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Interview with John Moore, 1998

Columbia College Chicago

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John Moore

The second of June, 1998.

You're correct. That's it, it's right there on the calendar.

All right, good, good. Well, I thought I'd start out with-- the most logical question, I guess, is to ask you to start at the beginning. What were the circumstances that brought you to Columbia?

Well, in the mid '60s I took classes at Columbia. And after meeting Mike Alexandroff and all the people surrounding him, it just was a livelier atmosphere in terms of where my mind was and what I was thinking. And I was very impressed with Columbia, got involved with employment there, and when I was a senior Mike got me to serve on the Board of Trustees. I was appointed, myself and another student here, Penelope Child. And it was quite an experience. At that time I worked with Mike on the Board with Arthur Rubloff, who helped us to acquire this facility here; [Dwight] Follett, who this is the Folletts that we is now in the Underground, and the Bookstore; Brother Sherman, from the Sherman House; Judge Maurice Burton, and Al Weisman, who passed on, and him and I worked together as a team, going out and speaking with people, raising influence for the College. So it was a lot of things.

You were doing this as a senior?
Yeah, yeah, as a senior I was still doing the Development Committee and the Founder's Committee with

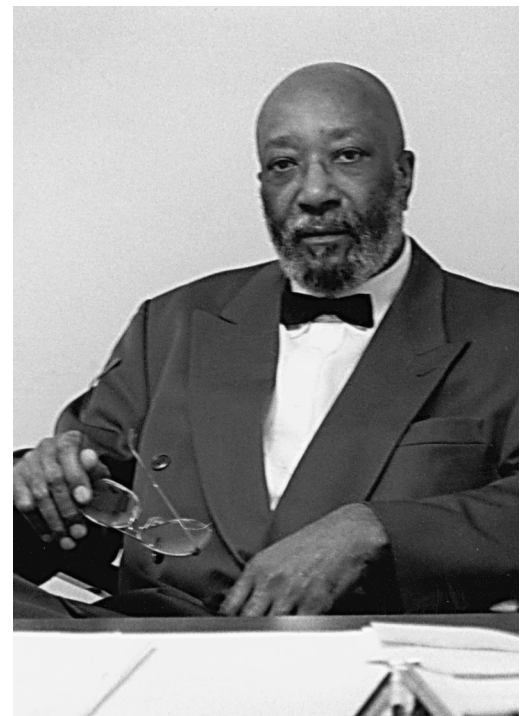
Harold Fathers. And he told me a lot of things. He always said, "Son, if you're gonna buy an automobile, buy American." And he said that a long time ago, you know, long before this thought became a slogan. He said, "Only two cars I'll buy, that's the Cadillac and the Corvette." *(Laughs)* And so it was nice, you know. We just got, did a lot of things. I became President of the Afro-American Club that we developed here at the time. And we just worked on a lot of different things, with a lot of different people. I mean, it was a fascinating time and we were very involved. I remember in '68, I had left, I was giving a lecture for Shaw University in Canada. And I read the newspaper that morning; I saw that it had the riots here. And I called Bert Gall, I got on the phone and I called Bert. I said, "Bert, what the hell is going on?" He said, "Oh man, everybody we know is either in jail or in the hospital." And I said, "Damn! I can't believe this." So, it was just a... We were all involved, yeah, that was in '68.

Bert was a student then?

Um-hmm, that was in '68. And so it was good times, you know. We just tried everything. We developed a thesis that we sent to Mayor Richard Daley, at that time, on how to operate the city, a survival kit, you know. We talked about education and finance and health and law enforcement and housing and welfare rights and things like that; rights of citizens. It was, you know, we were involved in things. When we went to jail Mike, you know, would get us out.

Tell me about going to jail.

(Laughs) Well, you know, at that time I was young, and even though I was doing some work for the city, I had been involved in higher education, I was doing special projects with Kennedy-King which is-- it's Kennedy-King now, this was in the '60s, around '68. And this was-- it was Wilson Junior College then. And I was coordinating things for the city, for what they called the Human Resources Commission. And I was working under Charley Livingboard and George Green; George Green was my Regional Coordinator. So I had the Englewood area, I had the largest area in the city, performing social services. A lot of the programs I set up were programs I had written up when I was out of the country. I had worked for a while in Europe. And so I wrote those programs up, and we began to get kids exposure, a lot of exposure. And it worked because even now I talk to young people that I got jobs for then, and they still



have those jobs. And we started sending them to places like Morton Arboretum and the Little Red Schoolhouse, down to the General Assembly in Springfield, to all the museums and zoos and aquariums...

These are Columbia students?

High school students. I experimented with those too, because I took their high school juniors and seniors even at that time. And I had developed a special project, a leadership training project. And I'd go with them and do things for the city. And recruited young people who were going to college who thought that they never would go to college. And so it was all part of experience, the Columbia experience, the exposure I had here as a young person. And I was always interested in education so when I left here, I went out to Olive Harvey, became the Dean of the England School, and I worked with them. And then Mike always wanted me to stay here; Bert stayed here all the time so then, and then, you know, I came back. They said, "Come on back home, you know, you'll be here forever." And he was right, because this is home to me. You know, I've always loved the place and I've always felt good about it, and it's been good to me and my family. And, like I said, my kids grew up here, [playing] in the President's office. I remember first graduation, you know, in '69 and he was standing there, he was the valedictorian. He had on red long johns and a Vietnamese flag, you know.

Did you graduate the year before?
The year after, and so...

The year after?

