RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH DEBORAH SHUFORD

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

KATHRYN TRACY RIZZI

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kathryn Tracy Rizzi: This begins an interview with Deborah Shuford, on October 24, 2018, in New Brunswick, New Jersey. The interviewer is Kate Rizzi. Thank you so much for coming in to record this fifth session of your oral history.

Deborah Shuford: Oh, my goodness, we're at session five, how exciting. Five is my lucky number. [laughter]

KR: I would like to start today by asking you--what work have you done as a producer, writer, and filmmaker?

DS: Oh, my goodness, oh, wow, I guess we can go back to my days at Maryland Public Television in the '90s. We did several projects. Maryland Public Television, part of the Public Broadcasting System, PBS system. So, I did on-air work as a co-host. I was interviewed in a session, back in the '90s, called "Women and Taxes" on a program called *To the Contrary*, which airs on the national programming service for PBS. It was a great program piece that they wanted to do involving women, working women, and paying taxes. So, if you go on the movie database and just Google, "Debbie Shuford," not Deborah Shuford, you'll find it says, "Deborah Shuford or Debbie Shuford was interviewed as herself, as part of a segment on *To the Contrary*, a PBS program, and the episode was "Women and Taxes." So, I remember doing that. [Editor's Note: *To the Contrary with Bonnie Erbé* is a news program featuring women that has aired on PBS since 1992.]

Prior to doing that, I did on-air work for Maryland Public Television, some of their shows, *MotorWeek*, which was interesting. I'm not a model, but they said, "We need you to actually just open and close the car doors and drive the demo cars," and who knew? I said, "Well, I'm not a model. I'm not an actress. I'm a writer, producer, editor." "No, no. We need you to stand there and just let the cameraman capture you as you open and close the doors." [laughter] So, it was kind of like being a model on one of the game shows, when they're opening and closing the doors on *Let's Make a Deal*, or one of those programs. It's a longstanding Public Broadcasting program called *MotorWeek* and people watch it. They want to get an idea of buying a car, what type of car to buy. It was kind of fun, because I'd get to drive new cars that I would never buy, because they were too expensive. I got to drive them, test drive them, and open the hood, open the trunk, open the door. So, I was kind of like, I guess, a model for the program. I did that. [Editor's Note: *MotorWeek* is an American news and information program centered around automobiles. It first aired in 1981 and is still running on PBS.]

I also did pledge drive, which I loved doing. Some people call it a beg-a-thon. It was interesting to do that because you're raising money for quality programming. To start in ratings-driven networks and to go from that to Public Broadcasting, which is supported by, as we say, "Members like you," like the general public. Public Broadcasting is unique in that they depend on the pledge drives to raise funds to secure the financing to support the kind of quality programs that they air. So, when I was asked to be a host during the pledge drives, it felt like I was paying it forward and giving back to the general public. I wasn't paid for it, but I was on the air and I got a lot of on-air experience doing that. I was paying it forward, raising funds for Public Television.

I was the co-host for that, and that led to doing voiceovers. I think the first one I did, which I loved, was a voiceover announcing a program for a tribute to Frank Sinatra. Every now and then when I hear that tribute, I hear my voice. [laughter] The thing about Public Broadcasting, which is so funny, is that they will air programs over and over and over, years later when you probably would forget about it, but then you'll hear it. I would hear my voice, my voiceover, announcing a special program, a tribute to Frank Sinatra, and this was aired.

It was funny, I would go to the grocery stores in Maryland and Virginia, and because they could watch--Maryland Public Television had over seven affiliates. I also did on-air talent work as a co-host for WETA, which is in the Washington, D.C. area. It's funny, you go into a grocery store and people actually recognize you from doing Public Television. So, they would say, "I know your face, I know your face. I've seen you somewhere before." Then, I would tell them, "Well, I do the pledge drive." Then, they would tell me, "Oh, I sent in money. When I saw you on the air, I sent money into Public Television," and I said, "Well, then I guess I've done my job." [laughter] So, that was kind of fun to do that and to have people recognize me, because I'm not a movie star, but they would actually recognize me.

I did that work, and then I also produced a few shows for Maryland Public Television. We did one called *Joyful Gospel*, a great show. We had a lot of gospel artists who are doing very well today, and that show, we did that. Then, we tried to do kind of like a news magazine show. It didn't really take off well. It was sort of like *Entertainment Tonight*, one of those shows, but they couldn't get the funding.

Again, it's important that people actually donate to Public Television, so that we could produce and air the programs that they want to see. There [are] no commercials, there's corporate supporters, and then the members like the general public. Then, during our pledge drives, we mentioned that, that we give out thank you gifts to members who donate. That's how I actually got on the air. I always thought of myself as being a producer, because I started as a producer in radio--at WOR Radio--when I was a junior at Douglass College at Rutgers University.

I never imagined that I would go on the air and be in front of the camera. I always thought I would be behind the scenes, and I kind of got talked into it at Maryland Public Television. That was in the '90s. That led to doing more production work and meeting more producers. That led to meeting a producer, a friend of mine, Jonathan Slade, who just reached out to me on Facebook, by the way, which is really funny. Jonathan sent a message to me that he just met Dr. Bill Rodgers, who actually works here at Rutgers University in the Bloustein School. Jonathan said, "Do you know Debbie Shuford?" He said, "Oh, yes, I know Debbie." So, it's funny how we all have the same connections and travel in the same circles. [Editor's Note: Jonathan Slade is a professor and department chair of the Department of Cinema and Communication at McDaniel College. William M. Rodgers III is Professor of Public Policy and chief economist at the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University.]

One of my dear, dear, Douglass sisters, Roberta Kanarick, said to me at the recent Douglass celebration--last month, September of 2018, she was, I think, over at an event, and someone said, "Do you know Debbie Shuford?" Roberta said, "Who doesn't know Debbie Shuford?" So, it kind of makes me feel good that I'm meeting so many really nice people, making friends as I go

through my professional and academic career. Graduating in '81, but starting as a producer in '80, and staying in media all these years, and taking on new projects, it's amazing. So, I just think that I've been very, very fortunate, and it all started at Douglass. Everything that I am, everything that I do, I feel it started on the campus at Douglass College.

KR: You were beginning to tell a story about Jonathan Slade.

DS: Oh, Jonathan Slate, yes. It's interesting, because I met him at Maryland Public Television when my son was two years old. Not only did Jonathan feature me on a pledge drive--because Jonathan produced pledge drives. Jonathan graduated from USC with a Master of Fine Arts, and his undergraduate degree, he received at McDaniel College, formerly Western Maryland College. Jonathan and I worked at Maryland Public Television, and he said, "You know, I want you to go on air." I was working in marketing and research, because that's what I did at ABC in New York--also marketing and research. I was hired to work for Public Broadcasting System in Alexandria, Virginia in the research department, and then, someone invited me to move to Maryland and work in their research department. Jonathan said, "No, you should be on the air. I need you to do pledge drives." Not only was I on the air, but then Jonathan said, "Your son is what, two? We have a show called *Bob the Vid Tech*," and this was a show conceived and produced by Jonathan Slade. He was the writer, director, and my two-year old son, Miles Quintel Smith, who is also a Rutgers graduate--School of Arts and Sciences 2014--made his television debut on *Bob the Vid Tech* with Barney. [laughter]

Most kids at that time--and I don't know about the kids now--but this was this big purple character on PBS Broadcasting System. My son was two, and so he actually did features with Barney on television, and not to mention that Jonathan Slade also produced segments for Public Broadcasting with my son. I said, "My son's not an actor," and he said, "Oh yes, he is, just let him go." Here we have a two-year-old running around the studios at Maryland Public Television. Jonathan's such a great visual director. He had all of these colorful plastic balls that you get at places like Chuck E. Cheese and the kids run around. He had that in the studio. So, he knew that if he had a two-year-old and you had these plastic balls that he could jump in--and that's how he filmed him. It was great, and they used that. We still have a copy of that tape. My son was two, running around. Then, when my son was in elementary school, kids recognized him, years later. When my son was seven and eight years old, PBS was still showing him as a two-year-old. My son has that professional tape, so actually he started acting at two for Jonathan Slade.

Jonathan Slade left Maryland Public Television and decided to be an adjunct at McDaniel College. He wanted to go back to where it started for him. When I was at graduate school at American, he said to me, "Are you done with those courses? Because I need someone to actually design a film course. I want it to be an African American film course. I don't think I can do that, because that's not part of my training at [the] University of Southern California, and I know that you could do it." I said, "Jonathan, I've never designed any courses. I've worked in media, as you know. Of course, I have my graduate credentials from American University and my undergraduate from Douglass College at Rutgers." He said, "Well, I know you can do it."

Basically, I designed a course based on my training in graduate school, and it was "African American Cinema." I did that as an adjunct for McDaniel College, and that would've been 2006. At the time, I was also teaching film editing, television editing, to students at Howard University, and I was living in Northern Virginia, Alexandria, Virginia. What a commuter I was. I would drive to Howard, which was right across the bridge from Fairfax County, where I lived. Then, I would also drive to McDaniel, which was over an hour and twenty minutes away in Western Maryland, twenty-five miles from Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. I created that course, and it became a very popular course.

I know when I started in August and classes started in September, within four weeks, the department chair at the time, Robert Lemieux, found me making copies of my syllabi. He said to me, "The students really like you. Could you come back in the spring?" I'm like, "Well, I'm not done with the fall. Are you sure?" [laughter] I mean, it was so new to me as an academic. Of course, I said, "Yes," and that was after four weeks of teaching. That's how I got into academia, and so I did that 2006-2007.

Then, while I was at Howard, Morgan State University needed professors, and Howard University invited us to--we were all on a bus from Washington, D.C. to Baltimore, Maryland. The reason I went on this bus trip is because my sister and brother-in-law were Morgan State University graduates. I said, "Well, I'll just go because they're giving us a free lunch. Then, I'll hopefully have my sister come up and have lunch with us," but she didn't. Anyway, while I was there, I realized that there was a need for professors in the School of Communication at Morgan, and it was a growing department. I told them that I would consider it, but at the time, I was teaching at McDaniel. Then, I got another call from Morgan State, and I said, "Well, let me just drive up." I walked in, and [the] department chair there said, "I could tell you're coming from Howard University, and we could really use you." He actually had a contract ready. I didn't sign it at the time, but I said to him, "Okay, let me give it some thought."

Then, I started teaching at Morgan State. It was a full-time opportunity as a lecturer, and that was fall 2007 until spring of 2008. The reason that I didn't renew the contract is because McDaniel College called me February of 2008, and I was teaching my evening television production course. They had left messages on my office phone at Morgan State, and I said, "Oh, no, I hope nobody hears this." So, during a break of this course that I was teaching, television production, I heard this message, "Please contact McDaniel College." Then, I called them the next day, and they said, "Don't sign another contract at Morgan State. We want you to come back to McDaniel in 2008-2009 as a visiting instructor," and they said, "Did you sign with anyone else, any other academic institution?" I said, "No, not yet; it's just February." They said, "Well, we sign early."

I didn't realize that in academia, when you're approached--and it's a professional courtesy--they want to make sure that you're not obligated to another institution. I didn't realize that they contact you in February, because they want to consider you and want to make sure you're available for the fall. Here it is February, it's cold, it's Baltimore, and I'm like, "And we're planning fall now?" When I returned the phone call, that's what I was told. I didn't sign with Morgan State, and then I did inform the department chair at Morgan State that I would be going back to McDaniel, where I started as an adjunct, but it was a full time with full benefits.

It was one of these contracts where you just couldn't say no, because it had retirement, it had life insurance, medical insurance, dental insurance, bonuses. I mean, it was like they rolled out the red carpet, and I taught just two semesters there as an adjunct. They had a contract that I couldn't believe. Not to mention that I was only required to teach three classes per semester, and because it is a private college, McDaniel College, the class size was so small compared to what I was used to at Morgan and Howard. They would cap off at no more than twenty students at your discretion, between eleven and twenty students per class. So, I'm like, "This would be like a walk in the park, a vacation. This is like just going from ABC television network to PBS," because going from ABC to PBS, I felt like I was on vacation every day at PBS. Leaving the number one market in New York at ABC, which was totally ratings-driven, and going to PBS, which was family friendly, that was like a vacation. The same with leaving Morgan and going back to McDaniel, I felt like I was on vacation.

I returned to McDaniel, and it was great. Not only did I return to teach the course that I created, "African American Cinema," but they allowed me to create two more courses at my own discretion. One of the courses was "Semiotics in Film." That no one knew anything about. [laughter] They were all saying, "'Semiotics in Film', what is that?" All the students were interested because they thought it was some really scientific way of studying and analyzing film. I used a book by our professors here at Rutgers. I had a book on semiotics in film that was edited by professors in cinema studies at Rutgers that I had in graduate school, and so I included that in my syllabus, a great book. Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, from our English Department, Cinema Studies Department, her name is on the book. I also used the book by John Belton, because John Belton's book--one of his first books on cinema studies--was a companion piece that was used for a PBS documentary, and because it said John Belton, Rutgers University, I used that book as well. Two great books. I created a "Semiotics in Film" course using their books. [Editor's Note: Sandy Flitterman-Lewis is an Associate Professor of English and Film at Rutgers University and is the co-author of *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics: Structuralism, Post-structuralism and Beyond*. John Belton is Professor Emeritus of English and Film at Rutgers University. His 1994 book *American Cinema/American Culture* was published by McGraw-Hill to accompany the PBS series *American Cinema*.]

