they would look at me and they would say you're gonna make it out, you know, you don't do this, don't do that. I have my brother who is 16 years old and I tell people all the time, he gave me a PhD in the streets, and taught me how to avoid certain things, and how to handle myself with the police because I was stopped by the police all the time.

How to avoid getting beat up by the police and you know those kinds of things but-

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Can you elaborate a little bit on that, how did you survive?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

One of my first memories of police.

I was a Boy Scout and we had gone on a trip and I borrowed a tent from a friend across the street. And so, when we came back, my mother told me to take the tent back to Lewis and it was getting dark so she was looking out to him. I took the tent across the street, gave it to Lewis and I was coming back home with some comic books, and all of a sudden, I hear a riot rifle, you know, cocked and I heard someone say "halt". I turn around and there's a riot rifle in my face with police. Now I'm just 10 years old, okay. My mother starts cursing to get the police off me, telling me to come on in and all of that. And so, I go and he's following me. He's apologizing to my mother as we go steps and my mother still cursing about everything. He tells my mother that they were looking, some guy stolen a car, and they were looking for the guy who stole the car. They thought it was me and my mother told him I can't even reach the pedals. (laughs), But the amazing thing about this story is, it never traumatized me because that was kind of the norm in our community. So, it was just, I used to point that out to some of our students sometimes because they think kids are traumatized by those things. If it's the norm, it's just the norm. I never had a nightmare, nothing regarding that. So yeah, but yeah, we were stopped by the police all the time for no reason, just to be harassed. There was violence. You know, I've seen dead bodies and everything. You know I've had nephews that were gang bangers and murdered and murdered people. We've had to even, one of my nephews was murdered and they've actually had to cordon off the streets at the church for the funeral, and have plains closed people in the inside to protect us, and they escorted us to the cemetery. All is consequence, so that's a little bit of how I grew up.

And then so you know, I grew up in the hood. I went elementary school, but when I went to, so my elementary school early on was kind of racially mixed and my best friend was a Jewish kid named Samford Swae all the way up until the 4th grade when they had to move because the community is starting to get to Black and they were beating up the white kids. But when I went to middle school, I lived right on the border, where a middle school was all black. And that was 7th and 8th grade and so sadly I was the only kid in reading one. And so, my job in the ended up being in in the reading language hard class to just help other kids, that kind of stuff so, but you know, so you grew up that way, you just deal with it. But I always had my eyes on getting out and my way of getting out was to go to college and then try to figure out what college was and to go. So that's what I did.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

In what instances, did you ever get a chance to step out of your community before college?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Well, you know it's really interesting that I grew up in a huge family, but even now I have over 300 nieces and nephews and great niece and nephews, great-great nephews, we have a lot of family; and my mother used to tell me that I would just disappear. Like you know, when everybody's around and all that she'd say disappearing, sometimes I would be somewhere just reading a book, but a lot of times I would walk to the museum to in Saint Louis, there's Forest Park. It was a long way away, but for some reason I'd walk there and the only part of the

Museum I would go to in the basement where all the African arts, African exhibits, mummies, all that was. And the amazing thing was nobody ever bothered me. They never said, "hey kid," you know, "where's your parents" or anything, but I would just find myself there. You know I think the thing that influenced me the most was. one of the things that influenced me the most was my father did something when I was really young. He asked me one time about, I told him one day I think I was in the first second grade that the bookmobile came to the school because I library was just a little like little closet kind of area and the bookmobile came and they were all these books, you know and see the thing with my father was, he was 26 with four kids from my mother and his other kid before he could afford to get a car. And he told me that when he, and so he quit school when he was young because thought he was done, and so he taught himself to read. And so, we would read, he'd read the newspaper, I'd read my books, and then we have discussions. And he would always talk about the what ifs, or we look at the news and he'd say, "well, the newscaster said this, do you think that's the truth? Well, what if this? What if this part? He missed this part," you know, so I lived in this world of what if. I lived in this world, I called it the world of why? And I always ask why, "I said don't have to be that way, you know, and there are other ways of doing it," so that's the way I still go on life in this world of why.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

You're essentially suggesting that he taught you the skills-

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

To think.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

Critical thinking?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Absolutely.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

Right, what if-

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

I don't know if he knew what he was doing, but he did.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

Right.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And most of it, most of it occurred talking about baseball. And I could never understand, it took me awhile to understand why he didn't like the St. Louis Cardinals and then finally he started talking, I finally realized the reason why reason why he liked the Dodgers was because they

brought in the first Black baseball player. You know, and the St. Louis Cardinals back in the day, even though they may have three outstanding outfielders that were black, they would never put three black people in the outfield, they always have some older white guy out there playing. And he, you know, he would point out those things and ask why? Like we would see something he says, “why is that like that? I wonder why that's like that?” Now this is the guy that may have gone through 4th grade.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

But he made me think, you know and imagine how things could be instead of what things were.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

So, it looks like from a very young age you learned not to accept the status quo.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

I was never conformist. You know my father even used to say, “I don't know if those other degrees are gonna make you any smarter, but it's stuff that you are. You gonna need options.”

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

(laughs).

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

You know (laughs).

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

It's helpful.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Right, (laughs)

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

And so, what was your academic level in terms of your grades, were you a good student? Were you a nerd like me or?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Well, no, I was always questioning things. I was a good student. When we were in school back in St. Louis, we took the Owl to test basic skills and in the eighth grade when you took it, you were tracked, so you were either in track 1, 2, or 3. I was your college bound material, 2 you were just, you know, regular student. Track 3, if you didn't get out of track 3 by the time you were a Senior in high school, you just got a certificate of attendance you did not get a diploma. And so, I was in track 1, but I was kind of just you know, it was too easy, I would just do stuff. But then they started my junior year in high school, they started offering baseball tickets to straight A students.

so, I got straight A's so I can take my dad to the baseball game. But that was the only reason I went ahead and study. I think if you-

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

That's some motivation.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Give an example how stubborn I was, so I was in the college bound program. So junior year they wanted me to take Calc 2 and trigonometry or whatever, and I told the counselor I was going to the University of Missouri to become a band director and I didn't need that. And we had a, you know, we had a discussion about it. He called my mother, my mother said I had to take it, but back then we would have to give these little digital computer cards to the teacher the first day of class so that they would use that to register you. I didn't go to class. I went to the band hall to learn how to play French horn the whole semester. Nobody ever knew.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Wow.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

So, I've always had that kind of stubbornness and refusal to accept the status quo. And to kinda do my thing without being a bad person or, you know an overly aggressive person. But if I didn't think that was the right way to do it, I just didn't do it. And my whole TCU career was like that, so.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Just kinda of also enlighten us on, I know you worked in education afterwards, but how easy it is for, you know a kid to just slip through the cracks.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

I mean nobody noticed? Even that whole notion of tier three, I mean why even let them go through twelfth grade?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Right.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

If you know they're not college bound, or that they're academically failing, you know?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah, the only good part about it was in St. Louis we had a school called Farm and Tech. Most of those kids that were in track three. Either they attended that school for half day and they learned a trade, like woodshop or electrician kind of stuff or plumbing. They did provide that and so when they did get out, they had a trade.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

They were certified in something. As a matter of fact, when I was in 8th grade, I tried to go get myself set up to go to a Farm and Tech for half day in computer science. Back then computers weren't considered anything and my teacher said that's for those other kids, you're college bound.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Wow.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Look at what computer science is all about, right now.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right, right.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

But she didn't recommend because she said it was for those other kids.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Hmm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yep.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

So, did you play any sports?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

No, I didn't. I would play. I had what was called Osgood-Schlatter disease. Basically, my tendons in my knees would not connect, so anytime I got overly active, my knees would swell up. And but I didn't find out until I was vice president of Oklahoma State. I was having some severe back problems, couldn't get up, went to see the doctor, and the doctor start asking me all these questions and it was all these questions were around this Osgood-Schlatter disease thing. And he finally told me, he said, "you don't have a back problem, you have a foot problem. Your

feet are flat and you need arches because your knees give you problems because you already place an additional stress on them. You know, and so after I got the inserts, I never had any more knee problems. It took till I was almost 47 years old before I found out what the real problem was.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Better late than ever.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah, yeah.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

So, let's transition until your entrance and acceptance into college. Did you choose the institution or you did? Did you go to your university, your undergrad by default? What motivated you?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Well, there were two things: my band director had been one of the few black men to graduate from University Missouri back then, in music. And so, he was trying to talk me into going to university, Missouri. I was thinking that it would be too expensive and I was thinking about going to University Missouri in St. Louis so I could stay home and all of that and get a POG grant, finished without any debt. But our teachers went on strike that year. And so, when they came back, we were not going to finish school until the first part of July, and I said without the hell with that I'm going to summer school. So, I met with all my teachers to get my finals done. I was in I was in the Upward Bound and you know they have the program where you can go and get them six hours in the summer.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah, I used to teach there, yeah.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

I went up to Mizzou and took college algebra and English and took those two classes. My band director driven me up there to audition for the band so I had been there and all that. But so, I went up there and took those six hours and then I came back home and went to University, Missouri in St. Louis, and that way when I finished my undergrad, I think I owed like \$200 or 200 something dollars total in loans. That was it.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Wow.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

I wish I could say that.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Well, you know, President Reagan screwed all that up. When I was in school, we had this thing called the POG grant and it would really cover all of your tuition, it wouldn't cover room and board but they would cover all of your tuition. And when he came into office, he diverted all those funds to the States and put them into two categories and it destroyed the program.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Hmm. And so, while you chose music, you have that passion for music. Where did you see this medium?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Well, you know, I loved playing, I played trumpet but I loved music. I was really trying to decide whether I wanted to be a music band director or history teacher. I loved history.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Hmm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

But the reason I chose music was I thought you know, in schools there's only one band director, and then there's several history teachers and I don't want to go to meetings all the time, so I chose being band director because, you know, you don't meet all the time with other people like that, but that's the reason I chose it.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Okay, and then you got your, well you got your masters first, then your doctorate. Wh-

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Well yeah, no, but when I was in undergrad-

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Uh huh.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

About, I don't remember when sometime during my junior year I guess, we finally got a Black professor.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Ohh.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

He had actually gotten his undergrad from Jackson State, but he gotten his doctorate from Michigan State. And they brought him in and starting my senior year, he pulled me to the side and he said that I didn't know who I was. I let these white people intimidate me. I didn't know my true potential.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Ohh.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

