
INTERVIEW WITH CHARLES MORRIS, EMERITUS FACULTY

Transcribed by Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft; May 2007

ELAINE GRAYBILL: Today is April 12th, 2007, and I'm interviewing Dr. Charles Edward Morris Jr. at his home at 1023 Barton Drive in Normal. My name is Elaine Graybill, coordinator of the Illinois State University Oral History Project, for which this interview is being conducted. Dr. Morris is emeritus associate professor of mathematics and emeritus vice president for administrative services at Illinois State University. He joined the faculty in 1966 and retired in 1995. Well, Dr. Morris—and would you like me to call you Dr. Morris? Is that your preference? [Telephone rings.]

CHARLES MORRIS: [unintelligible].

GRAYBILL: Dr. Morris, what year were you born?

MORRIS: 1931.

GRAYBILL: And where were you born and raised?

MORRIS: Bom and spent my first sixteen years in a town in Virginia named Big Stone Gap.

GRAYBILL: Okay.

MORRIS: I went off to college at age sixteen, and after that I only spent about two summers in Big Stone Gap.

GRAYBILL: What can you tell me about your parents, their educational backgrounds and the kind of work they did?

MORRIS: My father was a graduate of Hampton Institute. One of the most significant things about his education and experience was that he traveled and was a soloist with the Hampton Institute choir and was with a group that sang before the queen when they made a trip to Europe.

GRAYBILL: Oh, really?

MORRIS: So that was a highlight in his life. He started teaching after getting his degree at Hampton, and soon after, his father died, within months. My father was one of six children, the youngest of two males and there were four daughters. His father operated a shoe repair shop in Big Stone Gap, and my father was faced with a choice at the time of either continuing his teaching assignment at Hampton or returning to Big Stone Gap, where he could be of assistance to his mother and his sisters, all of whom were younger than he, some, in fact, probably teenagers or close to teenagers at the time.

So he chose to return home and operate the shoe shop, which is something I learned to do in my early years. It was probably the first thing I would have been able to earn a living at if I had chosen to do so. In any case, he made that decision, returned to Big Stone Gap and spent his life there, still operating his business when he passed in 1986.

My mother received the equivalent of a two-year college degree, which was sufficient at that time for teaching, and so she did some teaching after coming to Big Stone Gap but was primarily a mother of the two children, I and my sister. She also was very handy as a seamstress, and in their later years she sort of joined Dad in the business, where she concentrated on home decorating and that sort of thing, and he concentrated on shoe repair and leather repair and that sort of thing. So they both had, I would say, a pretty good education for minorities at that time. Even though Big Stone Gap was a typically Southern and segregated community, they were able to achieve some successes within those constraints.

GRAYBILL: What were your parents' names?

MORRIS: Charles Edward Morris Sr. and Verta Edith Morris.

GRAYBILL: Okay. All right. And you have one sister. Is that correct?

MORRIS: Yes.

GRAYBILL: And what's her name?

MORRIS: Her name is Miriam DeLois Fuller.

GRAYBILL: Okay. And what is your sister's educational background and education?

MORRIS: After finishing high school, she went to Virginia State College. At that time, when she and I were going to college in Virginia, the higher education institutions in Virginia were not open to minority students, at least to African American students. Typically the state would provide some supplement, support if a student, an African American student went to a college in Virginia. But the doors of the university colleges were not open. That is, the state universities were not open to us at that point.

She completed her bachelor's degree there, then later—she was in library education; she later received a master's degree in that field, and then went on still later, after her children were at the level of high school, anyway, she finished a doctorate at the University of Missouri in Columbia.

GRAYBILL: And what about her occupation?

MORRIS: She's been a teacher. She taught for several years in Big Stone Gap. Unlike me, she returned to the hometown, spent quite a few years there, and then in the later years she was a librarian. She did that when her husband was doing graduate work at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana. She also was doing graduate work. She's directed nursery school, early childhood type programs, spent quite a few years at that, and that was what her focus was when she got her doctorate.

GRAYBILL: Oh. Well, tell me about your elementary and secondary education.

MORRIS: Elementary was at the segregated school for African Americans in Big Stone Gap. To reach my school, every day I would walk past a white-only school, and then later, for high school, again the doors of the local school were not open. No schools were open to African Americans in that part of Virginia at that time, and probably not in the state at all. But I went to a county high school about four miles from home, leaving my so-called neighborhood high school and passing another high school on the way to the high school that we attended in Appalachia, Virginia, which is about three to four miles away.

Big Stone Gap is located in the far southwestern part of the state. The major industry then, and to some extent still, was coal mining. So most of my classmates, schoolmates in high school were children who lived in the coal mining towns in that part of the state. Big Stone Gap was more of a bedroom community for, oh, the managers and others who were in charge of running the coal operation. I think the headquarters for that industry were located in Big Stone Gap at that time. There were no mines in Big Stone Gap, but most of the other towns surrounding Big Stone Gap, to the west certainly, were locations for coal mines.

GRAYBILL: How and why did you decide to go to Johnson C. Smith University?

MORRIS: After I graduated from high school and knowing that I would need financial assistance to go to college, and taking advantage of my parents' strong involvement in the Presbyterian Church, I received some financial assistance and attended a community college, a two-year college, Swift Memorial Junior College, which was a Presbyterian institution in Rogersville, Tennessee. And then, continuing that theme with respect to schools where I could receive some financial assistance, I went my last two years to Johnson C. Smith University, also a Presbyterian-supported institution, which it still is, and received my bachelor's degree there.

Like many other small church-related institutions in that part of the state, certainly in Virginia, the junior college that I attended closed within—let's see, I graduated from there in 1950. By 1955 that institution had closed ostensibly, or at least the intention was to eliminate segregated institutions within the church in that area, but that was not always the best way to achieve desegregation of schools because African American students often lost their best support and encouragement for completing higher education.

The schools desegregated, but the faculties were not desegregated, so teachers that we had and who were very important in our lives, helping us to achieve some educational success—those teachers often had to leave the community or seek employment in some other career phase.

GRAYBILL: That's too bad. Well, why did you decide to study mathematics?

