Bearcat Memory Project Transcription

Summer 2021

Interviewee: Roger Daniels

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00:00:00

Katelyn Parvesse: Okay. Um, hi, my name is Katelyn. Um Dr. Daniels, today we're going to be interviewing you. Um, so can you please tell me your name and your association with UC?

Roger Daniels: Well in the spring of 1976, then chairman of the department, William Aschbacker whom I knew because you were both on the executive board of the organization of American Historians asked me if I'd like to come many them when I was in teaching at the State University of New York College [unknown] become chairman of the department. The desire was uh—to make the department more efficient more prestigious [unknown]. My wife and I came out, were interviewed.

KP: Jasmeen can you put your video on mute, please?

RD: What?

Jasmeen Patel: What?

KP: Can you put your video on mute please? I can’t hear what Dr. Daniels is saying.

JP: So I have to put my phone aside?

KP: No, put your, your zoom on mute.

JP: Okay

KP: Sorry Dr. Daniels. What were you saying?

RD: So anyway, so anyway I showed up in the fall and I got hired. Showed up in the spring, showed up in the fall and, uh, began a five year term as chairman of the department. I continued in the department until my retirement in 2002. But uh I served one term five years as a department head plot in Cincinnati [unknown] and spent a great deal of time on leave teaching at various universities in New York.

KP: What was it like being the department head? Did you ever find it difficult to um—be in charge of a lot of faculty?

00:01:01

RD: No. No, there were problems. We got some outstanding times Zane Miller was the most influential member of the department. Acted professionally, an urban historian, very much into Cincinnati life and times. Another very distinguished member was Barbara Ramusack , who’s a specialist in India, not Indians, but India. Um—there were some faculty who had not been productive. One change I made, which upset some of the senior people uh was I changed the scheme of teaching. All the big all the big survey courses were taught by young people, and many most of them major [unknown], of the department, taught only small departments, small classes, I I made it a general rule that most most large classes will be taught by senior historians. So that the these were classes that weren't just taken by history majors that you know, I'm sure that's, that's true. Primarily, US United States is very Western civilization, Eastern civilization.

KP: So I noticed—

RD: And also, and also I insisted that all department members to have ongoing research, because a number of cases, people had just not all, but people who've done enough to get tenure, and then literally stopped doing historical scholarship.

KP: I read an article that you were very involved in your students’ success. Um did you or how, how is that deep commitment shared throughout your faculty?

00:03:47

RD: I, I didn't. Deep commitment? Well, uh. It varied. Uh, there were some people, some people are more committed to—I'm sure in the faculty now that's that's true. There are some people who are only interested in research. Some people are only interested in teaching, but ideally, uh the—the role of a hist— faculty member in a discipline like history, is to be able to do creative research, make contributions to the history and teach history. Teaching and research are important and should set an example for students. That's very important.

KP: What kind of research did you do? I saw that you um were very invested in like International Studies. So could you talk more about what you studied what you taught?

RD: Didn’t you—didn’t you look me up?

KP: I did [chuckle]

00:05:25

RD: Well, then you know what the answers are. I taught a great deal about immigration, largely about Asians, I had a general book on immigration. At the end, actually uh after, after I retired, I wrote a two volume biography of Franklin Roosevelt, which is uh, an important book. The most important book I had written on. When I came to Cincinnati, was called Concentration Camps USA, dealt with the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War two. Uh,