I was gonna go to Washington University to work on a master's degree in music. He said you needed to be around your own people. So, he drove me down to Jackson State for homecoming and introduced me to all the people in the music department, and I went back that January and auditioned. I went back, I forgot where, but I went back and auditioned and so I got a graduate assistantship at Jackson State to work on my master's degree and my job was just to plan all the bands in the faculty quintet. And they would pay for me to go to school. That's how I ended up to Jackson State. So, but I was only there for 6 or 7 months because I saw the racism. I had joined a group of guys and we'd play a little jazz band, and one of the first jobs was at some restaurant or something and they wanted us to come through the back way and they wanted us to be quiet. They had all these rules and I thought this is crazy, I'm not staying here. And so, I had taken. Number of classes. I had started there and taking a lot of classes I took, I don't remember how many hours, but I was only short one course and my finishing my thesis and I had a high school buddy who had joined the Air Force and he used to tell me about how much money was having in Dallas. He was stationed in Abilene but he was having all kinds of fun coming to Dallas, you know partying and all this. And he actually sent me an application for the Dallas school system when I graduated from undergrad. So, I found it my father was telling me it's time to get a real job. I found it and sent the application in. I said it's warm down there, I won't go back to Saint Louis was cold, and I had a phone interview, had some kind of tests. And then went down and interviewed and got a job. So, I finished my last course at University of National Texas and I finished my thesis, you know, long distance to graduate, but only spent like six really seven months and actually in Jackson, Mississippi.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oh okay.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Then came to Dallas and started working as a band director.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Hmm well, thank you for clarifying that because you know I had gathered that you know, you get your entire your master's program, that you spent that that whole amount of time at Jackson State.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

No, only seven months. That was it, but I had I made lifelong friends with some of my professors during that time, but only seven months.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Okay. And how diverse was the faculty at the University of Missouri?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

We didn't have any diversity until my junior year and we got one Black-

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

But there was this one Black-

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Right, his name is Charles Hicks and he left soon after he left the Navy, he was there for three years or so and he went back up. I think he went to Wayne State. He left there, went to Wayne State, it was just too racist of an environment. As a matter of fact, it was so racist there that, for example, when we would take different instruments, like we take French horn or trombone violin, I would be the only kid to get to B and everybody else would get an A. And my some of my buddies, they were all white, but they somehow, they saw my grades at one point and they wanted to go protest. You know I said man I just wanna get out of here, don't you know, don't mess up- I know what's going on, don't worry about it. And so, that was the atmosphere.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Hmm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah so, and so, I'll give you a really good example of what the atmosphere was like. We had we would take music history, and this particular professor was notorious for failing a lot of kids, but if you, if you failed the first, you had music history for two semesters. If you failed the first semester, you would have to wait a year before was offered again, so you'd be a year behind.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Hmm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And on the first exam. You know part of the exam was called, we called it a drop and go test, where she would pay a portion of music and we're supposed to identify the era. And you know, genre right and all those kinds of things, the possible composer and it was- it wasn't a multiple choice, it was a narrative that we wrote. And so, I got my paper back and I think I got a D, maybe an F. And I'm looking at my other guys that buddies. I'm saying, "so what did I miss?" and naive as I was, I went to the professor, set up a time to go meet with her and she would say

she was saying things, “you didn't say this”, and I said, “no it's right here.” Then she said, well, I didn't see your name on the listening lab thing. I said, well, I think I would take the albums home because I was more comfortable listening to them at home and then this little cubby hole and then she said, “well no colored person has passed my class, I don't think I'm looking at one now.”

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oh,

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And I didn't say anything. I just said to myself, “you do now 'cause I'm gonna do all that I have to do to prove it.” So, I end up getting a B. She ended up not getting tenure, not just because of me, but because of her failing-

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Failing so many students.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

So, she ended up not getting tenure. But that was the environment. (pause). So, it was what it was. The amazing thing about that was after I was a professor at TCU, I was a member of an organization called the Society for the History of Loss of Education. We were having a conference in Saint Louis and I did a presentation and couple of the professors there in ED leadership came up to me and try to get me to take a job at my old camp. I mean given the history, I just told them no thank you. (laughs).

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

I'll be good. (laughs).

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Mhm.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

So, there's no formal mechanism, by which someone like you could express your concerns and file a complaint and if not, do you think that maybe informed many of your you know career decisions or trajectories as far as...

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

It did, it did. It impacted me tremendously and in that you know one of the things that really pushed me at TCU was to create a support system for students so that they would have someone to come to and not feel threatened. You know, and then I would go behind the scenes and work through issues and get what they needed. Those kinds of things because yeah, I could have bought it. You know there always little systems in place, but I think it was, I just wanna graduate. You know, I don't care about those people and I knew things weren't gonna change that quickly. I needed to get what I needed to get. I just kept my eyes on the prize and that was getting the degree. And then tell that other people go somewhere else. Don't go to that school.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

So, following the trail. Florida State, and then you started entering the workforce. What exactly did you do?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Well, after leaving, Jackson State I became a band director and so I was a middle school band director in the Dallas school system. And so, I took the last class, I got my masters' degree I think I got the masters' degree in 1980. And I graduated from college in 1978 and got my masters in 1980. And I then became a band director at a different middle school after the other school principal would always come to the band hall and with his boss and say this guy needs to be an administrator. This guy needs to and I would say to him I love what I'm doing. I love being a band director, but then I thought, well maybe 10 years down the line after hearing all this crazy stuff, I may want a change so I decided I like school. So I decided I to go back and get certified to be, you know, an administrator. And I sat in those classes and I thought this is so boring why are they teaching is this way, you could teach it in other ways, and so while doing that said, I'm going to go ahead and just get a doctor 'cause I think I'm gonna wanna teach.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Ahh.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And teach this stuff in a different way.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

So that's how ended up getting a doctorate while I was serving as a principle. And then once I- So, I was finishing up my dissertation that I heard a rumor about, my chair told me that there is a rumor that teaching you might be hiring, you know hiring an assistant professor in Ed leadership, and I was applying to different places, but I thought that's kind of close. So, I called one of the professors over there and start the conversation with. Yeah, actually he was the only professor in that leadership at that time and had been a former Superintendent in New York. And I convinced him to go lunch with me so I met him, had lunch. Then I convinced him to let me teach his

clients. So, I went one night to go teach his clients and I forgot it was some administrative class, I forgot what it was. But when I walked in the building and start the room number it was 113. And see I'm. I'm a strong believer in the number 13 because it represents rejuvenation, it represents renewal. You know it's like Jesus and the 12 disciples like the sun and the 12 signs of the Zodiac is like the jury and 12. And you know, all those twelves, the number 13 that's represent on the Dollar bill, all those representations. And so, I've always believed in renewal rejuvenation, I thought 113 this is my next step. So, I went in there, taught his class, and that he had also had the associate dean in the class observe, and the next week I got a call to meet with the dean. And I go meet with the dean, it's like sometime in October or something and before we leave, we've already talked about salary and all that, he said he wants a younger person and they're willing to pay, you know, because they usually get retiree people and he talked about the guy who's retired superintendent and all that. And then the job officially was announced in January. So, you know I went through all of that, and three days of interviews and everything but secured a position and I actually started June 1 and teaching the summer in 1990.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Okay, so I'm backtracking a little bit. Can you tell me about- I'm doing that because then we're gonna do the analogy with TCU- can you talk about the demographics at Dallas ISD?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah, Dallas ISD at that time was predominantly, it was urban school system, so there was a region in the school system that was predominantly Black and then other regions of the schools that were predominantly white. We were divided into 6 sub districts at the time and I worked in the sub district that was predominantly Black. When I started thinking about becoming an assistant principle, I wanted to stay in that area and so that particular administrator I would send him a letter every month talking about curriculum. Now didn't know anything about elementary curriculum, but I would just read up on it and I would send him a thing about what we ought to be doing. And so, when he called me in, he said, "I think I know you better than anybody, have you ever worked in elementary schools?" I told him no, but I have started up some programs in elementary school in the early mornings just to feed into my middle school. he said, "would those principles vouch for you?" I said "yes, sir," and before I knew it, I was assistant principle in that same region and in school that I was in. It was all it was about 15% Hispanic; the rest were Black and we had over 1400 kids in this elementary school. We have more kids in temporary buildings than in the regular main building, and even had a portable cafeteria for the K through second grade kids because we would never get through lunch inside. (Laughs) But that's kind of how it started.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

When the deputy Superintendent called me in for that job, he said, "son I'm sending to hell hole. Need to get you some good shoes, but if you can work there, you can work anywhere." So, I

said, "yes sir." And at the end of my first year my boss Doctor Bill saw me in the administration building, walked by and said one more year and you're out of there. And he didn't even say what that meant. I thought I had done something because I never- always walked the edge and so I, you know. And the next year they called me in and the deputy Superintendent said, "I told you last I told you two years ago, if you can work there, you can work anywhere." They had built a new school so they were dividing that school. They moved me up to street to the largest elementary school in Dallas and told me to go up there and be principle. And when I was walking out, he said son, "the school is horrible. You can't F it up." So, I went to that school, and we totally changed the school and made it a very successful school.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

And what about the curriculum itself? Did you see any opportunity to maybe infuse a little bit of Blackness in that curriculum? Cause I mean, we didn't talk about it, but when you did study music, was there any kind of promotion of Black music and Black styles? I know you talked about the history of music did incorporate any you know African music or you know the beginnings of jazz and Blues.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah, and you know mostly kids like to play stuff that was on the radio. You have to play the other things, but I would always write out, would write the music out for them. And if they had a successful day at the end of the day, then they could jam, you know that kind of thing. But no. I worked on self-identity, on who you are. Cause I've never even back then, I never fell into- I hate it when people looked at me and said I was a Black guy-

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And made these assumptions.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And I would say no I'm an individual, that's part of my heritage, but that's not all who I am. So I always work on helping students identify who they were, and it's all about empowerment, you know, and identity, and they had to determine that for themselves. But the good thing about that was it created leaders, so even in even when I was a band director the middle school, when I first got there, the principle would get on the PA and talk about the football players and, you know, how strong they are and all that and it evolved into the band students and how they were leaders all over the campus and because of identity development. And so that's you know that's kind of where I went. Even at TCU I created the diversity class, the Diversity and Education class in the college of Ed out of frustration. But they, they've gone back to teach that the way they teach it,

but the way I thought it was, it wasn't a journey of knowing more about this book in that group, it was more about you and your impact in your actions on other people based on your sense of beliefs. And so, it was always a journey. Our whole program was set up to as a self-examination of your strengths and weaknesses, and then how you build a team around that to have a quality program or quality team of leaders and that kind of thing. But I've never- what's that?

