Mark Wassenich Interview Transcription

March 16th, 2021

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: [1:06]

This is Sylviane Greensword, we are here virtually via zoom with Mark Wassenich. And this is the 16th day of the month of March. The year is 2021, and this is the interview for the Oral History Project with the Race and Reconciliation Initiative. Mark, it's really good to have you here. We want to thank you for participating to this oral history project, and we're going to start with just a brief story of the way you grew up. Can you tell us a little bit about your childhood, how you grew up, where you grew up, and how you ended up at TCU of all places?

MARK WASSENICH:

Okay. Well, good morning, Sylviane, I'm happy to be with you. I was born in Detroit, Michigan during World War II, where my dad had a church. My dad was a minister and then he became a professor of religion at the University of Texas. And at the end of the war, we moved to Austin, which was then a small city of about 80,000 people, and 15,000 people at the University of Texas. It's very difficult today for people to imagine Austin in those terms. Austin was a segregated town, on the edge of the Deep South, not entirely Southern. A mixture of Hispanic and Western people, and a lot of people from Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee and so on, which is what you get here in North Texas, or did before, now everybody's all mixed up but back then. And so, my father was from Beaumont, Texas, but his mother and my mother and that whole line of the family, 3/4ths of our family, are all from a small town in Ohio. So, in many ways I grew up with Puritan Values, Congregational Church values, and of course, Disciples of Christ values. And that that came from my mother's side and from dad's mother. My dad did not have a father. His father died in the flu in the Spanish flu epidemic in 1918, so he grew up without a father, and so his mother had a great deal of influence on him. And I guess it's from that background. That that the family had progressive values with regard to Blacks, and they didn't fit into the old Southern mode, even though Dad had been born in Houston and raised in Beaumont.

So, when the University of Texas, where he was teaching at the Texas Bible Chair, when it was told by the federal courts to desegregate in I think around 1955, but don't quote me on the exact date. That was welcome news to Mom and Dad because they always sort of struggled against segregation, and particularly the crazy Jim Crow laws that were so absurd and unfair. I don't know how much they were laws and how much they were just norms, but anyway it was pretty segregated. You go to West Texas back then and it wasn't like that, so you can't talk about Texas as a monolith about anything.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

MARK WASSENICH:

But certainly not about this issue. So, the university [University of Texas-Austin] and Austin, state government, they all decided to just let it happen and not to fight it. At the same time that that was happening, Governor [Orval] Faubus in Arkansas was fighting vehemently against similar orders in the public schools, and those are the famous ones that one in, and Governor [George] Wallace in Alabama, and others throughout the South decided to fight all this stuff, fight, fight, fight. And that's what caused an awful lot of the racial turmoil of the late 50s and into the 60s. And probably slowed down developments in other parts of the country or edges of the South, like Austin and Fort Worth because of the vehemence of the battles and therefore the fear, and in many people's minds, both black and white, of turmoil. But Austin, I mean, the University of Texas just did it. And the first class in about '56, I guess that included Black students had something like 55 or some number of Blacks in that first class. Which was good. It was a large enough number that, you know, it wasn't like one student or something that they could come on campus and, you know, feel somewhat at ease, I guess.

So, Dad was running the Disciple Student Fellowship at University Christian Church. A church which he had helped found a decade before, and that was a big group of about 200 students, so they decided to invite all of the Black students the first Sunday evening after they were on campus, and they did that in almost all of them came and they had, you know, typical student, you know, buffet dinner kind of thing, informal. They had their own big room in the basement and the church was very nicely appointed for students and come back anytime. You know? Or they felt the need for a safe haven or whatever. Come back anytime. Well, to a small minority of members of the church, that was really a terrible thing to do. They said, "You really shouldn't be mixing the races socially like that." I guess they had in there- these were not university people, these were townspeople. A couple of medical doctors and three or four others, and I guess they felt like somehow the Blacks on the campus there would move around in a completely isolated capsule separate from everybody else. I don't know. Anyway, so they actually went to the board of the church to try to get dad kicked out of working with the students. And so, they had been knocked down, drag out, vote. And it was about 30 in favor of integrating the church and these five or six against, and once they were voted against, half of them left the church as you would expect. The other half said no, stick it out and you know, in some ways I think it was those people and others like them who were opposed to desegregation, but who accepted it and learned to change their mind. I think in many ways I respect them as much as I do anybody in this whole struggle. And there were several important people, including a Supreme Court judge there in Austin who was in that category, and a high-level supervisor in the Austin Public Schools was another one. And they both stuck it out and overtime became reconciled to integration. So that was the experience in Austin and then in 1957, dad was recruited to TCU and I started high school, then in Fort Worth there at Paschal [High School].

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: [9:34]

And before you go to Fort Worth, did you have any non-white friends of your age range?

MARK WASSENICH:

In Austin?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

MARK WASSENICH:

No, uh, however, our Sunday school class, which was, I guess, about three years, you know, maybe 7th, 8th, 9th graders; for three or four years our Sunday school class was paired up with a an extremely low-income Black family in East Austin. It was a grandmother and a mother and a whole bunch of kids, and they lived in a shotgun shack, if you know what that is. And we would go over there with- I guess we were paired-our Sunday school class was paired up with them through the Council of Churches or some organization like that. And we went over there at Christmas and had gathered a whole bunch of food mainly, and then after we got over there and got to know him found out that some of the kids didn't have any shoes. So, we came up with shoes for some of the kids as well. My main memory of that, and we were there several times, realized that they needed more help. Back then, there weren't the welfare programs that there are now. And so we went back in the summertime, and I remember going there around July 1st and, you know, when you've got a house, it doesn't hold out to the weather, it's a lot different in December, than it is in July. Austin's hot and humid in the summer, really humid and I remember looking down through the floor, which was just a layer of boards, and you could see the ground.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Wow.

MARK WASSENICH:

Through the cracks and in the boards. And they had two beds for probably eight or ten of them. The mother and grandmother slept in one bed and all the kids tried to sleep in the other with, you know, think you could get eight kids in one bed, one double bed. So, I got to know that family a little bit. Then, for several years at this probably earlier. Yeah, it is earlier, prior to '52. We- the housekeeper for the Texas Bible Chair, and she also did some housekeeping in our parsonage, which was attached to it and next door, was a very educated young Black woman. I think she had like a master's degree education. And had come back home to Texas after that and couldn't get a job as an educated person. So, she was working as a housekeeper. And her name was Queen Latifah, something real fancy name. And she and my mother became friends and so I got to know her to some degree. And I remember that mom, who had just learned to drive, would have her sit, or she could sit anywhere she wanted to, would sit in the front seat of the car. Well, under Jim Crow, that wasn't done. So, if Mom was driving, then she should be sitting in the back seat. And a couple people called out my mother for that, for allowing this Black woman to sit in the front seat. She would drive her home sometimes after she finished work if it was hot or cold or rainy, as opposed to her getting on the bus and going downtown, changing bus going home. And so that was an experience. And another was when my brothers and I would get in trouble for drinking at the Black- what was called the colored water fountain, and in the in the department

store or something. That same department store is still there today, Scarborough, as it was the only store back in the day at downtown on Congress Avenue. And my mom developed a little drill, so if some old woman would come up and say, “Ma’am you need to teach your children how to how to behave.” And she would say, “Oh, I'm from Cleveland, Ohio, I don't understand your ways here.” Which she was (laughs) and she understood the ways, but you know, that was her comeback. And these women, would just “Oh it’s impossible,” and just walk off. But that was sort of the social methods that were used to maintain Jim Crow rules in Austin. Now deeper in the South, she probably could have gotten in deeper trouble, you know, if it had been Alabama or something, but Austin was kind on the edge, you know.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: [15:43]

Now tell me something, I'm always under the impression, and I mean, you were there you saw that so you can correct me, but it. It seems like the not necessarily the law, but the norm was a bit more severe if you had Black people drinking from white water fountains than the other way around, but yet your family seemed to get in trouble for doing the opposite.

