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Interview with Jason Silverman

Jason H. Silverman

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**LOUISE PETTUS ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**Interview OH #291
SILVERMAN, Jason**

SILVERMAN, Jason

Professor of History

Interviewed: July 30, 2015

Interviewer: Michelle Dubert-Bellrichard

Index by: Michelle Dubert-Bellrichard

Length: 02:20:36

Abstract: In his July 30, 2015 interview with Michelle Dubert-Bellrichard, Jason Silverman details his career at Winthrop since 1984. Silverman recalls the administrations of President Lader, Piper, DiGiorgio, and Comstock. In particular, Silverman recounts the events leading up to the vote of no confidence in 1995, his involvement as chair of faculty conference, and what happened on campus after the motion failed to pass. This interview was conducted for inclusion into the Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections Oral History Program.

Keywords: History Department, Presidents, Kinard Fire, Vote of No Confidence, Fretwell Report, Legislative Audit Council Review, Budget Priorities Committee, Faculty Priorities Committee

Interview Session (July 30, 2015): Digital File

Time Keywords

00:00:00 *Start of Interview/Interviewer's Introduction*

00:00:32 *Question:* When and why Winthrop? *Answer:* Fall 1984. Previously on faculty at Yale University. At Yale for 4 years. JS speaks of his time at Yale University and why he left Yale University. JS discusses being on the job market. Lead choice was Penn State. Southern Historical Association Meeting met in Charleston in November 1983. Winthrop invited JS. Describes the History Department at the time. JS invited to Winthrop for on-campus interview. JS describes interview. Campus. Birdsall Viault. JS offered the job. JS spoke with mentor about whether or not he should accept job at Winthrop.

00:10:30 [no question] JS continues talking about coming to Winthrop. Orientation. Tour of library. Meeting wife Susan. JS always fond of students. JS briefly discusses why he stayed at Winthrop.

00:14:30 [no question] JS talks about his connection to students. Senior faculty member.

- 00:15:50 *Question:* How does it feel to be senior faculty? *Answer:* An honor to be a full professor for 25 years. JS stopped caring about governance and ceremony. Chairman of Faculty Conference in 1995. Professional areas of importance to JS: teaching/students and writing books. Eleventh book coming out soon.
- 00:17:58 *Question:* Not a step down from Yale? *Answer:* No. JS compares his students at Winthrop to his students at Yale. JS discusses the accomplishments of his students.
- 00:21:15 *Question:* Stay in touch with all students? *Answer:* JS tries. Twice a month, JS hears from former students.
- 00:23:35 *Question:* Reputation as professor? *Answer:* JS discusses the death of his parents. JS needed a mentor in his undergraduate studies. Colorado State. University of Kentucky. JS never wanted to leave a student alone without a mentor. JS's lectures. Student recognition. Rate My Professor. "Silverman's Army" Facebook group.
- 00:31:14 *Question:* Titles held at Winthrop? *Answer:* Personnel, curriculum, general education, academic vice presidential search, university basketball coach search, American studies, African American studies committees. Harry Truman scholarship advisor. Elected chairman of faculty conference and faculty representative to the Board of Trustees in 1995. Held this position for two years. "Civil War on campus." "...We won every battle, and we lost the war." In "Academic Siberia."
- 00:34:40 *Question:* Years? *Answer:* 1995-1997.
- 00:34:58 *Question:* Full professor? *Answer:* Assistant professor: 1984-1987, associate professor: 1987-1990. Full professor 1990-present.
- 00:36:25 *Question:* Was the history department better then than it is now? *Answer:* Yes. Environment. Collegiality.
- 00:38:50 *Question:* Strengths and weaknesses when you first arrived? *Answer:* Sense of community. Phil Lader. Weakness at the time was it was known as a girls' school. JS discusses the goals of President Lader. JS says Lader's ambition was also a weakness. Discusses Lader's career.
- 00:44:05 *Question:* Do you resent Lader from leaving? *Answer:* "A little bit." Lader leaving ushered in an era of instability. Marcus Newberry brought in as an acting president. Martha Kime Piper. JS remembers meeting Martha Kime Piper. JS had a positive recollection of President Piper.
- 00:50:15 [no question] Kinard fire. JS remembers getting a phone call from Susan Silverman. "They had roped everything off, and the trucks were there, and Martha Kime Piper was standing there eating an ice cream cone." Destruction of fire.