I had the great pleasure. The great satisfaction for a historian, that Japanese redress for Japanese Americans, those who have been in turn, pardon me—incarcerated in ten concentration camps, and were awarded by a Commission, which which I briefed and generally worked with. In the end, individual, each individual who was still alive on the day that bill was signed, this was in the Reagan administration, that [unknown] was entitled to $20,000. And if uh, and if they died after that it was part of their estate, so they still got the money. And uh, now, as you know, the notion of some kind of recognition for African Americans and others, is now at least being talked about. Although uh, nothing can be done, nothing not can be done, nothing concrete has been done. And it would be a much more complicated thing—The records of the government were very complete, about the people who had been incarcerated. So that there was uh, no real problem and no one willing to pay. I encouraged the people who ran the program, after it passed through Congress and signed by the President, I encouraged them to send teams to Japan because some of these citizens have been expelled by the United States and uh—then sent to Japan, even though they were native born citizens. Everyone, but everyone in the camps would have been in the camps, whether they were united states citizens or not. And at that time, Japanese were in a category of of aliens ineligible to citizenship. Thad nothing to do with it. If you served, if you were one day, or one week, or four—or four years didn't make any difference. Every person got $20,000 it was a relatively simple thing. A program of uh—economic assistance or economic redress for African Americans uh who’d be a much more. Much more difficult problem.

KP: How have you seen um—progress throughout your years at UC with um, the treatment of minority students, minority faculty? What What have you seen progress in your time here?

00:10:54

RD: Well, well—well there were no uh—no ethnic minorities in the department at the time I came. Uh—one uh, one faculty member had a had a Japanese American husband.

But uh, the department was solidly Caucasian, and I believe always had been that, that of course, did not continue. And I, I assume is is now multinational, multi ethnic uh department, and has—There were there were African American students in the department, one professor, Herbert Shapiro, who did s—scholarly research on African American [unknown] and that sort of thing, and had a number of African American students. Some of them uh—became successful PhD candidates—and completed dissertations. That was a big change. The department had always had some women, and that had been the case for a long time. I'm not sure when the first woman was hired. I never uh—tried to do a, like a survey of the long history of the department. And this is this is continued. As I'm sure you know.

KP: How have you seen the role of women change?

00:13:59

RD: Let me give you an an example. Not this is not Cincinnati. But when I was finishing up my doctoral work at uh—UCLA uh, uh, the few women in the department were uh—not well treated. Most of them were a—the area of Asian history because an Asian history professor had attract attracted them, and were not in positions of authority, or regarded as major figures in the department. I think by the time I came to cin—to Cincinnati there were several members, several women in the department. I mentioned by Barbra Ramusack who’s a—more senior, she was not yet a full professor, but soon would be. There were—Cincinnati uh, there’s probably more more female in both numbers and influence than most departments at that time.

KP: Do you notice if the females were ever minorities? So Asian American, Japanese American, black American?

RD: Uh, there were there were no, there were no, there were no such faculty, in the history department, in my time, as I know it.

KP: So what was it like to be in an a department that lacked in diversity, both culturally and gender wise?

00:16:58

RD: Well, I don’t think it I don’t think it, I don't think it lacked in diversity gender wise. There were several women in an important role. Uh, more would be. One of the uh, one of the women I hired eventually left us for Yale and eventually became the president of the Organization of American Historians for one year. So that was uh, a kind of distinction that uh, would not have occurred in most Americ—in most—in the profession. It was strongly male profession. I won—I would not say that there was an equality, or that there were—was no prejudice. That's not true. But it certainly is not what it was when I started, which was 1960. That's the date of my uh, that's the date I finish my dissertation. If you go to col cat—college catalogs, in this in the fifties and sixties and seventies. You're can see a slow increase in the number of women and much slower increase the addition of non white persons. At UCLA where I got my, where I got my dis—I got my degree uh, the only non Caucasian member in the department was a man who taught Chinese history. There was Chinese and back was China born.

KP: So did you um, notice any tense meetings or interactions between colleagues due to um the prejudice against race and women? Have you seen? or what have you seen um? What kinds of controversy have you seen?

RD: That’s a—I think they're Cincinnati department were, was m—more, I don’t want to say more integrated, uh I will, was more integrated than most American departments at the time. And certainly that increased in the years uh since 1976, when uh, whe I came—I don't know what the I don't know what the lineup is now. How many non white faculty are there in the department now. That was a question.