KR: What does it mean, semiotics?

DS: That's the study of signs and symbols, just to be very clear about it and not to be extremely technical. You're studying and analyzing the symbolism and signs that we see in films. There's always an underlying message, if you will, and so that's what you're studying. Without getting too technical--because it is a technical course that I created, I don't want to get too technical--so I don't want to scare off the students, but you'd be surprised that there are underlying messages in films when you're watching them. You think that you're there and you're eating popcorn and drinking a soft drink and you're watching on the big screen, you're listening to the dialogue, but in each frame--there's twenty-four frames per second--there is a symbol there, but there's also signs in the twenty-four frames per second. There's a message, an underlying message.

If you look at some films, for instance, if we talk about *It's a Wonderful Life*, that was created by a graduate of Rutgers based on a greeting card. There's two parts of that film, and it wasn't a

commercial success, initially. There's George Bailey, initially, and his family, but the part two is very dark. It's noir, it's dark. It's got a message of capitalism and what happens to a small town if capitalism were to take over and what happens to a small town if corporate America were to take over the small towns of America, and there's other messages in the film as well. Lots of signs and symbols, lots of semiotics in that film. [Editor's Note: *It's a Wonderful Life* is a 1946 film starring Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed. George Bailey is Jimmy Stewart's character. *It's a Wonderful Life* is adapted from "The Greatest Gift," a 1943 short story written by Philip Van Doren Stern, a graduate of Rutgers University, Class of 1924.]

I show that film, especially in December, because I know the university, usually, on the website, will have a photo of George Bailey and the people of Bedford Falls on the website of Rutgers.edu, because we had a graduate of Rutgers who actually--it was his story, Philip Van Doren Stern, Rutgers University graduate. He was telling a story about a slice of Americana. It was a great story and it was well told, but there are two stories there. When I teach, I like to show the signs and symbols and the underlying message of the story. I learned all of that just by reading a book that was written by Rutgers professors when I was in graduate school.

Also, the professor that taught me semiotics in film [was] Jeffrey Baker, who lives, I believe still, in Howard County, Maryland. He was a great professor at American University. It was Jeffrey Baker, actually, who introduced me to the book and said to me, "Debbie, this was written by two Rutgers professors, and I know that you graduated from Rutgers." That's the book that I used when I created that course.

Then, I also created a course on editing out of McDaniel College, using Final Cut Pro. I learned how to use Final Cut Pro, editing software, at graduate school at American University. We were the first class to use it, and that system would crash every time. [laughter] If you go to the Apple stores now, it's well advanced now, but initially, when it was new, it would just crash.

I was editing at two and three and four in the morning, but thank goodness I did learn that system because I was able to teach that system to students at Howard University and Morgan State University. It is industry standard, and I was fortunate enough that I could return to graduate school--to leave the media for a while, for two years, and return to graduate school from 2001 to 2003--and have the opportunity to learn the digital technology at that time, which was a great time to learn it, during 2001 to 2003. A lot of my colleagues in media were still using the old media equipment, because they have families and they're working professionals and they didn't have time to return to school to learn the digital equipment.

I remember in graduate school, summer of 2002, on assignment for ABC, and--with my digital equipment--and going over to *CBS This Morning* and waiting outside with the whole group of the press pool, of everybody; CBS, NBC, ABC, international press people. Everyone had their equipment, everyone [had] huge cameras, and I had portable digital equipment that I had from American University, from our production studio. I remember some of the cameramen saying to me, "Where'd you get that, and how did you learn how to do that?" I told them, "Well, I'm in graduate school," and I said, "Because the cameras that you're carrying, I cannot carry. They're so heavy."

In fact, during the NABET strike--back in the late '80s, when I was working at ABC--we actually had to pick up the cameras and go out and film, because there was a NABET strike, the National Association of Broadcast Engineers and Technicians. That equipment was so heavy, I actually had to have those--when you go to training sessions and workout wellness places and you have to have the weights on--I actually had to actually wear those so I could stand up and hold these huge cameras. I remember that was in the '80s, and I said to myself then, "One day, they're going to make equipment that will be lightweight for women." Maybe that's why they were not videographers, because the equipment was extremely heavy. [Editor's Note: NABET, the National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians, is a labor union for workers in the broadcasting industry that was formed in 1934.]

Then, fast forward today, we have such small, compact, portable equipment that you see more women working with, and I was fortunate enough that I, at that time, I was able to do that and to interview Tom Daschle for ABC. I had my ABC credentials, I had credentials to the press room, the White House, Capitol Hill, Supreme Court, and all those credentials I received from ABC Television and Radio networks that I still have today. Hopefully, no one will delete them. [laughter] As far as I'm concerned, I still have those credentials because you go through so many checks. There's so many checks through the Federal Bureau of Investigation; FBI does a background check on you, Secret Service. [Editor's Note: Tom Daschle is a retired congressman who represented South Dakota. He served in the House of Representatives from 1979 to 1987 and then in the Senate from 1987 to 2005.]

When I was working that summer, I had to have all those credentials before I could even walk in the door. One of the first people that I met on Capitol Hill and--I guess he could tell I wasn't--I was a rookie, I was new at it. Oh, my goodness, thank God I had digital equipment, so I didn't have to carry anything heavy. I had a big bag with all my digital equipment, but then my credentials--I was so proud of them because they were from ABC News. As I was trying to walk through--we were going to Capitol Hill--you have to actually go through checks before you could get in, and there was John Roberts, veteran newsman, who sits right in the front of the press room today. He came up to me and he showed me exactly what I needed to do and just said, "Follow me." John Roberts, this newsman has worked for CBS and he's worked, I think, for Fox. He's worked for everyone. Today, when I watch him in the press room, I'm like, "That was the nicest man ever." It was my first day on Capitol Hill, and he showed me exactly how to do little things, like placing your bag, letting them check your bag, showing them your credentials, following him in, and going down the hall to the media gallery. There's a whole gallery of media people inside Capitol Hill, also the Supreme Court and then also the White House. The first day on Capitol Hill, having John Roberts help me out was great, because my producer was trying to call me to find out where I was. [laughter] The ABC News driver, I mean, they actually drive you from ABC News in Washington to the location that you're going to, so that helped. That was my first time doing that at ABC News in Washington.

Then, going from there to Sunday morning, well, I'm up early in the morning going to CBS Studios, waiting for Tom Daschle, who was in Congress at the time, to come out, so I can get that interview with everyone else. The driver drives me to CBS. You're at the CBS door waiting for him to come out of the studios there, and that was exciting, because there weren't many women. I felt so proud and I said, "Thank God for my training at Douglass College as a

Douglass woman," because there were more men with their camera equipment and here I was. I'm like five-three, holding my portable equipment, and these guys are towering behind me with huge Beta cameras. Then, all of the microphones and everything to me was so dated compared to the digital equipment that I had acquired from both American University and from ABC News.

Fortunately, for me, when I went in, early in the morning, to get my equipment, I knew what I was looking for, because I, at the time, was in graduate school at American. When I went in the equipment room, I basically selected all the new digital equipment that a lot of my colleagues had not even used. Some of the equipment was still in boxes, and I was going and saying, "Yes, I can use this, I can use that, and I can get the soundbites that I need. I can get the interviews," and it worked. Women, we always carry big bags anyway. I only needed one bag as opposed to the standard equipment--audio/video equipment--where you've got a van, and in the back of the news van, you'd have a whole lot of equipment. Well, I was fortunate enough to have the digital equipment, so I could just carry that in one bag on my shoulder. It worked for me, and the men were so impressed. Then, I remember the first assignment, as I said, with John Roberts, and then the next day of Sunday morning at CBS and I was thinking, "Wow, thank goodness for the confidence and the training and the education that I received at Douglass College at Rutgers University. I am so grateful to Roger Cohen, from the School of [Communications], and Jerry Aumente, from the School of Communications at Rutgers, for the training that they gave me."

Between the training at the School of Communications at Rutgers and Douglass College, and Dr. Louise Duus and Dr. Cheryl Wall in the English Department; these are people that trained me so well, that I could stand there in Washington D.C. with these people who have been in media for decades. I was very, very fortunate to have the kind of training, because it's a sink-or-swim business. When you go into media and you go into the networks, and I hate to say this and I hope the men will forgive me, but they always call it the "Old Boys Network." That's exactly what it is, and I remember Barbara Walters talking to us at ABC about that. I think she's retiring, fully, this year. You have to be ready, prepared, and you have to show up and you can't have that fear that, "I'm a woman and all these men are going to be there." You have to go in with such great confidence, and you also have to know what you're doing. I got all of that from just having all that training from Rutgers University and Douglass College and American University. It was just the best ever, and it's something that I share with students today. Take advantage of all your courses, meet with your professors, and make sure that you're prepared when you do arrive at that point in your life.

KR: You said there were few women, but you felt that your training had prepared you.

DS: Yes.

KR: How do you think women were treated in the media industry, and then how has that treatment evolved over time?

DS: Oh, my goodness. I was very fortunate that Professor Roger Cohen, in the School of Communications and Journalism and Media, secured an internship for me at WOR talk radio, AM radio, as a producer, not as a secretary. Once I got there--and I was still a student at

Douglass and I was a junior and I was doing my internship--there were women there who were receptionists and secretaries, not to take away from that, but these were really talented women who if they had had the opportunity would have had other jobs. Then, the men had all of the on-air jobs, and there were a few women.

I have to say, the woman that I worked for as her producer--and she's doing voiceovers today--was Patricia McCann, loved working for her. She came from a generation of the McCanns, started with her grandfather, and then her parents, and then the show. She inherited their show as the third-generation member of her family to go on the air at WOR on the *Patricia McCann Show*. Before that, it was *The McCanns*, her parents. She's now doing voiceovers--a wonderful woman to work for--but Patricia was like a Douglass woman. This woman, she was not married, didn't have any children, but she was a Sarah Lawrence graduate. I think Roger knew that the smart thing to do was to pair me with her, two women. She was powerful, and she was the type--take no prisoners. Patricia, just watching her, I said, "Wow, she'd be great at Douglass," because she was that type, she was a Douglass woman to me. [Editor's Note: Patricia McCann was the broadcast host of a talk radio program on WOR radio from 1970 to 1983. She is now the commercial spokesperson for 1010 WINS radio station. Her family had hosted *The McCann's at Home* on WOR.]

In that office, we had great conversations, and she would come in with that traditional New York breakfast. She'd have a buttered roll and coffee and run in and put it on her desk. Our desk--the way they had it set up in radio is that the producer and the on-air talent, or host, shared an office. We faced each other, and we would brainstorm. I would go do research at the public library on background information, because this is before the internet. So, you actually had to get up and go do real research just to get information on people that I thought would be great for her program and read *The New York Times* and look at the book reviews and choose authors and then I would book them. Based on their books, I would contact their publishers, and I would say, "Patricia, you should read this book. This person would be great on your show," and that's what we did.

The real coup was when we had the USA Olympic Hockey Team 1980, when I was able to get them for an interview. Then, the second one was calling the training camp of the late great Muhammad Ali, in Pennsylvania, because my older brother knew one of his promoters. I knew this guy's name, and I called the guy. Then, he gave me the training camp number, and I actually called it from the studios. Patricia was so impressed by that. I was a go-getter, because I had learned that at Douglass, and she was a go-getter, because she had graduated from Sarah Lawrence. [Editor's Note: The USA Hockey Team won the gold medal in the 1980 Winter Olympics in Lake Placid, New York, when they defeated the Soviet Union. Muhammad Ali was a boxer who lived from 1942 to 2016.]

We were two women, and this was the '80s. Here we are, two women, trying to carve out careers that we thought were suitable and that we thought were exceptional careers that we deserved, that we earned, based on our education and experience and our family support. That's what women needed.

Then, there was Sherrye Patton Henry, who I loved, who was very southern, a real southern belle. Sherrye--the first day--she had an office adjacent to Patricia's office. So, those were the two women who were on the air, and then there were a lot of men--the newsroom was all men. There might have been one woman who was an intern in [the] newsroom, but it was all men in sports, all men.

To have Patricia McCann and Sherrye Henry have a show, and then Dorothy Fields, who I loved--well, Dorothy was a producer for Jack O'Brien, Jack O'Brien on Broadway--Jack, another male with another show. Dorothy gave me the opportunity to fill in for her when she took vacation and personal days. So, I got to do the Jack O'Brien show on Broadway, because I was a film buff and loved theater. Yes, that worked out well. Again, these women gave me the opportunity of a lifetime.