MORRIS: I felt or I enjoyed two—three, probably—disciplines through my college career, and even in high school. I liked science, particularly mathematics; I liked mathematics. I also liked English. And by the time I got to Johnson C. Smith University I had decided it would be either science, natural science, or mathematics, and I'm not sure what pushed me toward mathematics except for things that I enjoy doing, that I'm challenged by, and it seemed that mathematics seems to fit the bill better than some other area of science.

GRAYBILL: What was your main emphasis in mathematics?

MORRIS: At the college level, the bachelor's degree was sort of a general degree, of course, but as I moved on towards graduate study and the Ph.D. program that I completed, my main interest was algebra, and within algebra I did a dissertation in a field called group theory.

GRAYBILL: Thank you. Why did you decide to go into teaching, and why William Penn High School?

MORRIS: Teaching was one of the areas where African Americans could feel that they would have opportunities for a career. There were not many opportunities open in other fields. To illustrate that, when I completed college, I went to—for summer, and I did this for two or three summers—I went to the city of Detroit, Michigan, with my bachelor's degree in mathematics and applied at one of the automobile manufacturing plants. And the job that I received was a job as a welder on a merry-go-round in the operation, where the average education level perhaps was seventh grade, certainly less than a high school completion. But most of the people that I worked with in that setting were people with little education and no higher education at all. But that was the job that was offered me at the time and the job that I worked at for, oh, several months, probably nine months.

GRAYBILL: You were highly over-qualified for that, weren't you?

MORRIS: I thought I was, yes.

GRAYBILL: And then did you enjoy secondary school teaching?

MORRIS: Ah, yes, back to—

GRAYBILL: Yes.

MORRIS: —the previous question.

GRAYBILL: Yes.

MORRIS: Yes, I did enjoy teaching. William Penn High School was located in High Point, North Carolina, which is not too far from Charlotte, which is the locus for Johnson C. Smith University. So opportunities for teaching seemed to be more prevalent in the state of North Carolina since I was a graduate of a North Carolina institution. And I taught there for four years and enjoyed the experience.

GRAYBILL: Did you have any particular experiences that you'd like mention?

MORRIS: Oh, I could cite incidents of segregation, incidents of things that I enjoyed, people that I met and became associated with. High Point is also the place where Jeanne and I spent our first year of marriage. She was teaching in Hollywood, Florida, at the time, and I was teaching in High Point. We decided that I would continue my teaching position there in High Point and she would join me when we married in 1957.

GRAYBILL: And then how did you meet Jeanne specifically?

MORRIS: We met in New Hampshire. She was a student at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia. I at the time was at Johnson C. Smith University. And we both were recruited or applied for work as college students at a summer resort near Ashland, New Hampshire. It was in that setting that we met. Both of us have a strong interest in music. Her college degree was in music education. And we formed a singing group at the resort and did some singing in the surrounding community. It was an all-male group. There weren't enough women who were interested at that time to do this sort of thing. So we had a group of probably sixteen or so men who enjoyed doing that. Jeanne was sort of the pianist and co-director of the group. I was there. I did that work for four summers; she did it for two. But that was where we met. She went on to finish at Spelman, and then she started her teaching career in Florida. I finished at Johnson C. Smith, and after two years started my teaching career in High Point, North Carolina.

GRAYBILL: And why did you decide to go on to graduate school, and why did you select the University of Illinois?

MORRIS: I applied to summer institutes that were financed, supported by the National Science Foundation while I was teaching in High Point and did this for a couple of summers and was strongly encouraged by a teacher in an institute, a woman, Dr. Marjorie Browne, I think her name was, strongly encouraged by her to apply for an academic year institute; that is, a nine-month program as compared with the summer program, which I did and was selected at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana.

When that offer came, we decided to leave High Point, come to Champaign-Urbana, and at that point I was seeking a master's degree. It was a year-long program with a master's degree offered if you completed it successfully. In the meantime, I had fairly good success in that program and was encouraged to stay after getting the master's degree and do further graduate work. At the same time, Jeanne started her work in a master's program in early childhood education.

GRAYBILL: At the University of Illinois also?

MORRIS: At the University of Illinois. Our intent when we arrived at Champaign-Urbana was to complete one year and return to High Point. However, we stayed eight years, and at the end of that I had completed my Ph.D. in mathematics, and she had made a lot of progress on a Ph.D., herself, a doctorate, herself. At that point, there were two other people in the family. [Both chuckle.]

GRAYBILL: And can you give me their names?

MORRIS: Yes. David Charles Morris Sr. and Lynn Elizabeth Morris, now Franklin, both of whom were born in Urbana.

GRAYBILL: And what years were they born?

MORRIS: David, in 1959 and Lynn in 1961. We are fortunate in that they both are in this community, and that three of our grandchildren, twelve, nine and seven in ages, are here as well,—

GRAYBILL: That's wonderful. Yes, I see the stroller over in the corner. [Laughs.]

MORRIS: —as evidenced all around. Especially with Jeanne’s interest in early childhood education, it’s been a real joy. Our oldest grandson completed his work on a degree in mechanical engineering at Michigan State University, and he’s now working in his field, in his area, in Schaumburg.

GRAYBILL: Well, good for him. That’s great. Well, how far have your children gone with their educations?

MORRIS: David is within hours of completing his degree. At a certain point, he just got so busy in his work, and I guess enjoyed it as well, that he stopped short of the degree. He’s an avid reader, not only for reading material that applies in his work—he’s the director of human resources for the Biaggi’s Restaurant Corporation. It’s a job that requires a lot of travel, since they now have twenty restaurants and they are creating more. And that’s the kind of work he’s been in for several years.

GRAYBILL: What a wonderful position! I’ve read that they’re really growing. The chain is really growing.

MORRIS: Yes. Been quite successful. So travel has been something that he’s had to do a lot of during his adult years.

Lynn completed her bachelor’s degree in music, piano performance, at Illinois Wesleyan University and then has worked on her master’s at Illinois State University. She is currently the staff secretary for the financial aids department at Illinois State.

GRAYBILL: Okay. I bet I’ve met her.

MORRIS: And she is the organist for a church in Peoria and teaches private lessons. She’s busy at her chosen career, in her career as well.