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

How many hours was this course and what department was housed in?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Well, it was a three-hour course. Let me tell you how it evolved. I was on the admissions council, maybe my second year at TCU, I was on Admissions Committee. And I went to a meeting and they were showing us a color-coded scheme of Atlanta at the time, talking about how they determine where they're going to recruit. And Barbara Herman, who's getting ready to retire there, she was also on that committee. And she raised the question and she said, "well, if you go and recruit in these areas, you'll never recruit any students of color 'cause you only going into the into the rich white areas." And they said that was the point, you know. And so, I was so pissed off I went back to my office and I sent the Dean an email and said, "we need a diversity class for our graduate students so that when they go out they understand diversity more," and that same day he emailed back and said let's go to lunch and we went across the street and had a hamburger and was talking. I was talking about the need for students to be more knowledgeable about other people than all of that. And he says, "well, sounds like you got the class ready to go," and I said, "yeah." I didn't, but I said yeah, I do. He said, "well then let's teach it this summer and then we'll go through all the committees to get it on the books for the following year." I taught it that summer and by the time we got it through the Graduate Council, University Council and all that in, it became a required course of all the masters' degree students in the College of Ed. And it was called- and it still there, but they teach it by groups, you know, talking about groups. And I think that groupthink, I call it groupthink, is more detrimental to the work that we want to do, because it gives white people and easy way to categorize Black people by set of, you know, some sort of norms. I used to start the class off by telling them that I was going to give them the background of the African American male and I put a circle on the board and I put me in the middle and then I will start talking about. You know where my parents were from, what religions they believe, where my siblings came in, and how they somehow became Catholics, and some of this and someone didn't go to church. And all of a sudden by the time I got through it that the only culture that represented was me. And I would tell them that culture is an individual phenomenon. It's a set of individual experiences at how we interpret those experiences. And that yes, a part of me is African America, primarily because society treat me a certain way because of my skin color, but I was so much more than that, and I refused to react to that set of ideas. I'm an individual and I am who I am and you need to determine who you are. And you need to determine the actions that you take in the thinking that you have to and see how it impacts other people, and if it impacts them in a negative way. You need to change the way you think.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Sorry, I'm taking notes.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

No problem. And I would even use me as an example. I created this little questionnaire called, "What is your Philosophy of Diversity."

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And there were four answers, multichoice, and each one either expressed the notion that you were more of an extensionist, ore of a tolerance type person, some more multicultural, or whether you have attitude towards inclusiveness. And then we would talk about that. I wouldn't ask them to give me their copy, but we would talk about it and I would even give an example. I said for example, when I was a principle, we had clubs after school and there was a group of kids that were- I forgot what they were, after weekends or whatever those things were- I said, "I don't believe in that but I have to tolerate it," you know. And then the student said, "yeah, like when I go to the doctor and they have to take blood, I hate giving blood. I have to tolerate it." And so, we were showing that tones was not enough. You know multiculturalism is not enough because its groupthink, and we've got move more to look at people as individuals and valuing their identity as how they express it. So, we even at TCU we had this logo at one point in my office that with TCU and around it was identity, presence and intentionality. Identity part had to do with who you were, and then what did your presence do to make this make this as community better, and how intentional on you and making that happen?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

And how, how big was the enrollment rate in the class?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

In the diversity class?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Normally it was about 20 to 25 students.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Okay.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Because it was a required course.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Okay

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

In the graduate level students and some that the 4-1 students who were finishing up their bachelors and getting their masters. But it was, it was pretty, it was full.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

What about that very first session that you had, like before it became a requirement.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Mhm.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Was it quite popular?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Oh yeah it was full. Mhm. You gotta remember, this was the graduate level course. The only diversity that existed in the College of Ed at that time. I don't know what it's like now. When I left, it was still horrible, but the only real diversity at the College of Ed is at the graduate level because we would recruit students out of the Fort Worth ISD program to come back to get their mid-management certifications.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

I see.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

But there was always only one or two students of color in the undergraduate program. Probably still is.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

Let's talk about, I believe it was 1990 when you took the initiative to meet with Chancellor Ferrari at the time-

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

No that was 1998 or '99.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

1998 or 1999? Okay.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah, Ferrari came in I think in '98 or '99.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

Start at the end of the year.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah, and see when Ferrari- well let me give you a little background on that. Before Ferrari came, the university senate finally pushed Provost Taylor into looking into a standing committee on diversity for the faculty senate.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Okay.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And so, Taylor brought together a group of faculty and staff to look into that, that question, and so when he brought the group together and raised the question, of course everybody there said, yeah, we ought to do that. Barbara Herman and myself thought that if we did that, we would still be 10 to 15 years behind most progressive institutions.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

So, we spent that entire year educating the Committee on what we really wanted to do and what emerged from those conversations was a proposal for the Chancellor's Council on diversity.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oh.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Where this Council would meet periodically with the chancellor face to face to talk about the issues and talk about things that we needed to do.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

That was presented to chancellor Tucker. And I got a call from the provost, 'cause I never went to convocation, you know, 'cause I just felt like I was a token. You know you get dressed up and you walk, you only have a couple of snacks so I just never would do it. So, he called and said I needed to go this time because the Chancellor was going to announce that he was retiring. But he was going to announce that we were going to establish this chancellor council on diversity. So, I

go and he never says a word about it. So then, Ferrari comes in, and every major speech Ferrari gives, he talks about the importance of diversity. I was a department chair over in the College of Ed. I emailed in one day and said that if you're really serious about what you're saying, we need to have a meeting. So, I'm there with him, one morning I talked about all the things that myself and John Butler, who was university minister at the time. Darron was helping some, Darron Turner was helping some, with the things that we would do in behind the scenes to support students and to, you know, to do a lot of things regarding diversity. And I shared with him the proposal on the Chancellor's Council on diversity and he read it, and we talked, and I was there for a couple hours. And before I left, he said, "we're gonna do this." When he went to convocation here, he announced it, he said "within 30 days we will establish the Chancellor's Council on Diversity."

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Then he brought the committee back together and he says, "what does that mean?" (laughs). You know, and so they-

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

What comes after?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah, so they went back to me as chair of the Council and I went back to my office and I emailed him. I said, "listen, I'm chairing a department I can't do both." And so, we had another meeting, he said, "so what would this person need to do?" And I talked about all the things that we needed to do and what that person needed to do. And he says, "well then in January you coming over here and you're not going to be the department chair in the College of Ed, you're gonna work for me." Didn't have a title or anything, he said, "I need you over here." So that's how I ended up being special assistant to the chancellor. And the info, that's how that started.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And one of the first questions he asked me was he said, "when I'm out in Fort Worth and I need Black and Brown people, they tell me that TCU is a white, racist, elitist, institution? Why are they saying that?"

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

(Laughs).

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

But I said to him, "I am not going to answer that question, but I will set up a series of luncheons and dinners. I'll bring in 10 or 12 of those leaders and each one of them, and they will tell you they will let you have it. But they also gonna tell you that they want to be a part of the change." And so, he attended all of those, he was the only white guy in the room. We'd have him in the Chancellor's dining room, and they'd lit it in on him, you know. And so, after the last one it was a luncheon, we were walking back to Saddler and he says, "Cornell I want to start something now, I want to prove to them that I'm mean what I mean, what can we do?" And I said Barbera Herman and I, and Sandy Ware who had been at end of admissions, had already put together a plan for the Community Scholar Program.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oh, you were ready.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah, we were ready and I said this is what we ought to do. And I shared it with him and we went to a cabinet meeting, the next cabinet meeting and he wanted me to present it to the cabinet. And before any of the cabinet could speak, he said "we're doing this." (laughs). And so, we went through the process of setting up a committee. I had already made really good connections with all the schools and we ended up with 12 finalists for this thing. We didn't know exactly what it was going to do, but we were going to provide a scholarship. The whole concept was to have a scholarship for kids from the Community Schools and we have selected number school that were 100% minority for the most part, all of the schools. He didn't worry about the legal test base, he said we if we end up being the test case for private school on the on that issue, we'll do it. So, they interviewed for the committee, interviewed all twelve of the students, the finals, and they came back and said that they couldn't choose between them because they were all good. They didn't know what to do.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Hm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And so, Mike Scott was still there, dean of scholarships and all that, and nobody was saying anything and so I thought he said, "I'm gonna call Mike." He doesn't know if I'm talking or if the chancellor's talking. I called Mike Scott and said, "we're taking all 12. After you finish their financial aid package, we're gonna backfield and give them all full scholarships, we're gonna give them about \$800 for books. And we're going to do that. And again, Barber said, "well, we're going to student affairs, we're going to give them free frog camp." And so, we invited all of them to I think the Worthington for dinner and their parents, you know, and all that. And you know they didn't know, they thought maybe one of them one was gonna get it. You know they announced when one of us will get the scholarship. And we pulled them into the lobby before the dinner started and Mike Scott told all of them that they were getting it. So of course, parents crying and all that now I hear somebody behind me crying. I turn around its the chancellor's wife. The chancellor's standing there, he says, "I don't care. This is great. This is awesome,"

(laughs). And so that's how the Community's Scholar program started. Nobody would do anything and I just said, "all they could do is send me back to the College of Ed." But we needed to do this.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Uh huh.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And so, we did, and so we started off with 12 and then we moved to 20 and now I think they're still getting 50 donors to approve 50 every year. But they're full rides. We also had money allocated for them to have a free study abroad, and now every year. And so, and that's so that's kind of how that whole, and you know Chancellor Ferrari's thing was imagine the possibilities. When he's saying, "I don't care," I say, "yeah you said imagine the possibilities" (laughs). So, you know it was like somebody else speaking through, but we just had to do it.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And career wise, there's always other jobs if I got fired, I got fired. It was something we were gonna do. I made a commitment and we did.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

What was the first year of the program?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