MARK WASSENICH:

Not really in trouble.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

What’s the dynamic really?

MARK WASSENICH:

Yeah, trouble may be too strong a word.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

MARK WASSENICH:

Except our dad, and that incident, you know, and he was in trouble. I mean, you know, they couldn't have fired him from his job 'cause she worked for the National Church action. But they could have kicked him out of the church, which is what they were trying to do. But a strong majority disagreed with kicking him out, and you know, that was just that one incident, sort of took care of the church’s policy once and for all. But you're absolutely right and I imagine that if there'd been a Black woman in in Scarborough's department store with her kids and they had drunk out of white-water fountain, that the floorwalker detective would have walked over and escorted them out. And you know, that's probably how that works. I never saw any or never directly heard of any violence, or serious problems, or anything like that. And another interesting observation from Austin 1940s and ‘50s, of course, I was just a little kid. I mean, what my perceptions were in validity, I don't know, but this is a fact that there's a small Black College in Austin called Huston-Tillotson College. And at that time, there were more people with doctorate degrees from Harvard University teaching at Huston-Tillotson, than there were teaching at the University of Texas.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Wow.

MARK WASSENICH:

Which spoke to that same problem that the housekeeper had. You know, a Black person to get the finest degree but get a good- well, I mean, those were good jobs, you know it's a good, competent college, but they couldn't get a job teaching at the University of Texas with a PhD from Harvard-

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Wow.

MARK WASSENICH:

In any field, even though at the university was probably desperate for chemists and engineers.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah, qualified yeah.

MARK WASSENICH:

And that's how rigid segregation was up to that point. That changed and then over the next, I don't know how many years, next decade, let's say, those people became highly sought-after professors. And that hurt Huston-Tillotson because they lost a lot of their best faculty who then were pulled away, once integration started actually happening later on in the ‘60s.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Brain drain all over again, yes.

MARK WASSENICH:

Exactly, yeah.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: [19:19]

Yeah, some have argued that integration did more damage to Black businesses overall than Jim Crow. So that's a different take to, you know, to consider 'cause it's not the popular view. But yeah because, you know, if you give a person the option between a fancy white neighborhood and the less affluent Black neighborhood, they would probably choose the first option, which would leave the other one disenfranchised. So yeah, it’s a….

MARK WASSENICH:

Yeah, very few, older I get the more I believe very few things in life are all good or all bad that, you know, there's. And racial integration was I think unquestionably, largely good, but there were those growing pains and one of them was the brain drain from the Black community.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

MARK WASSENICH:

And I saw this later on in life here in Dallas, when I worked with the city, and worked a great deal in the low-income neighborhoods. And the most, it's a generalization which therefore is not completely true, but there was a large brain drain as you put it of the most competent Black people, who moved out of the Black community and into the larger integrated community. And as a result, I think it made it more difficult for the less privileged, or less educated, or less talented people to move up because they didn't have the leadership that they had previously. And the leadership that did move into some of the, if I can call them ghetto neighborhoods, they're basically what they were, was often not the best leadership. There were good and bad, but that has been continuing problem in that portion of the Black community, it's not all the Black community, but in the most concentrated, lowest income, difficult neighborhoods.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: [22:00]

Right, and cooperation is not necessarily welcome. I'm talking racial cooperation because some of those leaders they feel like, you know, they don't want to be pointed out, as in you need that white savior in order to, you know, emerge from your situation? It's a very complex situation, yes.

MARK WASSENICH:

It is and when we get to my experiences at the city, which we will have to cut that short because that was a number of years and a lot of things, but there definitely was that issue. And it was interesting to work with those leaders because you worked with 'em in two completely different settings. In the public meeting, you know, I'd go to a meeting in the evening in the Black community, and I was there representing City Hall and City Hall's the bad guy, so they would scream at me and criticize what's going on at City Hall. And then before and after the meeting, we're friends, we just talk calmly, as long as we're not in front of the big crowd. So, they were playing to the big crowd by being the tough guy.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

MARK WASSENICH:

We'd have sit there for a couple hours and listen to that. But…

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

There is a fear of selling out…

MARK WASSENICH:

But…

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Or to appear like you are.

MARK WASSENICH:

Yeah, but the real work got done either before or after the meeting or the next day.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right

MARK WASSENICH:

When we sat down, it's just two normal people or four normal people or whatever. And that's the way the game is still played to a large degree, and it's unfortunate. Of course, the press only takes pictures of the “na na na me.”

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Has to be sensational, yes.

MARK WASSENICH:

And the real work is done-

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Indoors, mhm.

MARK WASSENICH:

In private.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: [24:01]

Behind the scenes, right. Alright, so we’re gonna go back to TCU ‘cause that's where we were supposed to transition. So, you say that your father came to work for TCU…

MARK WASSENICH:

That’s right, yeah.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

And this is how your family moved to Fort Worth?

MARK WASSENICH:

Right. Yeah, it's 1957.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

1957.

MARK WASSENICH:

And he became associate professor of religion in the undergraduate religion department. And worked on up for the rest of his career there and retired, ended up an emeritus professor.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: [24:42]

For the record, was he at Brite?

MARK WASSENICH:

No, he was undergraduate. The undergraduate religion and Brite Divinity School are two separate things.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: [24:53]

Mhm. Were you informed as to when the separation between Brite and TCU occurred?

MARK WASSENICH:

It- well then goes way back to-

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

It does.

MARK WASSENICH:

I don't know, I'm gonna guess 1920 or something. Way back Brite became a separate- well, I guess it was when Mr. [Lucas Charles] Brite gave the big gift to set up the school. That might be more like the 1940 period. I don't know. I should know that history, I'm working on some of that history right now. And it set up with its own board, and really separate funding and so forth, from the rest of the university. Undergraduate religion is just like the English department or any other department.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Just another major, mhm.

MARK WASSENICH:

Yeah, and their required courses. That's a difference between say TCU and going to a public school, is if there's some religious training. You don't have to take any particular course, but there is some religious training. The connection between Brite and TCU used to be much closer, and it was smaller. Both schools were smaller than they are now. And then starting around, oh, around the year 2000 or so, 1998, the two became a little more separate. And there's not as much connection between the two boards of trustees, then there used to be. But even now, like Chancellor [Victor] Boschini serves as a trustee of Brite Divinity, and of course Brite Divinity is on the campus and has their own building, which they control, buildings that they control and so on. But it's on TCU land…

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

MARK WASSENICH:

And they pay maintenance costs to TCU and so forth.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: [27:04]

So, you finished high school in Fort Worth?

MARK WASSENICH:

Yeah.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: [27:08]

Went to TCU. What was it like to study under Dr. [Austin L.] Porterfield?

MARK WASSENICH:

Oh, Porterfield?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

MARK WASSENICH:

That's interesting that you should raise his name. I had I think two courses with Austin.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Sociology, correct?

MARK WASSENICH:

Austin L. Porterfield? Yeah, sociology. He was an old man at that point.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Fascinating.