GRAYBILL: It sounds like she has three jobs.

MORRIS: Yes, sometimes some of us think it is three jobs. But she enjoys what she does.

GRAYBILL: Well, good. Well, what year did you first come to Illinois State University, and why did you come?

MORRIS: We came here upon my completion of the Ph.D. in 1966, and of the several opportunities I had, there were several choices, some at historically black institutions, mostly in the Southeast. And there were others, which were not historically black, and in fact had very low, hardly any black enrollment. Among those choices was Illinois State University and a university in Michigan.

While at the University of Illinois, I became acquainted with several members of the Mathematics Department at Illinois State. They were attending the same academic year institute in mathematics that I was, and I can mention several people who were in that program: Hal Gilmore, Ken Retzer, a man named James Rowe, Wilson Banks, and so I learned about Illinois State University through them.

Also probably providing some encouragement for this choice was the fact that we knew the minister of the Presbyterian Church here at that time, Rev. Richard Watts. We became acquainted with him and his

family, because we were members of the church, the Presbyterian Church in Champaign while he was there as an associate minister.

So we felt we had a set of people whom we liked and who also very strongly encouraged us to sort of begin a life here in Normal. That was a time, of course, when segregation in housing was still very much in place, and other kinds of segregation in the community: barber shops, many restaurants, most restaurants. Pretty typical. But it was through those colleagues in mathematics and the Watts family that we ultimately made or, with their interest and support, that we ultimately made the decision to come here. And it's been a good experience for us, a good, positive experience.

GRAYBILL: I'm glad that you can feel that way about it. Were there any experiences when you moved to Normal that you'd like to mention?

MORRIS: Yes, there were experiences. One of the realtors in the community refused to show us houses. On one occasion during our house search, we stopped at a home where there was a sign in the yard advertising the home for sale, and when we stopped, we were told very quickly and not very kindly that we weren't welcome and that they wouldn't be interested in selling the house to us.

And the house that we selected on Wilmette Drive, Wilmette Drive in Normal, we learned that there were people in that area, in that neighborhood, who opposed our living[^] there, and some, we learned, initiated some effort of a protest nature to discourage our moving to that neighborhood. But all the people, most of the people in that neighborhood, on that street, were people who welcomed us. Several were faculty members at either ISU or IWU, so the people who sort of led a protest against us, tried to make one, were very much in the minority.

GRAYBILL: Now, were you aware of the protest? Was it something you could actually see? Did they have signs or anything?

MORRIS: No, no signs, but we just learned that there were people who started, through conversations and talking about us in the neighborhood, a process which they hoped would end in our deciding not to move there.

GRAYBILL: Now, how did the restaurants make you feel unwelcome? How did they express that?

MORRIS: Well, if not refusing us at the door, the nature of the service, their behavior. It's obvious that you weren't welcome and you wouldn't feel very comfortable. And segregation was so much a part of the life of the community that we didn't often attempt to go places where we had suspicions that we would not be welcome. Now, there were some restaurants that were truly desegregated at that time, but the segregation was a part of the fabric of the community when we moved here, both Bloomington and Normal.

GRAYBILL: And can you tell me how that's changed through the years?

MORRIS: Desegregation of facilities is very much a fact here in Bloomington-Normal, and we can go virtually anyplace in the community, at least places that serve food, and feel that we are being received

and served very much like others. Other kinds of evidence are in people who work either in the restaurants, themselves, or the nature of employment in the community, itself. When we came here, I was one of two and a half African Americans who were on the faculty my first year, a man named Delano Cox, who was in the biology department, and Harry Shaw, who was in the English department but also had some administrative assignments.

State Farm Insurance companies had no professional African American employees there. The highest employee in terms of rank and service was a secretary. But to their credit, soon after I was here—I worked very closely with the personnel director there, a man named Jerry Strickland, and we initiated a program at State Farm which was designed to recruit minorities into their work force. There were no minorities, no African Americans in positions of professional employment in the community. Two and a half at Illinois State University, probably one or two at Illinois Wesleyan, but there were no people in the professions: doctors, lawyers, other areas requiring a professional degree of some sort.

So that's starkly changed, as you know. State Farm has done what I would call an exceptional job in changing the complexion of their work force. Both universities have done a pretty good job in that as well. The fact that the current president at Illinois State University is an African American is probably the best evidence of the progress that's been made.

GRAYBILL: Did you ever think you'd see that day?

MORRIS: No, I guess not, even though I saw the progress, the change through the years, and I was very much involved as an advocate for some of that. When I received my administrative appointments, the board was reluctant to give me certain titles or positions or let's call it responsibility at a certain level. So that speaks to how much the board has changed in its complexion and outlook. But nevertheless, there were certain members of the board at the time that I received my appointment who sort of placed pressures on the board to do, let me call it, the right thing. And so those changes started to come at the time of my appointments.

There were a sufficient number of people on the board, two of whom were African Americans, who were strong advocates for equality of opportunity and advancing education and the process for all. Another person who was significant in that was a man who was Jewish who was on the board at that time. So of the nine members, there were three who were strong and outspoken advocates. There was some courage required, as well, on the part of the presidents at the time.

GRAYBILL: What year are we talking about? Was this 1973?

MORRIS: My first appointment was in 1973, in February, as secretary of the University, which was a title that had been created, was created when the presidency was held by—a man named David Berlo created that particular title. And it had positions under it, under its management which crossed some of the traditional lines. It had both student service and administrative areas such as personnel and police, which weren't typically grouped together. That position was held first—the first man appointed to that was Arthur White, Dr. Art White. He was appointed probably in the summer of '72, suffered a heart

attack in the fall, and it was upon that development that a search was initiated to fill the vacancy that was created, and I was selected to fill the position.

I had had some good, positive experiences prior to that, which sort of positioned me to become a candidate. Although I was full time in the Mathematics Department as associate professor and I came here as associate professor of mathematics, I also had become involved, heavily involved in governance in the University and served as a chairman, the first chairman in the Academic Senate when it was formed in 1970.

I also had responsibility for some grants, programs funded by National Science Foundation grants in my department, and those kinds of activities gave me a visibility within the institution, and I got to know people and faculty in other departments, people in other areas of the University, and those are things I'm sure which positioned me to be considered for an administrative position.