KP: Oh, what is? What was your? How many? I, I, I I'm not exactly sure. Um I know, it's still an issue, but I think that there's more black faculty now than there have been.

RD: How many?

KP: I don't know a specific number.

RD: Yeah, I think you would notice. How—how big is the department now?

KP: The History department?

RD: Yeah.

KP: I—I'm not sure I'm a psychology students, so I—I’m not—this is my only class in the history department.

RD: Oh, I assume—I, I'm sorry.

KP: It’s okay [chuckle]

RD: I assumed uh, I was being interviewed by uh, history students. That's not the case.

KP: We're taking uh, an oral history course for our um majors but we are um studying other programs.

RD: Alright. And are—are located in other departments?

KP: Mhm. And do—

RD: And what—what department are you in?

KP: I'm in the psychology department, and due to COVID we haven't really had um face to face meetings. So, it's kind of difficult to see the um diversity in faculty.

RD: Yes, I'm sorry that I just assumed that I was being interviewed by history students.

KP: No you're fine. You're totally fine. Um, so were—did you ever witness student riots?

RD: No.

KP: No, no student riots? Okay. Um were you—were you involved in um the Union the staff or um faculty Union?

RD: Uh, no, I had a I had a philosophical difference from the faculty union. The faculty union was only for tenure people, and I said I wouldn't uh, I wouldn’t belong to a union did not include all regular faculty.

KP: That's very bold and that, that, that makes me happy to hear. Um, did you know any faculty or did you what what did you see the union doing during your time?

RD: They wanted—they wanted more money, better working conditions. Most of those things that the union wanted uh were thing I, things I would support, but I was not a member.

KP: How did you see the university respond to the unions? So since you weren't a part of it, I assume that you still witnessed everything happen. Um, so how did the university respond?

00:25:44

RD: Surely there were—there were strikes, usually very short lived. In theory, after the most serious strike, which only lasted a few days, while I was still chair, and uh, I was asked to provide a list of faculty who had not taught courses, or classes. And I said, I couldn't do that. Because I didn't know who was teaching classes and who wasn’t. Many of them were, came to their offices did work, use the telephone, etc. And I uh, deliberately did not attempt to investigate or make a list of who was teaching it who was not. There were some of both, and I really knew. But I didn't know. And uh, the result was that there was no immediate effect in the history department, in some departments, people who are on tenure, who have gone on a strike were dismissed eventually. But that didn't happen in the history department.

KP: So who was the president, um, during your time at UC.

RD: There were several. The most, the most important was Henry Winkler, who was a a UC undergraduate who’s degree was elsewhere. He was an English historian, historian of England,

came came to us from Rutgers uh, and was a friend of mine. I've known him before he came there. As a matter of fact, when he—he was brought there as as an assistant professor, as an assistant of the—as an assistant president. I have a precise title. The President knew he was going to leave in a couple of years [four words unknown], is he was not was not a retirement, he just wanted to do something else. And he had actually consulted me. He was dealing with a historian and I happen to know Henry Winkler. And uh, I think his was a truly distinguished presidency.

KP: What do you mean by our distinguished presidency?

00:30:18

RD: Well uh—he, he supported academic freedom. Had a liberal approach to problems of race and gender. And was a wonderful human being. We bacame, we had known each other, but we became great friends. We both participated in the march of historians in support of Dr. King. And uh, marched in a parade in Montgomery, Alabama, that was defended by federal troops, and uh, led uh, was part of Lyndon Johnson administration. Early in his presidency, Lyndon Johnson ended a speech on race relations was the great seeing of the American movement at that time, “we shall overcome” and that had a tremendous impact.

KP: Can you be more specific of the tremendous impact? What exactly happened?