2000 was the first class, the class you know they would be class of 2004. We had twelve students. I know they; you know they had different majors and they had different advisors, but I told them that I was there advisor and I, you know we stuck with the core courses and except for you know like premed, they had to take certain courses. And I told them that they could only take courses from these particular faculty members, and it wasn't because these faculty members were easy or anything it's because I could call them and say what's up with this kid. And I could keep tabs with them. Plus, Darron Turner was over in student affairs, he was the hands-on person with them. And so, we made them create study schedules and part of their requirement back then, it changed later, but part of their requirement was to be a part of a white organization because we wanted the white kids to begin to see that these kids are just as good as anybody else. So, they had to be a part of an organization that was predominantly white as part of the requirements for keeping their scholarship. That first year 8 of the 12 graduated on time in four years, all of them graduated eventually. One of them finished later and he ended up coming back and working for the university in the computer area. And for every year that I was there, we only

lost one student in the five years that I was still there for the program. We always had one of the highest GPA's, kids were very successful. They're all very successful now. A lot of them, I still know.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

So yeah.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

So how were you able to follow through and support them like with their social wellbeing within the TCU community?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Well, you know I had unlimited funds, because I was in the Chancellors office and he just said, "do what you need to do." And so, I would empower them. For example, if they wanted to be an attorney or something like they wanted to be an attorney. Well, all the kids, not just the kids in the Community scholar program but any kid that came to me and said that they were interested in something, I would connect them with someone in the community of color that did that work. So, I'd take them to city club or to the Fort Worth Club 'cause I used the chancellor's thing and I would even buy the kid a suit if he didn't have a suit and have them beat and then connect with them. I've mentioned Mattie Compton to you guys before. She's an attorney. She's retired now, but she used to be the- I forgot what her title was, Deputy chief of the Southern Region or whatever. When a kid wanted to be an attorney and they had financial aid, we would use their financial aid, their work study, for them to work in her office. And she would mentor them, and then we'd get on into law school, and they could get a law degree and their number of them are attorneys now in Dallas, mostly the Dallas area. But anything a kid needed we took care of it, whether it was a social issue with our academic issue, or you know they're having boyfriend problems or whatever. They knew they could come and we'd work through it.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

That's fascinating. And the so 1999 you're the inaugural special assistant to the Chancellor for Diversity and Community. Now, how did this appointment change, in your opinion, or reflects TCU culture? So, we're not just talking about the Chancellor office, I'm talking about TCU culture. How did this appointment change the TCU culture, or how did it reflect TCU culture?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

What it primarily did was we had the Community scholar program, so we were getting kids in that way. But what it really did was we had a lot of gatekeepers, what I call gatekeepers in the city of Fort Worth, who a lot of the really smart kids would go off to other schools. They would go off to Stanford or Harvard or wherever and not even consider TCU. The start of the Community Scholar program and maybe- and I would be a member of maybe 10-12, sometimes

14 different boards in the city- and so, they got to know me, and they knew that their kids would be taken care of if they came to TCU.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And so, the minority enrollment increased dramatically during that time because of those issues. Also, in serving on those boards, I didn't have the money because on boards you give or get. What I would do is allow them to have all of their banquets and stuff on the campus. I'd get them a night in for them for free. I would work Rick to get the food service at the lowest price possible and they made more money that way for their banquets and things. I would have them come on campus for meetings so that everybody will see all these black people and Brown people on campus. And so, it really just changed the whole vision of the campus. We created a, when the universe was thinking about a university course on diversity at one point, I secured a grant from some foundation in the city, I forgot which foundation, and I've got a number of key faculty members initially to volunteer to spend a year with me talking about how they can fuse notions of diversity in any course. And I would bring people into talk with them, but I also gave each of the island dollars for their own with the research or study, travel or whatever. And I got it through this funding through this foundation, and I use them to work with the provost. The provost didn't like me, but I used them and they would keep having members to work behind the scenes to get that kind of in place. They were talking about the generalized kind of crap, some generalized kind of stuff, but we showed them how they can infuse these ideas in any courts without diminishing the content end they teach from that course.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Without trying to spill too much tea, why did the provost not like you?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Because of my aggressiveness towards, well, I tell you he didn't like me, but I'll give you an idea for why I think he respected me. I'll give you two reasons.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

You're talking about Norm Donovan?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

No, no, Donovan was scared of me. No, this was Kaylor. This was Kaylor. I'll tell you about Donovan too. But this was Kaylor.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

Oh Kaylor? In the Kaylor Center. The Caylor Center is name after-

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Right so, Bill Kaylor did not like the fact that I didn't, Bill like people to just bend the knee. You know, it just be don't stand up, don't question anything he said.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Hmm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And I'm not an aggressive person but I would you know intellectually challenge him and he didn't like that. And so, at the end of my fifth year there was a lot of unrest on the campuses around the area, and so you University of Texas at Arlington called and wanted me to come work there. They were just trying to get a Black face, you know. So, the Dean there said just create the job and you do what you want to do, teach the courses you want to teach. Then at North Texas they were trying to recruit me. And I told my team what was going on, so I had to go meet with Kaylor and Kaylor said, "I hear you thinking about leaving." I said "yeah," we talked about. He said, "well don't accept anything till you talked to me." So, I had initially told North Texas that I think I would come, I would like to come teach there, but I wanted to teach in the summer to get a real feel for the campus and everything, and I did not want to get paid like an adjunct, I wanted to get paid like a full-time person. So, I taught two classes there in the summer in the mornings, and then I go to TCU and top two classes in the evening, and then I went home. But during, so all in that time I went to Kaylor and I said, "this is what North Texas is offering they're offering more money." Kaylor said, "I will match that and add \$1000 a month. I'll make it retroactive on your summer pay if you stay," and I said "okay." And we walked his out of office and he had his person to get that set up. He said, "you will not leave until you sign." And so, I signed it so it wasn't a white thing, it was a data point. You know just the data point, so that was and then the other example with Kaylor was when I became special assistant I was, I think, my 11th year. So, I decided I'm not gonna be a full-time faculty, but I need to go ahead and apply to become a full professor. So, I did that and I knew people on the committee and they came back and told me that Kaylor, when he introduced everything for the university visor committee, he said, "we had one person going up early but only superstars can go up early and get, you know, and get full professorship." And so- but then when they voted, their recommendation was for me to be promoted to full professor and he didn't like that. So, he called them back in and explained to them again that only superstars can get it, you know, early and he had them to vote in front of him one at a time. Well two of them changed their votes but the rest of them didn't. And I knew all of this, and so he calls me and he says he's and he had circled the thing in the book. He said, "why are you going up early?" I said Bill, "I'm trying to get stuff to get out of here." I said, "I need that so that I'm gonna be looking at deans positions next year." He said, "I'll do it." (laughs). But you know, he said, "I'll do it," but I already did the Chancellor was gonna support it anyway. But I just told him that because if he knew that I was getting ready to leave, I was trying to position myself to leave he would do it, and he said, "I'll do it." So, it's just a game.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Wow, I'm learning a lot from that.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah, it was just a game, but you gotta have even like with community scholars, I have my spies in admissions and in financial aid. So, when Mike Scott would try to say that you know we're gonna give this much money to a student, I would already know with their financial aid statement look like. I would say well if a student had you know this much commitment from parents and all that, these are the facts we can use. We also had established well every semester we offered, and in the summer, we offer a ACT workshops because if the kids could score higher on an ACT they might qualify for Dean Scholarship or some other and that way we can stretch our money out further. Even if they ended up going somewhere else, I didn't care, you know so we would do that, but in admissions I had people that would apply scholarships that we would talk about it. And well actually was the associate dean, Jim Atwood was good for them, 'cause I had his wife, who is like 27 years younger, used to be my graduate assistant and I'm like they're twins' Godfather and so they always told me what was going on there. I had people in financial aid that would tell me stuff. And so, we always had a battle where he would go to Kaylor and Kaylor would send me some email about what we couldn't do. I would forward it to Ferrari and then we would do what we needed to do.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oh my, office politics.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yes, mhm yes.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

So, backtracking again a little bit. What I liked, how you phrased it, that you kind of brought visibility to campus whenever you brought the minority students through the Community College program. Now there were already students of color on campus, a lot of them were actually student athletes. Now I remember, in a I believe it was a past interview where you mentioned the campus having only two Black male students out of the 137 students that were there, only two were non athletes. Am I correct?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah, this is 1991 I was advising the Black Student Caucus.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah that's-

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And I was asking where are all the guys? It's all girls, so where are the guys and then they started saying, "well we don't even have anybody to date," you know. I said, "what do you mean?" And so, I pulled up the data and I think that you're the 137 African Americans men, only two were not athletes.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And so, we had a forum, I brought in some of the athletes. We had a form about dating and they said, “well, we don't have to date. We don't have to deal with drama because these white girls do whatever we wanna we do. We drive their cars they give us money, sexually they do whatever we want. We don't have to deal with that.” And the girls said, “see I told you, we don't have anybody to date.” So-

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

And at the time you were you were the faculty advisor, correct? For the Black students?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah, for the, I forgot what it was called Black Student Caucus, I think that's what is was called, I forgot the title but yeah.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah, they know call it the, I think what they said was the Black Student Association. The name changed over time.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah, mhm.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

So how can we solve the problem like that? I know it's not exactly Race & Reconciliation Initiative material, but it's you know student material.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Well, I think you have to take a very, yeah, a very strong proactive approach in that there has to be someone to make connections with the local schools, that go out and identify students who have potential to be successful at TCU as the recruiter there. And they have the funding to support them, not only financial support for their bills, but to make sure that there's a support system there that empowers them to be successful, and I think that is so critically important.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yes.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