But I had been to school before and all that stuff but I didn't want to do a degree, you know, in communications. And so then I came and

got that, so...

Well, tell me when you first, let me go back...

[When I had been, I had more exposure, more experience there.]

...when did you, you came to Columbia first as a student. What year was that?

In '67.

'67. And you had been a student elsewhere?

Yeah.

Tell me about that real quickly.

Well, I had been a student at the University of Illinois, I had classes at Northwestern, I had had classes everywhere. I had classes at the University of [Wurtzburg], and I had had classes at Stuttgart in Germany. I had done a lot of traveling, because when I left the South, being a, you know, a young black male, my grandmother always said, "You can go anyplace you wanna go and do what you want if you're man enough to do it." So when I took off I just took off. So I came and I just traveled all over the country then. I had a good friend who became an evangelist; he had been a gang leader in Harlem, New York, and he was a good friend of my wife's. She introduced me to him, and so we did a lot of work together. That's why I was lecturing at Shaw University when the riots happened in '68. And we began to deal with youths all across the country, and so there was a lot of different things going on. Stokely Carmichael and I worked very closely together, Muhammad Ali and I was very good friends, and I headed out to his college a lot, so it was a lot of folks. Just a lot of times and a lot of things going on.

What brought you to Columbia in '67?

The... experience of communication. My major here was journalism and so, and I always did have a love for writing, you know. And then I met John Schultz and Paul Pekin and other people, and I started to write more. I had already been writing a few articles for The Defender and other, you know, black publications and stuff like that so... writing, primarily, was my interest at the time. And I just went ahead and took journalism as a result of that and more courses in broadcasting.

Oh, OK. So you did a couple different things...

Yeah, because I had taken, I had, previously before I came here, taken broadcasting and communication courses with the Columbia School of Broadcasting. Which wasn't Columbia College, which a lot of people make that confusion. And they still, I think their program terminated a few years back and some of the [families] finally terminated the program. But I had taken that training in broadcast communication and then I wanted to do more in journalism, to have a better opportunity to express myself dealing with the rights and issues and stuff, you know.

What did you do at Columbia?

Well, that was basically it, you know, that's what brought me here. I had talked to, at that time, I had talked to some other people I knew in broadcasting and so forth and they said, "Well, you know, with the exposure and experience you've already had, if you want to kind of bring things together, you know, go down to Columbia College." They said it would be open and liberal and Bernard Shaw, I knew him, Bernie was working down at WIND and we talked a lot. And he

had never actually taken the train in, the actual school train that I took, but he was fortunate because some of the connections that he had, he went right in. Because Walter Cronkite, his mother worked for the Cronkite family and so he had got him into broadcasting, and then later on he was able to get Bernie into Washington, and he started being a foreign correspondent and working directly with Jimmy Carter. And we have been friends for years. And [Lyle Darsen], from WGCI. Lyle is [presently] my closest friend; Ed Power, who was a musician. And Ed and I had spent a lot of time together, because we went to high school together and we had spent time together in Europe because he had played a lot there, he played all over the world.

Where did you go to high school, if I may ask?

Mount Carmel High School.

So you have a rather broad kind of background and Columbia lured you as opposed to, presumably, lots of other places.

Yeah, it was interesting. It was small, you know, and it was just, you know, a small close-knit environment. I came up in the Mississippi Delta as a kid, and then because of a nun I knew, because I went to a one room schoolhouse out in the country, and so she got me to come to Chicago, so I stayed with a family here from Lincolnwood. And I commuted back out south to Columbia, or to Mount Carmel at the time. And it worked out pretty good. So I was kind of [twixt and between], you know, I was neither here nor there, you know. I didn't know a heck of a lot of people in the city, generally speaking, even though I had played that-at Carmel

I participated in all the activities and so forth, but at first I was the only black there. And so I played basketball and football and all of that stuff, but I didn't have a lot of friends one way or the other because, you know, I was from the South; I wasn't from the North, and I was black, and so I was primarily in an entirely white environment. So I kind of, you know, was by myself [most of the time].

How did you find Columbia?

Earl Lowden and I had met. Earl was-his dad was the primary commentator in New York. And he had sent him here because he figured it would be best for him to leave New York to come here and get some training. [And he had an exchange and so he set it up] in New York and Earl came here. And so Earl was, well, my dad had told him told, he said, "Go to Columbia." He said, "That would be the best place. They have the most openness. They got other schools, but they're just too tight." And so Earl talked to me and we both [came here].

So you had a friend the day you walked in the door.

[He was always here,] broadcasting in New York, and so we... you know, we just, and it just felt good to me. We was on the seventh floor of 540 North Lake Shore Drive, and everybody knew everybody. I mean, all of the teachers and we had one little elevator. It was just like being at home, you know, I was used to that. It reminded me of being out in the countryside of Denmark someplace, which always reminded me of being in the countryside of Mississippi. Because, I mean, it was basically the same: I had plenty of dairy products, I had plenty of beef, I had plenty of open space, you know, I could listen to the crickets and stuff. And so it was

home. It was just a nice atmosphere. And Mike kept his door open, I mean, it wasn't this stand-offish type of atmosphere. I mean, if you had a problem you go and talk to the President. It was just that simple, that's the way Columbia was.

Do you remember the first time you met him?