MARK WASSENICH:

He was both a PhD sociologist and one of the leading experts on Health and Human behavior, and particularly the issue of suicide from a sociological perspective. He may have done his doctorate in that field because he studied with, what was his name? I'm gonna say [Émile] Durkheim, who was the first leader in studying suicide. And I took his graduate course in Health and Human behavior, it's one of the best courses I ever took, and even though I was undergraduate, he invited me in. It was a small class and it was in the summertime. It's the only thing I was studying and I found I learned better when I was studying only one thing at a time, so I got a great deal out of that course. I've used it a great deal in my work. And we also studied

epidemics, among other things, in that course and then geography as well. I've done some public health work as well. And the other course I think was just Introduction to Sociology, and he did something in that course I'll never forget. That was a good course to, you know, regular, you know, sophomore level course, fairly large class, 30 or 40 students. And it was the fall of 1963 and President John Kennedy was coming to Fort Worth, and the next day, going to Dallas and on Tuesday, Porterfield said to us in class. He said, "Now, I know that Thursday morning, I'm not gonna see some of you for our 9:00 AM because you're gonna be downtown listening to President Kennedy," and he said, "That's alright," but he says, "You're going to lose one grade level if you're not here that day." I was carrying an A minus in that course, and sure enough, I got a B+ as my final grade with that course (laughs).

And I remember standing out in the rain down there watching [President John F.] Kennedy, and [Vice President Lyndon B] Johnson, and Senator [Ralph] Yarborough, and all of them there, and Congressman Jim Wright up on the podium out in front of the Texas Hotel. And there are these other students standing right beside me and they were three or four other, we're all standing there, we're all from the same class, and we all know we're getting downgraded for not being in class that morning. And then at 1:00 PM that day, Kennedy was dead.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Now, I'm kind of surprised that a sociology instructor would try to discourage you from attending such a teachable moment.

MARK WASSENICH:

Well, I imagine he was not the only one. He was old school, and you know those people were educated, they got their doctorates back in what the 1920s, or 1910s, or something like that. He was probably born in, I'm sure he was born in the 19th century and school was much stricter back then and the professors were not to be questioned.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Wow.

MARK WASSENICH:

You know, it was old school. And so, we were in an era where we had teachers like that. And then we had younger teachers who were much more interactive with students, more likely to have almost universally now. What brought up, how'd you happen to come up with that question?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Well, I was reading about the history of TCU and I do know that Dr. Porterfield was one of the prominent figures. I know that there's a biography that's being written about him, and his name appears in several places. So, I always wondered what it is like to study under, you know such a character. Also, because of that, I believe that you did mention this, I have it, an interview I believe that was back in 2012, where you were talking about this incident, the JFK incident.

MARK WASSENICH:

Oh okay, I see.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah, so I was really interested in what was it like, I mean, to sociology class, why not encourage attending a talk by the President [Kennedy]?

MARK WASSENICH:

Yeah. Well, that's the old school stiff-necked way of doing things.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: [32:49]

Yes, I see. So, let's talk about your experience in student life and how you got to be involved in the student government.

MARK WASSENICH:

Okay, well, I started in physics and that was too narrow a field, and when it got into the more detailed-I love physics, love the general concepts, but I wasn't good at dealing with the tiny little details that you have to deal with and have your head down for so long. So, I had to find a field that was more people oriented, more immediately relevant to what is my real world, which is more of a people-oriented world. Geography was perfect. It was a mixture of dealing with earth sciences and realities on the ground, but at the same time relevant to people. You're studying both people and the land. Geography being the study of people on the land.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

MARK WASSENICH:

And that that fit me real well. I do well seeing things and grasping what I see. And I'm good at math up to a point, and statistics, things like that come easily, so that all fit, and then sociology fit into that as well. And that proved to be a good major for me because the wars were on by that time and with all of us, young men were being drafted. So rather than being drafted as a private in the Army had decided that I'd do better as an officer in the Air Force. And so, I went through ROTC and became an Air Force intelligence officer. The Air Force wanted me very much, in fact, they didn't want to let me go, and that was another struggle. But the geography served me very well. As an-Well, and the sociology, and the statistics, and all that is stuff that intelligence world needs very much. And they were very short of, geography is unlike Europe, geography has not been a very popular study and popular major in the United States. You find many more geographers in the European schools. And that's changing now because there is demand, maybe even more today for geographers. TCU's Geography Department is doing extremely well. It was very small department then, but we had a very good chairman, and I pretty much learned geography from Dr. Robert Mayfield. The one professor, he was about as good as you could get. And he was quietly encouraging to me, to work on the racial integration issue, yeah.

The professors had to be kind of subtle in their pressures on that subject. So, it was really the students, and the administration, and the trustees that were the, and the churches some of the church leaders, who were the major forces. So, you know, I don't know, I was always involved in a few committees, student activities committees in the Student Center and the Disciple Student Fellowship over at University Christian Church and. Those were my friends, and so on. I lived at home, and I was not in a fraternity, and so that was kind of my social group. And so, I kind of grew up in that, and then I guess it was starting it in the sophomore year, some of us in the various student activities committees at the Student Center decided that we needed to be exploring the desegregation issue and dealing with that. And we invited our first, and that was through the forums committee. Forums had some money from the Student Activities Fund to bring in a few speakers each year, and we would do it in whatever format we wanted to do it, but we usually brought pretty important people in who the faculty in certain departments would be interested in as well. So, we often coordinated these issues, and we brought in the ambassador, this was '62 I guess. The ambassador from one of the African countries, Ambassador to the United States, and he flew down at our expense to TCU, and spent a couple of days with us, and was very illuminating, and very few people around TCU knew much about the United Nations and what was going on there and things like that. He was not with the UN; he was Ambassador to the U.S. He personally knew Lyndon Johnson, and we took him out to buy him a cowboy hat out at Luskey's, out in north- Leddy's or Luskey's, two different companies out in North Fort Worth and buying him a cowboy hat. And he picked, you know, they custom make the hats for you right then and there, and he chose a style that was just like what Lyndon Johnson wore, the Vice President. And that was our first visible effort in inviting a Black person on campus. But that's another crazy thing about Jim Crow. As an African person, not an American Negro, he could come and go, and stay in a hotel downtown and so forth. Isn't that weird so.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Wow, yeah. And you know, to these days some of those, I guess I could call them conflict to some extent, between Africans and even African immigrants and African Americans, some of those have not been resolved.

MARK WASSENICH:

That's right.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

There still are some tensions in some areas and some communities, where you do find clashes between the African community and the African American community, and if you drive in the Afro Caribbean people in the mix, you know it complicates the issue even more.

MARK WASSENICH:

Yeah.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

So yeah, definitely a legacy of Jim Crow and even way back from the slavery era.

MARK WASSENICH:

Right, right. Yeah, and you find that, I'm sure you've seen this, that there will be a cluster of African immigrants who work in a particular business, and you walk in the store, and you think, "Oh, these are the Black people here?" Well, no, they're, I mean American, African Americans. No, they're not. They're all from Ghana or someplace, and they all work together in a group, you know?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

MARK WASSENICH:

Like that and yeah. So, that's interesting- that kind of emboldened us and then the nationally the whole Civil Rights Movement was boiling up in the early 60s, and Martin Luther King came to Dallas, sometime in the winter of '62, '63 I think yeah, and a bunch of us got in several cars and drove over to Dallas to hear him speak at the Fair Park Music Hall, which seats thousands, several thousand people. It was full, and crowd was probably 2/3rds African American, and everybody was dressed up, you know, in their Sunday suits and so on. And he gave a- he was there to help the voter registration drive that was going on in many places, but in Dallas at that time. And so, we were impressed with his manner, and speaking ability, and everything else, as well as his messages. And we wanted to invite him to come to TCU through the forums committee. Well, the administration nixed that idea, they said, "We can't provide security for him, and it might cause a riot, and might really cause trouble in Fort Worth, and so don't do it."