00:32:41

RD: Well, it was startling. It was absolutely startling to have a president of the United States take a strong stand for black rights, which had never happened before. Roosevelt had done things for African Americans, and would have done more if he could, but uh, did not make that kind of a statement, and no, no other President has made that. Truly uh [unknown]. Today, you expect a liberal president to make said statement. I don't know if you saw President Biden talking about the 100th anniversary of the Tulsa massacre. But, but it was Lyndon Johnson who first truly identified as president with the um, with the African American movement, a way that no previous president had.

KP: How did that affect um life or work on campus, if any, did you see? Or how how did I guess the news surrounding politics in um the US government affect your work at UC or um how your students interacted with each other, UC?

RD: Well, as I’m uh—some would say radical, but I would say liberal. I was in favor of civil rights and students’ rights, and the rights of faculty, and the rights of untenured faculty. But uh—

KP: So did you see how—

RD: it was—wait—it was a time of very great change. Now you you you you wanted to say what?

KP: I was gonna ask if if you saw a difference in how the, the I guess the feel of campus was after um the US president started taking more stand against racial rights and um—

RD: I, I think the—students—college students in my lifetime have always been as a group more liberal than the country. It’s particularly true of northern and western universities, the deep south is another matter. But universities have been more liberal and progressive in the general population, universities have been important factors in the continuing expansion in American democracy.

KP: Speaking of expansion, how have you seen um, the university expand particularly in the architectural areas? How, what um structures have you seen been removed or replaced or um

RD: There was nothing—there was nothing to remove in Cincinnati. Ohio had been a free state, but certainly in uh, many universities they’re now changing the names of things and taking down statues, statues that we know, uh, I don't think that I don't think there's ever been any issue about that on the Cincinnati campus.

KP: Have you seen other structures that might not be related to race or statues or something like that that have been um either modernized or completely torn apart, since you've been at UC?

00:40:38

RD: Oh yeah. There—there’s been expansion and more change to more buildings and larger than there were when I came, and I I don't know what's happened there we left Cincinnati in 2005 and I don't know what has happened in those years. But they're constantly rebuilding. Of course there was never there was never a formal segregation

KP: Did you have any particular feelings towards expansion on campus? Did you did you like it? Did you not like it? Like, what were your thoughts on um campus expansion?

RD: Um, better facilities uh, we uh—we had a great library, we built a great library. I think it’s still the current library. It was open while I was there, and I was on it, on the committee that oversaw it for a while. That was an important and positive thing. Is there are any—I don't know any issues that involved uh, building.

KP: I know it was controversial when they tore down the bridge. Were you there when the bridge was there and they took it down?

RD: Which bridge?

KP: the bridge by um TUC. It was the main bridge where um the students would I guess hang out and hold different organization meetings.

RD: There was a student union was there I don't know, I, I don't know. I don't I don't know what what that is. There was certainly no no controversy over anything like that while I was there.

KP: Okay, yeah. Did you um, or what what type of athletics were important and while you were at UC did you was there a specific sport that was very popular at the time?

00:43:59

RD: We were, we were, the major sports we were most successful at basketball. They had a football team and a baseball team but the basketball, the basketball team was at times uh, very highly ranked nationally. Never never won the national championship but the particip—was good enough to participate basketball team in the most prestigious tournament every year. The so called March Madness. The football team uh was less successful. Those were the two major sports. One of the uh, great basketball players over the last century, Oscar Robertson, was a Cincinnati undergraduate who became a major figure in the NBA but it but it was never important in Cincinnati as it was in State Ohio State where people have alleged that the football coach had more influence in college president but that was never true, never true in Cincinnati in my time. My doubt—I doubt I doubt that it has [four words unknown] it started out as a municipal University, so older than you know Ohio State.

KP: Did you ever notice any or witness any um tension between UC and other colleges in Ohio?

RD: Well there were, there were rivalries. That’s nothing I was concerned with.

KP: Okay. So, what what would you say your most important contribution to UC has been?