Sherrye Henry, who I loved, knew my parents were from Alabama, and some of the words that I would say, sitting in her office, had such a southern drawl to it. The first time I met her, I said something--I think it was raining and I didn't say, "Umbrella," I said, "UM-brella." She says, "Deborah, come here for a minute," with her southern drawl. I said, "Yes?" She said, "Sit down," she said, "Where are you from?" I said, "I'm from New Jersey." She said, "No, no, no, no." [laughter] She said, "I heard you, you said, 'UM-brella.'" She said, "You're from the South." I said, "My parents and my grandparents and great [grandparents]." She said, "I knew it, I knew it." It was so funny, and from that point on, we just hit it off and we would talk about the South. With her, I would talk about my southern background.

With Patricia, I would talk about how the women can change the world. Even after producing her show, we would talk. Then, we'd go out to dinner, and she would take me to some of the finest restaurants in Manhattan. She was just wonderful. Even after the internship ended, she had--and I'm trying to remember where it was--somewhere in New Jersey, she had a summer home that she would rent in the summer. She invited me to the summer home and asked if I could bring a couple of students from Rutgers, not just females, but the males could come too. It was by a lake, and she brought some of the other women from WOR, but she was that kind of wonderful woman. She didn't have any children, but she was a career woman. She was the kind of woman that women at Douglass would always say, "That's what we wanted to be." She was just great. She's still great to this day, and every now and then I'll listen to radio and I hear her voice. I'm going to try and get together with her sometime this year, because I haven't seen her in decades. I lived in the Washington Metro area for twenty years and didn't return to New Jersey until after my son graduated from high school, and that would have been June 4th of 2010.

I missed so much the Tri-state, because that's where I received my professional training, initially. When you meet women like that--Dorothy Fields, who was a great producer--I learned a lot from her--and then working with Patricia, who was a talk show host, and Sherrye Henry, and then Arlene Francis. Arlene Francis started in Hollywood and later she did have a radio show too at WOR. She had a fabulous apartment on Park Avenue. [Editor's Note: Arlene Francis was an actress, radio host, and television host who lived from 1907 to 2001. She hosted *The Arlene Francis Show* from 1960 to 1984 on WOR.]

The story there was we were doing a remote out in Minneola, Long Island, and of course, coming from New Jersey, I don't know how many trains and busses I had to take to get there, but I managed to get to Long Island. On the way back--she was wonderful--she said, "Why don't you ride with me?" and she had her own limo. We stopped on Park Avenue at her apartment, then we went to White Plains. She was getting a new television set. I'm in this car, and people are walking by thinking that I'm this young rich girl in a limo and they were fascinated by it. Little did they know, I was this little intern from Douglass College in New Jersey riding with Arlene Francis.

Arlene Francis had been an actress from Hollywood and had gone on to radio, and it's kind of like you go full circle. I would say from 1929 to 1948, that was the Golden Age of Hollywood, and a lot of those actors would then leave and go into television and go to radio. So, Arlene was one of those actresses who left Hollywood and went to radio. To have Arlene Francis, Sherrye Henry, Patricia McCann, at that time, it was phenomenal. These are women that I looked up to, and they gave me the confidence that I needed as a professional. They made me think that I would be an executive in radio or television one day, because they showed me that there were more opportunities for women. It was hard, and if you had that opportunity, you had to do a great job, but it was possible. They didn't believe that women should get the education that they received and then be relegated to a position as a receptionist or secretary, and I know that a lot of women started out that way. I know Barbara Walters mentioned she started out that way, because the door was ajar but not wide open. It got her in, and then, once she was in, it allowed other women, and look at the women today. So, we owe her a lot of gratitude for opening those doors, especially at ABC.

She talked with us at ABC. After I graduated from Douglass, I worked at ABC from '85 until 1990, before going to Public Broadcasting System. I would meet her, and we would have talks. ABC had this great cafeteria; it really was like a nice restaurant. You'd get to meet all the talent, and you would meet the people in news and you'd meet the people who were doing the soap operas. To talk with her then, she would say, "You're doing very well." She said, "We started out as receptionists and secretaries, and you never had to do that," and I said, "That's because of you." I would've been a lousy secretary because I couldn't type fast and back then--I'm sure that people today would laugh--but we had typewriters and I was never fast at typing. Even when I had typing class in high school, I think I managed to get up to forty words. Even when I was a student at Douglass and you go to these temp agencies and you have to take a typing test, I could never go past forty.

I know one time after graduating and waiting for a full-time position at WOR, I did go to a temp agency, and they sent me to HBO. They sent me there as a receptionist. I couldn't type fast, but I could pick up the phone, I could talk. Then, *Real Sports* was on, and they said, "What are you doing there? We need you to come work with us." I got to work as a producer with them, *Real Sports*, for the two weeks. Then, while I was there, ABC called and had a full-time position, so I left *Real Sports* at HBO and went over to ABC.

I managed to be at the right place at the right time in media. One job would lead to another and another. I've just been very fortunate that Roger Cohen secured my internship, Roger Cohen and Jerry Aumente from the School of Communications. To secure an internship for a Douglass

College student, and in my junior year--not even with a degree but just a student--I have to really thank them. They got me in media, and once you're in media, you meet other people, and you're in it for life because everyone knows everyone. Even today--now that we have social media--people reach out to me. A colleague of mine just reached out to me from Morgan State. He's thinking of relocating to New Jersey. He teaches communication law, and he said he may even apply at Rutgers and I met him back in 2007-2008.

Once you're in media, you're in media and your reputation follows you, so you have to do a great job from day one. From day one--because of what Jerry Aumente and Roger Cohen taught me--that's what I did, and that's at age twenty and I try to continue to do that. This is why I work with students today and secure internships for them, because that's very important. I know that if I hadn't done an internship, I never would've gotten into media. I probably would've have gotten, I don't know, a job at [an] insurance company, and not to take that away from anyone, but [I] probably would not have gotten in to media. Going into media and then working at PBS and meeting Jonathan Slade, who is now the department chair of cinema studies at McDaniel College.

When he approached me to teach as [an] adjunct, Jonathan was going to Budapest, at that time, in 2006, because McDaniel College has a sister school in Budapest. He needed to go to Budapest and teach courses there, but he had this fear that if he did go, that the cinema studies courses would probably be put on the back burner. That's why he invited me to create a course. So, he said, "I need you to hold down the fort until I return." He was there one semester, fall of 2006, and he returned to McDaniel spring of 2007, and then they invited me back. In fact, Jonathan would show up at Morgan State--when I was teaching there fall of 2007 and spring [of] 2008--and he was trying to recruit me to return to McDaniel, and it eventually worked.

He would show up at Morgan State in my office, and people were wondering, "Who's this guy showing up in Professor Shuford's office?" and it was my friend Jonathan. He just sent me a message over the weekend--this past weekend--on Facebook. It said that he met Bill Rodgers, Dr. Bill Rodgers from Rutgers. Jonathan, I have to give a lot of credit to him as well, because that's how I started teaching. We've been great friends, and we're still great friends. Jonathan now holds the position of department chair of cinema studies at McDaniel.

At that time, they didn't have cinema studies. They had a few courses in the Department of Communications, because they have a very small department, but Jonathan, he had a Master of Fine Arts in film and he really wanted to create cinema studies and it worked. I created three courses for him at McDaniel College, and he's now the department chair. It's gone from just a few courses of cinema studies to having a whole area of cinema studies within the Department of Communications at McDaniel College, and Jonathan is the chair, great friendship. He knew he could do it. I wasn't so sure that I could do it, but he invited me and we pulled it off. That worked out, great friendship.

KR: What years were you at McDaniel?

DS: I was at McDaniel from August 2006 until May of 2007, and then I was at Morgan State August 2007 until June--because they have a longer semester--until June of 2008, then back to

McDaniel as a visiting instructor, August 2008, until May 2009, and back in New Jersey 2010, when my dad was really sick. My mom was calling and said, "Your dad really needs you," and I am so glad I returned. Then, I was in touch with the Douglass women, and they said, "You're teaching down there. You're at Morgan. You're at McDaniel. You're at Howard. Why not teach here at Rutgers University?" I never thought about it, I guess, because I had spent twenty years there in that area, from 1990 until June 2010. It made sense, and it was time. It was time to return to the Tri-state, and there was so much going on.

While I was at McDaniel, I noticed that our New Jersey Film Commission was actually somehow able to secure a lot of filmmakers filming films in New Jersey. We had Tom Cruise doing *War of the Worlds*. Beyoncé did a film on Halsey Street in Newark. Now, with our Governor Murphy and the tax incentive, the film industry is booming again. In fact, just last week, they filmed *Joker* on Broad Street in Newark, New Jersey.

Then, I received a nice phone call from someone at the film commission on Halsey Street, in Newark, New Jersey, and he invited me to come and take a tour and to bring my students and they have internships. I said, "This is great!" We're bringing film back to New Jersey, where it started. I mean, the studios were in New Jersey. They were in Fort Lee, New Jersey, and then Thomas Edison wanted to monopolize the film industry. The story goes that this is why they fled and moved out to the West Coast, and in addition to that, the weather, using natural light and daylight. Thomas Edison--a lot of the filmmakers, at the time, were afraid of him, and so, who knows.

If we keep the tax incentive that we now have in New Jersey, courtesy of our Governor Murphy, we can have another thriving and booming film industry right here in New Jersey. The *Joker* movie was just filmed on Broad Street. The whole Broad Street in Newark, New Jersey was shut down. They brought Gotham, and it's called Gotham in Newark, Gotham City. So, films are coming back.

This is a great opportunity for students at Rutgers, because I know when I was teaching at McDaniel, I would have to secure internships at ABC in Burbank, California. A lot of the students at McDaniel wanted to be in film; they didn't really want to do news. Those who chose news and journalism, I would secure internships at ABC News in Washington. But, when I was at McDaniel, I had a student, Brian Fountain Murray, a non-traditional student. He had been married and divorced, returned to school at Morgan State, and this is 2007 to 2008.
Brian helped me pack my car the last day at Morgan, June 2008. My phone rang, and it--I kid you not--it rang and it was my contact at ABC Production Studios in Burbank, California. She said, "Debbie, you know, I'm looking for interns for the summer. Do you have anyone in mind?" I said, "I have someone standing right here. He's holding my box with my plants." [laughter] She says, "What are you doing?" I said, "Well, the semester ended at Morgan State; I've got to pack my car. I gave notice that I was going to McDaniel, so I have to clean out my office, and this nice student, Brian Fountain Murray, is standing here." So, she said, "Well, you know, it's Friday, and do you think he can come out on Monday?" I said, "Brian, do you think you can go out on Monday?" Brian said, "I'm taking the red-eye tonight." [laughter]

It was a Friday afternoon, like four o'clock. Brian took the red-eye, was out in Burbank, got the job as an intern, ended up working for ABC there, and I get messages from him every week. He is now doing his film in Japan, because he married a lovely woman and they spent eight years in New York. He was working for production companies in New York, but he's doing his film now with his in-laws. His wife has family in Japan and they've got two beautiful children, and Brian is in Japan now. That was a student that helped me pack my plants in my car, June of 2008, and happened to be standing next to me when I got a call on my cell phone from ABC Production Studios in Burbank, California. He just happened to be standing there helping me pack my car, and I said, "Yes, Brian is a senior; he's ready." He was graduating that year, and he said, "Tell them I'm flying on the red-eye." He went out there, and he did such a great job. Again, internships and opportunities.

I wanted to pay it forward, because that's what Jerry Aumente, Professor Jerry Aumente, and Professor Roger Cohen did for me; that's how I got in. Brian has been in the industry ever since--great story--and he's doing a film in Japan now. He and his wife are happy to be there with the in-laws. They spent eight years in New York, and now they're in Japan and the kids are in school--well, one, I think she's in kindergarten, one's five and one's three. He's thriving. He's doing so well, just another great story. He graduated from Morgan State and then got a master's at Long Island University while he was in New York for eight years, and now, he's in Japan. It's just amazing how I come full circle and how I got into academia, thanks to Jonathan Slade, department chair at McDaniel College, just amazing.

KR: I am curious about the course you taught and developed at McDaniel, "African American Cinema."

DS: Yes.

KR: What topics did you teach in the course?

DS: What I decided to do is to go back and [do] a lot of research on my own. I was very fortunate to get a lot of the information from Howard University, from professors who were African-born Africans, who were professors teaching at Howard, and African American professors there. Well, before developing the course, since I was teaching Final Cut Pro editing to students at Howard, I had access to everything, to their archives. So, I was able to go through a lot of old footage and to find a lot of tapes and film, original film, from Oscar Micheaux.

Before Spike Lee and before Melvin Van Peebles, there was Oscar Micheaux. This man was brilliant, and he would write, produce, and direct his own films. He didn't drive, so he had a driver. He would show his films in communities that were predominantly African American, but his films, what he did in the '30s and '40s was opposite of Hollywood. He wanted to show African Americans in professional positions, not as maids and butlers, and he didn't make any films about African Americans and slavery. He would show them as teachers, doctors, lawyers, and the cast, they were very attractive people. I don't know how he did it [at] the time that he was doing it in, with a lot of restrictions, but he managed to do it, and these were really good films. There was *Murder in Harlem*, and then our own Paul Robeson worked with Oscar Micheaux. [Editor's Note: Paul Robeson starred in Oscar Micheaux's 1925 film *Body and Soul*.]