So, we instead shifted gears in the summer of '63. I can't- yeah, it would be this summer '63, no summer of '62, I guess. And we decided to invite Ralph Bunche, who was the highest ranking Black American well, he was the highest ranking American in the United Nations at that time, and he was Black. And he had previously been with the State Department and had been involved in the development of the United Nations in the mid-40s and on into the late 40s, worked with [President Harry] Truman and so on. And he had won the Nobel Peace Prize, and he was like this Associate General Secretary of the United Nations, the number two guy in the United Nations. And they always put him into the hot spots because he had been able to settle peacefully, and the conflicts between the Israelis and Egyptians, who were chronically at war back then, and that's why he got the [Nobel] Peace Prize. But he accomplished many things. He accomplished the peace in Yemen, and you know, there's war in Yemen today again, and so on. So, we invited him to come. Administration said, "We think we can handle that," that he's not a civil rights leader who's gonna stir up the antis and so forth. So, he came and we kind of- Wayne Ewan and I worked on, I was chairman of that forums committee at that point, and Wayne Ewan became chairman, I guess after me. And then my wife became chairman the year after that and brought him to campus, had a very fine situation. He spoke to several classes and then some. We would have little, just anybody show up in the afternoon forums, you know, 10 or 20 people could show up. You could just have a discussion, just an open discussion with these people that we brought in and everybody really liked that. And then a formal speech in the evening in Ed Landreth Hall, pretty much filled the hall. Some Black people from the local community came, and that was

intentional and all worked out, you know. And there was an article in the newspaper, in the [Fort Worth] *Star Telegram* about his being there, and that was fairly important. These things were very delicate at the time you know. And Fort Worth generally and TCU in particular were of the attitude that if we do this desegregation calmly and step-by-step, that we won't have the kind of big blowups that we were reading in the newspapers and beginning to see on television. Television news was brand new then, the kind of trouble they had in Arkansas and in Alabama, so. Nobody wanted that, pretty much all over Texas nobody wanted that.

And so, that was a big step and it was a wonderful thing for me to spend an entire day with him, and on into the evening, and took him back to the apartment at Brite Divinity School. Had one apartment that was there for VIPs and he stayed there. Had a visit with him and I told him after it was over where I said, "Your visit here was really significant for us. And I appreciate so much you're coming all the way from New York to do this." And he understood what before, when he first accepted, he understood what he was there for, as a symbol that we can do something interracially and not have a problem, you know. Rationally, everybody knew that, but you know, in the sort of political, social world you can have problems where real problems don't exist. So, Mike Walsh was the head, another student in my class, was the head of the Activities Council that year as a junior. And I kind of thought he would run for student body president as a senior, but he was going into the ministry and he decided it would be better if he headed up the Disciple Student Fellowship at University Christian Church, which was a significant organization of well over 100 students and you know, it would kind of give him a little more ministerial experience. So, he did that.

So, I decided to run for student body president. I hadn't been involved in student politics so much, just more in the Activities Council work. And so, a friend of mine got- Jim Wright, was his name, not the congressman, but student. He got me appointed to a vacancy on the Student Congress, which helped me set up my campaign. And I ran on two issues, the public issue was that we needed to significantly alter the student activities budget that had a lot of sort of 1950 style things, like money for big bands and nobody danced to big bands anymore. Fraternities and sororities by that time had grown, and they first started in the 1950s and at TCU, and by that time, they had become the main social centers for parties. And that-so, having parties and bands and stuff in the student center, it didn't work anymore, people didn't come. It was wasting money so things like that and floats for the football games and homecoming, that was a very 40s and 50s kind of thing and had become a drudgery. And students didn't wanna spend their time putting little crepe paper flowers on floats, and so we cut out money for those things. That's what I was running on. Let's do more things that students want, including more money for these forums, which we're doing well.

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DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: [50:32]

Were you aware of the slave auctions that those fraternities and sororities were organizing as fundraisers 'cause I know that they had the actual slave auctions?

MARK WASSENICH:

Boys and girls, where the fraternities would bid up the value of a sorority girl, and then they would come to a party or something? I never quite understood. Yeah, yeah, I heard about that. It was kind of a joke thing really. I think it was more a popularity contest than anything else. Most popular girl raised the most money, and that sort of thing. I guess that went to charity actually, I don't know. I never really looked at it or thought about it. Yeah, that did occasionally go on, it wasn't a particularly major thing that you would notice. It may have been among the fraternities and sororities, but I was not a member, so I didn't get involved.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: [51:44]

And how was the student body, what was the student body's reaction to the JFK assassination?

MARK WASSENICH:

Well, you know, most of the things that happened at TCU are parts of a bigger thing that happens for the whole country.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

True.

MARK WASSENICH:

And that's true of the JFK assassination. So, to finish with the campaign, the underground part of the campaign was, "Okay if Mark [Wassenich] gets in, he and his group are gonna push hard for racial integration and push the trustees." There had been a little bit of push going on since the late 1950s actually, and my two predecessors, Joe Short in '61 and '62, and trying to think of his name, Galen Hull were just before me. They were both quietly pushing the integration issue as well. And but it was time in '63 to really hit it and get this done. I mean, the public schools, University of Texas had been integrated for a number of years now. It was just the private schools, SMU, Baylor, and Rice that were not integrated. 'Cause the private schools weren't under, you know, government mandates.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

MARK WASSENICH:

So, and some of them, and I think they're the old thinking at TCU and the others was that if we integrated too soon that it might drive students away. And we wouldn't get the matriculation that we need of new freshmen every year. It's not like today at TCU where there's twenty people for every slot. Back then it was pretty much one for one. And so, having enough students was important back then. So that was kind of the underground part of the campaign. And we won, and I don't feel like it was a "me," it was a "we" kind of group thing. We won without a runoff against two fraternity boys. So, I got about 53% of the vote without a runoff. And I think that said something about where the campus was.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yes.

MARK WASSENICH:

And back then you could kind of tell where the vote was coming from because there were ballot boxes in different parts of the campus. There was one over in the West Campus, where the fraternities and sororities were. They had a ballot box in their cafeteria over there. And there was a ballot box in the Religion Building right behind the Chapel. And there was a ballot box at the Business School, and so on. And of course, the main one in the student center where most people probably voted. And we got twice as many votes from the religion box, as had ever voted before. And what happened was all of the Brite Divinity students voted for me because of the racial issue. They never voted. Graduate students typically don't vote in campus elections. And so, there were things like that going on. I even carried a good number, I can't, I don't know that exact percentage of the ballot box in the fraternity and sorority area, and I'm pretty sure I got a majority of the boys and the fraternity votes. And I had several friends in Sigma Chi guy and Phi Delt [Phi Delta Theta], who were both running candidates, come up to me and quietly say, "I voted for you, Mark." (Laughs).

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Privately.

MARK WASSENICH:

Yeah, and I don't know. But the only place I didn't have a strong vote was the Business School and I didn't know those students well. And I think there were probably more conservatives there.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Well, as you say, you know, integration was bad for business.