That's hard to say. Because I always respected him as a father, you know, as a friend and a father. And I always, when I was here or somewhere else, I always communicated with him. I just had that feeling, it was a good feeling. And I remember him sharing things with me. I remember when I was real young my mother had an operation in [Yazoo] City, Mississippi. And Mike had been down there, he was familiar with the area, he had been helping with the Civil Rights Movement even before it really got going strongly. And I was amazed, and I was kind of, you know, after he told me that. Because I remember coming up through that area and going there when my mother was having surgery and then other experiences I had had in that area which was almost fatal, you know. Because it was rough at that time; it was on the dark side of Jackson coming out [49W]. And so it was just little things like that. Mike would always talk to me, you know, about different things he's experienced, and you know, just being down to earth. Because I was kind of naive, I mean, I came up, you know, out in the country and so forth. So all this is new to me, all is new, is exciting. You know, it was a whole different world; a whole different reality so-- and I guess I probably knew less about anything than anybody. I mean, every place I had been in, I never really had no

trouble. But I just didn't know a lot of things, I wasn't very sophisticated. He always said, "John Boy!" "You're so naïve," he said, "You should have come up in the Mediterranean someplace. You saw things differently, you know." Oh, boy. So that's the way it was, and he would always call a spade a spade, and I could appreciate that. And as time went by and even now I look back and I think, "It was a big help to me. What he said was the truth." You know, me and Mike just talked about stuff, you know. There was, I remember once I said, back then, I said, "Damn, I don't understand what's going on on the South Side." I said, "The people don't seem like they have themselves together in the black community." He said, "Damn it John, they've never been organized in the black community, I don't know what the hell you're talking about." He said, "On the South Side, it's totally messed up." And he was right, you know, and it still is. So it's just things like that... he always had an opinion about it.

Now did others, did you have a closer relationship with him than other students?

I can't say that. I mean, him and Bert was extremely close. Like I said, Bert never left here. Bert's been here from day one, you know. I, you know, I came and went, but him and I was close; he would invite me to his house. And his kids, you know, I helped them when they started in school, I got them registered and everything. And then Jane and I was close and we talked a lot. Because the last thing, I had written a proposal when she had the Artisans in Residence Program, you know, Artisans Abroad. And we had planned an itinerary to go to the

southern part of Africa, to Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Angola, and Namibia. And things like that...

When was this?

I think it was a few years before we retired. And, you know, I just felt close to them. Whenever I saw them, she always came up and kissed me on the lips and always embraced me, you know, as a son; it was just a nice feeling. And I've always loved and respected [them]. And he just said, he always told me as an administrator, he said, "I'm not going to tell you what to do. I know you always like people and treat people right. Just do what you do best." And that's what I did and I felt good about that, and I always said, well, you know, "This is it." I mean, this wasn't just some place I was getting a paycheck, this was my career, this was my life. So I came in and when I could help people, that was my commitment to them. To try to help students to get through their matriculation here. There's a lot of trouble going through school, you know. People coming in from different places. I remember when I was taking classes out of the country, so then I was working closely with international students and all the student life and everything else in here. I developed, at one time, intramural teams in basketball and softball and volleyball and all those types of things. And we would play the Sun-Times every year in honor of John Fischetti and then we'd play some of the other TV stations and radio stations and stuff. And we developed departmental teams; each department kind of had their own team. And it was good; it lasted very well...

When was this?

The last time I did something like that was probably about eight or nine years ago. Because we really didn't have our own gym, because space and facility was difficult. I had leased the space at the Armory down here across from Northwestern on Chicago Avenue. And that worked out pretty good for a while until [Mike wanted polo] and they had polo practice down there. And we couldn't get through the stuff for the horse stands. So I had managed to get the facility over at Saint Ignatius. I knew some of the priests over there and we got that. And that was a nice facility, but we had to practice and play after the students did at Ignatius, so sometimes we wouldn't get out of the place until midnight or later. And that was very difficult because we had people coming in from all over and a lot of the females were interested; they were participating and trying to get people back here to the College or to the bus station or the train station or whatever, that time in the morning. The logistics of it was just too rough, and so we just said, "We just have to wait until we try to get something of our own." I kept trying to get Jones Commercial and they wouldn't give me a play. And then eventually, [Iota Camrey] became the evening principal over there. And he said, "Well, I'll let you use the facility at no cost at all. You're here, a lot of our students are leaving here and they're coming to Columbia, so we'll work something out." And I was so happy I said, "Well, I'll get back in shape now," because it was so convenient. And then the Board-the union put in a grievance against the Board because they had terminated a lot of the evening programs. So they said if their people could not utilize the facili-

ties in the evening, they weren't going to let outside people use it because that was that, you know. And so...

Let me go back, can I go back to your student career a little bit? I'm real interested in Columbia during the '60s. Tell me a little bit more about the classes you took and the teachers. What do you remember about the teachers?

Well, we had people like Staughton Lynd. He was a, what we call a passive activist. It was kind of mind-boggling. We had John Hall, people like that. We had [Roland Brooks].

Now, are these folks you studied with?

See, those were instructors and friends, you know. I don't think you can make the, you couldn't make a distinction with students, teachers, you know. Because the whole thing, like they have now with the writing workshops in the circle, I mean, everything we did was in a circle. I mean, we wasn't the traditional classroom setting at all. And I'm sure it was all Mike's, you know, planning because of the mission of the College, the way he laid it out, you know. He wanted people to be a part of the whole. And I really felt strongly about that because when I came here, you know, I had a strong feeling about things the way, college... down at the one room schoolhouse, because that had basically been my exposure. And I started experimenting with that and part of what I did, I was in leadership training; I formed a circle. And the only reason that you would go into the center of the circle is that you needed help from the rest of the group in the circle; you wanted to share things with

the group, you know. And that worked very well for me and that was the same process that was taking place at Columbia.