GRAYBILL: And was David Berlo the president who took the strong position for your appointment?

MORRIS: He did. He did. It required some strong advocacy position with the board at that time. He left after only a year or so, you may know, and the next president was a man named Gene Budig, and I continued as secretary of the University during his tenure. But it was Lloyd Watkins who joined the faculty and became president, oh, in the late seventies, who initiated the change for my title to vice president for administrative services. That happened in 1980. While hardly any of my responsibilities, work assignments changed, the title was changed to one that was considered to be more appropriate for the level of responsibility that I had.

GRAYBILL: Well, that does explain something, because I wondered if that was a promotion to a new position, but it was a title change to be more fitting for that position.

MORRIS: Very much so. And it's true as well that it was not a title that was in use here at the University, vice president for administrative services, but it fit at the time and placed me in a position at the vice presidential level. After I left the position, however, that particular title has not been used, so as far as the history of the University goes, at this point I'm the only person who served as vice president for administrative services.

GRAYBILL: Okay. Would that be comparable to the vice president for student affairs now?

MORRIS: No, because I had a mix of responsibilities. Some were traditional student areas, and some were in other administrative areas. Some were in the area now which would be probably vice president for business. So as the University has changed, and this is not atypical in universities, the responsibilities sometimes are moved from area to area as a president feels is most fitting for his style of administration. So administrative services is used in many institutions. Today the most typical vice presidents are for student affairs, for business affairs and for institutional advancement. So, no, it was not comparable in its management of areas to a student affairs vice president, but I was comparable in level of responsibility.

GRAYBILL: So I guess you did have human resources if Dave Wiant reported to you.

MORRIS: I did, right, human resources, which at the time was called personnel.

GRAYBILL: Okay. Were you the first African American administrator and also the first vice president?

MORRIS: Yes, certainly here at Illinois State University.

GRAYBILL: Illinois State.

MORRIS: At that level. As I said, Harry Shaw, who was here in 1966 when I came, had some responsibilities in administration, but he didn't have a position at that level, nor was that his proximal assignment.

GRAYBILL: All right.

MORRIS: Yes, I was first at that level of responsibility. And also in the governance area, as I mentioned, I was the first chairman of the Academic Senate, which was created in 1970.

GRAYBILL: That's quite an honor. Do they have a plaque for you somewhere?

MORRIS: I have a plaque. I don't know if the University has one, which is one of the interesting ironies of holding a title which existed only during your time of administration. As you look around the University, you'll see evidence of people who have served as president, people who've served as vice presidents of business, you'll see evidence of people and often pictures of people who served as vice president for student affairs, but you don't see that for the vice president for administrative services. It's almost as though it disappeared from the life or the history of the institution.

GRAYBILL: I think I'd like to go back to talk about your faculty work a little bit more. I'm glad we got onto the administrative part of your career, but I would like to document a few things about the Math Department, and I'm interested as to why you came in as an associate professor. That's unusual, isn't it?

MORRIS: Yes, not typical, but I came in—there were three of us who came that year, all of whom held a doctorate degree, and there were only two other persons in the department who held a doctorate in mathematics. At that time in the life of the institution, it was virtually required for a person coming in with a doctorate that you be appointed at the associate professor level. As I said, there were three of us who came that year, all of us appointed as associate professors. And even across the University that was probably the pattern. The institution was building its credentials, so to speak, at that time, so they were strongly recruiting people who had completed the doctorate degree.

GRAYBILL: Okay. Who were the others who came in with you that year?

MORRIS: Robert Hathway and Orlyn Edge. In fact, when we came, the mathematics department was officed in, housed in Schroeder Hall, and the three of us shared one large room with cubicles. You know how that is.

GRAYBILL: [Chuckles.] Times have changed, I hope.

MORRIS: Well, yes, they certainly did change. When we moved into Watterson—not Watterson Towers; it's so near, but Stevenson Hall, we all received our own private offices. And we weren't the only faculty at that time. Other people were officed together as well. But going into Stevenson Hall really changed things.

GRAYBILL: That's good. Well, how many members of the department were there then when you started?

MORRIS: Well —

GRAYBILL: Approximately? And who was the chair, too?

MORRIS: The chair was Clyde McCormick. I would say probably twelve or fifteen members of the department. Some of them had assignments at University High School as well.

GRAYBILL: What was the ratio of men to women in the department?

MORRIS: At that time, maybe two or three were women.

GRAYBILL: And you've already told me that there were only two and a half faculty members of campus who were African American. Were any others in your department?

MORRIS: No, I in the math department, Delano Cox in the biology department, and Harry Shaw in the English department.

GRAYBILL: And that has changed during your career at Illinois State. Do you want to talk about that at all, about that's changed?

MORRIS: Oh, it's changed significantly. Most departments will have minority representation in the faculty, if not an African American. The numbers go up and down. I would like to see a greater representation. We're not at the point where I—let's say if I used the population of the state and its breakdown as a measure, the percentage of African Americans in the state being probably 13 or 14 percent, I would argue that that's a reasonable percentage for the number of African American faculty who should be here, as well as for other minority faculty, that percentage. No, we've not reached that level of participation, nor have we reached—even though we can probably say that we have a president at this time who's African American, as you look at other levels of administration and certain areas of operation, we don't have, the University doesn't have what I would call a representative number of people serving in positions in the University hierarchy.

GRAYBILL: We've talked about the campus climate. Is there anything else you'd like to say about the campus climate for minority faculty and staff?

MORRIS: I'm smiling about that particular question because one of the projects that I worked with through my later years particularly was a program which we called Assessment of Campus Climate. Through the years and in all my positions, I have been an advocate, usually an outspoken advocate, for

equity and opportunity, educational equity. I often wrote proposals, grant proposals for support from the Illinois Board of Higher Education to support some activities that I felt needed addressing.

And one of those was a project called Assessment of Academic Climate, Assessment of Campus Climate. It was a project which I would have to say wasn't warmly received around the education community because of suspicions and concerns that the University—other universities as well, not just Illinois State University—would not be shown in a very positive or very favorable light. In the early years of that project, which would have been in the late eighties, I received good support from members of the board, and through that support and through connections with other systems, we were able to conduct a survey of most of the institutions in this state. We developed an instrument for measuring campus climate for minority students.