MARK WASSENICH:

It was a difference place, yeah. So that kind of sent a signal to campus and then the next year when I was student body president, then this same group and some additional people organized a resolution to try to get a unanimous vote by the Student Congress to send to the trustees that we need to racially integrate now. And I took that over to President [McGruder Ellis] Sadler and showed it to him, and I said, "Is this gonna fly?" and he said, "Yeah, yeah. I think that's fine." And he said, "How many votes can you get? And when I told him we're trying for unanimous, he was amazed. He said, "There's no student opposition?" I said, "If there is, it's so quiet that we can't see it." So that sort of spurred him because that meant that the incoming students aren't gonna have a problem with this if the existing students don't.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right

MARK WASSENICH:

And so, we ran that resolution and there were two young ladies, one of them was a friend of mine, I didn't know the other one, from the sororities. And they represent sororities. And they came. And they were active in the Panhellenic Council, you know the overriding group for the sororities, so they were important people in that. They came to me, and they said, "We're opposed." And so, I had met with 'em just the three of us and I said, "You know, tell me about this, where are you?" Well, once they got to talking, it turned out that they personally weren't big segregationists, but they had mothers who were the faculty- or I mean the outside advisors, alumni advisors I guess the term, for the sororities. And they were pushing these girls on the Student Congress to oppose this. So, once we got that out, I said, "Well, how would you feel about abstaining from the vote?" I said, "You won't be voting for integration, you're just not taking the position." I said, "You think that'll fly with your sorority and with the mothers?" They said, "We don't think the girls would have any problem with it. It's the mothers and the alumni advisors." And they went away and called me a day later, whatever, and said, "That'll work." So that's what we did. We had the vote, by 30 in favor and 2 abstentions or whatever the number was. And so, I took that over to [Chancellor M.E.] Sadler and Sadler set up a meeting with the chairman of the Board of Trustees, Marion Hicks.

Marion Hicks was the Chief of General Dynamics Corporation, Fort Worth division. And they were building B-58s then and had something, huge number of employees, tens of thousands of employees. I think I said the number to somebody else the other day and I probably said the wrong number, I'm not sure what, but tens of thousands. They were the largest employer in Fort Worth. It's now Lockheed Martin. Back then, General Dynamics. And he was chair of the trustees. He also, and so I met with him and with Sadler in Sadler's office, and gave him the Resolution and he said, "I was student body president in 1930" whenever year, and he said, "The issue we pushed through to the trustees that year was the ability for students to dance off campus."

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Wow.

MARK WASSENICH:

Prior to that time, it was considered immoral for students to dance. But the big bands had happened, you know Benny Goodman, and Tommy Dorsey, and Glenn Miller, and the Black bands, you know, Count Basie, and all that. And so that was the music of the young people of that era. And these bands would come to Fort Worth, and they would play at a place called the Casino out on Lake Worth. And there was no air conditioning in the 1930s, so it was not a casino, it was just a name. This was on a big pier out over Lake Worth on over the water, it was beautiful, and it was cool because of the water. And these bands who play there and the students very much wanted to go out there and dance. So, he got that done on his watch, as student body president. So, he told me about that and thought that this was a somewhat similar policy change. Now to me, it wasn't similar at all, but you know, each era has its own issues, I guess.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yes, was ahead of its time.

MARK WASSENICH:

Both were moral issues in a sense. So, then it started occurring to me and really it was many years later when I realized fully that as head of the biggest company in town, and a company that gets all of its money from the U.S. military, which was already racially integrated.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

MARK WASSENICH:

And there was national policy by that point for racial integration, that he was doing something that very much coincided with the needs of his company and the needs of big business in Fort Worth, Texas etc. And so, he was pushing it, and Sadler was now on board. Sadler would have done it years earlier if it just been up to him. But the issue for the Chancellor was the money that these trustees made, most of them make major commitments to big gifts, mainly in their wills, that's where the real big money comes into the endowment. And he was worried about several trustees, that if we integrated, they would get mad and leave and they would lose millions of dollars. So, the board meeting was set up for November 22nd and 23rd of 1963, that was homecoming weekend. Normally, when the trustees meet in the fall, two meetings a year. And of course, they met on the morning of the 22nd, and in the afternoon they were going to discuss and vote on racial integration. And they had already received in their packet our resolution. And we hadn't gotten any negative kickback from that resolution, from the Student Congress. There were some churches who had sent in letters urging integration as well, and I don't know of any others, there may have been other groups. There were strong faculty indications of, need to get this done now, but nothing formal. They really try not to get the Chancellor in too much trouble by pushing those kinds of things too overtly. So, at 1:00 PM or so, the news came out that [President] Kennedy was assassinated and the whole country just froze. And absolutely nothing happened until he was buried in a funeral the next Monday or Tuesday. So, the meeting was cancelled. Homecoming was cancelled. All the football games were cancelled, everything was cancelled. And most of the businesses shut down on Friday, and everybody sat home watching their television with nothing to watch but repeats of all this horror of that assassination in Dallas. That assassination made pretty much made the career of Bob Schieffer, who had been a Fort Worth *Star-Telegram* reporter, and had gone to NBC News, and knew the local area. So, he and Dan Rather were the two big reporters on the ground who were unknown up until that time, really. I guess both of them had become a little bit known because of Vietnam War reporting, but that really made them big, well recognized figures.

So, we did not get the school integrated in November of ‘63. We would have been I guess the first of the private schools had that happened. I don't know about Rice, but Rice almost doesn't count, it was so small and far away. But Baylor and SMU and TCU were the three church-related schools, who were all seen as still segregated. I'm not sure about the dates on SMU. I know that

we got it done a few weeks or months before Baylor, but basically they all happened the same time period. So then, Sadler said, “Well, we'll just do it in the spring meeting.” And as students- and I’ll back up and say that there were probably 10 or 20 students, who were you know, really organized to push this forward and we were all pretty much working together, but it was just a loose group, it wasn't a real organized group. And then there were probably a few hundred other students who cared deeply that we'd get it done, and we felt some disappointment that he didn't call a special meeting, “go ahead and get this done in December” or whatever. But the trustees only meet twice a year and they didn't, I guess this wasn't a big enough deal to them. And besides, it wouldn’t have made any difference 'cause whatever the decision, it would be the fall, of you know, ’64, ‘65 would be the date that it would occur. So, whether it happened in November or in April wouldn't matter. And so, it did occur at the spring meeting, whenever that was March/April. And again, Sadler set it up for the afternoon of the first day of the two-day meeting in the agenda. And he, after the meeting that night, he called me at home. And he said, “Mark, I wanted to tell you that we got it done today, that we had a vote,” he said, “I had several”-handful, I don't know how many, “vote no.” But he said, “I lost two of my most important trustees.” And we've lost, I can't remember $7 million or $10 million worth of future gifts to the endowment.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Wow.

MARK WASSENICH:

I think it was 10 million. And now, I think these records are probably available in the Archives, Special Collections. It wouldn't have the exact numbers for each individual trustee, but actually I guess the numbers might not be available, but the names of the trustees are who voted. And I’ve never- he asked me never to disclose who they were, he said, “I will get them back.” He said, “This is a temporary problem. I will get them back.” And he said I made a mistake today, putting this on the agenda in the afternoon. He said, “I knew that these guys would drink some martinis at lunch. And he said they got to talking and kind of blathering about this race issue, and kind of went over.” And he said, “If I had done it in the morning, they wouldn't have been so locked into their position that they were just talking about during lunch.” And, kind of had to get their backup. But he said I will get them back.” And I knew he would because this issue was a passing issue, once it happened and there's no problem, then there's no problem. And he did. Over the next few years, he got them both back, and I think he got all that money back for TCU. But the endowment at that time was $50 million, and he had a $10 million problem. He said it could have been a $20 million problem but because of the Kennedy assassination, the whole issue of race had changed overnight in America. And Lyndon Johnson had a much, much easier job to do for the country. And all the Civil Rights legislation that he got through in ‘64 and ’65, that Kennedy could not get through. But it was a psychological thing of Kennedy’s shocking assassination that changed so many attitudes. And the same was true with these trustees, so two or three others who might have voted no in November, voted yes, the next spring. But there was a huge majority to do it, and once it was done, there was no problem from the political point of view as far as I know.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: [1:12:56]

Well, thank you for sharing this amazing story about the relevance of the JFK assassination in the timeline because, you know, we're tempted to see them as two distinctive ends that are independent and yeah, we kind of both talk about Civil Rights and integration, but yeah, we see that, you know, history is not just like a straight arrow. It's several events coming together, combining, and one influences the other, and you know the result is the present.