I always felt that, you know, you look at people's strengths and weaknesses and be supportive of those strengths that if they can overcome those weaknesses. If you didn't know the exposure, you know, they would look for a window of opportunity that you can kind of step in and kind of plug in. Eventually it usually opened up; it might be a slow process, you know. But eventually that window of opportunity will open up and that's what you're trying to lock into. If it's just for a brief moment, if you can have some real, sincere communication, where you can kind of touch their heart, their soul, you know, the spirit. And I think that's what was going on here. You know, I think they touched the heart, the soul, and the spirit of so many people, because irregardless of where we came from or what color we were, we felt that we were part of the whole, and we worked together, and we was very supportive of each other. And then that's the opportunity that I've had in coming back to work with Mike. I took the kids and I never made any distinctions about whether you were black or white or this or that. Let's just come together, and let's just do things. And by the basis of the fact that we are together, you know, that's diversity within itself. You don't have to talk about diversity, you know. Diversity, your experience is the sum total, the culture's the sum total of your experience. And different people have different experiences. I have been closest with people who were blacker than I was even though, biologically, I was black. And I have been places with people who

biologically was black, but was whiter than the white people that were around. And that was because of their exposure, because of their experience. And you need the things that are unique like that. I mean, you can go all over the world, you know, picking up elements here and there, being bombarded by this and that. So, you know, you're just seeing things and feeling things. And that makes you who you are rather than just saying, well, you know, "He's black and he's white and he's Jewish and he's, you know, Italian, he's Irish or whatever." I mean, it doesn't work that way. In reality-- I mean, people want to say it does, but it doesn't, in reality.

So this was a very, to use the current term, multicultural college when you were here as a student.

It certainly was, there is no doubt about it.

Has it changed? Has that changed today?

It's been changing gradually, yeah. It's not as unique as it once was, and I guess that happened in all institutions and organizations. What they start off as and what they grow into, you know, we began to change. I don't necessarily say for the better at all times, you know. Because I think even as you grow in size that you can maintain your image, your idea, you know, the basis of what made you what you are. But then the problem that you, as you're here and in that process, is that you're doing all that and other people are coming in and they don't know exactly who you were or what you are, you know. And so the whole process begins to change. Because there's nobody

there to stabilize it, to say, "Hey, you know, this is really what we're all about." And it just happens, you know.

That we continue the culture of the institutions.

Right. But it was a great time, a great time. And that whole thing was happening throughout the country. I mean, people came together. The long state of Mississippi, I remember the last time I was in Mississippi was, I [started living in Macaw], Mississippi and people were there from all over in support of that. And life is like, it's mutual, you know, it's like dreams. Because I remember there in the day when everybody came up with pitchforks and baseball bats and shotguns and everything. And we go back two years later and we see, you know, integrated couples pushing little babies in the stroller down the streets in Mississippi--wait a minute, is this the same place? And so I guess that it happens with Columbia, it happens with, it will happen with the world, you know (*laughs*). You just have to savor that which was good to you and brought you forth, and pass on what you can.

So you graduated here in 1970; tell me about graduation, you mentioned the '69...

Well, it was small and it was nice, and you know, people brought they whole families. We had it at the Prudential Building then and we would, you know, put on all of those shows in between. We were always entertaining at our graduations and we put [on slide shows] and things on different people that we respected, we had people we was nice to, other people. Our first library was formed.. the library.

Oh really, this is in the...

Michael set it up because he always admired, you know, respected us. And he had set that up, it was like the... library. And so we would show our own little slides and stuff that we had made up, you know, on some of the things going on in the culture or what was happening with the Black Panthers and things like that. What was happening in South America or Vietnam was someplace. And then we would have champagne and caviar and stuff because we were so small, you wouldn't have that many people there, you're talking about twenty-five or thirty people graduated then, not the fifteen hundred we have now. And everybody was just sitting around there and talking and laughing. Mike just loved that, and he always believed in people, you know, just coming together and just being people. And it was nice and warm, "Hey, what are you up to?" Go up to the lookout tower, you know, and look around the city.

Did you have your family here, or relatives?

I've had, no, not so much then because I married a girl who grew up in Chicago. But we met very young, when I first came here. So we've been married, this is our thirty-eighth year of marriage now. But we always traveled every place together, did everything together. And we have four children, you know.

At the graduation itself, did you have relatives and friends?

Yeah, mm-hmm. Everybody, all my closest people I knew, yeah, they all came. And they were all excited, they liked it. They talk about it now, they say, "You know, nobody ever has graduations the way you all do at Columbia." And that's true. I don't know of any place--

I've been to a lot of graduations a lot of different places, but ours is just different. And I mean, it's more of a fun thing, it's not this formal kind of thing. I mean, even now, you know, how we sing and celebrate, everybody, and our students get up and have a good time.

What did you think you were gonna do once you graduated? Did you have a job lined up? In your mind? You said you were looking...