GRAYBILL: And for faculty and staff as well?

MORRIS: Yes.

GRAYBILL: So minority students, faculty and—

MORRIS: And staff. The great emphasis, however, was on students, even though we had the other instruments and used them. We were fortunate that there were eight universities out of twelve that participated, which was quite an accomplishment at the time because nationwide, assessment of campus climate was generally thought of as not very friendly to institutions. But since then, however, that's changed. Very happily, that has changed, and there are projects of that nature at several institutions in the country, and some of them are doing some very good work.

But I had a good look at climate through that instrument and through that survey, and we developed reports which we shared certainly with all the institutions that participated but also with the Board of Higher Education and other agencies in the state. I think the primary benefit of that project is that it sensitized the institutions to the nature of the climate for minority students and how it differed and identified some of the problems associated with those differences.

GRAYBILL: And how it differed, you mean, between minority students and students—

MORRIS: And others.

GRAYBILL: —and students from the larger group, the white students.

MORRIS: Yes, the dominant, main group. As a study of that type would reveal, there were some significant differences, and most of the institutions—I'd say all of the institutions at the state at this time have taken positive steps to address those differences. And one of those, of course, has been to recruit and appoint more minorities in the faculty and administrative staffs of the institution. One of the things that might be evident— certainly was shown in our survey—is that role models are significant in the lives of students in a campus. And where there are role models, students feel more encouraged; they feel better received, and their activities and accomplishments reflect that. One of the things that was

brought out in the study is that having role models, like role models of the same ethnicity, is an extremely important aspect of having a campus which is open and welcoming to all students.

GRAYBILL: It seems that Illinois State—there has been some issue through the years of keeping minority faculty and staff, and I wonder what kinds of issues your survey project identified and whether that helped to improve conditions on campus for faculty and staff.

MORRIS: It certainly identified some areas, and I think where institutions have addressed those, it's helped to make a change. Minority faculty felt that they did not get the same kind of support, did not receive the same sorts of promotions and weren't generally receiving the same sorts of benefits in the university community as other faculty. So that seemed pretty clear from the study, and, as I said, I think most institutions have tried to address those. At Illinois State University, I don't think there's any doubt, as I said, with Al Bowman as its current president, that some of those issues have been addressed at the highest level.

GRAYBILL: But you chose to stay. You and Jeanne chose to stay at the University. Obviously, you had good reasons to do that.

MORRIS: Yes. Our children had successful experiences in the community. We each enjoyed some success in our departments and in the University at large. If we had moved, depending on the nature of the position let's say I might have taken because that would probably have been the reason for our moving—I received nominations through the years for presidents or vice presidents and other positions, and other positions at other universities, both historically black and otherwise; that is, institutions which were still somewhat segregated.

Many of those, I would say, based their judgment of me on the extent to which they felt I would fit in the university and community at large, and by that I mean minorities are often marginalized in that setting. You might be considered, let's say, too black for an institution which is dominantly, predominantly non-black but too white for an institution which is historically black. I've seen that through the years, as I have considered and gone through a selection process for some of these institutions.

So we didn't have strong incentives to go elsewhere. There was a fit for two of us, and so we stayed in that fit, although in my case, as you see in my resume, I did take a position at the system level.

GRAYBILL: Well, yes, if you want to talk about that now.

MORRIS: So that was the extent to which I moved off campus. I won't say I took a position outside of the University because I maintained rank and tenure at the University during the time that I served as vice chancellor for student affairs for the Board of Regents. That enabled me to hold now the position of associate professor emeritus and vice president for administrative affairs emeritus, because I never severed certain relationships with Illinois State University, since it was a part of the system where I held the vice chancellorship.

GRAYBILL: And were you working in Springfield at that time?

MORRIS: Yes, my office was in Springfield. I had an existence in two communities, you might say. We maintained our home here, certainly, with Jeanne continuing in her positions in the College of Education. I arranged to have an apartment in Springfield during that time for times that I would stay overnight, which was frequently. I was there two or three nights a week. Well, let's say I was away from here two or three nights a week because much of my activities as vice chancellor required visiting the other campuses in the system: Northern Illinois University—Sangamon State University was located there in Springfield. But I had an apartment there as a means of convenience in not having to drive at least seventy miles a day for the five years that I was there. But, as I said, there was a lot of other traveling associated with the job: visiting other campuses, going to Board of Higher Education meetings, things of that sort.

GRAYBILL: All right.

Well, I would like to then go back to your teaching yet again. We'll pick up a thread here again. Would you like a break? Are you okay?

MORRIS: [No audible response.]

GRAYBILL: Okay. I'd like to know what your students were like when you came to Illinois State and what was your teaching load when you came.

MORRIS: I had a typical teaching load, probably about twelve hours at the time. Students in the main reflected the attitudes of their communities from whence they came. Often, I think more often than for white faculty, I was challenged by a student who didn't like or appreciate the fact that they were having to take a course under me. But there wasn't strong opposition to my being in the classroom. My experience as a faculty member has been fully rewarding and very much appreciated by me and I think to some extent by the students at Illinois State University.

And there's visible evidence of that. Another faculty member here, who distinguished himself internationally as well as nationally, a man named John Dossey, who has retired as a faculty member here, once made a contribution to the University foundation, and on behalf, let me put it, of faculty members who had been important in his education here at Illinois State University, he named probably seven or eight people, faculty members, who taught him, of which I was one, and I regard that as one of the most significant responses and statements of appreciation by a student, a man who's gone, who has distinguished himself as appreciating, showing appreciation in a very public way because there is a plaque—

GRAYBILL: Yes.

MORRIS: —in the department with our images on it—

GRAYBILL: That's good.

MORRIS: —and words which are very appropriate for that. And I heard from other students as well, so those kinds of responses and that kind of evidence greatly outweigh any negatives associated with

people who didn't like having me as an instructor. I did not have many minority students in my classes because there weren't many minority students at the institution. Math, for them, was pretty much like math for most students; it's not a discipline that they rushed to study in.