I could give you another example of how tough things were at TCU. When I was, before I went up for tenure for associate professorship, I was part of a group we had received a small grant from Southwestern Bell at the time, it's AT&T now, but Southwestern Bell, just \$10,000 to

explore the idea of creating a math course in the College of Ed, that was conducive to education majors. Instead, I have to go across campus and take math that didn't really apply to elementary math and that kind of thing. So, we were doing that and exploring that and working with some math professors over there, and with the thought of the following year we're going to secure more funding from Southwestern Bell to recruit more students of color. We were gonna actually recruit students from the Community College from Tarrant County Community College system to finish their last two years at TCU and have a more diverse undergraduate population in the College of Education. Well during that year, I had gotten married and had a stepdaughter and she was getting ready to go to college, and I told them, "If we don't put these support systems in place. I am not gonna remain supportive of what we're trying to do." Don't add me to that grant if that's if we're not gonna do those things. And it was the associate professor and another professor in the College of the Ed, and so they were upset with me and they went and told the dean certain things. They tried to stop me from getting tenure. So, for example, I taught the diversity course.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And one of the things that I did in that course was after we talked about certain issues. There was a church in Arlington that I had developed a friendship with and partnership with. We would go for like two or three weeks instead of having class in the classroom, they actually had to go tutor students in color, and work with those students. And so, the associate dean told the dean that I was not covering, I was not covering my clients. And so, we went to lunch and he was telling me that this is what he had heard and I said, "well, you know, out of 25 or some kids, if we weren't meeting class, you would have heard it. So, I'm not gonna even tell you what we were doing, but I could tell you what's going on." And he said, "what?" and I said, "Dean,"- forgot her name and Sherry Reynolds was the professor, "was trying to stop me from getting tenure because they were upset with me," he says, "yeah, I know that too. I just didn't know if you knew." (laughs) That's the way that went. And then right after that I continued the keep department chair and people thought I was gonna take it out on Sherry. I don't think Sherry ever found out that I knew that you know.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Wow.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

Can we look at Community Scholars? I know 'cause you actually left TCU what year again?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

I left TCU in 2005.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

Five, right so-

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Basically, forced out.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

Oh okay, so I know Greensword is gonna get to that. So, you had a 2-year overlap with Victor Boschini because Ferrari stopped his tenure 2003, right?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

And you had five years with Community Scholars. So, I'm just wondering, at the time we started it, whether you were able to foretell the byproduct, I mean everything has a collateral effect.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yes.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

Byproduct of creating this schism of lower, Blacks who come from you know, indigent backgrounds-

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Right.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

You know, contrast with affluent whites-

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Right.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

And there just being the stark contrast-

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Right.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

That I don't know has quite been bridged yet, in 2021.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Well, is it hasn't been bridged, but it was bridged back then because we would do things like, for example, we had a day on the range every semester right? Where a bunch of the TCU staff and myself would teach them how to play golf and acclimate them to this world that they're entering. We would, after the first day of every spring break there was a golf course where you could do all you can, all you can play, all you can eat break. We would take every kid that wanted to play golf and line them up with staff members and take. We would take kids, like I would get tables to the list events, to any of the social sororities and fraternity events and some of the citywide events and put our kids on those at those tables, so they could see what was going on. I would take kids to the City Club, Fort Worth Club just to have them watch and say there's the mayor. This guy's the CEO of such and such. This is where business gets done. I would bring in people from those communities that share with them. We even had every semester a time to teach them how to eat with, you know, bring somebody up from Sodexo, so to teach them you know which fork to use and where to put your napkin when you get up, all that. So, we did all of those things to prepare them for a world that they knew nothing about.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And anytime they had a question they know they could come to me.

(Pause)

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

What was the flow rate of traffic in your office 'cause it looks like you must have students in your office all time?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

I'll tell you; I'll tell you the full rate was such that when I first took the position there was an office on the corner outside of the Chancellor's office.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Uh huh.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And that was my office. When Boschini came, he came to me and he says, "the only kids up here on the 4th floor come to see you." And he's a student affairs person. "I want them in my office." So, he created the suite that he's in now. That room over to the right used to be an individual

room. He created it so that we came through the same door so that when those students were up there, he could see them. So, I mean and it wouldn't just students of color, there were white kids, and everybody there all the time, you know. And even if I wasn't there Glenda who was by admin was there and they talked to Glenda and make sure that they tell Glenda, and they'd tell me what I needed through Glenda or something. Yeah.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

What would a white student come to you for?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

What was that?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

What would a white come to you for? What would be the type of conversation?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Well, there were white students, so I started teaching him when I became special assistant, I started teaching freshmen seminar courses.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Uh huh.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

I was on the committee that started freshman seminars, and I thought I wanna continue to teach, so I would do that. And like the first course I taught I think was called "Our Society". But I wanted the kids to see the difference between the society that they came from and then the other society. Like for example we took a tour of, one week we went to OD White High School and talked about issues and what they expectations were in the next week we went to Trinity Valley, you know, and to see the difference. But and so there were a number of white kids that always wanted to know stuff. And then word would get out, it was in my class, if not word would get out, that that's a person you'd go to if you felt like an outlier. And a lot of those kids felt like outliers whether they rich or not. They were outliers.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And so that's how all that happened, but really mostly word of mouth. We created the Conference on Inclusiveness. So, we had an annual Conference on Inclusiveness and the students ran that. And so, Darron and I would take ten students to NCORE every year. National Conference on Race and Ethnicity and at the end of each day they would come in, I would

always have a suite, people would come in and debrief; and then from that we would just establish what it is we want to do for that next year.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

For example, there was a young lady named Katherine Needer, and she's still in the community, little rich white girl. She came back after the first day and said you told me that everybody was gonna be, you know, welcoming and involved and all I heard was this anti talk about rich people, you know and stuff and so that whole year we talked about isms, you know?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And every luncheon that we had was focused on some particular issues. But they ran everything, I provided the funding, talk about the domino effect but they ran everything, you know?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And so, we would do stuff like. Anytime a kid had an issue or wanted to know more, I send them to a conference or send them somewhere, you know 'cause basically, I didn't have a budget, but I had unlimited funds, the chancellor would pay for it. now, Boschini accepted all that, but when I first met Boschini, my first meeting with Boschini, I came in and he said I gotta go, "you gotta go." He said, "you gotta go."

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

Wait, I'm sorry, so you said first contact-

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

My first official meeting with Boschini, one-on-one, he said, "now you gotta go. And I will give you-"

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

In those words?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah, he said, "I'll give you a sabbatical so you can get retooled and go back to the College of Ed. And then the dean at the College of Ed, Sam, was trying to get me to become his associate.

So, for those two years he was trying to get me to go because I had presented him a plan, we were gonna go through PFF and we'll start recruiting more faculty of color. And Boschini said he liked the plan, but the board wasn't ready for it, "could I wait awhile? And I said, "you know, I can't just rest." He said then you need to go. And so, the start of my second year with Boschini we were having a new board member orientation, and we have a dinner and each of us on the cabinet would tell the new board members what we do. And after I finished, the board chair back then was John Roach, he said, "let me tell you about Cornell," and he looked at me and said, "Cornell, you know, in Fort Worth and at TCU, we do things the way we wanna do them, when we wanna do them and you always want to go too fast." And so, after that I met with the chancellor and said, "okay, it's time for me to go." So, I started looking. Yep.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

John V. Roach, board chair at the time-

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yes.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

Said that, you do things, "too fast." Did he indicate how fast was fast?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Or what things?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

No, but yeah. He never liked the Community Scholar program. You know, do you know that when Boschini became Chancellor he really wasn't ready to be a chancellor, he was really good at raising money, but he'd do nothing, you know he lacked in administration. But for that whole first year, John Roach was there two or three times a week. To the point where they created a parking space for him, right next he was in his office, preparing Boschini to be a TCU Chancellor. He was there all the time.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

You know acculturated him, getting him into the culture. This is what you're gonna do 'cause they thought Ferrari was too aggressive, they would say Ferrari would shoot and then aim. The board members would joke around, some of the board members said, "yeah he'd shoot then aim," where they like to get everything in place and know the success before, they even initiated anything. And Ferrari was too aggressive for them. And they saw me in that state of mind, being aggressive for Fort Worth; but they couldn't, I didn't do anything wrong so they really couldn't do anything in that way. So, they really just found a way to try to push me out. And so they, so you know, that's basically what they did.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm. And you weren't interested in going back to music you weren't- that was not an option for you?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

No, I started applying-

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

For deans positions.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

At TCU?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

No, at other places. So, let me give you an example.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

So, I had and then Oklahoma State had a vice president for they had assistant vice president for Diversity. For all five of their campuses, but the position, when they first opened was really focused on student affairs kinds of things.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And so, I didn't apply. And then they had two failed searches, and then they finally put the focus on academics. And so, I applied. So, I applied there, applied at University of Central Arkansas and I applied at University of the Pacific, and at Mississippi State, and at University of Texas was having their first diversity person. And so, all of a sudden, I had back-to-back interviews, I had I went to University of Pacific, the next week I went to Oklahoma State, the next week I went to Conway, AR and I got offered all three positions. And I took the one at Oklahoma State because the potential it had, and the reason I took because they had some issues. They had just had their accreditation visit and the president told me that they were gonna get him really hard on the issue of diversity. And when I was interviewing there were only, there was only four people. There was the person that versed the position, and the Affirmative Action officer, and her assistant, and then my admin. And he said that he was gonna use that report to build the program,

he said, "create your unit." So, we went from 4 to 27 for my division and even you can look online now, all this stuff on their website I created even their diversity report card. They've got a number of awards. Jason Kersey, who's now there. He was a professor there. He will tell you, he gave, he would tell you who did it. He would give credit, matter of fact when I came back as a professor at TCU, I get a call some student came and told me Darron said you need to come down to the Kelly Center when you finish teaching because they were having the Big 12 diversity Conference people there. So, I went down here. I don't know why he called that I went down there and as soon as I got down there, Jason stands up and says you want to know who put all this together at Oklahoma State? That's him. You know that kind of dude. So-

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

So, I'm confused? I mean, if this is what they say they want, and if you're doing a job and you're creating community literally Community Scholar program, why- I mean by your own words, you said you, "I was forced out."