Having that information about Paul Robeson and Oscar Micheaux, I decided to start there. That was the starting point. I would also give information in that course about the Golden Era of Hollywood, and I also talked about the original filmmakers from Europe, because most of our directors from the Golden Age of Hollywood were Europeans. Then, I would show films from Otto Preminger and how he directed *Carmen Jones*, with Dorothy Dandridge.

I would kind of bridge those gaps, even though it was [an] African American cinema course, but I would also include a lot of historical references and also include the Golden Age of Hollywood. It was like a history course, not just a cinema course, but it was a history course. The students at McDaniel loved it, and I think Jonathan knew that. Jonathan knew that that was the missing piece of the film and video courses there of the African American story, as it pertained to film. I also included the Latino story in film too--I would put that in--and Asian Americans [as well]. Even though it was [an] African American cinema course, I would include all nationalities and races and how that worked into the studio system and the independent cinema's system.

That's something that I created for Jonathan. It was his idea to create it, and I'm so glad I did. They still offer it to this day. I left my syllabi, a lot of the films, and a lot of the films that I ordered, McDaniel College decided, "Whatever she needs." So, they allowed me to order all these great films. They had quite a budget. They have all of those films to this day, which is wonderful because I know we have a lot of films here at Rutgers, but I think McDaniel, they were just starting to build, because Jonathan was creating the Cinema Studies Department. I feel really proud of the fact that we were able to do that together, and just out of a friendship from working at Maryland Public Television together. That was great.

I said, "I'll have to go way back." When you're starting and you're developing a course and you really don't have the resources, you have to kind of find a way to do it, and as in the African American community, we always say, "Making a way out of no way." [laughter] I was like, "McDaniel doesn't have any of these films. Where do I go? Howard University." That's just going across town--well, actually not across town, because you're going from McDaniel to Howard, so you're driving fifty miles to Washington, D.C. I knew that Howard had the resources, and I knew I had access, so I had to start at Howard University.

They had everything, and the professors there had everything and I was very fortunate to work with the kind of professors that I worked with there. One of the late great professors who passed away early this year was Professor Abiyi Ford, who won the Fulbright and left the USA, went back to Ethiopia, his home country. I learned a lot about African cinema and African American cinema from him when I was taking graduate courses at Howard, 2003, and this is towards my Ph.D. I started taking programs there. I took [an] "African Cinema" program with him there and "African American Cinema" and "Preparing Future Faculty" courses there all through Professor Abi Ford, who we lost this year. When he won the Fulbright, he went back to Ethiopia and started a film school. So, thank goodness that all the courses that he taught at Howard, I managed to take them before he left and returned to Ethiopia.

I had all that information from Professor Abiyi Ford when I developed the course at McDaniel. I got that information and had his courses from 2003 until 2006, when I started teaching at

McDaniel. Then, I had all the Golden Age of Hollywood courses from Professor Jeffrey Baker, when I had a "Survey in American Cinema," and I had that at American University. Between American University, Howard University, and Rutgers University, I had what I needed to create that course. The films I had at Howard, they had films that I had no idea [about], and the films of Oscar Micheaux, some of them have been destroyed because you have to keep a film in a very cold environment.

I remembered at American, we had a--oh, this is great--with Professor Glenn Harnden, who retired. Twenty-five years ago, he started the film program at American University, and he's my Facebook friend too. He sends me messages. He's traveling everywhere with his lovely wife. His wife, she's actually the aunt of the model Gigi Hadid. [laughter] Ghada Hadid Harnden sends messages to me on Facebook all the time, and I'm like, "She's a wonderful woman, lovely woman, beautiful." I said, "Well, I can see where Gigi Hadid gets her genes." So, Professor Harnden married Ghada Hadid, who's now Ghada Hadid Harnden, and they travel everywhere and send me messages on Facebook. He was just honored, because he started the film program at American University twenty-five years ago. [Editor's Note: Ghada Hadid Harnden passed away on January 18, 2022.]

Well, I remember one of the trips--and it was raining--where he actually secured a trip for us to the National Archives. I had never been there. So, again, this is where American University comes in graduate school. In the archives, we had to make an appointment and wear white gloves, and I saw rare footage of films, black and white. I spent hours there. So, between going there and then going there on my own, I went there, National Archives, to get the information. You have to do a lot of research when you develop a course, and I was very fortunate to go to the National Archives with Professor Glenn Harnden and later go on my own and then go back to Howard. Then, with all the information from those resources, that's when I developed the course of "African American Cinema." Lots of hours, lots of work, but it was worth it.

I went from the 1800s all the way to 2006 when I created the course, a whole history and a survey of film, not just African American film, but a survey of American film. To bring all that, it was a lot of work, but it was worth it and the students at McDaniel loved it. Then, I actually created courses here at Rutgers, but I also brought with me the research and the films and a lot of the clips that I edited on my own--that I brought with me in 2010--and then I started teaching a film course in 2012, here at the university, at Rutgers, in Africana Studies. I had all the editing done, because I did it back in 2006, six years prior, which was great.

Thank God I did all that work. You have to have a summer to do that. The editing, as you know, takes a long time, but I edit on Final Cut Pro, which is all digital, which I had to do, because a lot of the old film, I had to transfer it, digitize it, and I would do that in Arlington, Virginia. There was a place there, and I know the owner has since passed away. We would have to digitize the film through the telecine process. That took a lot of time to do that as well, but it was worth it. I did all of that once Jonathan invited me to teach at McDaniel.

KR: You said in 2012 you taught a course in Africana Studies here at Rutgers.

DS: Yes.

KR: What course was it?

DS: That was the "Black Film Experience," which is a course that was created in Africana Studies. That was created by them. I think one of the professors who actually taught that course was temporarily going on a sabbatical, I guess, to promote his film. He's a documentary filmmaker. So, I was asked if I would step in and teach that course. Actually, they asked me to do it in 2011, and the reason I didn't [was] because my dad was really sick and I was his care provider. So, I didn't do it in 2011--or 2010 when I returned here--but by January 2012, I was just so fortunate to have found the best vascular surgeon ever through our medical school at Rutgers, and that's Dr. [Saum] Rahimi.

He has an office at 125 Paterson--here in New Brunswick. I said, "I would love to teach the course, but my father has poor circulation. I drive him to his doctor's appointments. I'm his care provider." That's when Dr. Rahimi reached out to me and said, "Where are you now?" He said, "Bring your father to my office," and I brought my dad to 125 Paterson Street. From 2012 to 2015, my father was driving and doing well, because he had the best physicians here at 125 Paterson Street, and Dr. Rahimi did surgery on his legs and got him walking and driving again. He was just the best doctor ever. The medical students would come into the room, and on my dad's birthday, in January 2013, they all gathered and they sang to my dad. My father loved the attention; he just loved it.

Coming from Alabama from a farm and to have medical students come into this room and sing happy birthday to him and just make him feel like a celebrity, he loved it. He loved Rutgers. He loved the students. He loved Douglass. He said to me how he missed taking me back and forth to Douglass every semester with my milk crates filled with books, because back then we had milk crates. It's funny, because I was just watching a news report over the weekend, and there's a Manhattan milk company where these guys have milk crates again. They deliver milk and dairy products in New York, and it reminded me of my books in the milk crates that my dad used to carry and complain about. Then, in 2013--when we were traveling to Robert Wood Johnson Hospital for his surgery--he said, "You know, I miss those milk crates, and I miss Douglass."

So, yes, Dr. Rahimi was absolutely wonderful. My father adored him and the medical students. My father loved Rutgers. He just loved the university. Again, it's like everything that I am, everything that I do, comes back to this university; it's amazing. Even when I returned to get treatment for my father, it was the medical school that said, Dr. Rahimi said, "Bring your dad to my office." My father got the best care ever, that he even referred some of his friends. Then, my brothers referred their friends, and they started to travel from--oh my goodness--from Essex County to Middlesex County just to get treatment at Robert Wood Johnson Hospital.

As we know now, it's even better because we have now Robert Wood Johnson and Rutgers Health as one unit now. Back then, it wasn't one unit. I had to do something. My father needed to have the right type of treatment, and the treatment was here and it worked. Then, when I started teaching, one morning, I was actually was able to drive my parents from Essex County, at six in the morning--he had the seven-thirty procedure with Dr. Rahimi. I remember it well, because I actually got them up, picked them up, drove them to Somerset Street, to Robert Wood

Johnson Hospital, and I went inside admissions. They said, "Oh, we'll take care of him," and then they said, "Go ahead and teach your class. They'll be fine." Then, my sister and brother-in-law, the Morgan State graduates, drove up. So, I was able to drop my parents off, and had my father going through admissions, get ready for his surgery, and go teach my class on College Avenue. Then, after teaching my class, I'd go over and check on my dad. You could only do that if you're working and teaching at Rutgers. I mean, that you could just take your father for a surgery for poor circulation on Somerset Street, go over on College Avenue, teach your course, leave your course, and go back to the hospital. Everything came into play, and it just worked so well for me. It was just amazing.

There's no way I could've done that in [the] Washington, D.C. area. There's no way, with all the traffic and the congestion. I would never have been able to drop my mom and dad off, have somebody push him in a wheel chair to admissions, and then go park on College Avenue and go teach a class and then come back and check on my dad. I would never have been able to do that in New York or Washington, D.C. That can only happen in New Brunswick, USA. [laughter] Even my father said, "Wow, I'm feeling great." He said, "How did you do it, you taught your class, you came back?" Dr. Rahimi said to me, "Listen, you teach your classes, and we'll take care of your dad," and that's what he did. It gave my father a quality of life that he knew, loved, and enjoyed for years.

Sadly, my father passed away March 11, 2015, but it was from natural causes. Dr. Rahimi gave him the quality of life that my father loved and enjoyed. Prior to that--prior to his meeting with Dr. Rahimi--my father had stopped walking and driving. So, the last three years of his life, he gained all that back, because he had the right physicians, the right health care, the right medical care, and that's why he just loved Rutgers. He loved Rutgers, because he just thought everything was here, everything, even his doctors.

Then, 2014, at my son's graduation--and I still call it the Barn, it was the convocation for criminal justice; my son graduated from the Criminal Justice Department. So, my father, mother, and my aunt and uncle from Ohio, they [all came]. My uncle, he's got to be eighty-six. 2014, he drives from Ohio with my Aunt Dot, my mom's sister, and the first thing he does is go to our football stadium, because they're football fans. I'm like, "Uncle Joe, where are you?" It was raining, and I told my dad to meet us at 125 Paterson, because he knew where that was. I said, "You meet us there, I'll wait for Uncle Joe." Well, Uncle Joe was at the football stadium and bragging to his friends that he was at the Rutgers Football Stadium, that he'll stay on campus, which they did, and then he comes on College Avenue. It stopped raining, and I said, "Well, where's Uncle Joe?" and I see this gentleman who--Uncle Joe was from the military, from the Army. He had trained in Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri, so he had military service and he's sprinting down College Avenue in his eighties. [laughter] I'm like, "That's Uncle Joe." He had already parked at the parking deck by Records Hall, was ready for his keys, and I had booked through the alumni association rooms right across the street. I guess it's what, Stonier Hall? So, Uncle Joe and Aunt Dot had a room. Mom and Dad had a room. I had a room, because I said, "Well, we're right across the street and won't be late," to go across the street, to the gym, to the Barn, for the convocation for my son Miles. That was 2014, May 2014.

It turns out that was also a reunion weekend. So, in that dormitory, there were a lot of Rutgers College graduates. My aunt and uncle loved it. My parents loved it. My father said, "I finally got my room on campus," which was cool; he didn't want to leave. He loved the room on campus. He loved being in the dorms. They had the best time. The next morning they got up, they went across the street to the Student Center, they had breakfast, and then they went down to Voorhees Chapel for the service. Then, we went for my son's convocation, and it was wonderful because the Department of Criminal Justice actually had the first two rows in the front for my family. So, we sat there, we got great pictures, and afterwards we had the barbeque, Voorhees Mall, and my dad loved it. Then, he went back to his room and said, "This is my room." I said, "Well, don't tell the students that." [laughter]

That was probably the last year we did that reunion weekend in May, but it was great, because my parents got to meet other graduates from Douglass and Rutgers College. We were all living in the dorms, and that was like that weekend of convocations and commencements. We had such a great time, and you could just see all the generations walking down College Avenue going to the bookstore. It was a great time. My father loved this university, and I think he would be very happy about the project that we're doing today. I know he would.

KR: Good, yes.

DS: Absolutely.

KR: In our first session, you talked about a gender, race and class course that you taught in the School of Communication and Information. Then, you just talked about the film course you taught in Africana Studies. What other courses have you taught at Rutgers? What other work have you done?