GRAYBILL: [Chuckles.] That math phobia thing.

MORRIS: Yes, that's a good way to put it, math phobia. So I didn't interact with many minority students in my classes, but I did in other ways. I was one of the co-sponsors of the National Association for [the Advancement of] Colored People here on campus, NAACP. I was the sponsor, faculty sponsor for a fraternity, an African American fraternity, and I was on committees which would now be defined as diversity committees, committees of that type, at various levels, college department. So there were many opportunities and many occasions for me to interact with minority students.

One which comes to mind particularly is during the time of the attempts to persuade Normal to enact an open occupancy ordinance, which they didn't do, but the NAACP, the student chapter, with support from me as a faculty member and many other faculty members on campus, did do what it could to advocate it in a public way through demonstrations, all peaceful, and marches to persuade the Normal council to enact such an ordinance.

I was very active in the community as well in organizations, in advocacy organizations for improvement for minorities, and you'll see that in some of the organizations I named—

GRAYBILL: Yes

MORRIS: —that I participated in. So although my position as a teacher of mathematics did not bring me into contact with many minority students or many minorities, for that matter, on campus, my involvement in community activities gave me that opportunity.

GRAYBILL: That's good. And things certainly have changed on campus in terms of the percentage of minority students.

MORRIS: Yes.

GRAYBILL: What do you think the University could still do to attract, retain and maximize the experience of African American students?

MORRIS: I think there are still areas of administration on campus which have not had minority professionals appointed. There are pockets like that that I believe need to be addressed. There need to be reminders or keeping departments sensitive to the needs to the fact that we've not reached the right representation or ideal representation yet, if you choose to correlate it with state population. And using that as a measure, I think it's clear that there's still quite a bit of work to do.

GRAYBILL: And please discuss ISU's community outreach activity and maybe particularly, now that you're retired.

MORRIS: No longer active. Well, I am still active in a sense because I have the title of senior associate director with the Center for Mathematics, Science and Technology.

GRAYBILL: And that's CeMaST.

MORRIS: That is CeMaST.

GRAYBILL: Okay.

MORRIS: That's a relationship I started before I retired and which has been maintained throughout my retirement years. I also had a similar connection with what was then the Center for Educational Policy, I believe, in the College of Education. But most of my activity since retiring has been through CeMaST. That gave me an opportunity to, I'll say, have an impact on students state wide, certainly, at a different level than I had been associated with before. I taught in high school, at the high school level and then later on I taught—I taught in high school at the University of Illinois, in its lab school.

I was associated with a project, one of the new mathematics projects. That one was called the University of Illinois Committee on School Mathematics, UICSM. It was one of two prominent mathematics initiatives, projects in the country during the time of what was called new math.

GRAYBILL: And I do remember that. [Laughs.]

MORRIS: So my teaching was at high school level and at the college level. I taught courses, college courses at the University of Illinois as a graduate assistant as well. But in my association with the Center for Mathematics, I coordinated a program for middle school students, primarily minority middle school students, so it enabled me to continue in a sort of advocacy role for education, for what I would call educational equity. This program was initially funded by the Board of Higher Education, funded for eight years, is not funded at this time. The current director of the center, Dr. Karen Lind, has hopes still, and certainly I do, that that program can be funded again through some means. But that's been the outreach, university outreach program that I've been most associated with during my retirement.

During the time that I was on faculty here, of course I was active in the outreach concept with University organizations or as a University faculty member, let's say, because of my participation on panels or in programs off campus, as well as being an active member of certain organizations which were community organizations trying to bring positive change, say, in housing. There was a project called the Bloomington-Normal Housing, mmm, Development. We'll get the exact title from my resume.

GRAYBILL: From your resume, I can do that.

MORRIS: There was a project for supporting businesses, encouraging minorities in business and other projects as well, which were clearly designed to improve the welfare, I'll call it, or to improve minority participation. Another one of those was the Minority Voters' Coalition, which tried to address minority participation in politics but, more importantly, tried to sensitize others to minority participation.

That's the nature of outreach activities that I've participated in through the years. One of the organizations that I cite in my resume, for which I was founding chair—that's the Illinois Committee on Black Concerns in Higher Education—was state wide in nature. It was a statewide organization, with participation from most of the universities in the state, public and private. So I had a history with that particular organization. I also was a member of a program at the national level, and again I'll refer you to my resume.

GRAYBILL: Yes.

MORRIS: That was the National Congress of Black Faculty, I think. You'll see. And that was an advocacy group for the enhancement of minority participation at the national level.

GRAYBILL: You've been very active in this outreach, amazingly. It sounds as though you're still very busy and active.

MORRIS: Yes, I'm somewhat active in that area. When I was appointed to various organizations in the community—let's take as an example—[Pause.]—oh, I can't quite recall the first one, but in many cases, it was true when I was in the Kiwanis Club, as a service organization. In many cases, I was the only minority person in that group. So whether I wanted to be or not, I was an advocate or I was a representative of the community, and I often accepted those appointments because of the lack of representation, knowing that often I might be overreaching in terms of time that I had to spend with certain organizations and be active with them. I still felt that the representation and presence was important, so I was undoubtedly involved with more organizations than I needed to be at certain times. But because of the lack of representation, I would often say yes.

GRAYBILL: Now, looking back on it, do you feel that that philosophy of yours that caused you to take that approach has had a good effect on the community and on the—

MORRIS: Yes, I don't think there's any doubt. My activity in that area, along with that of others, I believe has helped to bring change.

GRAYBILL: Where did you develop that philosophy? Was that something that you started out with as a child, or was it a product of some experiences that you had in your education or your church or your family?

MORRIS: All of those, probably. My own experiences as a child in a segregated town, which was segregated in every way, and then my experiences in the society, seeking jobs, myself, and coping with jobs that I got, being over-qualified, knowing I was overqualified and not being able to do anything about it, or being the sort of experiences one holds when you don't receive the same value as an individual or as a human being in a society. It's the double standard complex in the nation, and we're seeing that so pointedly at this very moment with the Don Imus situation, if you're following that.¹

¹ Transcriber's note: Don Imus was an MSNBC talk-show host who was fired because of his use of a racial slur on air in April 2007.