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

I mean in a sense, they made it financially worth it leaving.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oh okay.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

You know what I'm saying?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

You had a package.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Mhm.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Okay.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And again, Boschini and I remained friends. It wasn't personal, he just knew that we couldn't do the things that he felt like we did, he said he felt like we needed to do, but he didn't have the board support at the time he was new. And he wanted to wait awhile and I told him I couldn't wait. I said, "I just can't rest on what we've done. We have so much more work to do." So that's kind of where it was. So, we departed. You know, without any animosity 'cause you know when you're in this work, you know when you're in this work and you changing it, you know you're not gonna stay anywhere long because you're gonna ruffle some feathers and they're gonna put

blocks up. And remember you're in the South and you know the South is just not ready for certain things.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Are you on your currently still in contact with Chancellor Boschini?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

I haven't been for a little while, but when I came back, we went to lunch every semester. Now when we went to lunch, it was always about, "I know this Presidency and I could help you get it" because I think he wanted to get out of there. But we did have lunch every semester and before they hired Darron as Chief Diversity Officer, he was asking me what should that be, and we have put together a plan and give it- a matter fact, so we put together a plan. I said I'll work behind the scenes. I don't want anyone to know. And then all of a sudden, I get a call from Darron, and Darron said I understand we're having lunch with the chancellor. I said yeah, he said, he didn't know that I had been talking, I said Imma send you the whole email string. And then we went and played golf. I belong to Country Club in Nashville. We went to play golf and then we sat down at lunch and went through the whole thing. I said, "Darron if there's something I hear you don't want, take it out now." Then we met with Boschini and we both knew that Boschini wasn't gonna do nothing. But we met with Boschini, we shared the whole plan, it was a very aggressive plan, hoping that he would take parts of it, but he didn't take any of it. And I think it's not because of him, but he didn't have enough board support or for those kinds of initiatives. But yeah, so I'm just going to come with that-

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

Was this 2016?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Uh yes, 20- no, this was this was 2000..., yeah, around 2016. Yeah mhm.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

Right.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah, or 17 somewhere in there.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

So, when was the last time you stepped foot on TCU's campus?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

See there was some other issues. I won't go through on here, that happened that were also racist. And so, some things happen, and when I met with the Dean and with HR, we both reported the session. I told them, "You forgot that the affirmative action part of HR used to report to me when

I was Special Assistant and these are the policies that you broke.” And so, then I talked to Boschini and I said, “did you hear the tape?” He said, “yeah,” and I said, “well, I had planned on retiring when I turned 65 in January 2020.” This was January of 2018. I said, “I plan on finishing this semester, and I still planning on retiring January 2020. But I don't plan on being there.” He said, “okay.” So, I remained on the books until January 2020. And you probably don't want put that on the tape, but you know, but there was some things that occurred that and I know the law, and he readily agreed. And so, from May of 2018 to January 2020 I was still on the books as a full, you know, time employee. Got everything, salary, benefits, and retirement, all of that but I wasn't there. So, last I was on campus is when I finished this semester of May 2018. And I didn't want anything else to do with that campus at the time.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

And I just missed you because I believe I started fall of 2019.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Oh, did you? Yeah, you just missed me then, yeah. And see, and when I came back, he did not want me to get reengaged in the community and I agreed that I would not do that. And the reason why, when I came back see I was president at Jarvis and I was leaving Jarvis, and I was on a committee with Chancellor Boschini down in Austin. I said you gotta replace. And then I got a call saying, “well, if you don't know what you're going to do next, why don't you come back here until you figure out what you want to do next?” Which I was really surprised at. And so, I came back to give me a really good salary and all of that, and I was really shocked at all of that. Then I get an email a couple of weeks later asked me, “am I settled in, and how did everything go?” And it was a board member who pushed all that through. I'll tell you the name of the board member because he used to sit next to me in board meetings all the time. And I worked with him, with you probably heard of North Texas Lead, I was one of the inaugural people behind that and I helped them put together their first strategic plan. Even though I was in Oklahoma, they would fly me and then I worked with him one on one all the time, and that's Matt Rose, who used to be the chairman CEO of BNSF, but he's retired now. But Matt Rose was behind me coming back and them paying me the way they paid. Boschini every semester was trying to get me to go take some presidency somewhere so that wouldn't become actively engaged on campus and I didn't, I just taught my classes and left.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

I'm sorry I'm taking notes.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Okay.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Okay.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

So, I mean Dr. Thomas, man how do you reconcile-

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

I don't.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

I don't know how to describe it but the pain.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

I don't.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

You invest your life,

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

And for people to, you know, be reject.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Well, you know, I remind myself it was always about the students.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And there are a lot of success stories within students and so I would remind myself of that. And but yeah, it caused borderline depression.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm, yeah. That is widely understandable. And I see that to this day, even like just the time that it took for us to put that energy together.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Right.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

I could tell, you know, whether you never said in so many words, but I can tell that there is still a lot of hurt in your connection with TCU.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

I can tell that, you know, just like being physically on campus would have been, probably, you know.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Well actually a couple older students talked me into doing this.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Huh.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

They were the ones that kept saying you need to do it. I don't care. You need to do it. Cause I wasn't going to.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oh, (pause) interesting.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

You know, I think it's one of those deals where, you know, when you're in education business, it's so very difficult to see the fruits of your labor oftentimes. And so-

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Right.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

Every now and then when you know you do receive that feedback you know, is this refreshing? You know, but you know you don't do it for the immediate feedback, you know you're committed to long term cause.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Right, you plant seeds.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

right. But I must tell you though, that even though it will take us some time to put this all together and process that. I can tell right now that I see what your testimony has offered as being so very valuable-

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

Important my brother you must know how important this is for you to share your story and for it to be known? Your work is not in vain, my brother. Your work is not in vain.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

I see it in the students. I see it in the success that students. I'm in touch with a lot of them still and awful lot of them. And like most of them say I'm their TCU dad, you know that kind of stuff,

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yes, actually I got back this morning from, you know, a former student I interviewed-

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Oh okay.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

And that's basically how they talk of you. They refer to you in those terms.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah, I mean well it's tough love you know you need a kick in the butt or you need support, whatever it was.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Well, they have testified that they couldn't have gone through this experience without, you know your support and your advice, and your spankings so.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah. (laughs)

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

So, I'm gonna switch gears a little bit. Would you tell us a little bit about Brite? How you ended up in Brite and what are some of your accomplishments over there?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Well, I didn't really do a lot with Brite other than have a real good strong relationship with the President over there.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Primarily what the relationship was with the disciples and in Indianapolis.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right, mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

So, what occurred some years ago. The disciples got in trouble. A vice president in one of their areas, was it was told to me that a vice president's foot found the blood of an old Black female? And so, the NWC add gotten involved, Justin Jackson, and so the disciples said that every one of their ministries would have to go through diversity training. Don't remember which diversity training unit that they were going, the organization that they were using, but it was one that was kind of in their face, you're racist, you know, kind of stuff. And some of the board members for their foundation and for their retirement area also were board members at TCU and they said, they had them, the two presidents from those units to come down to talk to me about a different approach to addressing the issues. And so, they came and talked with me and I end up spending almost 10 years working on different issues of diversity. And the sad thing was the whole the whole issue emerged from this vice president joking around with his admin at the copy machine and you know how sometimes you flip, you flip your foot back, you hit somebody and you're joking someway, that's what happened. And it got blown out of proportion. But the good thing was, during that time we had an off, 'cause I told him I don't do one time diversity workshops. I said that doesn't work.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

It has to be an eternal journey.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right, continuous.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

That's why I ended up working with both of those units for almost 10 years.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Okay.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Meeting with them. And I mean sometimes it wouldn't even be- like one time the vice president for their foundation called me instead. I'm having my meeting. My board is meeting in Memphis and I want you to walk with us through Lorraine hotel, the Museum of the Lorraine Hotel, and then at dinner, have a discussion about it. No other agenda. And by the time we finished talking, everybody was crying. You know, talking about the issues, the dynamics, how that you know how that impacts our thinking. You know all that kind of stuff.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Hmm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And I didn't know where it was gonna go. He didn't know, but that's what we did, you know. So that's the kind of stuff that happened. And then while I was at Jarvis for some reason some of their- so I worked with the ministers in the in the Oklahoma region for a while too.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

But for some reason they thought I was a minister or something because they asked me to speak at something and I went and they had me listed as a minister, I said I'm not, but I did start with scripture, but I said I'm not, you know.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

You just have that aurora, I guess.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

I don't know, but so that was the relationship. As a matter of fact, when I was at Oklahoma State, they were trying to get me to become president at one of their other colleges and I said, "no, I'm really focused on Jarvis." Jarvis has a need. I used to try to get Jarvis kids to come to TCU in the summers.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Work in their labs. The one that lived in the area.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And I said, they really, it's a horrible place, but it can be turned around real quick.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And that's where I wanna go. And they kept saying no, you know, don't go there, they there was- I can't remember the name of the conference if the one that's in, it's actually in West Virginia,

just 30 miles South of Pittsburgh. I told him it's too cold. I'm not going there, you know, I don't like cold weather, you know all that. So, that's how I ended up going to Jarvis because there was more of a mission, more so than, you know, just the Presidency or something like that. I just saw so much potential in place.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And how it could he turn around fairly quickly if given the opportunity.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

And did you, did you see any like mutual interest between like, did the student manifest any interest between Jarvis and TCU, the TCU students interested in Jarvis and vice versa?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Actually, while I was the Jarvis, we had some students to come to get their master's degree from, that graduated from Jarvis. We also had, you know Fran Huckaby?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah, Fran had a class.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Associate dean of Interdisciplinary Studies.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah, she had a class that came to Jarvis and then one of the teachers at Jarvis had a class that came to TCU. They would Co teach they would teach and together and some of those things. Yeah, well but you know the history of Jarvis and TCU was basically TCU and early on ran Jarvis.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

You know most of the board was white, and if you would if you would look at the records you know the oil fields, the Hawkins oil fields were supposed to be shared between TCU and Jarvis in some sense.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

But, where while I was there, Jarvis would get about maybe \$60,000 a year from the all reserves. TCU was getting into millions. And there was always the rumor that TCU ripped off, you know, Jarvis. I don't know if you've talked to Vernell Sterns. Have you heard that name there?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

I have heard of that name. I have not-

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

The was the city manager, right?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

What was that?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

The Fort Worth city manager.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

He was formerly the Fort Worth city manager. He also was also over DFW. He runs now a waste management company. He has major contracts in the area. He has an office, if he's still working, he may have retired. He has an office in the Fort Worth Club.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

But he's someone, you know he was the first Black chair of the board for Jarvis.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

When I came to TCU, he was the only Black member of the TCU board. And when he retired, they, he didn't even know it, but they replaced them with Rob Parker, you know, 'cause they only want-

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Another Black person.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And since he was retired, he didn't have the influence that they wanted. So, they told him goodbye. But he has all of the history of that relationship.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm, mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And how bad it was even when he was chair, he was called "boy" and told to, "get back in his place," and stuff.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oh.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yes,