DS: When I taught the "Black Film Experience" course, that was from January to May of 2012. Then, the department chair asked if I would create another course, a film course, because of my experiences of teaching at Morgan State and Howard University. She asked if I would create "Third World Cinema." So, I created the "Third World Cinema" course for fall of 2012 and I continued to teach the "Black Film Experience" course. The "Third World Cinema" course didn't really take off, and I think that's a difficult course to teach if you don't have the film. Not to make excuses, but I think sometimes, when you say third-world cinema, people tend to think that it's a course that would be kind of old and dated. That students today wouldn't find it popular, because they didn't really have an understanding of it. So, I don't think it was a very popular title, and it didn't generate the buzz that students normally--word of mouth that they tell each other. After that fall of 2012, we went into 2013, and the black film course that I was teaching was so popular. I had so many students, and I had a wait list. In 2013, they added section two, so I had to teach two sections of that.

KR: Wow. How many students were in each section?

DS: I think they told me, because of room size, that I could have about thirty, but I would always get like thirty-three to thirty-five and I would have to add special permission numbers. I added two sections for that, and then, that summer of 2013, I said, "Well, because in the black

film courses I featured Oscar Micheaux, Melvin Van Peebles, all the pioneers of African American cinema, and also Spike Lee …" and the students had such an interest in director Spike Lee. So, the summer of 2013 is when I said, "Let me just test …" going back to thinking about my days of creating pilots at ABC Television Networks, I said, "I'll do a pilot, and it will be on director Spike Lee in the summer. If it works, fine. If not, well, it's in the summertime. We don't have to worry about it."

So, that was summer of 2013, and I created the Spike Lee course. I mean, right away, I checked the system and the roster--and it's a summer course. Eric LeGrand was in that class. That was the first Spike Lee class, and there were a couple of visiting students. Will Madden, who I love and adore. He was a visiting student, saw the Spike Lee course, loves film, knew about Spike Lee. Will, from Princeton, New Jersey. Will Madden registered for the course, and then another student, Michael--I can't remember Michael's last name. Michael and another young lady. Then, there were student athletes, football players, basketball players. Then, when I showed up the first day, I mean, they were already there, especially the athletes, because they're coming from training early in the morning. It was like a ten-thirty AM course at Ruth Adams Building, at Douglass. I needed a room that--I really wanted a small space, and I knew the Douglass rooms were small. What didn't really work for Eric was that it's an old building, so it wasn't wheelchair accessible. So, I knew when I saw Eric LeGrand's name on the roster, I said, "I will have to make arrangements to teach Eric in another building." So, I had to find a building over at Busch, which I did, at the Library of Science and Medicine. So, I would leave there, and I would meet Eric over there. This was like a three-hour morning course, but it was fine because I knew that would work. Now, I told the athletic department, "If that works for Eric, we could do it then," and we also did weekends over there whenever Eric was available, because Eric was going through therapy at Kessler. So, I would teach him one on one, but also, while we were doing the morning session at the Ruth Adams building at Douglass, Eric would be tuned in from his phone. It was like distance learning that we created, Eric and I. [Editor's Note: Eric LeGrand was a defensive tackle on the Rutgers Football team who was paralyzed on October 16, 2010 during a game against Army.]

KR: Yes.

DS: I said, "Eric, you know, you've got a phone ..." Most of these students have these iPhones now. I said, "You tune in, you listen, and I put my phone on." So, he's actually there, even though I didn't have the distance learning camera equipment, because that would have taken more time and he probably would not have been available at certain times. So, he had his phone, and I turned my phone on. So, he could hear us, as I was giving the lecture, and then, later I would meet with him face to face. So, we had to be innovative when we did that and it worked. I was giving him distance learning instructions using email, using his phone, using my phone, but still doing a lecture with the students.

It was wonderful because the athletes, they're coming from practice, and it was hot that summer. They would come in, and this room was old. It had [an] old-fashioned air conditioner. The athletes would come in and they were wonderful--they would get the room so nice and cool and I'd show up. Then, I had all my camera equipment and tapes, and I parked my car behind Ruth Adams Building and they're just getting over there. Someone had the room cooled off. The

others would help me carry stuff in, and it was wonderful. What made it such a nice atmosphere is that the students were learning, number one, and they were fully engaged and it was a small size. We had a total of twelve. In their surveys, they reported that they wanted this course to continue, and so the department chair said, "You know what? We should put that on the fall." I don't know how she did it, but she managed to put that on the fall because of the popularity of the summer. Then, the students went back and told their friends about it, and I remember other students saying, "Oh, you're that professor. You teach that Spike Lee course. I'm taking that course next fall." Then, students in the spring, "I'm taking that course in the spring. You're that professor that created the Spike Lee course." Then, the course--just by popularity--it's still being taught today in Africana Studies.

KR: So, you developed it?

DS: Yes, I developed the course in the summer of 2013, and I'll tell you, Will Madden--and I'm trying to--I'm not sure if he just graduated this May or maybe this December graduation, but Will Madden transferred here. His mother wrote a letter to Africana Studies saying her son was a visiting student, he was in that course, and he said the nicest things about me. Then, the next thing I knew, Will was a student, spring 2014. I was at Scott Hall, and I was teaching the course, and it was the black film course; he already had the inaugural Spike Lee course. Will was standing outside the door. He didn't want me to see him, so he thought he would surprise me, which he did, with his head inside his books and then he pulled the book down. I'm like, "Will! Are you in this course, the 'Black Film Experience' course?" He said, "Yes," and he hugged me. He said, "And guess what? I'm now a student at Rutgers," and that was the best ever, the best day, the first day.

He was great in class, because he had had my Spike Lee course. He just knew so much about African American cinema, and he was so great in his class presentation. Then, he sent emails to the president of the university and to the dean saying, "This is a great course, Spike Lee course, please continue it, and please continue other cinema courses." I mean, it's what the students want, and that's why we're here. But it started with that, I have to say. It was amazing how I would have students come up to me and say, "You're that professor that created that Spike Lee course." It all started with that. The "Third World Cinema" course didn't take off, but the Spike Lee course is so popular that it started summer of 2013, and even today, it's still taught in Africana Studies. That was the course that worked for the university.

KR: Tell me about the course. What is studied in the Spike Lee course?

DS: It's a survey of Spike Lee films, and not only do I teach film analysis, but I also talk about producing and how do you get the green light to make a film in Hollywood. I talk about Spike Lee's southern background--also from Alabama. His dad was from Snow Hill, Alabama. My parents are from Alabama. His mom and his grandmother were from the South as well. Spike's Lee mother graduated from Spelman. His dad was a Morehouse man. Spike Lee graduated from Morehouse University, as did the actor Sam Jackson and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., all Morehouse graduates. We know that President Obama spoke at Morehouse probably a year before he spoke at Rutgers University as a commencement speaker. So, I wanted to give the background of Spike Lee and how he was born in the South [and] raised in Brooklyn, New York.

[Editor's Note: Actor Samuel L. Jackson graduated from Morehouse College in 1972. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. graduated from Morehouse in 1948. President Barack Obama spoke at the 2013 commencement at Morehouse and the 2016 commencement at Rutgers.]

I started there, with his life history and what made him the director that he became. The people that Spike Lee studied were Oscar Micheaux and Melvin Van Peebles, the same directors that I actually analyzed in my film courses that I created at McDaniel. I also met Spike Lee when I was a graduate student at American, and I told Spike Lee then, I said, "You know, I'm going to create a course based on your film work one day." I told him that at American, and then my son and I met him at the Kennedy Center, because [he] remembers when I was still at American. Then, Spike Lee was a guest at Rutgers University, at Livingston Campus, at the new student center, and it was Black History Month, February. It snowed, and it was February 2011. I have a photo of him and my son, when my son was much younger, and he said, "How's he doing?" I said, "Oh, he's doing well." He signed that photograph, and I said, "You know, I promised that I would create a course based on your film work and your body of film. I haven't forgotten. I will do it." That was February of 2011, and I created the course 2013. It was just wonderful to see him in 2011. That reminded me that I had made a promise and I needed to do something about it and create that course, and so I actually did.

It was just a popular course. I never knew that course was going to be that popular. I kind of felt like the "Third World Cinema" course just didn't really take off, and I think it was the title and probably not an understanding of what the course would entail. I had included Spike Lee's body of work in the "Black Film Experience" and the students wanted to see more of his courses. There was one student in particular who said, "I know the black film course is okay, but you really should do what you said you were going to do, create a course on Spike Lee." You know, students don't forget, and I said, "Okay, I'll try, but we just can't throw courses out at the university. There is a process with curriculum and developing courses, but I'll do my best." He graduated, and he said to me, "Oh, now you create it, I've graduated." [laughter] I said, "Well, you can come back, and you can take it as an audit." So, yes, so that was 2013, and then, now we're in 2018, and the course is doing very well. Yes, so it's one of those things. It's like, "Well, that's Hollywood," you know. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't, and in this case, it just actually worked. Not to mention that we have the digital filmmaking program here at the university now, and students have a strong interest in film. So, it's just one of those things that it's the right time. The timing is always important.

It's just the right timing and it was the right time, and then that class was great. To have Eric LeGrand in that class. Jerome Seagears, one of the student athletes in that class, and he transferred. He was at Auburn. He had left our basketball program here and went to Auburn. Then, Myles Mack, a good friend of his, also a graduate from here, who graduated 2014 with Eric, Myles called him and said, "You should come back." So, of course, Jerome needed some courses for the summer, and he was the first one, front row. When I saw his name, I said, "Oh, I thought you transferred." He said, "I'm back." He was in the Spike Lee class too, and he was also with Will Madden. They became good friends, and then, they both were in my "Black Film Experience" class in the spring of 2014. So, there were a lot of friendships made in that class over the summer, because it was a small classroom and there were twelve students and they became very close, student-athletes and then just students who were not athletes. I taught it as a

Socratic seminar, where I allowed the students to analyze the films, discuss the films, and then they did great presentations.

Malick Kone was in that class also. Greg Lewis also. They've graduated, and they were student athletes too. Malick Kone --who was from the West Coast of Africa--I guess Malick was bilingual, French, English, and maybe his other native languages. Malick was so quiet initially, but then, through the summer and then that course, he started to develop into a really good filmmaker. Greg Lewis, who's from Baltimore, Maryland, he and a group of friends just produced a film recently too. So, they're both also filmmakers now, producing their own documentary films, and it all started in that Spike Lee class in the summer. They've just really come into their own. I consider them to be future filmmakers; they learned to study and analyze films that summer.

I think you can spend more time [in a summer course], and I know this for a fact, because I know my cinematography class that I had at American back in 2002, I decided to withdraw and take it in the summer because I needed to have more time. You can spend more time analyzing, studying films if you have a course in the summer, because the semester's sixteen weeks. You just seem to have more time in the summer sessions with film than you do during a traditional sixteen weeks of course work, because you have other courses, other disciplines. So, I think that's probably why you get a sense of enrichment and appreciation of film if you do it in the summer. Not to mention, then the students went out and they would film using their cell phones and I taught them to edit using Final Cut Pro, using the equipment on campus, using the Mac computers. So, they're able to do that as well, and so that really worked out. I think we did it Monday through Thursday, so you have four days of watching, viewing and analyzing and discussing films, and the students were fully engaged and really learning a lot. To me, that was the best summer ever teaching here.

Prior to that, in 2012, we had a great--I call it my field trip--where I had the students at the visitor center and we were at the Cornelius Low House. We were there because they had [an] original display of Thomas Edison's Black Maria [movie studio], which you can find at West Orange at his lab. It's there now. They actually had, during this--on loan--they had a lot of information on the original studios in Hollywood. So, I actually had a trip there. Of course, it rained that night, but I had to do it in two days because I had over thirty students. I wanted them to see that filmmaking started in New Jersey through that trip that we had there, and everybody parked at the visitor's center. It was great. The Rutgers Police, I called them once I got all students on the bus. Now, the parking lot, because the second day it rained, and I was very worried about thunder and lightning. It worked out well that we entered from the visitor's center, walked in, and the whole museum--we learned so much about film right there, about the history of film in New Jersey. So, I included that in the syllabus, and so, that worked out well too. [Editor's Note: The Black Maria is Thomas Edison's film studio, located in West Orange, New Jersey.]

I think based on that, a lot of students were like, "Wow, we didn't know that we had this rich history of film in New Jersey." Then, the word just got around, and I have to say, Eric LeGrand told a lot of students about taking film courses, Greg Lewis, Malick Kone, Will Madden. These were some of the students that [were] just talking to their classmates. Will Madden is a commuter, but he spends a lot of time on campus talking with a lot of students, fully engaged,

going to a lot of student events. Also, going to Rutgers-Newark events, meeting students there. So, they would just tell other students about the Spike Lee course that I created when I taught the "Black Film Experience" and so it just became popular. Then, that led to--I think I sent that article to you in the *Daily Targum*--where a student from the School of Communications wrote an article about me and teaching that course. Then, students actually put that on Facebook and Twitter and everything else. Then, they're like, "Oh, are you going to come back and teach more film courses?" "I'd love to," because it's paying it forward.