But not only did I not receive the same opportunities and benefits as a child in education institutions in my town, we didn't get the same kinds of opportunities for recreation, couldn't participate at a swimming pool or go to a golf course. We didn't get the same sort of responses or service from the police departments. There was that kind of double standard which has followed me [chuckles softly] all my life. And to a large degree at this point, I'm happy to say much of that has dissipated.

But on the other hand, when you look at the conversations and dialogue about the Don Imus situation, this man who made some very racist comments, totally inappropriate and totally underserved by the people who were identified, the girls' team, basketball team at Rutgers, it's evident that racism is still very much a part of the fabric in this country. You know, many people state that we no longer have it and there's no longer any need to do anything about it. I hope that this has opened their eyes, the Don Imus controversy.

GRAYBILL: Thank you for those comments. Now, before we get to perhaps you might say your leisure time activities, is there anything else you'd like to say about your career, your outreach activities, anything that we've talked about at all, or beyond?

MORRIS: No. I'm just thinking in my mind here that there is a price that goes with being the only one or the first one, which is not always of a positive nature. There's some stress which goes with that, and there's stress for the family. I was away from home probably more than would be typical for a person who had the positions that I had, and my children were experiencing activities and situations in their schools at the elementary and secondary level, which I might not have been here to address at some time or which Jeanne had to carry the burden for. So there are impacts, not only on the individual but on the individual's family, and there are stresses that one has to experience, which probably take tolls in undetermined ways, health wise for example. And this causes me to hearken back to my own experience when I was a child. Segregation was the rule, not only in education but, as I said, in recreation and services from the police and other departments, but also in health care. We did not have the opportunity to receive what would have been, for white families, normal health care in the community. There were doctors who would see us and attend to us, but it was usually after hours. I didn't have the opportunity for regular dental care, for example. And the only time that I can remember being in dentist's office in Big Stone Gap was after the office had closed for normal business and the dentist would then see us if we had a problem with a toothache or something like that. And not all dentists would have done that. So your question sparked that recollection, that the impact of segregation starts early, started early certainly in my life and stays with you.

Another situation which happened during my lifetime involved being examined for the armed services, and this happened right at the end of my college career. At that time, receiving let's say an analysis of my health, which prevented me from going into the armed services at that time. And, by the time, when I was examined, I was the only college graduate in a group of probably twenty men, all of the rest of whom had less than a high school education, some of them less than an elementary, full elementary education. But the point here is that the analysis that I received at that time, [the] assessment of my health put me in a category which was problematic and caused difficulties in many ways for me in later life. At a time when I was applying for insurance which related to insurance for the home we were

buying, that particular assessment was noted, and because of that, then my insurance rates were going to be higher. But this wasn't the first time I had seen higher insurance rates because of my race.

Fortunately for me, the doctor, who was the father of a student of mine in University High School in Champaign-Urbana, and who also was a member of the school board there, but later became the chairman of the Board of Regents, which at that time was the governing board for Illinois State University—he had been an examiner for the armed services during World War II, and when I told him about my situation, he knew immediately what had happened and how segregation had affected the results of those examinations. So he had me come to his office, and through his consultation with other doctors, he was able to give me an examination result or assessment which removed what had been a stigma and onus for me for years, and which—

Well, don't let me over-exaggerate. I'm married about twenty-five—and that was '57, but I have to go back to 1952, when I was examined. So it was then [the] late 60s that he did this, and we were able to remove that stigma which caused me to get higher rates for insurance and other things. But this is just an indication on how some of those things which happen as a result of segregation early on in life can haunt you and make life difficult for you throughout your lifetime.

So, no, I don't guess I have anything else to say. [Laughs.]

GRAYBILL: I just wondered, with these experiences, if you ever feel you're living in a different universe than some of your colleagues who never experienced this kind of thing.

MORRIS: Oh, without a doubt. Some of them don't have a clue.

GRAYBILL: Yes.

MORRIS: Can we take a break?

GRAYBILL: Certainly. I think we're actually done.

MORRIS: Oh, okay.

GRAYBILL: And I just wanted to mention that I understand that you're a bridge player.

MORRIS: I enjoy—I've been an avid bridge player through my years, yes.

GRAYBILL: And an avid golfer as well. [Laughs.]

MORRIS: Well, more an avid tennis player. I like golf, but my choice is tennis because I think I get more exercise at that.

GRAYBILL: Okay. Well, thank you very much, and I think that we've talked for an hour and a half, and I will turn off the tape.

MORRIS: On other comment.

GRAYBILL: Okay.

MORRIS: We're talking about avid interests. One of them is music as well, and one of my most delightful moments here on the campus, maybe delightful two hours, was the time when I sang the role, I played the role of Joe in the University's production of—I'm blocking on it now. But I sang the song "Ol' Man River."

GRAYBILL: Was it *Steamboat*?

MORRIS: Well—

GRAYBILL: I know which you mean.

MORRIS: Yes. But I performed in that role of Joe on one night, and William Warfield did on the other.

GRAYBILL: Oh, my gosh! What an honor!

MORRIS: That was a result of my taking music classes, though I'd sung through the years, but this was the first time I had taken classes with a faculty member here, and that was one of the results and one of the things that I remember most fondly.

GRAYBILL: That's amazing.

MORRIS: *Show Boat*. *Show Boat* was the name.

GRAYBILL: Okay.

GRAYBILL: Okay, we're recording again.

MORRIS: I was identifying some of the organizations that I participated in as a board member. One of those, early on, was the YMCA. The point at the time was that I was the only one serving on the board. If you get into too many of those situations, it begins to wear on you in terms of building the stress level and that sort of thing, and so one has to make the decision, is that is it wiser to serve on a few and do a job or provide a service that you think is close to what your wishes are, rather [than] to serve on many and not be able to give the kind of contribution that you wish to?

I suspect I chose to serve on many, and it was because of the lack of representation. In a normal setting, I would have said no to some of those [chuckles softly] because it not only prevented me from being as active and involved and as contributory as I wanted to be, it also took time from home activities and other things going on in the family that were important. So you sometimes think if that was the right—the better choice. I'd like to think that my contributions in those larger community-wide activities were sufficient to justify and compensate for other things that I think I could have done with that time.