MARK WASSENICH:

So true.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah.

MARK WASSENICH:

It makes history difficult to interpret because the more you learn, the more complicated it gets.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: [1:13:38]

Yeah, so many parameters, absolutely. So, without taking away from this victory, several, I guess several critics of our timeline always ask the same question, "Why did it take so long?" You know, comparing TCU to other institutions, even to other states. So, your take on the situation is that integration had always been part of the plan, it just had to be developed into several steps in order to avoid the scandal? As if the scandal would be a worse outcome than early integration.

MARK WASSENICH:

I wouldn't say it was always a part of the plan. And I really don't know when the attitudes changed. But to my knowledge at all these private schools, there was no effort. I don't know this, but I'm guessing that there was no effort in the late 1950s, were they said, "Oh, look, the University of Texas has successfully integrated in 1955 or 6 when it was, and therefore we ought to join them." That didn't happen. In fact, A&M didn't, which was the only other big important school at that time. A&M didn't integrate, even though Texas had been ordered to. Now they came along just a few years later, but they held out as another public school. I mean, you would think that maybe the immediate court order would have been for both of them or all the state schools, including the small ones. But it wasn't, it was just- I guess they felt like they didn't wanna fight too many battles at the same time.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

MARK WASSENICH:

Maybe if they hit all the schools all over the state in the mid-50s, that maybe there would have been a Texas uprising like there was in Alabama and so on. I don't know. That's, you know, I

was a kid then I don't know what was going on. But yeah, it just sort of, it's like a lot of things and many years later, well, it's still going on in the acceptance of gays is similar, which you've experienced. It just slowly comes on; and you know step by step. I think the reason that TCU, SMU, Baylor were a lot slower than the public schools was A: they were not ordered by the federal courts to do it; B: they had trustees, many of whom were very conservative people who just don't go for any kind of change; and C, or maybe probably C ought to be A, what I said before that that recruiting students to the school was critical. There were years in the 50s, 60s, maybe even into the 70s when not enough students came to TCU. And you know they had empty beds in the dorms and empty seats in the classrooms, and boy, that's you know, you have to start laying off faculty when that happens. You don't have the money.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

MARK WASSENICH:

So, they were really worried that it would be, you know, a negative thing for recruitment of students. But at the same time, TCU is getting better academically.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Okay.

MARK WASSENICH:

And very slowly, but incrementally every year it was getting better and better. And once it got into the 70s, then TCU took on a higher academic profile than it previously had, and many of us from my era say we probably couldn't hack it at TCU today, you know, but you can't compare the two different eras, different everything. So that's some of the answer to your question, but I think some of it is an eternal mystery. What are people's attitudes and why does culture change so slowly? I mean, we've seen it so much in the past few years politically, where problems that we thought had died in the 1920s have come up 100 years later.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

MARK WASSENICH:

Same problems you know. It's a mystery.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: [1:19:02]

Right, so let's move forward, chronologically to the aftermath of integration. So, the resolution is passed 1964, from this date henceforth. So, we know that now African Americans can apply and be accepted as long as they meet the criteria. Now, did you have any interaction with the first Black students on the main TCU campus? Those students who came in 1964.

MARK WASSENICH:

I graduated in June of 1964 and I went into the Air Force.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Immediately after?

MARK WASSENICH:

And on active duty in the Air Force, immediately and was sent to Denver to the Air Intelligence School, and then off to Germany. And so, I was not back on campus for five years. So, I never saw or heard of a Black student ever, and my wife was one year after me, she graduated ’65. And I just lied, I did come back on campus to marry her.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right. (laughs)

MARK WASSENICH:

I was for about two days and then gone again. And-So, I don't have any knowledge of that or anything. It apparently was peaceful and kind of a non-event. But as you've done a lot of study already, I can tell, and I imagine you know about Ron Parker and about Dr. [James] Cash. They were both, I think, in that first class, I know Dr. [James] Cash was.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Well, this is the thing, there was a wave of students who enrolled in 1964 in the fall semester. And they stayed for one year, but they never came back.

MARK WASSENICH:

Wow.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

All of them, all of them left TCU and the one that we know was the first class was actually those that enrolled in 1965. And that would be the class with, you know, Dr. Cash and Lillian Warner Green, and you know, they're known as the class of ‘69.

MARK WASSENICH:

Okay.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

So those students who did enroll in 1964, you know, it's kind of a mystery that the RRI is trying to solve among the different investigations. Because-

MARK WASSENICH:

Yeah, that would be interesting, gosh that obviously was a serious problem.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah, that that the situation was so bad, that they refused to come back, every single one of them. But the class that enrolled in 1965, however, does testify. Yeah, it was relatively uneventful. Was just, you know, just going to class, there was no incident, nobody was throwing stones at them. People were, you know amicable, and everything was really nice and dandy overall. So, it would be really interesting to find out what went wrong with that wave of ’64.

MARK WASSENICH:

Yeah. Yeah, it’d be really interesting to dig up some of those students.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah.

MARK WASSENICH:

And I guess probably the faculty members and so on are all dead now who would know, you know, like the leaders of the Student Union. Elizabeth Crawford, Libby Crawford was the head of the Student Center, and she would have known exactly what was going on. I wonder if Dr. Cash and Ron Parker and those people maybe know.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

That's on the agenda (laughs).

MARK WASSENICH:

Yeah, good, good. I had, with a quite a group last year, a pretty frank session about where we were and where we are on racial integration. And I think we all kind of agreed that all we accomplished back then was desegregation, as opposed to integration. If you put integration in a sociological sense that we're all one group and,

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

MARK WASSENICH:

We're still not, you know, I mean, there's still differences and I don't know how the, I would be very interested, and I am interested in hearing the results of this whole research effort and study effort that you and the others are doing as to how the Black students of today feel about campus life.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

MARK WASSENICH:

Are they comfortable on campus? Do they feel integrated? Can they walk into essentially any forum group, gaggle of students, and you know, without thinking about race? Or can they just, "Hey, that looks like a fun group of people, I'll go over and hang out with them." Or are there still barriers?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oh yes. There are numerous barriers, and these are the barriers that actually triggered our task force, the fact that those barriers still remain.

MARK WASSENICH:

Well, oh yeah, that's true. Yeah, that's true. And not only barriers, but I think communication problems?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: [1:24:53]

Yeah, and there's also that, you know, I'm a language person, so I think that a lot of people are lost in cultural translation. And we're not fluent in the cultural language of other groups

MARK WASSENICH:

This is true.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Which leads to a lot of misconceptions, a lot of misunderstandings, some attitudes are perceived as aggressive, some as passive-aggressive, when they're just cultural language. And hopefully the Race and Reconciliation Initiative can eliminate some of those discrepancies. I just have a couple of questions; we're almost done here. I would like to talk about your father's work at TCU. Now Professor Paul Wassenich is to be credited for starting the Honors program. Now on one hand honors overall have been criticized for encouraging elitism and even furthering segregation. I mean, at some point we could count on one hand the number of Black students in the Honors College. And I know that it hasn't always been a college, but the number of Black students-

MARK WASSENICH:

Program.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

In the program or college, you know what's very, very low. So, on one hand, we have that criticism, but yet on the other hand Dr. [Paul] Wassenich was very active in the civil rights. So, how do you reconcile these, it's an apparent contradiction, but we know that there's more to the surface, so can you speak a little bit to that?