This is where it started for me, and I think what we learn from film is what we learn about life. Then, I keep going back to George Bailey and going back to Frank Capra's story, telling that story. The story started with a greeting card from one of our own Rutgers grads, and the rest is history, as they say. [laughter] That course, to me, I think that's part of my legacy to universities that I created that course and then also the course that I created at McDaniel College. So, in my academic career, those are two courses that I'm very proud of that I taught at two institutions of higher learning. I just think, hopefully, students will gain an appreciation of it. You learn about life when you teach film, which is what I learned, and it started [by] taking that one film course [in] Murray Hall, way back when. I had no idea. That's when I found my love for film.

KR: I want to ask you about your reflections on something.

DS: Sure.

KR: I asked you before about how you felt women were treated in the media industry.

DS: Oh, because of the MeToo generation now, yes, okay.

KR: I want to ask your reflections on the evolution of the treatment of women in communications and media. You mentioned the glass ceiling, but then also, with the MeToo Movement going on now, there have been many women in media and broadcasting who have come forward and told their stories. I want to ask what you think about the evolution of how women have been treated in media and in broadcasting.

DS: I'm glad you asked that question, because I was watching *The View* and I believe Whoopi Goldberg mentioned this last week on *The View*, one of the episodes. Of course, it's a program created by Barbara Walters at ABC News, which I love and follow, and another panel of women. I know Whoopi Goldberg said that, "As women, we have to stick together," and Barbara Walters believed that when she created that program. I remember when that program was created, and I think a lot of the--and I won't call any names, because these are people that I worked with at ABC as well--but initially--and Barbara Walters would certainly tell you this too--that some of the men felt, "Oh, this program will never last." What is it? Over twenty years now. It's doing very well, but as Whoopi said, "We have to stick together," and sometimes--I don't fault the women, and especially the women coming out now in Me Too [Movement], I don't fault them for not coming out. People say, "Well, why didn't you say something back then?" They don't understand the climate that you're working in, in media. It's a male-driven climate and a male-dominated climate. If you really wanted to keep your job, you actually had to, unfortunately, just grin and bear it. I had a couple of encounters, in my media career, where I had to grin and bear

it. Nothing physical but just some of the language and comments that were made that I felt was inappropriate towards not just me but the other women. If you made waves and if you said something or if you reported it to human resources, you could lose your job. [Editor's Note: *The View* is a currently-airing television talk show on ABC in which the hosts are all women. It was created by Barbara Walters and first aired in 1997. Actress and comedian Whoopi Goldberg has been a member of the panel since 2007.]

I never said anything. Certainly, I could say, "Me too," because I remember in [a] newsroom--and I won't say where--just having somebody who constantly harassed me. I was producing a show, and I kind of tried to just ignore him, but it seems like, sometimes, the more you ignore a person--you know, they say that with bullies. You try to ignore them, that they continue and it escalates the situation. So, I was trying to move from the situation, and when I transferred to another location, I never saw that person again. I know it happened to me in radio, and it happened to me in television. Because I was so young and trying to be a career woman and career driven, I didn't report it. Now, I'm wondering, "Maybe I should've reported it." You hate to second guess yourself, but at that time, women were not reporting it.

I remember we had sensitivity training at one point. I won't say where, because I don't want the media. You never know, I may have to go back there, and they'll say, "Well, you brought up the fact that something happened there." We did have sensitivity training--I won't talk about the particular media outlet where I was working--because something did happen to two women and they reported it. Then, we all had to go through this--the human resources had this training. We had to sign documents that we completed the training, we had [an] understanding that this was not appropriate in the workplace and that it would never happen or be tolerated in the workplace. I was very young, and I said to myself, "Whoever reported it, they were very brave," because that's not something I would have done in my twenties. I think when I, later on--reflection and thinking about it now--perhaps I should have reported it and I could have supported those two women, but I don't remember those two women saying anything to anyone, maybe they did, maybe they didn't.

When it came to light, certainly it was a legal issue and something had to be done. I do say that the executives in charge and human resources took immediate action, and I remember going through that sensitivity training. I said to myself, "Wow, something really bad must have happened to these two women for us to have to take the time to go through this training." It was a secret, not a nice secret, but we all knew that something happened. Of course, you don't reveal the name of the victims and they didn't. I don't think they should have, but I kind of feel like the women who worked with us--we should've all come forward at that time, like they're doing now, the MeToo generation. When people say, "Oh, that happened decades ago. Why didn't they say something?" Well, because, quite frankly, we were afraid to say something, and I have to say, the two women who said something, we should've said something. We should've supported them. If we had done that back then, maybe today a lot of the women who actually suffered from their encounters, maybe that would not have happened to them, but we didn't say anything.

We were all afraid, I think. Not only that we were afraid, but when you reflect on it--and through reflection--if we said something and if we were all fired, then we wouldn't be there to help the other women coming after us. It could've been a situation where there would've been a

limit and it would have been discriminatory not to hire more women, but it could've been done in a way. Just like age discrimination, no one's going to come out and interview you and ask your age. If you're interviewing and you are female, they don't have to ask, if they're afraid to hire you because of past litigation from other women. If we had said something, I think now--hindsight is twenty-twenty, as they always say--but I think now, maybe it would've closed the doors on recruiting and retaining women in media. That's just my personal experience from working in media as long as I have. I think that would've been the case, because I know it was the case with--well, I saw age discrimination, I'm not a litigator, I'm not an attorney, and I could not have represented anyone, but I actually saw that. Coming in my twenties and having women who were approaching age forty and getting laid off in the mass layoffs, and these were strong women. These were experienced women, very credible, very knowledgeable, but I saw them get laid off. I said, "Wow, will that be me when I approach that age?" because I was in my twenties. I started at twenty as a producer. I actually saw that age discrimination, but then there were men everywhere and they were older men. They had job security that women did not have.

KR: Was that an effect of the glass ceiling?

DS: Yes, absolutely, and then the mommy track. I keep going back to *The View*. I love *The View*, and not just because I worked at ABC and not because it's a Barbara Walters' production, but I love the fact that she created that show. The conversation last week, they talked about the mommy track, because Meghan McCain--my heart goes out to her still. I was so glad she returned after a month of losing Senator John McCain, her dad. She talked about the pressure--now that she's married--of having a child and working in the industry. Well, she hasn't been there a year with *The View* program, and maybe she's concerned that if she does have a child, then you have to make that choice. Whoopi talked about
that. Abby Huntsman, who's new on the show, talked about it. Joy Behar has one child. Barbara Walters had one child. Then, Sunny Hostin, a former prosecutor from D.C., has two teenagers now. Sunny just turned fifty, and they celebrated her birthday this week. [Editor's Note: Meghan McCain is a television host and commentator. She is the daughter of the late Senator John McCain, who lived from 1936 to 2018. Abby Huntsman is a reporter and television host. She joined *The View* in 2018. Joy Behar has hosted *The View* since 1997, taking a two-year break between 2013 and 2015. Sunny Hostin joined *The View* in 2016.]

When you get a position like working in media and then you have your family life and professional life, it's a hard choice. I know I didn't have my son until I was thirty-three, and it was because I was told, for health reasons, that if I didn't have one then, I would never have a child. So, it kind of forced me to have a son, and I had what they call a miracle baby, because of some health-related issues that women have. So, I just decided, if that's what my doctor's telling me--and this was a brilliant doctor, Dr. Fred Mecklenburg, Fairfax Hospital in Fairfax, Virginia, Falls Church, Virginia, where my son was born--and he said, "I don't have a crystal ball, but you've got to make a decision. I know you're a career woman, career driven, but you have to make a decision now." So, I had my son at thirty-three. I don't think I could ever have had a child when I was working in New York.

When I had my son, I was working for Public Broadcasting System, which was family friendly. I mean, they packed my computers and moved it to my condo. I was able to work from home

during my pregnancy--later stages--because I had a high-risk pregnancy. Also, I was able to take as much time off. A lot of women don't get that. A lot of companies don't allow that. I think you get six weeks and that's it. Sometimes, for health reasons, you're not ready at six weeks to return to work. You need a longer maternity leave. Well, I know the conversation on *The View* last week was about putting you on the mommy track. Now, that does happen. I saw it happen in media--and this is probably why I waited--where once a woman decided to have a child, they were like, "Well, she's going to be a mommy now. Forget about promotions. That's it for her, she's done."

I remember working in media, initially, where some of the younger women said, "You know, they're not going to promote me anyway, so I'm going to get married," and some women did and we had these elaborate baby showers at ABC. [laughter] Huge, the whole department. First, a wedding shower, followed by baby showers, and some women--and these were women who were working as secretaries or receptionists--they didn't get promoted, so they felt, "Well, I might as well just get married, stay home, and have kids," and they would do that. My heart would break for them, because they were smart women. I'm like, "Well, first of all, they've got you in a wrong position. They should've promoted you, but since they didn't, now you feel like your only course of action is to just retreat and get married and have a kid and leave." A lot of the women would leave, and I'm like, "This was a smart woman. You had the talent here, and you just didn't give them the opportunity." I would see that.

They talked about it last week on *The View*, and Meghan McCain mentioned it. I think there's a lot of pressure of people telling her. She's, I guess, thirty-seven or thirty-eight. She just had a birthday this week. "You've got to have a kid. You've got to have a kid." It's a choice. Maybe she doesn't want to have children. Women make choices, but I do fully appreciate the choices that they make and the working women versus the stay-at-home mom. We used to have those conversations, but a lot of the women just said, "Hey, they're not going to promote me anyway." There would be men in media that I met throughout my career that would get promotion after promotion after promotion. Then, the women were like, "Well, by the time this guy retires, I'm going to be too old for the job." So, they would just leave.

I was very fortunate, at ABC, that I had two of the best bosses ever, and I think they spoiled me, and it was Steve Vause, who is Asian American. His family had been in the Japanese internment camp, and he had stories that you wouldn't believe. I told Steve then, "You really should do a documentary on your family story," but I think it was too painful for him. He was my immediate supervisor, and then, Henry DeVault, who was from Harlem, African American. They believed in promoting women and minorities, maybe because they were minorities and because of their histories and Steve's history of having his family in a Japanese internment camp. He had served in the military. This man did everything right, and he was promoted--I think his final promotion was a director at ABC--and then, he decided to retire in his fifties, moved to California to be near his sister and to be near relatives in Hawaii. I mean, they had growing up--their parents were--they were in a Japanese internment camp, but he believed in the country. He loved America, and he was a veteran of the military service. He believed in promoting women.

So, I was so fortunate to have Steve and Henry DeVault, who was from Harlem, whose wife was an executive in the old Baby Bell Telephone System before they disbanded, before AT&T, New

York Bell, New Jersey Bell, Southern Bell, before the FCC decided to change all of that. I was fortunate enough to have these two men, and that's how I got my promotions at ABC. I had two men who were in positions of power. They just said, "There is no glass ceiling in our department for you," and Greg Brown, who brought me into the department. So, there were three men who brought me into their department, because I had been producing a radio show on West End Avenue for ABC Radio networks. Then, when I would apply for positions, I didn't really know anybody on television at that time, but Greg Brown I met. Greg Brown found me in affiliate relations, and he told Steve and Henry about me, and Greg was African American from Queens. So, these three men brought me into their department, and they helped me, helped me move up, helped me get promotions, and I would get great evaluations.

I remember when I left ABC to join PBS--and this was March 1990--I remember the executives--Alan Wurtzel, who's with NBC now, he said, "You know Debbie, we don't get many women like you." He said, "And coming from Douglass College." He said, "I have all your credentials. I'm looking at it." He had it on his desk. He said, "And if you look at the department, and you have a journalism degree, a double degree, English from Douglass and Journalism from Rutgers." He said, "And we don't get many women like you." He said, "And if you decide to leave, which we're sure you will …" he said that. He said, "You will always have a home here at ABC." So, I never got laid off, and I was like, "Wow." They would have the mass layoffs, and somehow some of these women would be included.

I remember one of my bosses--this is when I had gone from radio to television and I was in affiliate relations before Greg Brown and Steve and Henry told human resources I should be with their area, which was marketing and research. Before that, I remember going in one morning--I would always take the train early. I was commuting from Edison--living in Edison--and that morning when we're all at our desks and getting a phone call and going into an office, and then I'm like, "But there's just a few of us." I thought someone was sick. That was the management consulting company from Madison Avenue who told them to pull in certain people in your offices. The people that were out in the open common space areas of the offices--and these were huge cubicles--those are the people who had the pink slips. The security guards with ABC, they must have had an army of security guards who came with boxes and escorted them out of the building, just like that. It had to be around exactly nine A.M. I remember that well, and after they escorted them out, then we were allowed to leave our director's office and go back to our desk. While we were in the director's office, we thought it was some kind of meeting, someone was sick, and he explained to us that we couldn't go out until the other people were escorted out.

KR: How long were you in there for?

DS: Oh, my God. It probably was the longest thirty minutes of my life, and I felt badly because there was one woman who was my supervisor.

KR: Who wasn't in the room with you.