GRAYBILL: It's good that that's your assessment of it.

MORRIS: Hope so. I think my children have been successful enough that I don't have strong feelings of deprivation of my contribution to their lives. Maybe I've managed to be a role model in some ways that would overcome what I see otherwise as shortcomings.

GRAYBILL: Shall I ask you this golf question?

MORRIS: Well, sure.

GRAYBILL: [Laughs.] Is it true that you use a three wood to get a ball out of a sand trap? [Laughs.]

MORRIS: It's true, and my only comment is that I was maybe the Tiger Woods of that era, using a club in a situation which wasn't traditional. And I think the distance that I had to go at that point had a lot to do with that choice. [Laughter.] And the fact that the three wood was my most comfortable wood to use. The most comfortable shots I think I've made have been with that particular wood, and so I think that was the right choice for me.

GRAYBILL: Did you ever think you'd get to justify this for all history?

MORRIS: No.

GRAYBILL: [Laughs.]

MORRIS: Never dreamed I would have the opportunity to explain why I chose that club at that time.

GRAYBILL: And for the record, this question came from Dave Wiant. [Laughs.]

MORRIS: David Wiant, who was on the foursome on that day and who was most surprised to see me pull that club out of the bag.

GRAYBILL: And now one more thing about bridge: Did you ever play bridge competitively?

MORRIS: Not on any national basis. I accumulated a few points in some of the settings in which I played, which was a competitive setting, but I wasn't there because I wanted to accumulate points or anything like that. I enjoy the game. It's been one of my major recreational outlets through the years. I find it to be of a competitive nature or a type, which I think enabled me to use my mathematics training to give me some advantage. [Chuckles softly.] Jeanne and I both have played in groups through the years, which were mostly social. And when I wanted to be more serious about it, I found people, mostly men, who were more like me in terms of why they were playing and what it accomplished. That was primarily was you focused on, and others going on in your life could be set aside for a time. That's the best kind of recreation.

GRAYBILL: Did you ever play with Jim Moon, who is chair of the accounting department or who was, here at ISU, and his wife, Gail?

MORRIS: I don't remember ever playing with Jim Moon.

GRAYBILL: Okay.

MORRIS: But I played with a lot of other people on the campus, who enjoyed it like I have.

GRAYBILL: And then with your music, did you do any other performances in addition to playing Joe in *Show Boat*.

MORRIS: No, [unintelligible] performances of that nature. I've sung in choirs throughout my life: churches, college choirs, and on many occasions did solo work for those. So there were other times once I performed in a somewhat public setting, like churches, where I'm doing the Messiah in some presentation somewhere in schools, but *Show Boat* gave me my fifteen seconds of time, I think.

GRAYBILL: That's a wonderful—was that in Braden Auditorium?

MORRIS: Yes.

GRAYBILL: Wow. And so you're a baritone or a bass?

MORRIS: Yes.

GRAYBILL: A baritone?

MORRIS: A baritone and bass, combination.

GRAYBILL: Okay.

Well, is there anything else?

MORRIS: I don't think of anything. Please feel free to call me when you want to follow up on something, but I don't have anything in my mind at the moment that I want to say.

GRAYBILL: Okay. Well, I'll turn off the recorder.

MORRIS: While I served in the department, I was chairman of a committee which had responsibility for developing grants, and it was through that process and my involvement as one of the writers that the University received grants from the National Science Foundation. One of those was a program which we called a Summer Institute for Teachers in Lower Division College Mathematics. That may have been the first summer institute supported by the National Science Foundation that came to this University. I don't think there were any prior to that, and I don't remember any since then that were summer institutes funded by the National Science Foundation.

The foundation also funded a pre-service institute, which I directed while in the department, through which we developed a material center on the campus, in the department, which was one of the first material center[s] of that type. And that has been a part of my success story, helping to achieve grants from the National Science Foundation, which gave me greater visibility and leading to other kinds of things, but also I think provided some visibility for the department and even the college as well. So that's part of my positive experience in the University, which I think has been important.

GRAYBILL: I'm glad you thought of that, because without you saying these things on the record, a lot of these things would just be lost. It's just amazing how that happens, but it does, you know?

MORRIS: Right.

GRAYBILL: And so thank you for—

MORRIS: Yes, I agree with you.

GRAYBILL: Is there anything else now, while you're thinking?

MORRIS: No. I'd like to emphasize, though, the significance of the support that I received from certain board members in my life journey through the University career. It was the support and the encouragement of those individuals of me and things that I was trying to do that enabled me to succeed, which illustrates the importance of having people in other arenas, not just here at the University but on the board, who were providing support and encouragement, which helped to make quite a difference not only in my career but quite a difference here at the institution.

I can go back to what would have been the first—well, the first Board of Regents, an individual who was significant and I felt played a significant role in the life of the regents of the University, was Percy Julian.

GRAYBILL: Oh, really.

MORRIS: The scientist.

GRAYBILL: Okay. I've heard a lot about him.

MORRIS: And he was the only African American on the board at that time, but he was very significant in his contributions and what was achieved at the time in the lives of the three institutions at that time, and it was later when there were more of them who were sensitive to the needs and interests of minorities, and when more things were accomplished—but that illustrates the point that one person can make a difference, and a significant difference, as Percy Julian did. But it was at a time when there was more than one minority on the board that greater things were achieved with more of them who were able to more or less pool their influence that more things were made to happen.

GRAYBILL: It was sort of like a tipping point, isn't it, in a way?

MORRIS: Yes. And you would appreciate that, as a female, as a woman.

GRAYBILL: Oh, yes.

MORRIS: That there is a time or a point at which the balance sort of can shift more in favor than when you have sometimes a token representation. It makes a real difference.

GRAYBILL: That's a good observation. Thank you again.

MORRIS: You're welcome.

GRAYBILL: Your comments are very, very valuable, and I appreciate them, and I know that history will as well.

MORRIS: I hope so, that we've made that contribution, Jeanne and I. And you'll hear some interesting things from her.

GRAYBILL: I know I will.