What I had in mind, I guess, and what I was thinking, I said I always wanted to be independent regardless, because [I had started a] restaurant of my own in the Old Town area, [Mr. Jim's] at Division and Wells. I mean, I was lecturing for Congressman [Belson] at that time, I was accepting more offers. I mean, I did what I felt like doing. I just wanted, I wanted to write. I really wanted to feel the pulse of the country, the nation, and just write. And I still do, you know; and my wife was on me lately, talking about that, just take more time, and just sit back and write what I've seen and been exposed to because I've been close the pulse in the city, you know, with the Harold Washington thing and everything else. Even though, because I had known him so long, I wasn't involved in his mayoral thing that much, but I knew Harold very well. Mike was the one involved and I was and so was Bert in that venture, you know. Whereas the other stuff involved in that and around that that I had the exposure to. And so those are the things-I don't know what difference it'll make--but those are the types of things that I really wanted to share with people, the young people coming forth, that they have some

concept; some idea of what actually took place, the reality of it. Because I was living in the eye of the hurricane, you know, and I was right there on all of that stuff... I was there. And so, and that's why I came, you know, to get more exposure and communication, to address the social issues of the country. You know, the first, you know, like-- see, at that time the city colleges were a little different because we had made some major changes. I had served on the planning committee for what is now Kennedy-King. It was Wilson, because I was doing work out at Wilson, with Dr. Monroe. And so we had a lot of students. We really recruited people. I mean, at that time Kennedy-King had about eleven or twelve thousand students and Malcolm X had about fourteen and I don't know [about, it was very small]. And so I started recruiting. I would, during the day, you know, I enjoyed working with people, so I went to all of the high schools and everything. I talked to the kids during the daytime even though I was over the evening school. And I'd be at the school till two o'clock in the morning, after I started to work at ten o'clock in the morning. And we got the enrollment up to almost nine thousand students, where Columbia is now. And it was really exciting, you know. But the politics of it didn't work out, because the type of things they wanted you doing, I didn't believe in doing things that way, and they kept saying, "Well, if you do this, you do that, you know, you'll have your own college." And I wanted my own college, you know, because I had worked hard in higher education; I was committed to it. But I just couldn't, I just couldn't buy into it-- the political

factors that they offered. So I walked away from it. And I'm glad I did because if I had continued, eventually, the way things were going, I probably would have ended up like some of the other people, you know. And they couldn't recover from the type of stuff that they were involved in, the corruption and everything else, you know, it's just not worth it.

So you came to Columbia?
Yeah.

And you stayed in touch with folks at Columbia during this time?

Yeah, I always stayed in touch with people at Columbia. Yeah, I always came back to the graduations and everything else, Hubert Davis and Bert and all them. We always stayed in contact with each other. I never lost contact with them, you know, I was always in contact.

So when you came back, what was your job title officially?

Same as it is now. Associate Dean of Student Affairs, and Mike told me that he wanted me to handle the problems and develop student affairs and just be a people's person. He said, "You always did like people. You can make a difference in other people." It didn't make any difference who the people were. He said, "It might be some of the wrong kind of people but you just like people, so I trust you to deal with that." And I did. I took him at his word, you know, and that's the way it happened. We developed a lot of the, all the stuff that-- I might have something to give you. I need to get away from your mike for a second...

That's OK, I think it's a pretty good one, actually.

I'll find you something a little later on. I was just looking for some of

the old newspapers and stuff. I remember we developed, you know, talent shows, and I started doing an extravaganza every year on-- taking talent from each department and getting the students to work together. And we would put on a talent show, and we'd have all kinds of things: singing, dancing, ventriloquists, you know, contortionists, and all kinds of stuff like that. Because I realized that we had kids here had a vast array of talent, and what we needed to do was to give it exposure. That's what they were in college for, to get exposure, to develop their skills, you know, and get an opportunity to express themselves. So that's why we started an annual program, you know, a talent show, to give people an opportunity to express themselves. And along with Fred Fine, who finally became the Commissioner of Cultural Affairs for the city, we did Star Vowel. And Star Vowel was a good program; we would bring in the rock bands. And even at that time, that was about a forty thousand-dollar production. And we set it up at Eleventh Street Theater, and we had so much good talent. And I had kids, I think I had scouts come in here from Hollywood and from the cities all throughout the country, you know, just to hear our people perform, the singing and the dancing and so forth. And we still have that; it's unique, you know. I would just like to see more of the, you know, just the harmony, all of us working together and just putting together a good package, a good show, you know. And just like I said, let diversity come out in a natural way; not manufactured, you know. We get all these programs, we got programs for blacks, you got them for Latinos, you got them for whites. I mean, I think they

kind of put a damper on things, you know. The people-- they are who they are to begin with. Just let them do the things that make them even better. And so that's what I tried to do with young people, you know, build on their strengths and give them the exposure, give them the opportunity to express themselves. And then let everybody recognize that talent that they have.

Columbia is an open enrollment institution. What does that mean when you came here, and what does it mean now?

It meant the same thing then that it does to me now, that a lot of people don't quite understand. Traditionally in this country, when you didn't have open enrollment, it was a way of controlling people, discriminating against people, in a sense, because you say, "Well, I'm only gonna select this person or that person, based upon this and that." Mike felt differently and I'm glad that he did, because we have brought people in here that thought they would never go to school, and they became some of the best students and the best productive people in the world. Maybe kids, even like George Tillman, who's gonna receive an award this year from the Alumni Association for his film *Soul Food*. He did a fine job, and he was a very close friend of my oldest son, who was a student here at the time. Young people like that probably wouldn't have even gone to school if it hadn't have been for a school like Columbia that was willing to embrace them. I've seen people, in my experience in teaching and so forth, and talking to other colleagues at different institutions, people who had a hard time getting a good score on the SAT or ACT, and yet those people become valedictorian. People need an opportu-