DS: She wasn't in the room with me. That was a chilling feeling, and that's when I said, "Wow, you've got to be very careful in this type of business." It's a business, and I tell students here--usually on the white board--or I'll them to type it in their cell phones. I said, "I want you to type

show business or write it somewhere, and I want you to cross out show. It's a business." I tell them the story of what happened to me at ABC. I didn't see it coming. I did not see it coming. I felt so badly for some of them, and a lot of women were laid off, a lot of women. I don't know if it's because they were on the mommy track or just women, but a lot of women were laid off. Sophia, I remember; I loved Sophia. I can't remember her last name, but she had a desk next to mine. The moment she got married, first we had the wedding shower. Then the next thing, within a year, she's like, "I'm having a kid; I'm getting out of here." She just didn't want to be a part of that, because she experienced that layoff and she did say to me, "You know, Debbie, that could be us ten, fifteen years from now. I'm not hanging around for that." We were in our twenties, and she's like, "We hit forty, we're not going to be here." There's something to be said for that, and it's sad because I think a lot of women feel that way.

You're working in New York, so New York, Los Angeles, Chicago media, that's it, the top three. If you're in film and television and radio and cable, you're either in New York or you're in California or you're in Los Angeles. I remember one of the bosses telling me, "Hey, this is sink or swim. You came here well prepared. Otherwise, you'd be out in Utah. You started in New York." [laughter] I thought about it, I'm like, "I wish I were in Utah right now, because this is rough," especially the way they laid people off. I'm like, "I should've gone out to Utah, or Iowa, or anywhere but here." I didn't see it coming, because I had such a great experience as [an] intern, and then, even my senior year at Douglass, I would get calls to come and produce shows and they paid me. I hadn't graduated yet, and I was already in. I was in at age twenty, so I didn't know that this kind of thing would happen, they would lay people off like that. I was still in my twenties, but I remember Sophia saying to me, she said, "You know, I have an old Italian grandmother who keeps telling me to get married and have kids, and that's what I'm going to do." I loved Sophia, and she and I were good friends. I missed her. I still miss her to this day, but I can understand why she made that choice. It's all about choices.

Then, to hear them talk about it on *The View*, I'm like, "To this day, we are still kind of trying to make choices between family and careers. Why do we have to do that and men don't?" Then, to shame the victim--I know why they did what they did. I know why they didn't come forward until today, because I didn't come forward. I haven't come forward even today, except here, taping with you, and I'm not going to reveal any names. These two men--I don't know if they still work in New York, maybe they do; I would never reveal any names.

I do know that the other side of that, the flip side, is that once I worked for Henry DeVault and Steve Vause, I had full protection. None of that happened to me at ABC Television, because I had two men who were businessmen, who believed that I had the ability, and they wanted to ensure that I would receive the kind of respect as a professional working woman. I got it, and I got it from men. So, there's the MeToo Movement, but there's also--I think this was the conversation on *The View* and a lot of women are having it now--that if we had more men like Henry DeVault and Steve Vause, we wouldn't have as many victims. Once I worked for those two--and I was working for them at ABC--none of that happened to me at ABC because of those two men in ABC Television Network, none of that happened now.

It did happen to me in radio--and I won't mention where--but it didn't happen to me at ABC Television Network because those two men, that was my protection. I actually had protection. I

had protection and I had promotions and I had a career and I didn't have to worry about that. So, I think, when I look at the MeToo Movement, I know a lot of women will probably blast me for saying this, because a lot of women feel like, "Well, why do we have to be protected?" It's a shame that we have to be, but I had protection and I still have a career because of that. But you have to include men. The kind of men that protected me were raised by women who raised them well. Not only were they executives at ABC, but they were also husbands and fathers. They had a strong, strong respect for women, and they believed in women. They're both retired now. ABC really was very fortunate to have those type of men at their network, and then we should have more men like that working in all industries.

If we had that, then we wouldn't have women who are ashamed to come forward and women who have to wait decades before they tell their stories about inappropriate behavior in the workplace. It was zero tolerance at ABC. It was zero tolerance in [the] department area that I worked in, in marketing and research with Henry DeVault and Steve Vause. There was zero tolerance. I do know there was another woman, Judy Magnus Long worked in human resources, and she was [an] African American woman. She believed in just hiring the best, whether it be men or women. So, they had a balance at ABC then, in the '80s, because they hired the right talent. They had the right people at the right time. They were coming off of strong ratings in the '70s. When I got there in the '80s, they just had the right talent, the right time, and we were just very fortunate.

Like I said, the best bosses I ever had in my media career were at ABC, and it was Steve Vause and Henry DeVault, and Judy Magnus Long from recruiting in Human Resources. I was producing a radio show, and once I met her in human resources, she said, "You know, we have these openings in television. It pays more." [laughter] My mom was happy about that. It pays more, and then I said, "Oh, great, then I won't have to have a roommate. I can get my own apartment," but it was a great opportunity. Again, ABC hired this woman, Judy Magnus Long. Her husband worked on Wall Street, and Judy was ahead of her time in terms of her recruiting efforts, just trying to recruit. She was trying to reflect America in her recruitment efforts, and she did that. That's probably why ABC hired her. [laughter] They hired the right woman. I don't know where she is now. Then, we would get involved in networking and go to a lot of nice networking parties with people from CBS and NBC, and the bankers, and the people on Wall Street, because her husband worked downtown in Wall Street.

Then, we had a softball team. We called ourselves the Moonlighters. [laughter] We played softball in Central Park, and we played against the other networks, kind of like the ABC show *Battle of the Network Stars*. Well, this was battle of the network workers. It was a great time. They gave me the biggest going-away party at ABC, and again, they said to me, "You know, you always have a home here. You could always come back." I never got laid off. I said, "Boy, I really had some protection there," and the mentoring and the mentors, just the protection overall at ABC, and the going away party when I left to go to PBS. Then, when I was in graduate school, Henry DeVault, he called ABC Washington and said, "You know, Deb Shuford is down there," and that's how I got into ABC Washington, from Henry DeVault, who was at ABC New York. I remember Roger Cohen and Jerry Aumente telling me in the School of Communications, "Just do a good job. Be yourself. Do a good job. We've trained you. You've done well in your courses; you can do it." They were right, what we did here with all the interns

at Rutgers, because you would leave and return to school and then another intern would replace you the next semester. So, we all wanted to do a good job, because we wanted to keep those doors open. To this day, I know--I checked with Steve Miller, who is the coordinator of internships now in the School of Communications--we've got a lot of Rutgers graduates in New York, to this day, at NBC, ABC, CBS, HBO. It's because of our reputation and because we have the training and we have great professors who train us and prepare us, because you're going into New York. You really have to be on the top of your game, as the young people say, and we have that here. So, I'm very proud of that. Like I said, "I never could have gotten into media on my own," no way. The internships are the best here, and it's your gateway into media. Then, I pay it forward, and then I get internships for my students.

I just love hearing from Brian Fountain Murray, because he just happened to be helping me pack my car at Morgan State and I get a call from ABC in Burbank, California. I hadn't been to Burbank in years. When I worked at ABC, of course, we would do trips out there for business purposes, but here I was teaching at Morgan State and had not been to ABC in over ten years, but they know you. They have your contact information. They stay in touch. When they learned that I was now teaching, they had my cell phone number and they called and said, "Do you have any interns? Any juniors and seniors?" Brian happened to be at the right place at the right time, and now he has that on his resume. He's in Japan, a filmmaker. Eric LeGrand has his own radio internet show on Fox. I believe it's an internet show on Fox. I think may be starting a podcast. I hear from Eric LeGrand every week. I hear from a lot of my former students at Howard University, Morgan State University, here at Rutgers, Douglass College, and it's paying it forward and it's important.

In essence, I'm a Douglass woman. I'd like to see more women in media. I think now, we're ready to support each other, so that we don't have a Me Too of the future. We know what happened and we can deal with it and we can move on, but we have to somehow support each other. Whoopi Goldberg said it best last week, she said it, Meghan McCain, last week on *The View.* Those are strong women. It's a great program, and we have to really, really thank Barbara Walters for that program, because a lot of shows come and go. I mean, when I worked at ABC, I saw shows get cancelled within two weeks, so to have that program and to see how far it's evolved. I mean, I even worked on a primetime show on ABC News that didn't last very long. So, there were a lot of shows, but that show, *The View*, it's still on. Women are on that show, and men are sometimes a little intimidated by the show. They've had great guests on that show. They had Senator John McCain on with his daughter, which was [a] beautiful moment. They've had Vice President Joe Biden on there. They had President Obama on there, and they get Hollywood people on too. They have a lot of Hollywood folks that come on there from time to time, and then they had a lot of actors and actresses. It's a well-rounded what we used to call a news magazine program, which Patricia McCann coined that phrase at WOR. She would call her talk show a news magazine on radio, which I loved.

My whole media career and then having Jonathan Slade invite me to teach in academia, I've just met some of the best people ever, and everybody helps everybody. I believe in that, and especially women, because I know how hard it is for women in media because I've lived through it. It's very difficult. It's easier for women to be in--I hate to say this--traditional jobs, nurses and teachers, but when you're in media, you have to have some support. I was very fortunate to

have support from men and women. Not everyone is so lucky, and then you have a lot of women, they just say, "Forget this, I'm out of here. It's not worth it." But for me, it's been worth it. Even when I was talking to women during the campus night, at the Douglass event--we celebrated our centennial--I told them, "Don't get discouraged," and, "You can do it. It's going to be hard. I'm not going to kid you and say it's not. It is difficult, but women can do it." We are doing it. We just have to support each other, and then find men that support you too. I don't want to leave the men out. We need their support as well.

KR: Well, I have reached the end of my questions.

DS: Oh, okay.

KR: Is there anything that we have skipped over? Is there anything you want to add?

DS: I'm not sure. Let me think, because this is session five. Five is my lucky number. We've talked about my on-air work, my work as a producer, my work teaching. Oh, well, I'm actually a career coach now with New Start Career Network. We just had a wonderful third anniversary of that. I became a career coach through the New Career Network here at Rutgers in February, and I received my training one day on Saturday and my certificate. We had First Lady Tammy Murphy there with us at the breakfast and all supporters who actually started it. As a career coach, the reason that I joined is because I think that it's important that--and this is for the long-term unemployed, this is a program through the State of New Jersey, through grants and through other funding efforts--I think it's important as a career coach that I share some of my stories of my working career, because I've been working since I was fourteen.

I started working at a mom-and-pop ice cream store across the street from Weequahic High School. Back then, you could get your working papers. I got mine on Green Street in Newark, New Jersey, and my two older sisters worked there. When I was fourteen, I had working papers; I worked there. Then, from there, Simco Shoes, on Broad Street in Newark, which was owned by Mr. Simon. The first store was store number one--they named all the stores--store number one was Brooklyn, New York. As a career coach now, I share all of that. I go back to when I was fourteen, and I know sometimes you feel like, "Oh, this is a dead-end job," but it's just your first job. You will have many jobs throughout the course of your lifetime. I feel that.

Then, yesterday, I attended an event at St. Barnabas with Dr. Michele Blackwood, who's my breast surgeon, who's now director of the Breast Center at Rutgers Cancer Institute. She did a whole talk last night, from five-thirty to about six-thirty, on lessons from her mother and her father, and she talked about--her father once told her, "Your wealth will not come from money. It comes from your family and friends." I feel that my wealth of my career, it actually came from my family, my friends throughout my college career, my media career, my teaching career, networking that I do today, career coaching, and that's where my wealth is coming from. I don't measure it in terms of dollars and cents.

When she said that last night, I thought about having this interview today, and I thought I would share that. I said, "You know Dr. Blackwood is a very, very clever woman." Actually, I invited her to come speak at Douglass Residential College, and she said she would because I think it

would be important for her to talk about her journey and being a surgeon. When we think about women and surgery and surgeons, she talked about that. Women have come a long way in the medical profession as well. So, I think that really capped it off for me to be with her last night and then invite her to come. She was just here in New Brunswick at meetings. She said she would love to come to Douglass, and she saw the video that I sent to her of our centennial celebration. She said she thought it was great that we did that and that we're doing things at Douglass and we're Douglass women and she would love to speak to us and to the whole community here, the whole alumni community. [Editor's Note: The Douglass Centennial Celebration in 2018 celebrated the one-hundred-year-long history of Rutgers University's Douglass Campus.]

I think that moving forward, my next projects are working on two documentaries that I've wanted to do, that I'm going to do. One, I'm actually going back to graduates of Chancellor Elementary School through photos that I've found and talking to Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver last Saturday, and we had a long day there. It was a great--the pre-natal summit for women--from pre-natal to age three, on how to care for your children. If we care for women and women can care for their children, then they can care for their families and we can care for society. She brought that up. She's a graduate of Chancellor Avenue Elementary School, and so am I.

Then, I went home and I found some photos, and I've been going through these photos the whole summer that I've been doing these interviews here. When you look at the photos and you see the faces of the young people, they're so promising, especially when you look at the diversity of Chancellor Avenue Elementary School back in the '60s. I'm hoping that I could find some of these people and interview some of these people, also the Weequahic graduates and other graduates who graduated from schools in New Jersey, not just in Newark but other schools. When you look at young people and they show such promise when you start at elementary level and then you follow them and then you see where their careers have taken them. Then, another Douglass graduate, a Douglass friend, when she shared her stories, and that would be Kathy McAdam, who's eighty-three now, started in [the] New Jersey College for Women. So, I'd like to interview her for a project one day too.