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

Wait, he was called "boy" in the 2000s?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Oh, this was like 1971 or somewhere in there, when he was the chair of the board for Jarvis Christian College, some of the board members still disrespected him, you know. They were connected to TCU.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Wow, well, we know that-

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

You know that Jarvis is named after Major Jarvis, whatever-

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right. A slave owner by the way.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah, that whole area was swamped, it's still swamped later you know.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

So, it wasn't worth anything.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oh wow.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

And so, we know that Jarvis was founded by JJ Jarvis who actually was a member of the Board, the TCU board.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Actually, it was founded by his wife.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

His wife convinced him to give the land to the-

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Van Zandt? Mhm, yeah.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Prominent slave owner.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah, mhm.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Something which we found in archives. And so, that that collaboration, that kind of TCU taking over back in the 60s. You know, we did see that it does coincide with the date of integration.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yes.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

So, TCU decides to integrate and one of the most famous statements, that that the then Chancellor was saying is that there will never be a large number of Black people enrolling at TCU because-

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Right.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Well first they're gonna raise the admission requirements in terms of grades, they're gonna raise tuition, and then Black people are gonna want to attend HBCUs anyway.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

(Laughs) right.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

And that coincides with, you know TCU investing in an HBCU like Jarvis.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah, just so they won't come to TCU.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Just so they won't come to TCU. And even with that exchange program back in the 60s. You know we had students from Jarvis attending TCU, students from TCU attending Jarvis, but it still remains a mystery. What happened to make the TCU students stay less than a day when the Jarvis student attended to see you for over a week?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah, well, but you know, to be honest with you, even when I went to Jarvis, did the academics were horrible. The faculty members should not have been there. Most of them had retired from school districts who did not think they were good even in the public schools, you know.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

We have to really work hard to increase the academics there.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Hmm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Have you talked to Reba Bell?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

I have not.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah, the best, the easiest way to contact her is through her son. You probably know her son Michael Bell, who's the pastor of Greater St. Stephen First. (Pause) You know he's out protesting all the time, but Michael Bell will get you connected. She was one of those students.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Okay. That is one of our priority projects.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah, I think she was one of the first Black professors at TCU.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Correct.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Mhm.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Correct.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

But she knows all that history.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Very good. This is one of the most fruitful interviews.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And Michael Bell knows it too. But you you'll tell you some things too.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm. Very good. So, when and how did you leave Jarvis?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Okay, so it was very interesting in that you know we were making major changes there, and so I decided we only had 600 beds and we needed to increase enrollment. So, I created an honors program that was focused on diversity and inclusion that any student could take us a minor. What the goal for this program was that we were going to recruit students from the community to take these courses and that way they could just stay home, take the courses and it would be a rigorous program and only certain people would choose the courses. So, I presented that to the

board and the board approved it. I got a call from the chair and the chair said, "that he didn't like it. He said there proved it, but he didn't like it because I was trying to bring in all those other students." I mean, Jarvis had an open enrollment and you're trying to bring in students with, you know that you're trying to change that culture. I said, "no, we would still be open enrollment, but we need to increase our profile and he said, "well, you'll never get the money for it anyway." And so, at the same time this was, I think it was like the 15th year anniversary of North Texas Lead. I think it was 15 or 20. I can't remember. So, I came to Fort Worth for the luncheon. And Matt Rose was the speaker and Matt Rose is kind of short. He was the speaker. And so, when he finished speaking, I try to get up to go and thank him, you know, and all that. I couldn't get to him, he disappeared. So, I went back and I, I'm jokingly I sent him an email saying, you know, I'm so short I couldn't find you. I couldn't say, you know. I said, "but now you have a boss"- because Berkshire Hathaway had purchased earlier tonight, this sort of thing- "Now that you have a boss, if you have an opportunity, I want you to share this program with your boss to see if they would support it. He came back to my chief of staff and said "no" in a sentence, and the program called for us to purchase, to really to buy 50 students every year, full scholarships, everything. That's the only way we're gonna get these students to come too. And the board chair and a few of his friends came to the campus and they turned it down. They said that I was, "trying to create a little TCU," and I told them, "In our interview, I told you that." And they said, "yeah, but we never thought that would happen, and you try to bring in all these other kids"- in other words, white kids- "and we don't appreciate that." And their aspirin school was Wiley because Wiley has over 1000 students, I said, "Wiley has over 1000 thugs," and they didn't like that. And I said it's a matter fact when you look at our student records, most of them should not have graduated from middle school. We've got to make some changes. If you want that kind of person, you got to get you another president. And so, they did. Now I still had two years left on my contract. I hadn't done anything wrong, so they moved me. I had a lake house down Lake Whitney, they moved me. I put my stuff in storage, move down there and I already had secured another job TCU anyway-

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And they had to keep paying me. But that little group called me an Oreo.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oh wow, do you believe there's any reverse racism involved?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Oh absolutely, and so students want to protest.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And I told him they need to graduate. A third of the board quit, some of them almost gave me letters. And you know, and so in their look for a new president, they stated that they had to have had HBCU experience, 'cause I hadn't had any. (Laughs) you know. And they brought this guy in, who I already knew had just been fired from as president of Mississippi Valley because of financial misdoings and sexual harassment and he's still there. And the kids, they created a different website Facebook page showing all the stuff that was falling apart. They had said we had a real college and now we're back to where we used to be, and stuff so yeah. It's really bad there you know it's gone back to what it used to be. Just the community after I got you know to go play tennis in the community or do things and they got to know me, we got them back on campus coming basketball games, come to the Christmas thing, but they said before you came we used to call to place Thug U. They would go down to the local store and rob them, and you know they were afraid of the campus. They called it Thug U so. But we totally, we put in 16 smart rooms, we totally remodeled the entire campus. We cleaned up. We federal over a billion dollars that they didn't know about, you know had been spent. We cleaned that up. We owed the state of Texas gave us money for teacher education. We had misused about \$400,000 of that. We negotiated that down to 200,000. We had been running negative budgets since the last accreditation for like 8 years, but I left we had over \$1,000,000 surplus, you know, so a lot of good things happened.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And it was really just good, just regular sound budgeting. They didn't really do budgeting, you know, so.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Looks like our people still have a lot to learn.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah, well you know, unfortunately most of the HBCUs do some crazy things and they don't- they're struggling because of their own lack of leadership, real leadership. And they cheat. Yeah, as an example, my first year there, we're UNCF presidents are gonna be on the phone call as we're waiting for the rest of their line, I'm naive, I'm saying listen, I need some advice. We're letting kids in and we don't even know if they've graduated from high school. You know we're having them here. I noticed my first year there, I went back and looked at records, I came in January so the year before, I noticed that we let these kids in and on the books, we had all these kids, when I get there, we have like 300 kids. Found out that a lot of them had not even graduated from high school. Some of them, when they get their financial aid package, they may get \$1000 'cause you know it's required that we release that money, they're gone and they don't

take them off the books till after the 60% point, so that the institution doesn't have to pay. I said what should I do about that? They told me to shut up. Like they all did.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Wow. I'm dumbfounded, honestly.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Oh, they would do that. they would do that. They keep the money and the kid would be in the Fall, you know, but they would keep him on the books till the 60% mark so they would have to give it in a money back. Stuff like that. And they rest their laurels on just a handful of kids, like Jarvis, we had a handful of good kids and they put them on front on everything. But I would say no, we gotta work with all of our kids.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

Do you feel as if you unfairly took the blame publicly for the lack of accreditation that these were some of the incorporeities you discovered?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Okay, so yeah, I took it publicly but guess what? So, my first year there, I'm looking at the books, my first day there I'll get there in January and I'm going to the CIC President's Leadership Institute in Florida. I asked them for the financial aid part. I get it. I'm reading on the plane. I'm saying what in the world is going on here? So, there's a financial aid guy down there that's supposed to help new presidents, he said, "I don't know how you all are open." So, when I get back, I look even further, I find out that we're paying people's health insurance that haven't been there in years, that money is missing. Had to end up firing the vice president for finance because I found out we were paying for his boyfriend cell phone who lived in Dallas, and they had bought a bunch of other stuff, like when they remodeled the president's house, they bought a washer and dryer and all of a sudden, I found on the records, they actually bought three and I don't know where the other two ended up. You know stuff like that. So, I did an audit and I told the chair what was going on and he said, "well, I know we've been allocating money every year to make the books meet," but I said, "you all have been taking out of the endowment, a million point 500,000, 800,000 every summer and using funds that were designated in other ways, you misspent those funds. Just to make the books you know, and we have, we no longer have any endowment because of that." And he didn't believe, I said so, "you bring in, you go find an external auditor and come in and let them do a check." I got the vice president for finance from UNCF to come in to do one, and then I got a small grant from the American Governing Board that brought in someone to do it. And I had them review the plan that I put together with the help of our former finance person at TCU, Carol who was down at Arizona State, and then I had a financial workshop in Dallas for the board and we had funding from the American Government Board to pay for it. And for that I got to come back and give report, and they told him they don't

know, you know, we'll never get reaccredited because all the financial misgivings and everything that's been going on, and my board chair response was why did you have a white guy do it, it embarrasses us. You know, and they gotta reaccredited because it's a system there you know. There's a group of people that drink with **dewed** every time we have a meeting and they set things up so that HBCUs will pass that and unfortunately, I was part of one of those schools.