nity, and that's what people are denied the most. Even now, you know, they talk about things and gangs, and drugs, and so forth, but there's nothing out there. I mean, I remember times when, regardless whether he had formal training or not, you had tremendous opportunities. If you had your health and your strength, you could work. And that's gone dry, the well has gone dry, you know? The plants and things that I knew that people worked in; made a decent living and felt good about themselves and could raise their family, you know, and feel good about that-- it's just not there. They talk about the economy being up and so forth-- somebody have to venture out, somebody have to make an effort, somebody have to stand up and be willing to be counted in order for other people to survive and get on with life. And that's what you're not seeing a lot of now. I talked to Harvey Brosman and Jay Miller recently. And Harvey was just talking, and he said, "John, these are weird times, these are bad times. It's difficult now for you to find a black person who'd be willing to deal with a real issue and stand out in front and deal with it. And it's very difficult to find any white people, who have the money, who are willing to support a cause like that." He says it's just not there. And then they ask our young people, you know, to do the right thing, to stand up. I mean, hell, we need to set an example ourselves. If we don't do it, how can-- we tell other people to do it. So, and that's what Columbia was all about, it was about doing things. I mean, let's do it! You know, and Bert will tell you that. I mean, we did things. We didn't just talk about it. I mean, we took the chance. We pushed the issues, you know, the real issues.

What do you see is the future of Columbia in this respect?

Well, one of the things we've been working on through the faculty council and so forth, is that looking more seriously at the whole nature of the curriculum and what the general studies are. I think one of the good things that they had in mind was to put ethics in there. Because people need to have ethics, especially people into communication. I mean, we can't just have people getting out there and showing and telling and doing their own thing, you know, and trying to expose this and that unless they have some real basis for it. Because exposure's not always the best thing, you know, it can do a lot of harm. So we need to teach our young people, you know, about the quality of life, you know, the substance of life, so that they can have something to value, so that they have something to pass on, they can have something to feel good about, instead of just pulling their cheap trick. And that's what I'm more concerned about.

Tell me about the mission of Columbia College in relation to the arts and communication medium.

Well, we happened to be in the right place at the right time. The whole area of telecommunication, arts and communication, has been on the rise. And this evidence of what you have seen at Columbia College, I mean, for as long as I can recall we've had a continual increase in enrollment and success. I mean, wherever I go throughout the country, or even out of the country now, people know about Columbia College. And that's amazing, what has happened since the '60s. We have gone from a few hundred students to approximately nine thousand students in that period of time. And that is fantas-

tic. And I think it was because of the mission of the College, and the nature of the mission of the College, that it reached out to people and embraced people. People, in a traditional sense and even people here now, they don't understand that, what made us who we are and what we are. It was because we were willing to do something different. We were willing to reach out to everybody. We're like the Statue of Liberty saying, you know, "Send us your needy, your hungry, your poor, you know. And we gonna show you the way, we gonna help you." And we extended that hand, that's what the institution did; and open admissions, that's what made us so vital and important. And that's what gave it the stimulus that it had, because it gave people who were crying for an opportunity, for a chance to do something with their lives, to be productive. And other schools had turned them away and they came in here and they felt good about themselves, they stood up and said, "Hey, I can do it. I am somebody now. I believe in myself, and I believe in the institution." And that's what made us what we are. It gave us strength. And it has been our strength, you know.

Do you think Columbia has had an impact on the teaching of higher education in general?

Yes it has, yeah. I know it has. Because over the years that I've talked to the accreditation people from North Central, and other people, you run around the country... I mean, we were unique. They don't tell you what to do but they tell you tell you to live up to what you're saying that you're doing. And in reality, we have been living up to what we said we were doing and how we tried to do it. We didn't have all the answers. I mean,

we were looking at things and we were learning as we grew. And that's part of the process, nobody has all the answers. I mean, life is like that, I mean, it's like an illusion, in a sense. You learn as you grow, you know, as you go along, and there's no end to learning. [It doesn't matter] how old you are, you know, you'll still be learning stuff. I mean, every time I think I know something the kids pop in and they do something or say something, and I say, "Damn. John Moore, you don't know anything." That's the fascinating part of it, that it's always there, it's always exciting. I mean, outer space is not the final frontier. The frontier is here, because we got young minds and we're helping to cultivate them and they're going further and further all the time because they're seeing more, they're feeling more, they believe in more. And there's no end to it, it just goes on and on, it's just an endless chain, you know? And I think that's what the institution has been about. That's why I love it and have been supportive of it in every way that I can. I try to be good to it because it's been good to me.

Is your, has your personal vision of education changed over the years? If you can go back to your...

Well, mine hasn't. Because I think, because one of the things that happened earlier-- we took a few hundred students and experimented with them and those are students that had no idea that they would ever go to college. They were too young to take the GED and they were out of school. So I got special permission from the state Board to give them the GED I got the MAT students from the University of

Chicago to teach them, and we taught them regular collegiate courses. I taught them the GED on Saturday. They all passed it; ninety-nine percent of those kids graduated from college. Because if they had, if somebody missed a class or was late for something, I went to the house and talked to the whole family and let them know that, you know, they all was a part of this. This wasn't just one person isolated out there; this was a family project. And it worked. But those are things that I studied with [Prodigy Whisner] early on, you know, in terms of the one room schoolhouse and exposure here and the types of things he had done. And it works. It's still the best element. I see the young kids now with my own grandchildren. I mean, it worked. And we need to get back to the basics, you know. Life is basic and fundamental, you know, we need a foundation. People need to know, they need to be steeped in the culture in the real sense of the word. I mean, you can't be too abstract and animated; you're just out there. You've got to have some type of foundation. You need to know what made the country grow to begin with, I mean, what the building blocks really are, you know. Education hasn't changed. I mean, I've looked at [the ritual] too many different times and too many different ways. I mean, people can say what they want to, you know. You can write a book and rewrite and give it a new preface, but the basics are another thing. I talk to scientists, advanced scientists, and they say, "Well, I still gotta deal with the basic elements, I still got to go back to the table, the elements, you know, the basic elements and I go from there. If I don't go from there, I don't reach anything." And they're still [soul-

less], people overlook it because everybody want to look over here and look over there and say, "This is exciting, that's exciting." Kids need to start basically getting their basic tables and equations and alphabets and so forth and just move on from there, and just learn to enjoy it though, you know. I mean, don't just read because you're forced to read. Read because there's good stuff there. You're being exposed to a world that you don't know anything about.