It's just interesting that now I have more time and flexibility that I can do the documentaries that I've been trying to do, but when you're teaching and when you're working full-time in media, it's hard to make your films. Professor Jeffrey Baker, who taught me at American University, he would do his films in the summer. He wouldn't teach courses in the summer. He's a filmmaker, and he shot on film, not digital cameras. He always said that, "You have to find the time to do it, because time will just slip away from you." So, I'm finding the time now to work on documentaries that I've wanted to work on for a long time. That's where I'm moving.

I just think that I've been so fortunate to have the wealth, that Dr. Blackwood mentioned last night, that I had through family and friends and connections and then meeting you, meeting you in May, and meeting people from the oral history project, and being here today, and Dean Jacquelyn Litt at Douglass. Oh, my goodness, over the eight years that she's been there and what she's done at Douglass and moving us into the next generation of women, it's just phenomenal, to put together the centennial for a whole year, and she's also teaching. Teaching and being a dean

at the Douglass Residential College and to put together such a celebration of women, which we need. [Editor's Note: Dr. Jacquelyn Litt has served as the Dean of Douglass Residential College since 2010. She also is a Professor in Women's and Gender Studies and Sociology.]

It's so funny, because to have the MeToo generation come out at the same time that we're celebrating at Douglass, and to have Douglass, as we do, when we know the Seven Sister schools kind of folded into Harvard and into Columbia and into Yale. Whereas Douglass, we're still Douglass. We're still Douglass women. We still have that name and that distinction, and we're sisters for life. It's been a wonderful life, just as the movie says, "It's been a wonderful life." It's going to get better, and at Douglass, we said we're celebrating the next hundred years. [laughter] We plan to be here until we're two hundred, I guess. So, it's been great, yes, wonderful.

KR: Well, thank you so much for doing this oral history series with us.

DS: Thank you, yes. This is excellent, thank you, bravo, cheers. [laughter]
[RECORDING PAUSED]

KR: We can go back on.

DS: Yes, I wanted to mention …

KR: Okay, we are back on the record. Debbie wants to add about a professor that she had at Douglass.

DS: You know, now that I'm reflecting and going back and thinking about teaching, I have to say, when I started teaching at McDaniel College, the professor that I thought about was Professor Avery Brooks. Professor Avery Brooks, actually, received the first Master of Fine Arts of Mason Gross, here at Rutgers, and Professor Brooks was the first African American, to my knowledge, to receive that Master of Fine Arts. [Editor's Note: Actor and educator Avery F. Brooks graduated from Livingston College in 1973 and the Mason Gross School of the Arts in 1976. He has starred in many shows and films such as *American History X*, Star *Trek: Deep Space Nine*, *Spenser: For Hire* and its spinoff *A Man Called Hawk*.]

Professor Avery Brooks at Mason Gross, at the time when Professor Brooks taught at Douglass, as a member of the faculty at Douglass, when I was a student--and this would be '77 to 1981--I didn't know, at the time, that he received the first Master of Fine Arts at Mason Gross. This professor, he was phenomenal. I mean, he had a voice, the baritone voice. He was a musician, composer, director, producer, and he was our professor. I managed to take one course with him, because my major was not theater. I believe the title was "Black Theater Workshop" and we had it on the Douglass Campus. I learned a lot from him about teaching. I didn't realize that later on I would teach, because I didn't take any education courses. I never thought I would teach on the college level, but when I started teaching at McDaniel, I started thinking about him and the way he taught the "Black Theater Workshop" course.

I think that helped me to teach the course in African American cinema at McDaniel College, because I had never taught on a college level. That was my first teaching assignment, courtesy

of my friend Jonathan Slade. The way I taught my course in African American cinema was the way that Professor Avery Brooks taught me. I'm in touch with his wife, Dean Vicki Brooks, who works with the Equal Opportunity [Fund] program here at the university. I think she's still on Livingston Campus. I mentioned to her this summer--with students who were here for the summer enrichment--that I was doing this oral history project and how much I enjoyed taking classes with her husband, Professor Avery Brooks, who is also an actor. He did a great job in a feature film called *American History X*, also in the *Star Trek* series, *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*. Even though I've lost touch with him over the years, I've watched his work and I've included his work.

I forgot to mention that when I worked at ABC, in the '80s, he was on a program called *Spenser: For Hire* and he had this character called Hawk. I don't know if I mentioned this in the earlier session, but then ABC did a spinoff from *Spenser: For Hire* with Robert Urich and the show was titled *Hawk* and he was the main character. It was a great show, and I think it took place in Washington, D.C. You could see his range of acting ability and directing in *Hawk.* Sadly, ABC cancelled the show because Middle America [was afraid of the character]. I know this for a fact, because I worked at ABC at the time when the ratings would come in and when they would do focus groups. They had a fear of this presence of this dominant man, and it was his character Hawk. Hawk was a man who wore this leather jacket like John Shaft--from the movie *Shaft* in the '70s--and these dark shades, these eyeglasses. I think Middle America had a fear of this man, but he was a brilliant character, brilliant man, portrayed so eloquently by Professor Avery Brooks. I think, during the focus group, if I had been involved in that particular focus group--because I did all the news ratings at the time at ABC--I would've explained to the people in the focus group that this is a character, that you have to understand why Professor Brooks brought this character to light. I think if they had that understanding, that show could've gone on a little longer. [Editor's Note: The spinoff series of *Spenser: For Hire*, *A Man Called Hawk*, starring Avery Brooks, aired in 1989 and lasted only one season before cancellation. *Shaft* is a 1971 film starring Richard Roundtree as John Shaft.]

I remember when they announced the cancellation of the show. I think it could've been done in a different way, and I don't think people at ABC will be terribly upset with me for sharing this. I think the way that Professor Brooks received the information, he should've been told at ABC executive offices. I don't think it should be something you read in the *Hollywood Reporter* or *Variety*, and I think that's the way I remember that it was done, the cancellation. I just thought that that was quite a disservice to him and very disrespectful. In the meantime, they had a show, *Family Matters*, with this buffoonish character, Urkel. I don't think the actor would disagree with me, but I remember, when reading Donald Bogle's book that I use in my black cinema courses, it's called *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*. [Editor's Note: *Family Matters* is a television series that aired from 1989 to 1997. Donald Bogle's book *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* was originally published in 1973.]

The Urkel character fit well into that and Professor Brooks did not because Hawk was a very intelligent man and he was a street guy--that character--but then they loved Urkel because Urkel was a buffoon. Middle America loved it because he made people laugh. Then, I think about Professor Donald Bogle, who, I believe, is still teaching at NYU, who actually--when I was a

student at Douglass--did a lecture at Douglass talking about the images of African Americans in Hollywood and about these characters who are in the categories of coons, mammies, mulattoes, and bucks. So, I use that book today, and it's in our bookstore at Barnes & Noble. I use that book in my syllabi, when I'm teaching about the characters that were featured in the Golden Age of Hollywood and also in television. So, we explore that, and the students get a firm understanding of that by reading Donald Bogle's book. I also show clips of the Hawk character, which all the students at Rutgers feel that is a very good character, and the show should not have been cancelled. But it was a business decision on the part of ABC to do that.

When they explore these images, negative images of Hollywood, and then we go back to Oscar Micheaux, with the positive images of Hollywood, this was a general consensus with all the students, they clearly stated that they understood why Professor Avery Brooks wanted to portray that character, a strong African American male. Every semester, I'd have someone approach me and say, "Why don't you include Tyler Perry films in your syllabi and in your courses?" I said, "Because I don't feel that I want to contribute to the coons, mammies, mulattoes, and bucks that are featured in some of the Tyler Perry movies." Not to take away anything from Tyler Perry, but that is not my focus. So, I start with strong characters like Hawk--from the title show *Hawk* and from *Spenser: For Hire*--because I was there when those shows were featured on ABC television network.

I don't show Urkel and *Family Matters.* I don't want to show those characters, because I want to teach more redeeming qualities of characters in Hollywood. I also don't show *Tarzan* movies either. When I explain that to students, why I don't, on their own--when they do their class presentations--they would go out and do research and then they would show the reasons why some of those characters in Hollywood were offensive. They would show that based on my teachings, but I don't contribute to it. As a filmmaker, whenever you write, produce, direct, or edit a film--and this is where the students began to have a full appreciation of director Spike Lee and why I created that course--you are contributing to this form of entertainment, if it is entertainment, but you're also creating images that will last forever. When you do that, it has a social impact on society globally.

I also go back to Professor Jeffrey Baker, at American University, who showed *Birth of a Nation*--and then my graduate class with Professor Baker--and this was a survey in American cinema. I remember it well. Maybe there were three African Americans in the class and maybe one or two Latinos and one or two Asians. We were very offended by the movie, but what Professor Baker did, he sent emails out to all of us, stating that the reason he showed *Birth of a Nation* was to show the technical abilities of the film. I remember Spike Lee, in his film class--graduate class at NYU--he had to watch that film too, but then he did a film or a response to that called *The Answer*. It was his answer to *Birth of a Nation*, and granted, *Birth of a Nation* was shown in the White House and it gave empowerment to the Ku Klux Klan. They felt empowered by that movie, and D.W. Griffith knew what he was doing when he created that movie. [Editor's Note: *Birth of a Nation* is a 1915 silent film by D.W. Griffith that was shown in the White House to President Woodrow Wilson. *The Answer* is a 1980 film directed by Spike Lee.]

Now, there were some technical elements of that movie I do show, but I also allow the students, in a Socratic seminar, to explore the ramifications of that movie and to explore the social impact

of that movie. It comes out in their presentations, and it's not me saying it. It's our students saying that, because they do see the power of media and what media can and cannot do. I know that I learned that early on from Professor Avery Brooks, and I have to say, as an employee, former employee of ABC, I was very proud of that character Hawk and his portrayal of Hawk. I was very proud of all of his work that he's done in theater, because while I lived in the Washington area, he would do theater work at the Shakespeare Theatre in Washington, D.C.

Then, I was also proud of the work he did in *American History X* and *Star Trek*, and I remember Whoopi Goldberg saying, when she did the *Star Trek* series, that what she liked about *Star Trek* is that it had an African American presence and Latino and Asian. So, it showed that in future society that these ethnicities and races would be around, that they would not be annihilated. So, I have to recall that "Black Theater Workshop" class, which was an elective. After completing all of my internships and my requirements, I was able to take that class with him. The impact that he had on me, and to work at ABC years later, and have Professor Avery Brooks actually appearing as an actor for two programs on [the] ABC program schedule. They knew that I was a Rutgers graduate, and they knew that he was my professor at Douglass. Maybe that's why they didn't tell me when they decided to cancel the show. No one told me. Had they told me, I would've made every effort to contact him in advance, but I was not told. I think that was a decision that the executives made, because I actually worked, at the time, in the research department and I saw the ratings and I had colleagues who worked on the focus groups, at the time. I will say, they were nice enough to apologize to me and say, "You know, we're sorry we had to cancel that show. We know that that was your professor."

One door closes and another opens, and Professor Brooks, he's done phenomenal work since the days of doing *Hawk* and *Spenser: For Hire*. He's still and always will be a beloved professor for all of us. He does voiceovers, and every time I walk into High Point Solutions Stadium as a commencement marshal and I hear his voice on the big screen, I know that's his voice. He does the voiceovers and announcements during commencement, and it reminds me of the first day I walked into his classroom. Then, this year, in May, when the parents are all walking into the stadium, and you hear this magnificent voice in the stadium, filling the entire stadium, it's the voice of Professor Avery Brooks, our beloved professor and also an alumnus of Rutgers University. He's made us proud, and we try to make him proud.

I wanted to add that. When I see his wife on campus, I always say, "When is he coming back to the university? Can he just come and do a guest lecture for me? I'm teaching because of him." Everything that I knew about and learned about Paul Robeson's acting career, I learned from Professor Avery Brooks. Then, the rest is history. I want to thank you again for allowing me to share that story. I just wanted to make sure I included my beloved professor. I told his wife, Dean Vicki Brooks, that, "He is my professor for life." [laughter] Always, yes. I feel like I could always learn something more from him and that I will always call him Professor Avery Brooks. I will always call Professor Glenn Harden at American University, Professor Glenn Harden. Professor John Douglass at American University. Professor Jeffrey Baker. You have that respect for professors and teachers. Last but not least, my second grade teacher, Mrs. Rivers, from Chancellor Avenue Elementary School. If anyone sees this on the website, please share it with Mrs. Rivers, who taught me in second grade, Chancellor Avenue Elementary

School, Chancellor Avenue, Newark, New Jersey. I hope one day that she'll get to hear some of the oral history that I'm sharing today, and thank you.

KR: Okay. Well, thank you so much, Debbie.

DS: Thank you.

KR: This concludes the interview.

----------END OF TRANSCRIPT----------

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