00:47:28

RD: I think I helped the history department become more professional and more prominent and more generally respected among professional historians. That was uh, what the university hired for, uh and I helped the department accomplish that. Was not a young It was not a one man job But I think it, that was the dynamics or such In the mid 1970s. Then I came. It was than an outsider was needed if major changes were going to be effected relatively quickly. And that did occur.

KP: So when you say that you made the history department more professional, what exactly

RD: I helped I helped

KP: helped make it more professional. My apologies. You helped make it more professional. What what things did you do that um made it more professional What? What wasn't professional to begin with?

00:49:35

RD: Well, uh, I encouraged individual professors to be more professional, I gave them a pretty good example. I published, I participated in the two professional history organization, National History organizations, the American Historical Society, and the Organization of American historians. Made suggestions uh, was able to help the university acquire uh, new faculty, and I attract many students.

KP: So what did the university look like when you were working here? Can you describe um what it looked like what it felt like?

RD: It was a university of some, some, some tradition. We had a a high degree of publication, the people who published got promoted, got time off. People who did not have an active [unknown] reproduction were discouraged uh, did not get pay raises. But the department itself was fully as a department, there were always some exceptions. It was truly was fully cognizant of what it took to become a better department. A department head he was both a boss and a cheerleader. There were ways in which I was able to help create an atmosphere and scholarship, that was both faculty and students become central rather than peripheral.

KP: What specific buildings did you see um when you were on campus here?

RD: Well I saw them all.

KP: Can you name them?

RD: What?

KP: Can you name some of them for me?

RD: Oh, my goodness. [two words unknown]. I’m uh, I’m, the history department is the building with the two lions outside.

KP: McMicken?

RD: McMicken that’s the name I can’t remember. And McMicken was the home of the history department, and I assume it still is. We taught, almost all our classes were taught there. The most important new building I already mentioned was the library, which opened shortly after I arrived. It was a great improvement.

KP: Which library was that? Was that Langsam library?

RD: Yeah, the Langsam library. He was a previous president. I never I did not I did not know Langsam, I knew his son.

KP: We actually interviewed um Walter E. Langsam the other week.

RD: Glad to hear he’s still alive.

KP: Um, so is there anything that I didn't ask you specifically that you would like to talk about?

RD: No, not really uh. I could talk about individuals in the department, but I don’t think, I don’t think that uh—Have you? Have you interviewed any other historians in this project?

KP: We're we’re working on completing that this week and next week.

RD: Any other historians?

KP: Um, I interviewed Walter Langsam, um and Jasmine interviewed Anthony McKean?

JP: He was Anthony Mukkada.

RD: What? I didn't get that last.

JP: Oh, it's Anthony Mukkada. He's a biologist, he’s not a historian.

RD: I, I still don't I still don't get the name.

KP: Anthony Mukkada.

RD: Mukkada?

KP: Yes, he was a biologist not a historian.

RD: Oh, thank goodness I would hate, I would hate not to of known the historians in the department.

KP: I don't know what we're, I know I'm also interviewing Martha Stevens or Stephens, but she was in the English department. So um yeah. Did you have any mentors? Or what mentors Did you have that would be important for us to know about to interview them as well?

RD: No one there.

KP: No one here? Anybody retired?

RD: As a matter of fact, look, I’m 93 all of my all of my mentors are dead and buried. I've learned a lot from younger people. Don't misunderstand me, but I had several mentors.

KP: Anybody younger than you that you would think, have an interesting story to tell for this project?

01:01:13

RD: Oh, I think I think several. I'm not sure how many people it's still there. Barbra Ramusack is still around. She is an important person. She’s one of the—she the outstanding woman in the department. She’s not, certainly not they're not still teaching. And all the people senior to me, are dead.

KP: Okay, well, thank you so much, Dr. Davis for your time. I really appreciate um you taking the time out of your day to talk to us.

RD: Thank you. I enjoyed it.

KP: I'm glad you enjoyed it and were able to share a part of your story. So thank you so much um

RD: You’re welcome

01:04:49