And that's what the old girls did when I came up. And I had two teachers, one nun and one lay teacher, and they said, "Well, you can't get out to see the world, we'll bring the world to see you." So we read all the Shakespeare and everything else, you know. We read all the Chaucer, you know, and all those things. And so when I started to travel, I mean, I had already had some exposure from a literary point of view. I hadn't had the personal experience and exposure to people from growing up and different things. But that came along, you know, as time went by. But if the kids listen, you know, let the little kids listen, you know. The older you get, when you have an opportunity to reflect more, you know, and to look at things and kids are amazing to me, little kids. Because they are so alive, you know. I mean, they see and hear and feel everything. If you just give them the opportunity and just let them grow, and expose them to things, it's amazing. And they do it with so much respect and grace, you know. And they're not filled with all the animosities and stuff that has been built up from, you know, other people and exposures and experience later on. And so it's just

fantastic. I mean, I can take a group of any kids, any color, anywhere, from any ethnic background, and work with them and watch them flower and bloom into something, and know that they'll make a contribution. Because little people need people. They're human beings; they have a hell of a lot more in common than we imagine that we have, you know. If we'd just learn to trust each other, respect each other, and share the love with each other, it's there. And life is just too short to do anything else. (*Laughs*) A hundred years is like a day, it's just too short, you know.

Tell me about the biggest challenges Columbia has faced in the years that you've been associated with it, in whatever capacity.

I don't know, maybe Bert could-- in terms of the evolution of the growth, it's trying to maintain and even keep up with the rate at which we are growing. To keep up with the physical plant, you know. I mean, Bert worked day and night. If I have to give anybody credit I have to give credit to him. I mean, people don't realize, he has committed his soul to this institution. It's not easy to keep this thing afloat at this day and age with so many institutions closing, you know. And we have continued to thrive and be successful and to meet our budget and to expand at the rate that we are expanding. And especially expanding in the area of arts and communication, where more and more technology is needed, and to be able to cope with that and to be able to provide, you know, an extension of the physical facilities that we need, is unbelievable. I think that's what's probably been the most difficult aspect of it.

Was that as big as an issue, say, twenty-five years ago as it is now?

No. It was always, there was a need, you know. We knew that we were growing and as we began to grow, but it wasn't as big an issue then as it is now. And we always managed, like I said, you know, we had good people on the Board and stuff and they looked out. Because we have had Board members who have really been committed. I mean, it wasn't board members in name only, you know, it wasn't people who just came and socialized. I mean, they did some things, and that's what it takes, you know.

I want to just go back to the Board. You were on the Board as a senior?

Right.

Was that sort of an ordinary kind of thing then, or was that special?

It was special. That's what Mike did was, he said, you know, "If it wasn't for the students then the institution wouldn't be there." And so students were, he wanted students involved in everything. So he involved me in that, and he just thought I would be a good person for that.

He's obviously right. Was he picking, was he really trying to get you involved in the board or was he really trying to get...

He was trying to get students and he just thought that I was, because, you know, I got along so well with all of the students, the other students, I mean, for whatever reason. And it just happened, you know, everybody kind of came to me. But that has always happened, wherever I've been it worked out like that for me, I don't know why,

at the community level. In my own community, you know, it's always been like that. And so it just worked, that's all.

Were there other times, other years, in which students were on the Board?

You know, I don't think so, I don't think so. I think Penny and I was the only students that were on the Board. You're gonna have to ask Bert on that, that's the one thing I cannot answer. But at that time, you know, we ran around-- because I and Al, Al Weisman, he was with the second largest marketing advertising agency in the, you know, there was, I guess the largest one was in Japan. And so Al was from, he was from Cairo, Illinois. And we went around together raising funds and we always had a little introduction. We said, "Well, you know, we gonna talk about different things and John will probably give you exposure to how they enjoy black-eyed peas and cornbread and pot liquor, you know, and ham hocks and stuff like that and a vast array of things." And then laugh about that and we would talk, and people were pretty generous. We were just trying to build our institution, feel good about it.

Who were some of the other people you can remember who were involved in building the institution? You mentioned Bert Gall and Mike Alexandroff.

Well, John has been here from day one, John Schultz. John worked hard on things, you know. He was part of the long haul. And Shirley Mordine from the Dance Center. I remember a time when I had a little Datsun sports car, a convertible. And we'd all get in that car, at least seven or eight people, police look at us like we crazy, you know, and drive over there on Wells Street

right off of North Avenue where we first started, you know, our first Dance Center there, and things like that. Just going back and some of the people had passed; Harry Bouras, Harry was on the Board with us. He was one of the most gifted people I ever knew. He had a very high IQ and was known for his, you know, artwork throughout the world. He did a lot to contribute to the development of WTTW. And then I was with the city colleges, I was a TV coordinator for the city colleges. And Harry and I always worked closely. I was running for political office, he would, you know, help me out and do stuff. So, Bob Edmonds...