They asked me to go to Payne College. Payne College was in trouble. They were going to be put on probation because of financial problems. My job was to go in, there was a white person on the board that was a vice president for finance at some other institutional lane. My job was to convince her to give them a chance because that President was fairly new. He was like a year longer than me and they had put together a plan that would work if they you know. So, I had to go through the plan with her and say if they follow this plan they will get out of trouble. We ought to give them a chance and she did. And guess what? Right after she did that, they threw away to play it and they got in all kinds of financial trouble, the guy ended up leaving anyway. But they do that, and so they put the team together for Jarvis, and Jarvis got through accreditation but they should not have. They should not have. I mean people from back in the 80s once I got to know them, from California and other places, yeah, we they would rip us off. They would tell us we owed money, even when we paid it. But when I got there, there were no checks and balances. Parents will come in to pay \$500, but they paid in cash and there are no receipts. There was nothing you know, the President before me left only because they found out she's been \$137,000 in Jarvis money on her daughter's wedding and I found it in the books. And I told the board chair, he said, yeah, we made her pay that back. I said it's not in the books. They just made her leave, but they gave me a credit card and said do what you want to do with it. I said no, I'm turning in every receipt. Those guys don't have to turn in receipts. You get an American Express, whatever card, do whatever you wanna do with.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

Do you just think it's just like, I mean, the African American experience unfortunately has been one that has been mired with lack of resources, and so do you think it's just a matter of like once the resources are available, I mean the temptation to finally, you know, maximize them, you know, can be overpowering, or...I mean cause Jarvis is not alone, I know other HBCUs have also dealt with this issue of mismanagement of funds.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Mhm. No, it's not a lack of funding, it's a lack of budgeting. Like I shared with the board chair, I showed him, I said, "we have 200 students in and still balance the books. If we, do it the right way, it's not about more students being there we will be financially stable. It's how you manage." I talked to the President before then I said, "how did you develop your budget?" "Well, we just we put together what we needed and then we would just backfill it and say we'll raise this much money and we'll"- I said, "but did you look at your utilities? Do you do a three-year average rate of utilities? Do you know all the standard things that you're supposed to do?" And they didn't do any of it. I said, "well, if you look back at your past three years of fund raising, that should tell you about what you're gonna get." You know, you don't just put up a number that you know

you're not gonna reach. You know stuff like that. And even my board chair, I had two CPAs on the board and I told them I said, "listen, we get this \$60,000 in oil every month. We ought to put that in the endowment, let's not put it in the budget." You know let's put it in the endowment, rebuild the endowment." "No! We've always been in the general operating quote with operating." I said, "okay then let's just put it in contingents." They said okay. And then at the end of the year I just put it in the endowment. You know, (laughs) I just wouldn't spend it and rolled it back into the endowment. They didn't even see it. These two CPAs, one of them worked for Southwest Airlines, one of them was at a nonprofit. They couldn't even see where I hid stuff in my budget, paying just to make sure that we ended up, you know, in the positive setting and then like I got a gift from what is the Christian churches in Dallas for \$250,000. And I told him I want you to stipulate that this is gonna go into our disciple's foundation funds. I can't put it in our foundation funds because I don't know how it will be spent. And that's what he did. And I got another gift for \$127,000. Did the same thing so that even though we didn't have the total benefit at those dollars immediately, the percentages from those dollars will come to that campus from now on. You know that kind of stuff. I even said, "you know, if you're on the board you're supposed to give or get \$10,000. We don't have any board members, current board members doing that, and the only ones that were actually doing it with the ones that I brought in, and I said we need to change some of these people. Then I found out he was only; the board chair was only giving \$1500 every semester.

(Laughs)

I said I will set the example. I will give 10 every year and I did. I said but you know, and the only people that were doing it were people that I brought in. Even made a letter with Rosa Navajar at the time, she's in Fort Worth but she used to be president of the Fort Worth Hispanic Chamber, and my deal with her was I said, "Rosa, we want to bring in more Spanish students. You all have all this scholarship dollars. If you just give them scholarships, you know that will count towards your giving," you know. And that's the deal we made. But she was one of those that was in uproar and just quit you know, when they found out that I wasn't gonna be there, you know? So yeah, there are ways that they would budget correctly. The HBCUs would not be into trouble that they're, you know, the private HBCUs, even UNCF is not run well. They misspend money. You know that what's his name? I forgot the guy's name who was over it, when he became the leader of that program had been the president of Dillard, and he left Dillard \$60 million in debt. Another thing that saved Dillard was Hurricane Katrina because then they got all that other funding to get reestablished. And he misspends money, they would take us to some of the most elaborate places, hotels, and elaborate meals. You know that money should be going to the students and they would just live in luxury, you know?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

So, what advice do you have for administrators in HBCUs?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Well, I think that we need to get administrators that have experienced administration outside of these HBCUs. That culture is not a culture that's gonna help our institutions grow. We need some

individuals who have had other experiences to come in and know what it's like to have a campus that's not just living to survive every year. So, one of our slogans was we were moving from surviving to thriving. We're not gonna just deal with this, worried about enrollment, and all this year after year after year, we're gonna thrive. We're gonna find ways to raise money and do it. The other thing is they don't know how to raise money. They need individuals over there, advancement officers, that know how to go in and raise real dollars, not these \$100, or, you know luncheons that raise \$50,000. They need millions of dollars to be to rebuild their endowments and stuff. Even like when Bill Cosby gave that \$70 million to Spelman, they misspent the money. That's \$70 million should have been left alone and just used the interest off of that forever. You know they didn't do that. You don't do that, you know? You gotta look long-term, you don't look at media, you know? And when Janetta Call went to an all-women's college, I forgot the name of it, she raised money, you know what she did? Cause I knew her assistant; she remodeled her whole office suite. First thing she did. You know, you don't do that. They used to get on the about driving my car. I said I can't go get a Mercedes or something, I'll feel like a slumlord driving on this campus with that, you know? So, I was an outlier, they didn't like me. They were glad when I was gone.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

What advice do you have for faculty and staff that work in a PWI like TCU?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Recruit.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Recruit?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

You gotta have more, you know? You gotta have more. They gotta be strong don't get me wrong, but one of the things you gotta do is recruit and one of the things you gotta do is get funding. You gotta get some money.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

You know whether its federal. You know when I was at Oklahoma State, we had over \$10 million of federal funds in my office. And from that, what Oklahoma State did was that 8% that administrator's get, the administrative- so like you get federal funding and you get a certain percentage for administrative costs. Well, at Oklahoma State they would divide that between that office and that division that got the money. So that gave me a lot of play money, you know, to do different things with, but you kind of have a focus on raising money. A place like TCU green counts. I don't care if you're the worst professor in the world, if you got a grant, especially if

you're in the sciences. If you got some money coming in, you can do it and then you use that to help bring in another faculty member.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Hmm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

You know with that funding, and that kind of thing. I think that one of the things I was trying to do before I left was to create a fund from my office to support the recruitment of people, say in the sciences. A person will come in, they may have an NSF grant, but in order to get them in they might want this microscope that costs \$100,000. You know? So as part of negotiating, my office would pay for that you know. And then they could come in, you know, order their lab and all that. But they were afraid of me having that kind of you know- I said I can't choose anyone but I can just help you recruit them. You know, once you identify someone, I can help you, you know, and I can help identify people. You know have you heard of that? I can't remember the name, it's called PFF. It's a program that prepares PhD's for faculty to teach, they're from all different areas. I can't think of the name of thing, but I used to go there to try to recruit to tell people about the positions that we have open, and to just answer their questions if they had questions. I did that there and at Oklahoma State, and try to you know, open the door, and make sure that they know that this is an opportunity. And it's, I forgot the name of the organization I'll think of it eventually, but it's an organization that prepares PhD's to teach. So that they're not only getting their degrees, but they also know how to teach a little bit, and it's all minorities. And so, we would go there and set up a table and talk about the opportunities. These are our openings, I'm here to answer any questions. I can tell you all about, you know different things, different aspects. We have a support system if you come, you know all that kind of stuff. And then I was trying to get in my office funding to help support the recruitment of those people. But those are the kind of- you gotta be that assertive.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

In order to get quality people. And then you've got to have a way to support them. So, I mean, even like once we had a Spanish professor there named Carol Durham. She came from Hampton. And the Dean at the time was giving her hard time and I talked to the Chancellor Ferrari about. I said, "I don't know, you know he's being unfair to her." and Ferrari said, "well, you know, I don't get involved in the academic side," I said, "well, let me suggest this, can I called dean McCracken and just say I understand you have a problem with Dr. Durham, is there anything I can do? And he won't know if it's coming from you or from me. And let's see how he responds." And he said, "okay," he laughed and I did it. And McCracken hated me after that, but he knew not to touch her either.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Hmm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

She was a Fulbright scholar; she came here on a Fulbright scholarship. And was Spanish- I mean, she taught Spanish. She was a Black lady from Hampton.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

But most of her work was in was in Brazil. But he left it alone, and so the reputation was, you know, he's gonna, you know do whatever to support, you know those faculty members.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

I really couldn't do anything, but he didn't know, and Ferrari of course would go along with it, he would just laugh and go along. Boschini was too scared to do something like that. Not scared, I shouldn't say the word scared, he's just more cautious. You know he understood the dynamics of the board-

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And all that. You know he's a good guy but he understands his board.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

I see.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

So, the interview is actually getting close to its end.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

I want to thank you for you know, taking the time to share your story with us. It's incredibly valuable to this oral history project, which as you know, we're trying to create the picture of what is the racial experience here at TCU.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yes.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Your testimony's definitely going to be a pivotal key to the puzzle. I do have one last question.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Okay.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

And you know, feel free to be as elaborate or as brief with your answer.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Okay.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

And this is a question that we asked to all our participants. What does reconciliation mean to you?

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

I think it means equity. I think that- I don't think it means writing wrongs from the past. It's about doing stuff right now you know, and I think that what we ought to be thinking about when we talk about reconciliation is treating people the way you want to be treated. And if you're not doing that right now, making the change to make that so. Bottom line is, if you're having kids on that campus that are not having great experiences, right the wrongs. Don't rationalize and don't make excuses for them. Don't be impacted about the money that these other kids have. Treat people the way you want to be treated, that's what reconciliation to me means.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Well Dr. Cornell Thomas thank you so much for taking part in this oral history project. We appreciate your words of wisdom, and we are just so grateful that you are actually sharing those with us.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Well, thank you. I'm encouraged by the two of you, I just hope you have some support there as you this journey 'cause this journey's gonna be rough. It's worthy of the journey, but it's gonna be tough.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

It's gonna be tough.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

You'll lose some skin in the process, so.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

But I mean in time, you know, we gain, you know energy through your story and your testimony, right? It helps prepare us for the road ahead because as you indicated, you know there will be turbulence, you know.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yeah, there will be.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

And there will be, but so long as we know, I mean we're gonna manage expectations.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

Yes.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

I mean tis God's gift, you know, shed not struggle, you know what I mean, it's just part of the course. So-

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

And I'm available behind the scenes.

DR. FREDERICK GOODING JR.:

Yeah.

DR. CORNELL THOMAS:

You know anytime you want talk whatever, I'm available. I'm not-

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

And I regret saying that. (Laughs).

END