- 00:52:05 [no question] Piper ceased to be visible. Rumors on campus. Mike Smith. Era of instability.
- 00:53:25 [no question] Next presidential search. Finalists: Anthony DiGiorgio and Bernie Dunlap. JS describes Bernie Dunlap. "Dunlap reminded a lot of people of Lader." Why Dunlap lost out to DiGiorgio.
- 00:57:25 *Question:* What happened to Bernie Dunlap? *Answer:* Dunlap became President of Wofford College. Successful fundraiser for Wofford. Taught a class every semester. Visible to campus.
- 00:59:20 *Question:* First impressions of DiGiorgio? *Answer:* JS was skeptical from the beginning. Recently tenured. JS remembers that DiGiorgio had a mustache when he first interviews. JS says that appearance made a difference to DiGiorgio. JS talks about DiGiorgio's goals: accreditation. JS says DiGiorgio not visible or accessible. Revealed that DiGiorgio gave raises to administrators.
- 01:05:25 [no question] JS named South Carolina Professor of the Year in 1990."I became almost synonymous with him." DiGiorgio selected JS to be the co-chair of his inauguration committee. Lack of transparency from DiGiorgio.
- 01:07:45 [no question] Talks of vote of no confidence. "He was consolidating power." Nickname at Trenton State was "Tony the Knife." Atmosphere on campus. JS hasn't been to a faculty meeting since 1997. JS describes faculty meetings – faculty, students, and media.
- 01:10:30 [no question] The meeting that voted no confidence elected JS chairman of faculty conference. Vote of no confidence in November 1995.
- 01:11:00 *Question:* How did the vote of no confidence progress? *Answer:* Lines were drawn. Public opinion. JS says that everyone was confident that DiGiorgio would be dismissed. Budget Priorities Committee given the right to see where money was and wasn't being spent. Bob Gorman, Glen Broach, Bob Kline, David Stokes, Steve Million. Faculty Priorities Committee responsible for meeting with the President to inform him of issues on faculty's mind. JS's speech for chairman of faculty conference. 86% vote in favor of no confidence.
- 01:17:45 [no question] DiGiorgio was crushed by the vote allegedly. Board of Trustees did not fire DiGiorgio. Unrest across campus.
- 01:19:55 [no question] Fretwell report. JS skeptical E.K. Fretwell. Discusses Fretwell's work. People were not holding back.
- 01:22:20 [no question] JS corrects timeline. JS was chair of faculty conference elect. Barbara Price. Fretwell delivered the report.

- 01:24:00 *Question:* What came of the report? *Answer:* Board decided to keep DiGiorgio. JS says that DiGiorgio became more visible at first. "Nothing had changed." Herb Kirsch. Legislative Audit Council review. LAC report revealed DiGiorgio's spending. DiGiorgio's discretionary account. "That was the day morale died."
- 01:29:20 [no question] After the vote of no confidence. Faculty left. JS relegated to "academic Siberia." No raises. Furloughed nine days. "In a world of givers and takers, Tony DiGiorgio is the most shameless taker it's ever been my misfortune to know." Aftermath of the DiGiorgio administration. Enrollment, visibility, and professorship.
- 01:34:40 *Question:* Accomplishments? *Answer:* DiGiorgio got every program accredited that could be accredited. History department could not be accredited. Buildings. Campus. DiGiorgio Campus Center. West Center.
- 01:39:00 *Question:* Rate the presidents? *Answer:* JS says the best was Lader. JS discusses acting presidents. JS says it's not fair to rate Piper. DiGiorgio would be last. JS can't say anything about Mahony. JS spent 15 minutes with Comstock. Silverman Scholarship. Comstock rated second.
- 01:44:40 *Question:* General opinion on Comstock? *Answer:* JS, referring to series of Herald stories, says he believes her. JS discusses Comstock's behavior.
- 01:47:15 *Question:* If she stayed, would Comstock have been good for Winthrop? *Answer:* If she continued that behavior, no. Board of Trustees and Comstock.
- 01:51:00 [no question] JS wants Mahony to know the truth.
- 01:51:35 *Question:* What do you hope Mahony will do? *Answer:* Enrollment, endowment, and morale.
- 01:53:40 *Question:* Current strengths and weaknesses? *Answer:* Good people - students and faculty. Weaknesses: finger pointing and every man for himself mentality. JS says a president needs his/her own people. JS discusses the key to success.
- 02:00:40 *Question:* Why didn't you leave? *Answer:* Family. Full professor at the time. "This is my school." JS speculates that he would have been happier elsewhere at times. Winthrop students.
- 02:05:35 *Question:* What do you hope to accomplish in the next five semesters? *Answer:* Be a better professor. JS talks about relating to his students. Mentor. Father figure. JS talks about writing his new book. JS talks about retirement. Gregory Crider.
- 02:12:25 *Question:* How would you like to go down in Winthrop's history? *Answer:* Compassionate and fair-minded teacher. Entertaining professor. Active and prolific scholar. Courageous individual.

02:13:55 *Question:* Final words? *Answer:* JS satisfied with interview. JS doesn't want books to become expendable at the expense of technology. JS tells story about a student writing a thesis.

02:20:36 *End of interview*