Can I just ask you about that? Running for political office, tell me about that.

Yeah, well, I had just thought I'd, really at first I just wanted to try to change the election laws for the State of Illinois, you know. And make it a little more, make it better for people, period. And then, I was running for the State Senate in, I guess in the late '70s. And so the organization had told me, political organizations, they said that unless I joined the club, you know, I could forget it. And so I told them to kiss my ass and went ahead about my own business. And so when I ran, they just did a job on me. They did what they said they would do. And so then [Jennen Black] and the ACLU took my case and they pushed all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. And I challenged the State and they had a leading attorney then was [Stafton], I believe, and he was saying, you know, he came to me and said, "Well, I'm sorry I have to fight against you. I know that you're right and you're doing the right

things, [because the party and] nobody's ready for this." [And they had done so much papers] and so we had stacks of paper this tall. Since the [Republican] Democratic Party started here, and the way the machine operates and so forth. Skanow, Skanow was the head attorney that was there. So I had to fight against him, so I had my days in court, you know. It was crazy. My wife was sitting there and she said, "Who in the hell are they talking about?" And I said, "They talking about me." And she said, "But you never done none of those things." (*Laughs*) And so then later on, you know, with the stuff...

And I remember the moment Michael Benedict came to town. And Michael was working for a guy I had known for years, Vernon Frasier. And so Vernon called Michael back because he said, well, he wanted to do some things to benefit the city, because they had worked out things with waste reclamation in New York and Los Angeles and Memphis and Atlanta and New Orleans, every place. So there would be great money to be made to help the people, you know. I said, "Well, it would benefit everybody-- if it's not gonna benefit everybody-- there's nothing I can do," I said, "Because Harold and I have been having it out, but his floor person is Clifford Kelley and his other person, leader person, is Clarence McClane." So then I just gave them Clarence's number. I told them to contact him and they did. And they set up a big banquet, Clifford did, and they invited me. But I didn't go out to them. I said, "I can't participate." And so they held that and that's when Michael Benedict was acting as the mole for the FBI, because he had chopped up some lady down there in the Gulf Coast and they were using

him. And Vernon had committed some crimes since he was with Michael, so they used them both. And so they did have a big banquet. And then all those people went to jail: Wallace Davis, Marian King; everybody but Cliff Kelley, you know, Cliff didn't. He was the one that testified, you know, turned state evidence. Then he pleaded that he had [impotent] parents, which he did and so they let him off the hook. But everybody else got locked up. And then the FBI came back and they sat right there where you're sitting now. And you know, I talked to Mike and I said, "You know, they're full of crap, man." Because I wasn't involved at all. And so they come back and they sat there with their tape the way you're sitting there now. And they said, "Well, we know that you were one of Harold's boys." I said, "I've never been anybody's boy." And I said, "If you don't believe me ask your momma." And he said, "What'd you say?" I said, "Go ask your momma. I've never been anybody's boy." And he said, "Whoa, we got to do this, you know, this is our job and we know that you involved in stuff." I said, "Well, you can say what you want to say, but I know and I feel good about myself. My conscience is clear." And I told them what I did. And then they played the tape back and said, "You know, we had to question you anyway."

But Vernon has stayed with them. He's in federal custody in San Bernadino. [Exactly what I did to him], he said, "John never accepted any money." Because they offered me ten thousand dollars and I told them I couldn't accept it. And so, and they played it back. They said, "Well, we know, but we have to hear it from your lips." And he had

said the same thing and he's still in jail now. Michael is dead, he died. But Vernon is still in jail. So that was just that type of thing. But, like, Mike and I had talked about that early on. I said, "I can tell them about the truth." He said, "Don't worry about the truth, just tell them the truth." He said, "You know you weren't involved, I know that." Because he used to go and talk their head off because he supported the movement and so forth. And Harold said, "Well, John, they won't treat me right." Well, I treated him OK but I told him, he had a friend of his that I couldn't support and he was in my area, and they would think I was Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. I mean, I couldn't come out and support the sucker. He was pushing drugs, prostitution, everything else, and everybody knew that. So he was OK with me, I mean, we always got along fine. But I just told him I couldn't do that. So he called me up at four o'clock in the morning, said, "Well, you know, you could do the right thing. Where are you going now?" And I said, "I'm not going now, I never have," I said. "But I'm just not gonna do no shit like that." And so Mike went and talked to him and he said, "What are they trying to do to you?" Because I had told Mike, you know, and he said, "I can't discuss it. He just won't treat me right." I told him "Forget it." And that's the way it was. So I don't know what happened to Harold. I don't know if they jumped him or he died of natural causes. Because he was on the fast track, because nobody controlled him and he was out of control. He did his own thing. And a lot of it was good, you know, and so that's the way life is. So I don't know what happened there. [Because he had made some enemies who put him in that situa-

tion.] One way or the other, he had to get away from them.

I want to pursue that but I should probably ask you, because we're about out of time, were there other important events, or important challenges the College has faced?

Well, they're facing some now, you know, to deal with this type of growth and to have a faculty, enlarging a faculty that would be committed to teaching. I mean, we're running into some things and everybody wants to stabilize themselves but I guess, you know, looking at unions, at one time they had a better place in life than they might have now. And then at one time-and then the unions became so corrupt. I don't know, you know, it's very difficult to manage an animal that's steady moving at a very fast pace and growing like the institution is growing, and get the people that you need to keep, to fill those slots that you need to educate people and still maintain a balance, and the mission, and the philosophy of the institution.