MARK WASSENICH:

Yes, I think I can. When the Honors program was first set up, last Chancellor James Moudy, who was the head of academics, I guess you'd call him a Provost now, but he was more than that and he was about to become Chancellor. He and dad, and sometimes I all commuted together daily to TCU. We both lived in Wedgewood, about 10-15 minutes south of the campus, and to save money they would drive one car, and the two of them would carpool and I was going to Paschal High. So, I would jump in the back seat and go with him many days, and then after school I walk over the campus and then when they were ready to go home around 5:30, and then we'd go home and by the end I'd have most of my homework done. I had a couple hours by the time school ended. So, I heard a lot of these discussions and in fact, this is all been written about in the history book, honors history book. I tell that story there, but anyway, basically they and some other faculty members felt like there was a small collection of extremely capable students at TCU, who were being shortchanged by the academics at that time. That these were students who could go to the Ivy League schools, but who ended up here. And they would talk about, well, should we encourage them to transfer. Of course, you couldn't transfer into an Ivy League school, but maybe after sophomore year, and they see this really sharp kid, will send him to Tulane or Vanderbilt, or Duke, you know. And they said, well, that most of them couldn't afford it, and they've already been here two years and transfers not really the best way to do a college education. So, they said, "Well, let's set up a special program for these-" and they knew their names, and they came up with like 18 or 20 kids. And they said these are the 20 kids who we are shortchanging. Now that time school was 4000 people, so less than half the size now. So, you know much more personal. And so, dad outlined an honors program and Moudy, he handed it to him in the car, and Moudy marked it up that night, handed it to him the next morning on the way in. And out of that outline, they built the program. So, then the short answer to your question is, it wasn't set up as a recruiting program for smart students, it was set up as a TCU catchup program for students who were being shortchanged by a curriculum that wasn't good enough for the smartest students. So, it had nothing to do with race, or selectivity, or anything else. Hey, we happen to have these students already on campus, and we're not doing justice to them. That was the program, and that was the program for years. And it didn't get big, it wasn't intended to get big.

And so, the idea it was, well I hate to say when it changed, but when McDormand, Catherine McDormand was director of the program, she really started thinking about it in broader terms and bigger terms. And by then, I don't know, maybe 200 students, you can check the records, I don't know, were in the program by then. This should be during, around 2000, that time period. And she was talking with the provost, and so on. And they were, you know, they were thinking that, you know, TCU is on the move. We've got more money. We've been able to hire really top faculty across the board. We've added programs or majors, etc. And there are more students coming here and wanting to come here. And so, we, you know, honor, it was kind of obvious that they could set up an honors program. I mean, an honors college, it would be much broader, go across campus. At that time, Honors was really just arts and sciences, there were very few students from any of the other colleges in the program before. That was really the big change when it went to college, was all of a sudden, you're bringing in the business students, nursing, all

the other fine arts, education. And so, that was it. Certainly, that program or any program that encourages the very top-level students is going to have a little bit of an elitist touch to it, and they worried about that all the way back to the beginning. And you know they did a few things to try to avoid that, you know, trying not to segregate those students, although ultimately, we've had an Honors dorm which is extremely popular, but it doesn't seem to segregate those students from other students. They live there a year and then they move into all the other types of housing and social groups. So yeah, but, you know, I think you could make the same argument of selectivity, which has a racial component to it unintended I think, about who let's- who they let into Harvard, or Stanford, or any school that's selected.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yes, actually not even 24 hours ago, we had a virtual town hall meeting that actually address those race neutral policies that actually function as barriers to integration.

MARK WASSENICH:

Yeah, they do, and so far, as I know, and now I'm getting away from what I really know, but the Community Scholars' program has been a serious effort to counteract that trend that almost inevitability at this time. And from what I hear, it seems to be pretty successful as a method, and you know this gets into even broader than race and social issues, into the economics of who can afford to come to TCU and not just tuition but afford the lifestyle if you will? Now that's something that us old folks laugh at because when we were students, there were dirt poor students who, I mean they didn't own a suit, you know. And the idea of owning a car was just okay, I'll fly that car at the moon, you know? And a lot of us worked part time, and I don't see many students working now, and then you know, take a job on campus is a good thing, very good. It's a better kind of work. But you learn a lot working on campus part time. But no, I mean you know, working as waiters and one guy at my class ended up being a millionaire, not long after graduation. He set up a garbage collection company in the rural areas outside of Tarrant County, where there was no garbage collection. I worked as a garbage collector myself, but not with him and so I know a little about that business, and not to mention working at the city. And he ended up making millions being in which he started doing is as an undergraduate student with his pickup truck. So, you know there was, and sometimes he wouldn't have time and he'd come to class and his blue jeans were smelly and dirty. And back then you didn't wear blue jeans to class, you wore slacks.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

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MARK WASSENICH:

But everybody knew that he just came from work and he didn't have time to clean up, I mean, that didn't happen often. But so, this idea that you have to be, you know, of a certain amount of money and spend it on clothes or whatever or go certain restaurants that is, it's a real issue. And

it's probably made more sensitive by race, when people wonder some of the people from one race don't have as much money as most of the kids. But that's where I really worry about the socialization, and whether the dropout rate is higher among Black students than other students, I don't know, but those are all things to worry about.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah, yeah. the thing is, though, you know, we worry about Black and worry about white, but in a lot of contexts, the only color that matters is green.

MARK WASSENICH:

(Laughs) yeah, well-

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

I think the definition of poverty has changed a lot with time, and there are also, there are so many different types of poverties, you know, you have social poverty, you have educational poverty. It's not necessarily just financial.

MARK WASSENICH:

And that they all fit together.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

They all fit together.

MARK WASSENICH:

Education and medical and,

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

It’s multifaceted, yes.

MARK WASSENICH:

Every-Yeah, and there's no such thing as money poverty. It's a part of a much broader deal.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Absolutely.

MARK WASSENICH:

But I learned that working at the city. Yeah.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: [1:38:01]

Which leads me to my last question, we still have just a couple of minutes. Can you talk a little bit about the issue of gentrification. As an urban planner [Break]

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

One last question, I know that you worked with urban planning, you worked with the City of Dallas. Can you talk a little bit about something that is of growing concern in a lot of communities, which is the issue of gentrification? What have you seen and where do you see us going as an urban community, in the next few years, in your perspective?

MARK WASSENICH:

Okay, well, I've been out of that business for a long time. Back when I was in that business, I was the first director of the Community Development Program in Dallas community, that's the HUD money Community Development Block Grant that is pretty large amounts of money that come into the cities each year to work on whatever difficulties there are in the low-income areas. And I did that pretty much in various jobs, it seemed like I that the supervision of that work went with me, whichever job I was in, whether it was in the city manager's office, or out in the housing department, or back into the budget office, and so on. I was always watching over that program, and our issues back then were catching up with the city norm for neighborhoods that had been overlooked. And so, the issue then was very, very different than it is today, and I won't get into what, it but basically it was another segregation issue that-

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right

MARK WASSENICH:

That the Black areas-

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right

MARK WASSENICH:

One of the biggest was West Dallas that had actually developed out in the county and had never been in a city. And so, it developed without proper streets and sewers and water lines, and so we had to pour huge amounts of money into West Dallas just to get the basics done of being in the city, and so on. So that was a lot of my work back in the day. Gentrification was not an issue in Dallas at that time. It is certainly is now. A couple of observations, one is that if you look at the really old, old, inner-city neighborhoods, they were built maybe around 1900, 1890 up to the 1920s. So, the infrastructure, some of it can be as much as 130 years old, some of the water lines, sewer lines. The streets are newer, most of the streets were built were paved after World War II really. But the houses, some of the houses were built on wood post foundations with a type of wood called bodark or Osage orange. Now that wood is impervious to termites.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oh.

MARK WASSENICH:

It's the only kind of wood we have in this part of the country that termites can't get into, but after many, many decades, the poison in the, it's the sap in the bodark. It dries out, deteriorates, oxidize, and then the termites can get in. So now you been at LSU [Louisiana State University], you know about termites in Baton Rouge and New Orleans. I mean, they eat up whole houses down.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yes, they do.

MARK WASSENICH:

And it's not that bad here, but it's bad enough that if you have a house where the foundation is rotted. And that's another thing about bodark, it doesn't rot for 50 or 80 years, but when it gets a 100-120 [years] depending on the amount of moisture in the soil, it quits working. And so, you have these old houses that where they fall apart, the foundations fall apart. Without a foundation, there's no rehab of the house, really. I mean, it can be done, but it costs more than tearing it down and build a new one.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right, right.

MARK WASSENICH:

So, there's a physical component to gentrification of old neighborhoods. Where they've got to come down because the physical buildings are not viable anymore. And we have a few neighborhoods in Dallas like that, and I was on a taskforce just two, three years ago for two years looking at Fair Park and the neighborhoods around Fair Park, of what to do because that's exactly the situation there. And some of those neighborhoods now have 50% vacant lots. And there's no gentrification yet, but it's gonna happen. And when it does, unless there's some gigantic subsidy program that we've never heard of before, to build single family back on those little single-family lots.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

MARK WASSENICH:

It's gonna cost about double what people who live there now can afford. It would still be an affordable neighborhood-

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

MARK WASSENICH:

But not for the people.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Not at all.

MARK WASSENICH:

Now, most of the people who are there now are elderly, and they're gonna die, and their children inherit the house, they can't repair it, they don't want to live there, and they're gonna tear it down. That's why they're sitting there as vacant lots. The city doesn't allow the houses to sit there vacant if they're substandard, the city will tear them down quickly, just to avoid you know, having crack houses, and all that stuff.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right, right, right.

MARK WASSENICH:

So, that's a component. Another component in these big cities in Texas, is that most of the poor people now live in apartments, not in homes. Not in what we think of as traditional neighborhoods. And in fact, the lowest income neighborhood and the highest crime area in Dallas right now is in Northeast Dallas, right next to Texas Instruments, which everybody thinks is a wealthy northern Dallas suburb.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right, right.

MARK WASSENICH:

But there's a huge aggregation of fairly new apartments in that area that have been built either last year or 30 years ago, but you know, recent decades and it's become somewhat of a ghetto. There are too many low-income people in one place. They're multiracial, but a lot of Black and a lot of children and grandchildren of families who originally were in South Dallas or West Dallas. The grandkids are now out here in these apartments. And the sociology of those apartments is completely different from little houses, on little lots in South Dallas. And, I mean, we could talk for hours about the problems and so on, but you're asking about gentrification.

So, let's take another neighborhood like East Dallas. Now East Dallas was at one time a separate suburb, and it was built to high standards and a lot of the wealthiest people in Dallas in 1900, 1920. And the mayors are mainly from East Dallas, up until the 1950s, in through the 1950s, and so forth. So, it was an upper income area that sort of lost, partly lost its cachet. And some apartments were built in there, and it kind of went downhill for a while, and now it's coming back to where the younger, urban type couples and young families with little kids, want to live in that area where they can bicycle to work downtown and that type of thing. And the school

system has gotten better in that part of town, and so it's back in demand. So, it's gone from upper income and upper middle to some pretty low-income apartments, where mainly where immigrants moved in. You know, like after Vietnam, thousands of Vietnamese, and Cambodians, whoop, moved in there overnight. And then, you know, now it's mainly Hispanic, and now you're seeing all kinds of different people. Some of the Somalis, we've got a lot of Somalis. Whenever there's a war somewhere in the world-

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

MARK WASSENICH:

You end up with a few hundred or a few thousand of those people in Dallas because there's a lot of work here. And so, you can-direct correlation. The apartment people move around, you know, they're not so much committed to their location the way a homeowner is. As they're looking for the right rent and the safest apartment complex that they can get in. And you got a lot of drug problems in the apartments, and it's hard for the police to deal with apartments, really up to the managers to handle that. So, a lot of that trouble really falls on the Dallas Apartment Association to pressure their membership to deal with these problems. We do have problems in South Dallas in the single family, like I said, not all those neighborhoods are falling down. Some of them were built good 100 years ago, and I hazard still perfectly good and can be renovated and are renovated.

West Dallas, has-that's probably our worst area for gentrification right now. A lot of decent houses there for people with very modest income, but you know, decent neighborhood, good small houses. And now that the young executives and wealthier downtown workers are buying into those neighborhoods. So, where do those people go? And do we somehow interject public policy into what is normally a private sector, supply, and demand situation. And there are huge interests out there that say no, you do not mess with the private sector. You know, you've got the value of the property is the value of property. What somebody will sell it for, what somebody will pay for it. And how are you gonna change that? And I haven't seen anybody come up with good answers to that. One of the answers that you do hear, and there's some work going on, I've been to a few meetings where this is discussed is you try to slow down the gentrification by kind of manipulating the value of the property. And this is again is one of those double-edged swords. You've got a Black family that lives in a home in West Dallas, and the neighborhood is starting to see people, maybe other Black people, maybe Hispanics, maybe whites, maybe a mix coming in with more money, buying a house next door and fixing it up. So, the idea is to cap the property taxes on the existing people, so they aren't driven out by higher property taxes. I've seen that happen to people who make $200,000 a year, not in West Dallas, but in other neighborhoods where the property taxes simply got so high that they had to sell out because they had bought the house for $200,000, it's now worth $800,000. The taxes are four times what they were when they bought it just ten years ago, and they say I can't handle this-

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right

MARK WASSENICH:

And they sell out and move to Frisco or someplace where it's more affordable. So, so there is talk of that kind of protection of property taxes for existing people, existing homeowners. But homeowners are a minority in Dallas, so a majority people are renters in these apartments. In fact, it's getting up close to 60% now, it was about 50% when I moved here, now it's up to 60%. So, it's, I've got no answers. I would say it's not a big problem that you hear about every day, people aren't marching on City Hall screaming about this problem. But you do hear about it if you go to the individual neighborhoods-

MARK WASSENICH:

Where it is a problem.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

MARK WASSENICH:

So, as you can tell, I don't know much about this subject (laughs). It's gonna get bigger and it's in every city in the nation.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yes, it is. Yes, it is. Well, that really was my last question. Mark Wassenich, thank you so much for joining the Race and Reconciliation Initiative, especially with this Oral History Project, but also with just the breath of knowledge that we have been able to gather thanks to your work, with you know our report, and our ongoing investigations that we're still working on. So, we are truly grateful; we wish you all the best. And this was Sylvian Greensword with the Race and Reconciliation Initiative Oral History Project, interviewing Mr. Mark Wassenich.

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